

# Reasons



## (or Excuses?)

Photos by Tom Hoffmann

*(Editor's Note: FAA Safety Briefing received the following account of a conversation the authors had with a young flight instructor of their acquaintance following the 2011 FAASTeam Safety Standdown events in their location. We have withheld the name they provided, but we will tell you that the CFI in question had a grand total of 400 hours. The authors' response to each reason—or excuse—are shown in italics.)*

### **Reason (Excuse) Number One**

Listen, I'm a CFI and I had three instructional flights scheduled for that Saturday. I need those hours. I don't plan on being a CFI forever; after all, it is not a real profession or career. I want to fly for the regionals and then go on to a major airline. The more hours I can get in my logbook, the better. And if I hadn't flown with those students, another CFI would have grabbed them.

*Did you know that there were five airline pilots at the standdown? They would have told you that hours are important, but demonstrating that you are committed to a culture of safety is far more important in the airline hiring process. Events like these can also be a great way to network and rub shoulders with fellow pilots and airline professionals. And yes, flight instruction can be a career. That's what the Master CFIs and Gold Seal instructors at the meeting would have told you.*

### **Reason (Excuse) Number Two**

Do you know how little I get paid as a CFI? With paying the rent for my place, for food, and the loan on my motorcycle, I've got nothing left at the end of the month. I would have to give up over 100 bucks worth of instruction to attend that FAA meeting. In addition, I can ride my motorcycle up to the glider port and try to pick up some work flying tourists. Saturday is a busy day for tourist glider rides. Sure, I would have been tired after flying all day, but there is no such thing as required crew rest for me. I can sleep when I am dead.

*In the long term, that 100 bucks will fade to insignificance. If you believe that flight instruction is a step to the airlines, then use each hour you instruct to build your skills in communication, CRM and interpersonal relationships. Don't get in line at the FBO just to pick up your paycheck. It is simply not what flight instruction is all about. At the standdown we talked about fatigue and safety. You may get your chance to sleep sooner than you think.*

### **Reason (Excuse) Number Three**

Talk about boring. Those FAA meetings are just a bunch of old guys telling stories. What can I learn from them? Most of them can't even fly glass. One of those old guys hanging around the FBO once asked me, "Of all the aviation knowledge in the world, how much of it do you know?" Maybe there are one or

two things I don't know but I told him, "About 95 to 98 percent." He laughed. I wonder why. But I think that's pretty accurate since I scored an 80 percent on my CFI knowledge test and I've learned some more since then. Why waste a Saturday to add a couple of percent more knowledge?

*Stories are the nails that we hang principles on. Listen to them, think and learn. Each story contains a lesson that you won't have to learn the hard way. And by the way, if you ask an older guy how much of the world's aviation knowledge he knows, he'll probably give you a very, very, very small number.*

#### **Reason (Excuse) Number Four**

Let me tell you. Even if I didn't have lots to do on that Saturday, I probably wouldn't have gone to the FAA Standdown anyway. Why? I would have partied, or recovered from Friday's party, or gone to the beach with friends or worked at my part-time bartending job. Those FAA meetings are so serious. Always safety, safety, safety. I have never been in an accident. Okay, so my students have banged up a couple of airplanes, but that's not my fault. Those guys should lighten up.

*Yes, you have a different set of priorities. That's OK. Just recognize that no airline is going to hire you unless you can convince the chief pilot that you are a serious professional who has the maturity necessary to accept the responsibility for the safety of your passengers. Aviation is a profession with professional standards. We would have told you about these at the FAA Standdown. And by the way—those bent airplanes are your responsibility. You are responsible for the safety culture in your student's cockpit.*

#### **Reason (Excuse) Number Five**

The last time I flew, I was so good that I don't think I could have been better. On takeoff, I was looking at the PFD and it showed a perfect six and

a half degrees nose up attitude. And I held it there. I was able to do perfect steep turns at a much steeper bank than 60 degrees. My landings were right on. I put it down *before* the numbers. What can those guys at the FAA meeting tell me about technique? I can crank and bank with the best of 'em. And those old guys say some really dumb things. I was flying the Arrow on an early morning flight. We took off in the dark but it was light when we landed. I put the gear lever down but no three green. I promptly declared an emergency with the tower and this old guy gets on the radio in the middle of my emergency and asks if I have my nav lights on? How dumb! I landed it smooth as silk. The mechanics couldn't find anything wrong but I think all three bulbs burned out at the same time.

*Whoops! We could have let you know that staring at the PFD is one of the major safety errors made by pilots flying glass. Try 70-80 percent outside, 20-30 percent inside. You may have busted a reg on that steep turn. We talked about the relationship between the regulations and safety at the standdown, along with G forces, definition of acrobatic flight, parachute requirements, stuff like that. The fixed distance markers and the VASI could have helped you make a stabilized approach and a safer landing. For short field technique, you could have listened to a story from a former Air America pilot on landing and taking off on a 50-foot runway on the top of a mountain in Laos in a Pilatus Porter. We also discussed the importance of aircraft systems knowledge. You do know about the auto-dim feature of Piper landing gear indicators, don't you? ✈️*

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*Scott Allen, Jim Hein, and Dave Lohmann are safety-minded pilots who make it a point to attend the FAA Safety Standdown and continue adding to their aviation knowledge and skill.*

