

Fresh Air Matters... with Capt. Yaw

Because I appear to never take a 'day-off' or stop running the treadmill of aviation, I often get asked whether I have any hobbies. I do. I also get asked why I work all of the time. I don't. You see, I love what I do and I do what I love. I work hard at playing and I play hard at working. I really do have the best job in the world and the most beautiful place to work at. So when this week I got asked how I remember all of these checks, a comment stimulated by last weeks 'mini-lesson' on FRED A, I have to say that I don't try to remember everything, it is simply impregnated through usage – and understanding the reasons behind all of these checks; they are simply a part of my life.

I had a particular student, who got his pilot's licence just before his fiftieth birthday, who runs a farm in Ghana. He found learning the so-called 'vital checks' or **TFGMHCS** checklist a bit unrelated to his work; so we helped to create a relevant reference in his mind. Upon getting into the cockpit, he would simply declare 'Thank-you For Giving Me Hot and Cold Showers'. After about 50 times of using this relevant memory-jogger, the associated actions of this check became second nature... This said, he can still be heard to mutter something about his bath-time when he is about to line up a small aircraft at Kpong Airfield, ready to fly up over his farms for a visual appreciation of his agronomic achievements and an assessment of disease, needs and development opportunities. In less than one hour, he can 'visit' all of his land, a task that would take at least a day or two by road and foot – and he sees his developments and opportunities in a new light, improving his business, and expanding his horizons at the same time.

So what do the letters **T.F.G.M.H.C.S.** stand for?

T-Throttle and Trims. We make sure that throttle (accelerator, in car terms) is at the right revs setting, and the trim (a sort of balance system for the controls) is also correct. The equivalence in business terms would be to make sure that we are set to operate at the right speed – which is what the rev counter measures in a plane. How often do we try to start something without the correct speed and balance of things? For example, trying to do something either too quickly or too slowly is not only costly and inefficient, but potentially disastrous.

F-Fuel, Flaps and Full and Free. Simple questions and answers solve this part of the riddle. Is there enough fuel for the mission intended? Is the fuel tap on and the correct fuel tank selected? Are the flaps (devices that change the wing shape for take-off and landing) working correctly, smoothly and symmetrically? Are all of the controls working as they should – full movement and free of excess friction - and the relevant control surface responding? In fact, this last one has a cross-check saying of 'Up yours'. This means that the relevant surface should move up, as the flight controls are moved in that direction. How often do we remember to check that everything is working smoothly before setting out on a project? Just hoping it all works is ok sometimes, but a quick check now can save a lot of time, money, energy and (especially in aviation) lives as well.

G- Gyroscopes and Gauges. Gyros are used in instruments that tell us which way up we are and which direction we are going in. These instruments are called the Attitude Indicator or Artificial Horizon, Direction Indicator and Turn Indicator. The gauges in our aircraft tell us temperatures, pressures, levels, etc. All are checked before we commit to getting airborne. Are we reading the relevant instruments of our lives, economies, and businesses before and during our activities? If not, we need to learn how to read and how to set up systems to make those readings readily available.

M- Mixtures and Magnetos. Are we running on the right fuel and air mixture? Do our Magnetos (that which makes aircraft spark plugs work) operate correctly? The four-stroke, internal combustion engine needs air, fuel and 'fire' (from a spark) to work. The mixture control in a plane regulates the fuel-to-air ratio, and should be 'rich' for critical phases of the flight. If the 'sparks' are not strong enough, the combustion (and hence the power) will be affected. This is analogous to workforce and cash-flow. How many producers to non-producers, and how much cash-flow do you have? If you have a 'top-heavy' organisation, then you are operating a 'poor' mixture – insufficient people working making things, and too many sitting at desks talking about things! (Does that sound familiar?) The other way round results in an equally-bad result: lack of leadership and administrative oversight. The cash-flow really is the 'spark' that is needed to keep the engine 'firing on all four cylinders'!

C – Clearance and Communications. It is really important that aircraft are given 'clearance' or authorisations, and that is no different to our business activities. Part of 'calling' for and receiving those authorisations, is a working radio or communications systems. Are we all making sure that we have applied for and received authorisations, and established suitable communications with the authorities? Of course, it is not always easy, and I am the first to admit that at times the 'system' does not hear our calls or respond in a timely manner. In aviation, the Pilot In Command is ultimately responsible and may, in the interests of safety, act as necessary. As in our business world, such actions may be called into question – so if they are carried out without all of the paper lined up, then we had better be sure of our call!

S - Safety and Security. Before we go any further, is it safe to do so, and is everything secure and secured? Need we say more? This is fundamental to aviation, and hopefully to you as you head out on your week!

What does it take to carry out suitable checks prior to embarking on a project, a trip or any aspect of our daily, weekly, annual, or five-year 'missions'? How important is it to us that our mission be successful? If we want to be successful and safe, we need to ensure that we have our personal, working, business, driving, riding and living checklists established as second nature to guide us and remind us that 'Safety is NO accident!' as we prepare for the mission or task ahead.

So next time you hear somebody whispering under his/her breath 'Thank-you For Giving Me Hot and Cold Showers', just consider that they may not be thinking about their bath, but actually preparing for an adventure of a lifetime - in a safety-aware manner!

Capt. Yaw is Chief Flying Instructor and Chief Engineer at WAASPS – The Best Flying Experience in West Africa
(www.waasps.com)