

How Women Pilots Succeed


Succeeding in a job world dominated by men can be a real challenge, especially for women pilots who are new to aviation. If you're thinking about turning your passion for flying into a full-time profession, there are several important areas to consider as you work to advance your career. They run the gamut from optimizing your performance with skills to dealing with gender-sensitive issues and learning to be yourself, rather than trying to be one of the boys.

Start by distinguishing yourself as you progress through your training. Make sure you are well prepared by doing your homework and reading ahead by a lesson or two so you know what's coming and can ask some intelligent questions. Show up early, ready to do the job. Don't expect any favors because you're a woman. Rather, show that you're qualified and sincere in your interest and enthusiasm.

Too many men like to attribute a woman's progress in aviation to her gender. The comment, "She is just here because she's a female" can be countered with a properly barbed reply like "No, I was hired for my T and A—talent and ability!" Let them know that you may get noticed because you are female but you got the job because you're qualified.

Some strategies that work

Networking, a major key to success, is a female talent that can accelerate your progress up the career ladder. There are several good books on the subject that can help you



develop your skills and use them to your advantage. My favorite is *The New Network Your Way to Job and Career Success* by Krannich and Krannich, which details how to use, rather than abuse, the contacts you make. The “good-old-girl” network is alive and well, waiting to help you if you’ll only demonstrate that you’re worth the time and energy.

A number of gender traps can present problems to women advancing through what is most certainly a man’s world. Rather than ignoring the differences, try to understand them and use them to your advantage. Learning about the world in which you’re working can be very revealing, particularly if you can comprehend how men view you in their aviation world.

Since men do most of the hiring in this business, following some important rules will help you get ahead. These include learning the game of flying well and understanding the industry structure and the hierarchy of the players, as well as the importance of setting goals and focusing to win.

Women tend to see establishing good relationships as a goal in itself and are quite process-oriented. Men, on the other hand, see relationships as tools to get the job done. Said another way: women talk about it, whereas men DO it. Recognizing how the two viewpoints differ can affect your progress. It’s crucial to your advancement to learn how to trade your talk-about-it traits for accomplish-the-job-now skills, so you’re perceived as a pilot who’s competent and enthusiastic and doesn’t need special treatment.

Seven rules for achieving success

I could, of course, spend pages discussing each of these ideas in depth, but let me list the most important ones for you to consider.

Rule #1 Be goal-oriented rather than process-oriented.

Rule #2 Strive to work well with other women; they will contribute to your success.

Rule #3 Focus on one item at a time in dealing with men.

Rule #4 Use your power; that's what it's there for!

Rule #5 Be direct in your approach, particularly when dealing with conflict.

Rule #6 Remember that business is a game and act accordingly.

Rule #7 Hold no grudges (this is a particularly important requirement for women aviators).

Some tricks of the trade

In closing, I'd like to offer a few tricks I've found to be helpful in overcoming obstacles in our male-dominated world of flying. Be assertive, find a mentor, and learn to be a leader. These actions will help you overcome some of the many pitfalls that can easily overwhelm you.

Let 90 percent of everything you hear about what you said or did go in one ear and out the other. Much of gossip is meant to test your ability to get along with the boys. Notice, I said "get along with," which is quite different from acting like one of them. If you find yourself in an offensive situation, say so. Draw boundaries when you must and clearly state your limits, or the fellows might think you have none. No limits can lead to as many problems as having too many. You're a woman and there's no reason you shouldn't be treated like one.

Don't take yourself too seriously. Learn to laugh at yourself. Remember that success in this business is bound to incur occasional disappointments, jealousies, and rumors, along with many new experiences and positive rewards. Use your assertiveness, creativity, flexibility, perseverance, and courage to enjoy each step along the way. In a word, use your power wisely, it will propel you to new heights if you nurture it properly.