

Ken Stoltzfus

Flying Higher



Passing It On

No. 11 in a series

Daring to pursue the highest possible level in all of life

It was December 1967 and I had a decision to make. Little did I know how it would shape my life.

Marvin had been my first flight student, in New Hampshire in 1963-64, but we were now both in Virginia.

By this time I had 1300 hours, but I was a college freshman, struggling to provide for my wife and three kids and flying didn't have much to do with it. Meanwhile, Marvin had graduated from college, was flying full time, and was creeping up on me. Pilots know that we often measure ourselves among ourselves by "hours," and I was feeling a bit threatened by "my student" overtaking me.

And then the question. Marvin was going for his CFI-I and needed some CFI-I dual and a sign-off. Would I - - ?

Objectively, it was near Christmas and we were going to Pennsylvania for the holidays. I would have to stay in Virginia a day or two longer.



But emotionally - by giving him this dual I would be further equipping him to pass me, and that was getting to my gut. Surely he would understand our need to spend the holiday with family!

And then something popped into my head. "One of the marks of success is to equip others to go beyond you." Now that *couldn't* have come from my selfish side, so I give God the credit for it!

I did. Marvin did. He retired with over 15,000 hours, mostly turbine and jet, compared to my 4,000, mostly taildragger but all piston.

That was the beginning of a lifelong pilgrimage. In the parsonage basement I showed my sons how to recover airplanes and repair wrecked cars, and all three have become better "wrenches" than me.

I taught them how to do Ceconite fabric work. Ken Jr. did a lot of it and got real good - - while I lost my touch. One day I was messing around and picked up the heat gun to shrink some fabric around a wing strut fitting. It didn't go well. He grinned and said, "Here, let me show you how." He was only a kid! Gulp - - and then, YEAH!!

When we started Preferred Airparts in August 1982, I planned to be head honcho for a long time. That November we burned out. Now it was either do business well or hang it up. It created an opportunity like none other for me to impart the basics of business to my 15, 19 and 22-year old sons.

By 1985 it was time to step out. Since then, Ken Jr. and Brian have done a better job of building Preferred than I could have, and I was their employee in marketing for many years. It has been an

immensely satisfying experience, freeing me to invest myself in other areas such as missionary work in Kenya. And writing stuff like this.

My father taught me to fly, and I taught my sons. When Brian had 500 hours to his name he was my co-pilot in the DC-3 sprayer, flying at nearly 5000# over normal gross. I taught him all I knew and let him do it. Part way through the next season I gave him the left seat and had him function as PIC. That was in the late-80's. He now has a lot more DC-3 time than me, and over double the total hours!

For years now Brian has been Training Captain on a turbine DC-3 in East Africa, operating out of bush strips as short as 2250'. He carries personnel, equipment and supplies for a Christian missionary, medical, development and relief organization. How do you think I feel when I see him doing such a good job with the airplane and passing his skills on to others? It is beyond words!

In my leadership training classes in Kenya, pastors told me they were reluctant to train others for fear they might rise above them. That fear is human, not just Kenyan! It presents us with a choice.

I watched a DC-3 pilot approach the closing stages of his flying career. He was to be training several younger pilots, yet he sat in the left seat and "drove the bus" from one country to another, day after day. When he retired, his protégés had scant hands-on time.

Some of the young guys were better "sticks" than he, or at least more motivated at that stage of life. He had made his choice about how to respond to that. He not only cheated them, and the future of the missionary flying program, he cheated himself of the privilege of imparting to them. He could have enjoyed their future success if he had vested himself in them.

II Timothy 2:2 in the Bible presents a life principle. The Apostle Paul says, "You have heard me teach many things that have been confirmed by many reliable witnesses. Teach these great truths to trustworthy people who are able to pass them on to others." Yeah!! Pick out some good ones and pump yourself into them and this will be a better world!

No one will succeed only because we give them a break. We can never take credit for their success. They had to apply their own initiative, develop their own disciplines and hone their own skills. But there are many out there who never achieved their potential because those who had the skills to help them advance, were too insecure to help. Everyone loses in what could have been, "Win, win."

Some who we help will say "Thank you." Others won't. We do it, to do it, not for accolades. Helping them advance, and feeling a tiny part of their success is enough. And the greatest reward is the sense of a strong but gentle hand on your shoulder saying, "Well done."

Is it your son or daughter? A neighbor kid? A flight student who seems to have the touch? A co-pilot? It doesn't matter. Invest yourself in them. It will take both of you to new levels in the flight of life! And this will be a better world.

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Ken Stoltzfus was born in 1940, the son of a crop duster. He has worked as a pilot, pastor, business man, missionary to Africa and writer.

A Commercial Pilot with S&MEL&S, DC-3, Glider and Instrument ratings; CFI with A-I-G ratings; Ground Instructor A&I; and A&P, Ken lives in northeast Ohio with Elaine, his wife of 50 years. His hobbies are aviation photography and collecting aircraft photos, negatives and slides.

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