

In the exercises that followed, the participants characterized their perceived risk of flying—and whether that risk was physical, mental, or sociocultural. Castner talked about techniques that athletes use to elicit peak performance, and Stafford talked about different styles of learning. The three flight instructors who would take them flying (all women in this case) were introduced, and the group asked them questions: How do you deal with a close call? How much physical strength is required? How often are the airplanes checked mechanically? How often do you go up with students?

After a short course on aerodynamics, the women went out to the airplanes to learn about the preflight inspection and how the controls worked. A wheelbarrow exercise demonstrated how it would feel to pitch, roll, and yaw. Back in the classroom, a visualization and oral rehearsal of the takeoff roll prepared the participants for their first flight.

Choosing flight

The atmosphere for this first flight was carefully rehearsed—and probably very different from most introductory flights. Before going out to the ramp, Castner said to the group, “You put yourself into the environment, by pushing the throttle in—and you decide if you have the courage to start.” In position for takeoff, the student in the left seat initiated the takeoff roll by doing just that, advancing the throttle while the instructor guided the control yoke.

Because of less-than-pristine weather conditions in the practice area, the flight consisted of an extended trip around the pattern—but it was enough to make a big impression. By focusing on her partner's strengths (“my partner is a survivor—she made it through being homeless and jobless” and “she comes from a can-do background”) each woman helped teach her partner that accentuating her strengths rather than pushing away her weaknesses would enable her to meet the challenge successfully.

A young college student, newly wed, who had been holding her partner's hand for support prior to the flight, jumped out of the airplane all smiles: “I loved that!!”

Changes in attitude

A second, longer flight on the next

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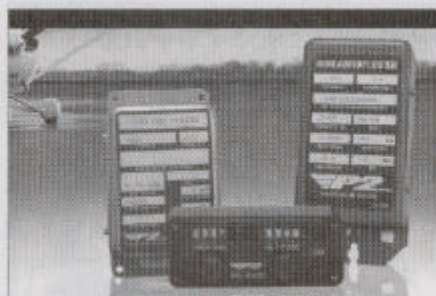
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