



Bridging the Gap!



When I was president of IAC Chapter 1 in the early 1990s, I was intent on growing our membership. One new member of the Chapter was a gentleman who had a marketing background, at one time worked for Bellanca Aircraft, loved flying aerobatics for the fun of it, had a positive energy, and later turned out to

be one of our best presidents. His name is Doug McConnell.

With Doug's help, we started working on recruiting new members through an emphasis on aerobatic education and a friendly atmosphere. We also hosted three great contests every summer. Bottom line—we grew the chapter by over 100 percent in less than four years, and it happened naturally by concentrating on doing the best we could with the fundamentals of teaching our members.

At that time, I was an avid competitor, so my focus naturally revolved around contest flying. I recall another Chapter member, Sissy Webb, who flew a pretty Decathlon, saying to me that we focused too much on competition, and she would like us to diversify our focus. I never got around to her request because I was so wrapped up in what I was doing—competing. But I never forgot what she told me that day because she was voicing a discontent about something I thought I was doing a good job at.

In my last President's Page, I spoke of the "perception" that our club is all about competition. I guess when I spoke with Sissy, I was giving that perception to her with my enthusiasm for contest flying. Now that I am retired from competition, I can reflect on my whole cycle from start to finish and understand more clearly what she was talking about. I cherished my competition years and made a lot of dear friends along the way. But in the haste of climbing the ladder, folks not climbing that ladder with us get left behind and sometimes unnecessarily.

Our mission statement in our by-laws says, "To encourage, aid and engage in research, including that of a scientific nature, and in education for the improvement of aviation safety through a better understanding of the art of aerobatics." One thing we have to do a better job at is gearing our education to whatever level an individual

wants to be involved. This may just be something as simple as being more proficient with stalls. If that's all a member wants from us, we should be happy to provide just that and feel good that we were able to help.

IAC Director Jim Taylor has done a lot of work preparing to launch a program called Aerobatic Rallies. The whole purpose of the program is to reach out to people who have an interest in aerobatics or advanced maneuvering but don't care about competition. The intention is to gather people together with common interests in a noncompetitive atmosphere. We've had some insurance snags along the way, but we're closing in on a format I am convinced will work.

If done properly it will begin to bridge the gap between competition and noncompetition. I still strongly feel, however, that one of our biggest assets is the knowledge base that exists within our membership. It's not rocket science that the pilots who practice more, sometimes under the careful eye of a trainer, will have a more complete understanding of the art. It goes without saying that pilots who are constantly working on refining their skills for a purpose will become aware of the finer details. Beginning members need to feel comfortable with tapping that library of knowledge. Veteran members in a position to teach must feel comfortable in providing that information to the extent wanted without the pressure of where the member should use it. Quality, not quantity, should be the rule. Concentrate on the fun of it, and let the members decide the goals of their learning.

Whatever your intentions are for belonging to IAC, you should be proud that you're making the effort to become better at the very essence of what it is to be a pilot—to understand all that you can about controlling an aircraft to its full capability and to become more proficient at the skills you already have. In a sense you are a stick and rudder professional because a professional is one that always seeks more skill and knowledge in what they do. It's an endless endeavor, and there is always so much more to learn.

It is also everyone's responsibility to share what you learn to further the collective knowledge of this club. In the process, let's make sure we don't leave anyone behind who wants to learn the aerobatic art or any portion of it. Fly safe and have fun! ✈