

MENTORSHIP MATTERS

Mentorship is an integral part of becoming a successful pilot. It is an aspect of learning, perhaps beyond the necessary training, which one would be wise to value. Mentorship allows young pilots to avoid making many of their own mistakes by learning from the mistakes of others. Also, in having a good mentor, a pilot not only has an instructor, but someone who is genuinely concerned for his or her wellbeing and safety. Lastly, proper mentorship paired with a proper learning attitude of the student, allows for a smoother road to success.

As is the case for many pilots, my dream to fly began at a young age. And so as soon as I was old enough, I began to study and to train. In the spring of 2011, at age eighteen, I received my PPL and in the winter of 2011, at age 19, my CPL— both at Mountain City Aviation, Morden MB. The following spring, I went to North Battleford to take the Professional Aerial Applicator course which Battleford's Airspray teaches every spring. That summer I began flying for Jonair, at only nineteen years of age. I flew the Cessna 188 Ag-Truck for three seasons and then in spring of 2015 I went back to Battleford's Airspray to do the turbine conversion. Since then I have been flying an Air Tractor 502B.

Throughout the PPL and CPL training, much is taught on piloting skills, human factors and so forth. While these are all important factors to becoming a pilot, there is one important component of training which was highlighted at Battleford's Airspray—the importance of mentorship. While I was still being taught how to fly, to spray and to land tailwheel, there was a much greater focus on mentorship. Fran DeKock, a very successful pilot who is well recognized throughout North America for what he brings to the industry of Aerial Application, was my first mentor. He continually stressed how important proper mentorship is in order for young pilots to be successful in the industry. Not only this, but also how important it is for students to have the right attitude and to be open to learn. As Fran says, **“I can make a hell of a pilot out of a guy with only half descent skills but a good attitude, but it is hard to make a**

good pilot out of a guy that has outstanding skills but a bad attitude.” And so I decided to have the attitude of a learner and to find some mentors. After all, who doesn't want a good chance at a successful career?

I recently read a book by John C. Maxwell called *Sometimes You Win—Sometimes You Learn* (It's a great book, I would highly recommend it to everyone). The book is about wins and losses, and how we deal with them. When people experience losses or failures, they have the choice of learning from their mistakes (or those of others) or simply seeing the event as a loss—gaining nothing from the experience. Maxwell writes that “85 percent of success in life is due to attitude, while only 15 percent is due to ability.”¹ I learned a great deal from this book, the most important being that you can learn from your losses, or bad situations, and use them to become better in life. How this relates to mentorship is that you don't only need to learn from you own mistakes. If you are willing to look at other people's mistakes and learn from them, you might save yourself the pain of going through the same problems.

In life, it is important to have a mentor that can sit down with you and tell you about his/her lessons through life. If you have the right attitude, there is always something you can learn. In the Aerial Applicator industry, that might be something as simple as how to spray a certain field, or how to deal with certain obstacles in your field. Sometimes it might be on whether it's too windy for you because you are less experienced, or you have to give up a big field because you haven't been around many big wires yet. If you have the right attitude towards learning and towards your mentor, you have a head start and you'll save yourself many headaches.

There are many different people in this world, no two are the same. Everyone's personality is a little different and everyone has various ways of interacting and communicating with other people. It is important that you have good and clear communication with your mentor. Your mentor should be

¹ John Maxwell. *Sometimes You Win—Sometimes You Learn: Life's Greatest Lessons are Gained from Our Losses* (New York: Center Street, 2013), 111.

genuinely interested in your wellbeing and safety. He should sit down with you and talk, ask how things are going, and be willing to give you a few tips. Sometimes your mentor might see you doing something that seems too dangerous or less efficient, and he might remind you of it.

Something that one of my mentors has always done is that when we get ready to spray he will tell me to not rush, make sure I check for towers and wires and so forth. When I have my plane running and I'm ready to go, he'll come up to me and tell me the same thing again. People could react to this in a few different ways. Some guys might think, "I'm not a baby, leave me alone;" others might think, "I've done this before, no need to remind me." I think of it this way; he is interested in my safety and wellbeing, and he is just reminding me; it's reassuring for me to know that my mentor is interested in my wellbeing.

Since I have this relationship with my mentor and I know he cares for me, I can feel free to sit down and ask him questions. I don't need to be afraid that he will think that I should know everything by now. It is important to have an environment where all the pilots are able to talk about their occurrences and of what they experienced. This creates an environment where the newer pilot doesn't feel like the 'odd ball' if he or she has a few questions. Also, being in this environment teaches young pilots to set an example and to be part of the mentorship later when newer pilots join the crew.

Keeping an attitude of a learner and having a good mentor, allow for a smoother path to success. This has proven itself countless times during my career. I remember the first year as an AG-Pilot, going for breakfast with a few other pilots from our company. While we were waiting for our food, the senior pilot grabbed a napkin, starting drawing a field on it and asked me how I would spray it. I remember he did that because close to the field lived a man who didn't like when we turned over his yard. And so we discussed how we would spray it. It was nothing out of the ordinary, but what was key about this scenario, is that the mentor was making sure that the new pilot wasn't getting himself into

unnecessary trouble, and also that I was willing to listen and to learn. I could have easily become unteachable, thinking that I had just graduated from the professional Aerial Applicators Pilot training and that I knew how to do it. However, looking back at what I learned from Fran, I knew I had better listen if my mentors were taking the time to teach me something.

I also remember another time when one of our pilots came to me and pointed out that I seemed to be turning quite hard, considering the low time I had. He went on to tell me that when he was still flying that same plane, he had once stalled the plane in a turn and was lucky to have been able to recover before striking the ground. Again, I could have had the attitude that I had done it like this before and I'd be fine. But I listened to what he said and made sure that I didn't turn as hard. One stall in a turn, a little less lucky than his, could end my career and possibly even my life. My mentor would also get me to shut down sooner sometimes than the other pilots because it was too windy, or would not allow me to spray certain fields because of obstacles. Sometimes it was difficult to accept the decisions, because I saw all the money that I could have made, but that was the time to remember that my mentor was fighting for my own good. You might not always understand it in that moment, but a few years down the road, you'll look back and be happy for all that your mentors taught you.

If you have a healthy attitude of listening to what your mentors say and learning as much as possible, you'll have a much easier time in the industry—and everything else in life for that matter. Because, believe it or not, if your mentors are advising you about something, then they have gone through it or have witnessed someone else go through it.

One last story that I would like to share is from when I was doing my training at Battlefords Airspray. There were several instructors and I wanted to make sure that I would fly with each of them. I wanted to do this because every pilot has his or her own way of doing certain things and I wanted to learn from them all. I remember flying with one specific instructor who caught me not thoroughly

checking the powerlines, and so he reminded me to always check them thoroughly. Well, in my second year as an AG-pilot, I was spraying a certain field, which I had checked, but had not given enough attention to the powerlines. And so when I did my trim, pass I noticed that the powerline was bent. I had not noticed this in my pre-spray inspection. If I had come in from the other side of the field to do the trim pass, I would have likely ended up tangled in the lines. The way in which I had done the pass now, the line bent away from me, whereas if I had come in the other way, the powerlines would have bent towards me. In that moment I remembered vividly what my instructor had told me.

There are certainly things that everyone must learn on their own, but having the right attitude and being open to learn from your mentor, is key to being successful in life. As Fran said, **“I can make a hell of a pilot out of a guy with only half descent skills but a good attitude, but it is hard to make a good pilot out of a guy that has outstanding skills but a bad attitude.”**