



January 2022 Newsletter

**Mike Goulian Aviation**  
**Pro Tip of the Month - Acting as Pilot in Command**  
**By CFII Christian Franqui**

So, you've got your pilot's license; you can officially call yourself a pilot and tell everyone about it at dinner parties. Cool. You were taught about the airplane and how its wings produce lift. You were taught about aerodynamics, how to perform maneuvers and when you're supposed to use more right rudder (you're probably still not using enough). You learned how to navigate and how to pass a written and flight exam. But we are rarely taught how to be a great pilot-in-command, nor do we get to fly with many other pilots-in-command leading up to our licensure. So, let's explore a few ways we can stay true to the awesome responsibility of being PIC.

The pilot-in-command knows his/her role and the role of ATC.

Don't let the title of 'air traffic *control*' confuse you. It's a misnomer that ATC controls the airplanes flying out there. I've never heard of a 'controller-in-command,' It's the pilots that control the airplanes. If anything, I would think of ATC as air traffic *services*. ATC is there for us to separate air traffic and provide other *services* like clearances, vectors, safety alerts and traffic advisories. (See Chapter 5 of the Aeronautical Information Manual (AIM 5-5) for Pilot/Controller Roles and Responsibilities.)

FAR 91.3 states that the pilot-in-command of an aircraft is directly responsible for and is the final authority as to the safe operation of that aircraft. Therefore, the cockpit is not a democracy. Whether it's a passenger or a controller wanting something from you, it is up to you to make that final call.

For instance, there may be times when a controller is looking to sequence you for a landing in between other aircraft. Sometimes the aircraft behind you is moving at a faster rate than you are. The controller calls you and asks to "maintain best forward speed." This request does not mean we should increase throttle to near full when on an approach. The pilot-in-command recognizes that perhaps your best forward speed for those conditions that day might just be your present speed. This request may sound like a directive, but it is merely a friendly "hey, if able, keeping up your approach speed would be very much appreciated." You're not going to get in trouble if you aren't able to comply in this scenario. The alternative on the other hand, well, let's just say a good pilot-in-command is always ready and willing to go around.

The pilot-in-command removes their "inner passenger" when making decisions.



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The cockpit is a very dynamic environment that is known to be challenging because it presents the pilot with a slew of decisions to be made. If we aren't well prepared before a flight, the likelihood of finding yourself in a situation full of uncertainty over what to do in a difficult situation will be significantly higher. Often, it's the urge to just "get there" that keeps us thinking like *passengers* rather than a pilot-in-command. "Get-there-itis" is to be resisted at all costs especially as a general aviation pilot.

An airline pilot for instance, will fly from point a to point b and if someone in the back really needs to get there in a hurry, it doesn't affect the PIC's decision making inside the cockpit. Whereas a GA pilot has a vested interest in getting to where they're going to go. We give ourselves our own pressure. So, learning how to resist these external pressures is vital to flying safely. You must take the need to get there out of the decision-making process.

You may find it helpful to set a criterion for making decisions. Personally, I follow these three benchmarks and I ask myself, in this order:

1. Is it safe?
2. Is it legal?
3. Is it comfortable for passengers?

If at any point, there exists the need to get rid of something on this list, then I start at the bottom and make my way up.

The pilot-in-command is always educating themselves.

A great pilot is someone who doesn't know they're a great pilot. Yes, we may have some metrics like flight hours or the number of different types of aircraft we've flown to give us a gauge of one's ability. But it can be just as easy to *over-estimate* those abilities to perform well inside a cockpit. Continuous education is the PIC's way to balance the forces of confidence and competence.

The FAA and the aviation community has many resources available to help us stay sharp, informed and humble. A good pilot-in-command will:

- Know the FARs (and follow them).
- Know their airplane and its limitations. Continually review normal, abnormal and emergency procedures.
- Enroll in the WINGS pilot proficiency program. Found at <https://www.faasafety.gov/wings>



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- Explore and read through aviation investigations and reports. Found at <https://www.nts.gov>
- Regularly obtain training or try for another rating or special endorsement.
- Fly with other pilots as often as possible.

The prudent PIC should also be keenly aware of their ability to discern between trust and complacency. Most of us (hopefully) have had years of uneventful flying which can easily build a false sense of security like “that’s not going to happen to me, that only really happens to other people.” We should be cautious of blissful ignorance and the feeling of invincibility. Continually educating the PIC in us with fresh information allows us to stay safe and always enjoying the ride.

Being a pilot-in-command requires a combination of skills. But It’s not all mathematical or technical. We also must think creatively, act under pressure, and adopt a mindset fitting for a role of such great responsibility. I think having the privilege to exercise this role in part is what makes aviation so great. You may have stories and/or tips that can be added to the long list of items that PICs can learn from, if you do, share them with a fellow pilot next time!

Happy flying friends!!