



Attitudes, Airmanship, and Accidents

The 2006 AvKiwi seminar series discussed the issues of pilot attitude, the situations pilots sometimes find themselves in, and the role that these factors have in aircraft accidents.

Attitudes

Have you ever known an individual you would describe as 'an accident waiting to happen'? What was it about that person that made you think they might have an accident? Most people when asked these questions will readily acknowledge that they have known such a person, and most will also say that the reason for their being an accident in waiting was a 'bad attitude'.

What determines an individual's attitudes, good and bad? How was your attitude developed to life, the universe and everything – including flying? There is undoubtedly a genetic influence on our attitudes, just as there is a genetic influence on our physical and mental traits and abilities. These traits are, however, moulded by our life experience – what we have seen and done. A big part of this is what is sometimes called 'cultural immersion'. We are, to a certain extent, a product of the culture in which we live.

Culture

A simple definition of culture is, 'how we do things here'. Different countries, different organisations, companies, schools, industries – any group – all have different ways of doing business, and so have different cultures. Some of these differences are small – there isn't really a big difference between how one airline operates from another. Some differences can be large – the culture of the airline industry is quite different from that of, say, the 'ag' industry. That culture has an effect on the way individuals within that industry behave.

How would you describe the culture in your flying organisation or industry? Is it conducive to safety? Note that cultures, like attitudes, change over time. What is the New Zealand culture and attitude towards drink-driving like now, compared with say, 20 years ago?

Behaviour

It is often easy to confuse behaviour with attitude. It is actually relatively easy to get someone to change their behaviour, but changing attitudes does not normally happen overnight. It takes a long time to mould attitudes.

For example: a young C-cat instructor turns up at the aero club after a hard night out. He is wearing a shirt that looks like he slept in it. His shoes look like he has been wearing them to muck out the horse paddock. The CFI gives him a bollocking, sends him home, and tells him to come back better presented. He turns up the next day in shiny shoes and neatly ironed shirt. His behaviour has changed. Has his attitude changed? Probably not. If anything he probably just thinks his CFI is a @#%*. Over time, when he sees everyone neatly presented, and realises the benefits of presenting a professional image, his attitude may change.

The Hazardous Attitudes

Researchers have put together a list of 'hazardous attitudes' – those most likely to get an individual into strife:

Anti-Authority –

The rules do not apply to me.

Impulsiveness –

I must act now.

Invulnerability –

It won't happen to me.

Macho –

I'll show you how good I am.

Resignation –

I cannot change things.

Denial –

It is not as bad as 'they' say.

Deference –

It must be okay if you say so, or if others do it.



Carlton Campbell conducting the AvKiwi Safety Seminar at Invercargill.

You may well look at this list, nod wisely, and note that none of them apply to you. Really? Ask yourself a simple question. How often do you exceed 100 km/h when driving on the open road in New Zealand? Most people will admit to doing so, so you are not alone!

Why would you knowingly break the law, and do something demonstrably likely to increase your chances of an accident? People come up with all sorts of reasons – "It's safe", "The speed limit is too low", "I'm a good enough driver to go faster", "Everyone else goes faster than 100, so it's okay", "I was in a hurry to get to a rugby match". We've heard all of these reasons. Most can be linked back to the hazardous attitudes.

There is no doubt that these attitudes are factors in many aircraft accidents. The trick is to recognise the potential for these attitudes to sneak up on you, and actively work at keeping them at bay.

Situations

Not all accidents have attitudes as obvious causal factors. Many accidents appear to stem from the situations pilots find themselves in. The fact is that any of us can do some fairly random things when placed in the right situation – things that other people might look at and say, "I'd never do that", or "How could they be so stupid?" Do you think you are immune from this? Think again.

Researchers did a lot of investigation into the situational nature of human

behaviour, particularly after World War 2. There was a general disbelief that supposedly ordinary people could somehow commit heinous acts. Researchers were in for a shock – literally. A number of experiments were conducted to investigate why people did what they did, including:

- **The Prisoner and Guard experiments.** Take a random group of people. Arbitrarily make some of them guards and others prisoners. What happens? The guards quickly tend to become authoritarian and start to abuse their prisoners. The prisoners tend to take on the traits of real prisoners. Some of these experiments had to be stopped because of the anarchy that was developing.
- **The Shock Learning experiments.** People can be coerced into giving other people supposedly painful and near-lethal electric shocks in controlled learning experiments.
- **The Good Samaritan.** A group of theology students (trainee priests) at a Seminary was told to prepare a sermon on the Good Samaritan. Half were then told they were late for their presentation, and to hurry to the venue. The other half were told to make their way to the venue when they were ready, and there was no time pressure. On the way they passed – you guessed it – someone in need of assistance. The half in a hurry tended to race on by, while those with time to spare were the ones that tended to stop and help. The situation had largely determined the reaction of the people.

