FIRST THINGS FIRST !

'First things first' is one of my rules for life. That being said, I always start from the very beginning when I have a new student. I will not accept a student until he or she has completed ground school, and has a recommendation from their ground school instructor.

The first lesson is very important for the student. It also gives me the opportunity to determine what kind of pilot this person will be. After the student and I are formally introduced we retire to my office for the beginning of the first lesson.

I start by asking about what he or she thought about the ground school that they had just completed. We discuss in detail the hands-on business of flying the airplane. I go over the theory of flight, the three separate axis that the airplane moves around. The dynamics of an airfoil and how the manipulations of the controls effect different airfoils associated with the airplane. We discuss all the control surfaces that effect the flight, how they work and why. We go over lift, gravity, roll, pitch and yaw, "P" factor, torque, adverse Yaw, slipping and skidding, drag and "g" forces. We talk about the rules and regulations, we talk about standard traffic patterns and non standard traffic patterns. We talk about taxing, takeoff, climbing, level flight, and descending. I describe in detail the different things that they will see and what to watch for in the different phases of flight. I describe speed and power control. I talk about how the wind will effect the ground track of the airplane while flying across country. All of these things have already been discussed in detail in ground school, however, I go over them again with each new student.

My self-devised syllabus that I use on the first flight is one for familiarity. It's for the student to know and understand me. And it's for, the student to start learning to fly the airplane.

As we approach the airplane which is always tied down on the ramp, I take the opportunity for the student to look at the airplane from a distance away. I ask if they can see any apparent damage. Sometimes the forest can't be seen for the trees being in the way. First thing we check as we approach the airplane is the fuel quantity. Are we going to need to order fuel? Second thing we check is the engine oil quantity. Does it need any oil? "These are things that can be accomplished by service personnel while we are completing the preflight inspection." I tell them. Most times the fuel and oil are already topped off. From the Engine cowling we unhurriedly inspect the rest of the airplane. We check the propeller for nicks, the leading edges of the left wing, the wing tip, the trailing edge of the wing, the ailerons, the flaps, then along the fuselage to empennage. We check the condition of the leading edge of the horizontal and the vertical stabilizers, the elevators, the rudder, around to the trailing of the left wing, flaps and ailerons, left wing tip, and the leading edge. We look at all static ports, static wicks and so on. This may take 25 to 30 minutes as I try to impress upon the student the importance of a good preflight inspection. "Sometimes the obvious is so obvious that we miss it completely." I tell them.

Once the inspection of outside is complete. I ask the student to climb into the pilot seat and while I am standing on the ground with the door open I continue with my monologue. I talk about each of the controls that the pilot uses and how they work. I describe in great detail each of the flight instruments. We discuss the engine instruments, the fuel control lever, the throttle, the carb heat and the mixture control. (I admit that I am good at this, and I cover everything.) I describe each and every lever and switch that is used, how they are used and why. "Nothing is there that doesn't have a purpose, everything that is there is a way to control the outcome of each flight. Each item has its own importance," I tell them.

After I have covered everything I always ask them if they have any questions. The vast majority of the students say that they don't. One or two of them may ask about something that has already been covered. Most often the student may need to get something right in their mind. When I re-explain it to them and when they seemed to be satisfied with their understanding we continue.

More times than not they seemed to be satisfied and have no questions. I continue my monologue something like this.

"Okay, I'm glad that you understand everything and that you have no questions. Here is what I want you to do. I'm going to close this door and back away, I want you to start up the engine and taxi over to the runway." I physically point to the end of the runway. "Then, I want you to go ahead and takeoff and fly around the field a couple times then come in and land on the same runway. Then taxi back here and we will discuss it. Okay?" I ask.

Most of them ask, "That's all there is to it?

I answer, "Yep, that's all there is to it."

"Really? That's all there it to it?" Some of them ask again.

I reply, "Yep, be careful now, okay?"

This is when I learn about the student and their ability or inability to think and to make good decisions.

SEVEN OUT OF TEN would attempt this if I would allow it. I NEVER ALLOW THEM TO GO ANY FARTHER.

My next statement to them is in the form of a question, "**ARE YOU OUT OF YOUR MIND?** Do you actually think that I would allow you to take the airplane by yourself and attempt to fly it alone?" At this point I realize that decision-making is going to be an important part of this student's training. This is the only negative statement or question I have or make to the student ever again. Everything else will be taught in a positive manor. But I have learned a great deal about them and will instruct them accordingly.

Three out of ten will ask me if I am **OUT OF MY MIND**, and explain to me that there I no way that they will try to fly alone.

So what I have are three students out of ten who I can instruct, they will listen to me, they will learn rapidly, and I will allow them to fly solo and I will not worry about the outcome.

On the other hand, I have seven students who I will watch like a hawk. Students who, for what ever reason, can't make good decisions. I will tell them over and over again about the dangers of flight, the hardness of terra firma, the finality of death. I will express to them again and again that "Aviation in itself is not inherently dangerous. But that it is terribly unforgiving of any carelessness, incapacity or neglect. Thinking and the ability to think is paramount in learning how to fly safely. Okay?" I say and ask.

Some of them will get it some of them will not. Some of them will learn to fly safely, some will never fly alone.

Two things I refuse to do as a flight instructor. First; I will not allow a student to fly solo until I am reasonably sure that they have the ability to think and that they can make good decisions. Second; I will not allow a student to fly solo until they have successfully recovered from a spin.

I've been flying airplanes for more than forty-five years and I haven't hurt anyone, nor to my knowledge have any of my students hurt anyone. We may have dinged an airplane or two, but we haven't caused any physical pain to anybody.

~Adverse Yaw