

Fresh Air Matters... with Capt. Yaw

I first took a flying lesson in 1988. It changed my life. It opened up new horizons. It changed the way I looked at planning. It made me understand planning. It gave a new meaning to 'emergency'. It became the first step to a new outlook.

Over the years of learning to fly and subsequent flying (mainly for private use), it has given me an understanding of the meaning of patience and perseverance. They are not really linked, and a quick look in the dictionary clarifies the situation. According to the online dictionary of Microsoft Encarta[®], the two words are defined thus:

Patience: *capacity for waiting: the ability to endure waiting, delay, or provocation without becoming annoyed or upset, or to persevere calmly when faced with difficulties.*

Perseverance: *determined continuation with something: steady and continued action or belief, usually over a long period and especially despite difficulties or setbacks.*

Now, in my years in Ghana I have learned that the phrase '*exercise patience*' is the most common phrase used as an excuse to do nothing. (Please excuse the offense just caused, but bear with me as I explain, in my usual take-off, climb, cruise, descend and land type manner!) However, I think that the phrase should be re-written to '*exercise perseverance*', if we really want to achieve something!

In aviation industry terms, **patience** is a good attribute for airline passengers and meet-ers and greeters. You must have heard the expression '*time to spare, go by air*'. This was highlighted this week when I was waiting for my wife to arrive at Kotoka International Airport. The airline she travelled with was several hours late – again. I had planned to bring a book to enable me to be more 'patient', but ended up discovering the new waiting area for the meet-ers and greeters at KIA. It is truly the single most impressive change I have seen on the 'comfort' side of the airport developments for the general public. The ability to wait (patiently) in an area with seating, drinks, small shops, etc was a real surprise, and made my 'patiently do nothing for three hours' more supportable.

How many times have you been a passenger on an airline when you have had to wait for the departure gate number to be declared (sitting patiently doing nothing, because there is nothing you can do to speed it up); or waited on-board, for an hour or so, for the aircraft to 'push back' (patiently sitting doing nothing to assist in solving the problem). Perhaps you have had to wait in a queue for Immigration, Customs, or for your bags to arrive – patiently, because there is nothing you can do to accelerate the situation.

Now, if you are like me, there is a point at which your patience breaks and you start to raise your hands, voices and blood pressure in a synchronised, symphonic, progressively louder series of explosions as you attempt to change the situation. However, the situation is completely outside of your control, and you cannot change it no matter how much you object, protest or subject yourselves to self-imposed adrenaline poisoning!

The above instances are clearly those where 'exercising patience' is the only valid option, most of the time.

In aviation terms, **perseverance** is the key to development. I am sure that, as you follow the next part of my rambling, you will understand that we need to be exercising perseverance more than patience, and hopefully will retract your offense a little from earlier.

Those early pioneers of aviation persevered as they developed the early flying machines. Many died in their attempts, but others were not dismayed; they persevered and learnt from the misfortune of their colleagues. Those who pushed the envelopes of speed, altitude, seats, comfort, etc. were not necessarily patient – but they were those who knew the importance of perseverance.

In the early days of rail travel the directors of the London and Manchester Railway had offered a prize of five hundred pounds (a vast sum for the day) in a competition for the best locomotive. In 1829, Robert and James Stevenson - engineers of the day - became excited and developed a steam engine called The Rocket. In the simulated 50-mile (80km) round trip, The Rocket averaged 12 miles per hour (19 km/hr) while hauling 13 tons, and 29 miles per hour (47 km/hr) running light. Later, it set the 'world speed record' of the day, of 35 miles per hour (56km/hr). The engine was constantly being adapted. They changed the piston arrangements, the smoke box, the funnel, etc. They did not sit and wait 'exercising patience' for the invention to become faster and win the competition – NO, they 'exercised perseverance'.

There is an account that the Doctors of the day tried to stop the competition, because they believed that it was a 'medical fact' that the 'human body would explode if it exceeded 50km/hr'. Fortunately, nobody 'exercised patience' with the doctors of the day, and the competition went ahead, changing the world of transport for ever. Sadly, somebody was killed on the day of the trials when the train hit them, but it did not stop the developments. The perseverance of these men, and others like them, laid the foundations for engineering of self-powered machines to become more important than horse-drawn carriages and the like. It changed the universities' syllabus to cover steam power in more depth, and eventually lead to the concept of the engines that we see in our cars and aircraft today – not through patience, but rather through perseverance (generally of a few).

In the cockpit, I know that the pilot who perseveres in his training to succeed at the landing phase (the hardest part of learning to fly) is rewarded. His family, who exercise patience with him whilst he makes the effort to overcome any challenges he has in his learning, are also rewarded. The same pilot may need, later in his/her flying career, to persevere flying in tough conditions to save his/her plane and passengers; a case when patience is not appropriate...

I am sure that, this week, somebody will ask you to 'exercise patience'. I ask you to consider if it is patience (i.e. there is NOTHING you can do to change or accelerate the situation), or whether it is time to persevere, demonstrating your *determined continuation with something: steady and continued action or belief, usually over a long period and especially despite difficulties or setbacks.*

What will bring about the changes you and Ghana need – Patience or Perseverance?

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