Aviation Situations

Research has shown that a number of aircraft accidents are caused when normally responsible pilots find themselves in situations that lead them to do stupid things. Most of these can be classified as either situations outside the experience and training of the pilot, or those where the pilot was under some pressure to do something. Pressure is an insidious contributor to accidents. Typical examples include:

- Pressure from your passengers (“I’ve got to get home by tonight”, “I don’t feel well”, “I need to take all these bags and can’t leave any behind”, etc).

- Environmental pressures (It’s getting dark, the weather is getting bad, the wind is not what was forecast, etc).
- Organisation expectations (“We need the plane back today”, “If you won’t do it we’ll find someone who will”, “The engine will be okay, bring it home and we’ll fix it here”).

The Role of Attitudes and Situations in Accidents

Consider an accident caused by an engine failure. Engines **do** fail. An accident or incident caused by an engine failure is therefore not something the pilot has much control over, so that would be a situational accident, wouldn’t it?

Sometimes that would indeed be the case – say 300 ft agl after takeoff with no suitable forced landing area in front (and there are quite a few runways in New Zealand where that is the case). But pilot attitude can have a significant bearing on the result when engine failures occur. The pilot chooses the flight route, the altitudes flown, and thus the proximity to suitable forced landing areas.

For instance, a flight from Paraparaumu to Wanganui can be flown as a straight line over the water at 1500 ft – and for most of the flight an engine failure will leave you swimming. Alternatively you can follow the coast. It adds a few more

track miles, but an engine failure then will leave you much better placed to conduct a forced landing. Logic would dictate that all pilots (of single-engine aircraft at least) would follow the coast. Many don’t. Why? Are the hazardous attitudes playing a part here? (“Engines don’t fail”, or “it won’t fail on me”, or “the other aircraft are going direct so that should be okay”, etc).

A rule of thumb for any flying is that you **always** have options available to you – in mountain flying the phrase is to always have an escape route. Do not allow your own attitudes to lead you in to bad situations.

Summary

Our behaviour, not just as pilots but in all things, is influenced by both our attitudes and the situations we find ourselves in.

Our attitudes are in turn influenced by the culture in which we operate. A good culture helps to generate good attitudes. A poor culture can cultivate the hazardous attitudes. We can all exhibit some of these attitudes at times, how fast will you drive to work tomorrow? Beware of the insidious effect that such attitudes can have on safety.

Beware also of situations that could lead you astray – always have an escape route. That is another way of saying, “keep your options open”. Do not allow external pressures to unduly affect your decision-making. ■

AvKiwi Safety Seminars

The final AvKiwi safety seminar for 2006 was held in Queenstown on 4 May, and it was attended by 52 people – that’s a good turn-out and reasonably typical of attendance numbers at other venues. Thanks to everyone who made the effort to attend – your participation made the seminars a great success. Jim Rankin and Carlton Campbell enjoyed presenting the 22 seminars (from Kerikeri to Invercargill), and if we didn’t come to your town this year, hopefully we will get there next year.

We are already thinking about possible topics for the next series, and have appreciated your feedback about topics you would like covered in the future. Watch *Vector* later in the year

for an announcement of the 2007 series.

Thank you to Airways New Zealand who have generously sponsored the spot prizes of a full set of the 2005 VNCs, **or** an *AIP New Zealand Vol 4* with a 12-month amendment subscription for each winner.

Spot Prize Winners

Blenheim	Richard Gorman
Nelson	Barry Chapman
Motueka	Golden Bay Flying Club
Wellington	Kris Ericksen
Masterton	Cliff McCann
Rangiora	Colin Marshall
Ashburton	Alan Wright
Oamaru	Sharyn Price
Dunedin	Peter Dean
Invercargill	Jacques de Reeper
Queenstown	Lachlan Falconer