

# Do the Right Thing

By Leroy Cook

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AS PART OF the training given to up-and-coming, would-be flight instructor candidates, I'm always compelled to teach circumspection of flight habits. Young pilots about to sprout instructor wings tend to be of the age of invulnerability, a time when they're utterly convinced they've become so good that they have no need of precautions. They seek the license to preach and teach to others, but they seldom feel the need to restrict their own activities. I'd logged but 425 hours when I presented myself to the FAA district office for certification as a flight instructor. Inspector Ernie Geier took me down a notch or two before he signed off my shiny new CFI ticket. I was reminded that other eyes were now going to be watching how I flew and I needed to set a good example.

With a few hundred hours in a log book, we tend to think we're far removed from beginner status. We know how to fly pretty darn well, as evidenced by a successful record and the clean, crisp maneuvers we demonstrated on our checkrides. Well, maybe the afternoon turbulence did help us squeak by, but we must have been good or we wouldn't have gotten the commercial and instrument ratings, those necessary adornments needed before can we seek the instructor's certificate.

However, we now have to step back and remind ourselves that impressionable student pilots look up to CFIs. Mentor pilots are supposed to be paragons of virtue, whose every move is worthy of emulation. After all, they've been given the power to take raw clay and breathe the breath of aviation life into it. Pearls of wisdom drop from their lips, their footprints mark the pathway leading to true enlightenment. At least that's what pilots still on the second page of their new logbook think.

## Teaching by Example

Once upon a time, I used to drag our trainers away from the fuel pits by riding down the tail and shoving the lowered tailcone around with my beer gut. It was easier and quicker than digging

out the tow bar. And then I saw my students beginning to do the same thing, only they weren't being too careful where they grabbed the delicate tail feathers. I hadn't told them they could do that, but I didn't specifically tell them they couldn't either. They simply watched me, the super-pilot CFI do it and figured they could play drag-a-plane just like I did. Ever the innovative instructor, I first tried to show them exactly where to push, concentrating all the force on the rivet heads delineating the spar, never on the unsupported oh-too-thin-gauge aluminum. That idea was abandoned after I found a dimple in the stabilizer skin. After that, I began to insist that only a tow bar could be used to move the airplane on the ground.

The trouble was, I knew how to maneuver the plane without causing harm, but I wasn't setting a good example. Without supervision, inept hands could cause damage. And it's not enough to tell students how to act, you have to show them by example. I long ago learned to make an exaggerated stretch to look around before we begin a maneuver - not because I wanted to see if the airspace was clear, but because I warned my student to get in the habit of looking. I knew there was no airplane out there because I had been watching outside while he flew intently with his head in the cockpit. But I knew that if students saw me (a gnarled wizened old veteran pilot) looking, then they'd be more likely to look themselves.

It isn't always easy, being the torchbearer. I'd dearly love to save some taxi time by rolling onto the runway at the midfield turnoff and blasting down the abbreviated length of pavement that's still two or three times more than I need. But I can't because someone likely to follow my example will see me do it. I must, therefore, taxi sedately to the end, nosegear on the centerline, and use the full length. There's a time to depart from an intersection, I'll teach them, but only if the airplane faces more runway than you have at home. Preflight inspections may be consid-

ered a waste of time if you've been flying the same airplane all day long and it hasn't been out of your sight since you gave it a thorough checkout. But as a CFI, we have to make at least a short walkaround to deliver the point; check under the cowling, look at the fuel caps

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and verify that all parts of the airplane are undamaged and functional. Otherwise, you're teaching students that, "Hey, we do this stuff for training, but not in real life."

Years ago, when I flew tailwheel airplanes almost exclusively, I got into the habit of holding the control yoke back during the runup for a magneto check. Originally, it was done to make sure the tail stayed down when propwash was blasted across the elevators. Then,

as nosegears became conventional, I held the stick back to keep the propeller a little higher off the rocks during the runup. I never told my students to do it, but I noticed that they also held the wheel back when they were trusted to do a runup, simply mimick

ing my action. Such is the power of suggestion, an unspoken command given through the example of a supposed master of all wisdom.

I love a good chandelle, even more so when it's done with a powerful airplane right

off the deck after a runway-hugging takeoff. It looks and feels great to extract the energy from a wealth of speed for a sweeping climb as high as the force will carry you, until the threat of a stall requires a level-off into safe, sensible flight. But I can't do them where students' eyes can see them, lest they would be tempted to emulate the master and carry on into the low-altitude stall that waits for the unwary.

There is, then, a code of behavior for

flight instructors that must be taught, as much as flying with your right hand or verbalizing a demonstration. You are, as a CFI, responsible for what you impart. If I teach you how to teach, one of the things you'll learn is to never mislead a student into a lifetime of bad habits. If you don't drain the sumps, he won't either. If you taxi with 1500 rpm, that will become his normal modus operandi. A traffic call, unaccompanied by a scan outside the cockpit, is obviously sufficient for collision avoidance because he saw you drop the mic and turn onto final without looking.

There will be a time to indulge your wild side, after you no longer practice the CFI craft, or when you're far from home and cloaked in the anonymity of a strange N-number. But you may find you're settled into a CFI leadership mode that won't allow you to skip the mag check or fly without a VFR chart handy. That's the way it is, and if you look around, off there in the distance, you'll probably see a kid watching how you do things. And you'll want him to be a CFI someday too. Lead by Your example.

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