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The pursuit of becoming a helicopter pilot is a unique endeavor. For the vast majority of the populace it is a foreign concept to imagine what it feels like to fly in a helicopter or perform the duties associated with the job. Most often a future rotorcraft pilot has never even flown in a helicopter prior to starting their training.

This level of commitment to a career choice attracts a very particular type of individual. Without any knowledge of whether his or her personal skills are suited for the profession, or a complete picture of what the job involves, the candidate starts the long road to becoming a pilot.

This ambition has two avenues of possibilities. One can apply to a military program and take the risk of not making the “cut”, in which case he or she is still committed to remaining in service with other duties for a set amount of time. Or one can pay a very large amount of money in the private sector and take the risk of spending the money without having the necessary skills.

Either way this leap of faith into a foreign pursuit takes a committed mindset. The excitement projected from these up-and-coming pilots is evident and enviable. But over the years of doing the job this affection can often be forgotten or diminish.

No matter how much our passion took us in the direction of becoming a helicopter pilot, like any profession over time it can become just a job. Whether it is dealing with company politics or just getting up in the morning to go to work we can lose the desire we once held for the job.

I was recently speaking with a young man whose dream was to become a pilot, and he was looking for advice on how to enter the career. As I answered his questions and described career avenues and opportunities I was reminded of what a unique profession we all share.

Even the most ordinary flight from an outside perspective is an adventure in sights and duties. When describing a less than ideal mission environment the story projects a sense of accomplishment and overcoming adversity. All of a sudden my job didn't seem like so much of a job anymore.

Days later I was tasked to perform a flight that was one that I normally would not have embraced with any enthusiasm. It was a short ferry flight of a little over a 100 nm, with passing marginal weather and a need to get the aircraft where it was going as quickly as possible. As I monitored the weather throughout the day I found that I was enjoying the challenge of finding the perfect opportunity to launch, as opposed to worrying that I wouldn't find a window.

Once a window of opportunity did present itself I was able to launch for my mission. En route, between using weather radar and ground reporting stations, I was able to maneuver between the weather to achieve my routing. As the flight progressed I prepared in the cockpit for any unanticipated meteorological conditions by pre-tuning frequencies and having applicable approach plates handy.

It was then that I realized that I was having fun again, and it occurred to me, “What is safer ... being stressed out before and during a flight, or addressing the problem and solving it with a relaxed and analytical attitude?” The answer is self-apparent and within that mindset it gives us the most important skill as a helicopter pilot – the ability to say “No”.

As our careers progress we need to remind ourselves of the passion and enthusiasm it took to get us where we are now. Not only will this make us a safer pilot but it can also add gratification to our daily flight duties. As you enjoy this issue, try to look at each story with both the eye of enthusiastic newcomer and the seasoned veteran.

This month's issue of *HeliOps* is loaded with everything that makes our career an adventure. From pirates to cockpit configurations, from EMS safety to helicopter airframes this installment proves to entertain and educate. ■

GLEN WHITE
EDITOR