



Mistakes You Wish You'd Never Made

How many times have you wished you could back up about 30 seconds and redo your last action? From flip comments to plain old bad judgment calls, we've all had occasions when we wished we had done things a bit differently. Hindsight, they say, is 20/20, but since we can all be a bit myopic at times, I'd like to focus on a few of the little mistakes we're prone to make and how to avoid them before they grow into larger ones.

A rather gross error came to my attention one day from a chief pilot at a regional airline whose company had undergone many changes during the last few years. One day, he received a pilot's resume addressed to the chief pilot who had retired years before while at their former airline's name and in a long-since vacated location; he sighed in disgust. "What's the matter with pilots these days? Can't they pay attention to details, especially important ones like who should receive their resume and where to send it?"

The sad part of this story is that this pilot might have gained an interview if he had managed to correct the gross errors before he mailed his resume. His qualifications were good ones that interested this chief pilot, but they couldn't overshadow the glaring blunder of not mailing the data to the right person at the proper location.

With today's preponderance of information available at the touch of a computer or telephone button, there's no excuse for botching something as simple as a name and address. Each company who receives your resume could be your future employer. Be sure to double check your details before you launch into your advertising campaign.

The failed checkride

No doubt the majority of pilots have failed a checkride at some time during their careers, but the reasons we hear discussed during interview preparation sessions tend to demonstrate the poor judgment of the applicant rather than unavoidable mistakes that led to their failure. Since you know you're going to have to discuss any failed checkride in a future interview, begin now to consider how you can minimize the damage such an event could have on your record.

First and foremost, don't take a checkride before you're ready. Never be too proud to ask for more instruction or postpone the event to adequately prepare for it. No one looking back on your flying history will know you took a little extra time to complete a rating or license. Besides, you could probably use the extra flight time, which all goes toward that important number—your total flight hours. A check ride failure, however, will remain on your record forever and be something you'll have to explain at every job interview.

Time and again we see pilots taking checkrides when they're not prepared or are overstressed or physically sick, figuring it's best to just get it over with rather than relive the anxiety and pressure that routinely precede a checkride. Here is where your good judgment (that nagging voice in the back of your head) should tell you how stupid it is to risk blemishing your good record just for the sake of expediency.

How will it sound at the hearing?

Every time I'm faced with a decision that could later be construed as less than sterling (read: stupid), I ask myself,



“How will it sound at the NTSB hearing?”—which could likely occur if my judgment is wrong and my course of action is a poor one. If the answer is “not good,” then another course of action is probably wise. Rushing into a situation that offers no penalty for waiting is both stupid and immature, as well as a leading cause of airplane accidents.

Look into your own background. No doubt you can find examples of your own poor judgment. Hopefully, the mistakes are small ones you’ve learned from and can now use to help temper your future actions. In my own attempts to slow down my sometimes hurried nature, I’ve developed a self-imposed set of rules that says 1) If you have to rush to get something done, you’re not doing it right and 2) If you take the time now to consider the consequences of your actions *before* they occur, perhaps you’ll *not* find yourself wishing you could back up 30 seconds after you’ve done something that should have been covered by Rule # 1.

When all is said and done, perhaps the most important of all is my captain’s rule: Look carefully at whatever action you’re about to undertake in our unforgiving aviation world and ask yourself if you’ve carefully considered all the necessary variables. Is there anything you can change now, rather than regret later? Do it now, while you have the chance (and the consequences are likely nil). If it takes an extra three minutes to make sure you avoid wake turbulence or you have to delay 10 minutes to depart on the longer runway that’s into the wind, just remind yourself that this is what judgment’s all about.

You’ve probably got your own list of mistakes you wish you’d never made. Just remind yourself, as I do, that time is on your side. Use it wisely to ensure many years of happy, productive flying.