

Wow!

THE SKY'S THE LIMIT

Weekend Flying Workshop Teaches Women to Unleash Their Personal Power

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WHY ARE THERE SO FEW female pilots? Airport owner Linda Castner thought she knew the answer: fear of dying. Castner, herself a pilot, set out to learn why only 6 percent of U.S. pilots are women. She and philosophy professor Sue Stafford of Simmons College in Boston launched a research study funded by the New Jersey Division of Aeronautics and the Wolf Aviation Fund.

The results proved Castner wrong. The actual reason tying women to the ground? A fear of looking foolish.

So Castner and Stafford set out to convince them otherwise, creating two weekend clinics: Women Take Flight and Leaders Take Flight. The intense workshops, team-taught by the two at Castner's family-owned airport in Pittstown, N.J., encourage participants to experience flight firsthand.

Castner believes piloting skills—using a compass, navigating based on limited maneuverability, managing outside forces while flying—are similar to the ones needed for charting a course through life.

"What's so beautiful about the cockpit is that leaping into risk is one crystal-clear moment," Stafford says. "You've prepared yourself well; you've taken the risk; and when you push that throttle in, you do it by yourself or the plane goes nowhere."

The \$3,000 courses include lectures, discussion and, of

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course, actual air time. Castner says experiences absorbed under the influence of adrenaline seem to be permanent. Chairing a meeting, putting ideas forth or heading a project can create a panic response similar to attempting a complicated aerial maneuver.

First with classroom instruction and then in the plane, participants learn how to manage outside forces with logical, specific steps. Thinking clearly ensures the plane stays on course and in the sky. "To be a successful manager, you have to take risks. And when you do, your palms will be sweating and your heart will be pounding just like it is in the airplane," Stafford explains.

At the start of each weekend session, participants are paired off as flight partners. While one pilots the plane with a qualified flight instructor, the other rides in back. How each person responds to challenges affects the other, which makes for interesting discussions afterward.

THINKING CLEARLY, TAKING RISKS

RETIRED POLICE CHIEF MARY RABADEAU OF CRANFORD, N.J., recently participated in Women Take Flight. She says the workshop helped her take more risks in her personal life and in her private-sector business position.

"The clearest moment for me was when I banked left and overcompensated to correct it," she recalls. "The adrenaline got going, and I worried about crashing for a moment, which was ridiculous considering I was sitting beside a flight instructor. This one experience is worth more than a thousand hours of training in a virtual situation."

For Sue Fox, who works with a Flemington, N.J., educational services commission, the lesson came not from a fancy maneuver but during "slow flight," when the plane is at a speed between gliding and stalling. "I tend to jump headfirst into things, but slowing down and figuring out where I am is a good thing," she says.

At the end of the sessions, Castner and Stafford ask participants to write letters to their partners. "People say things to each other after they've bonded that a facilitator can't say," Castner says. "When you know you've met the challenge and that someone has helped you, it's like spending two years in a co-mentorship."



Linda Castner: Piloting skills can help you meet life's challenges.

ABA/JONATHAN BAENDERS