

# LIVING THE IFR PILOT LIFE

***We acquired a great deal of discipline, organization and judgment while earning an instrument rating. Applying IFR practices to everyday life pays off.***

by Fred Simonds

Consider for a moment that pilots lead two lives: on- and off-airport. We morph into pilots upon arriving at the airport to fly IFR and revert, like shape-shifters, into ordinary mortals when we leave. Many of you sense this transition, and compartmentalization of our lives, as surely as I do.

Since we spend more time as ground-bound mortals than instrument flying, aerial adventurers, we bring more life experience to our flying than the other way. I would like to suggest that you apply more of your IFR pilot skills in everyday living because I firmly believe, from my observations, that it will enhance not only your personal life, but make you a safer pilot. I call it living the pilot life.

## **Risk and Reward**

We all know that every IFR flight is a series of decisions based on careful calculations of risk. Why not become a better risk-evaluator by practicing risk analysis all the time? Develop the habit of recognizing and analyzing objectively risk-reward situations in everything you do.

How much risk must I take to achieve a given reward? How can I mitigate a high-risk/low-reward situation into something safer? Think of something as prosaic as driving and approaching an intersection. You evaluate time, distance and risk; you can go right away to beat an oncoming car or let it pass. Is it worth getting T-boned to save a few seconds? That's a pure risk and reward analysis.

## **Situational Awareness**

Great situational awareness goes hand-in-hand with risk-reward. The car is a great place to sharpen SA. How can you recognize a risk-reward situation if you're not paying attention? As with flying IFR, keep your head in the game; avoid daydreaming, live in the moment. Keep your head on a swivel. Use all your senses to learn what's happening in the bubble around you. Make it hard for trouble to catch you unaware.

No matter where you are or what you are doing, the three questions you are constantly asking yourself when IFR may save your life: Where am I? What is happening right now? What am I going to do next?

## **Always Have an Out**

"What's my way out?" IFR, we file an

alternate airport and constantly consider where we would go if we have to divert. We have a rolling plan A, B and maybe C at hand. Dropping a plan that isn't working for one that will is the smooth transition from decision to action that marks the savvy IFR pilot.

On the ground, we can use the same technique. It makes our lives better in the air and reduces stress on the ground. If the restaurant is closed or if there's a traffic jam, have a plan B ready, in advance, to give you a way out.

## **Be a Problem Preventer**

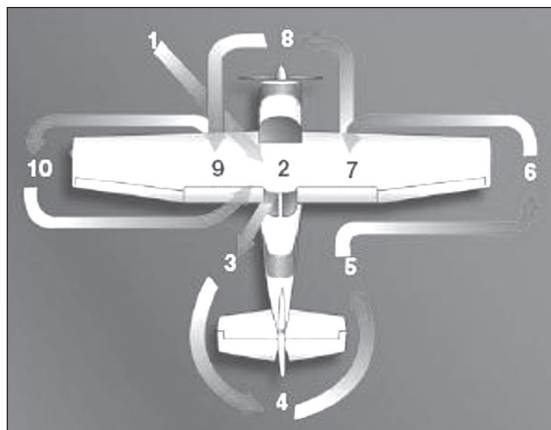
You've seen it in the air and on the ground, problem preventers slide through life as if on rails. You strived to become one in your IFR operations, so be a problem preventer on the ground as well. As IFR pilots, prevent problems by paying attention to detail, being meticulous and anticipating what can go wrong.

We check oil, fuel caps, weather and all the rest to prevent or mitigate the risks of flight. Grizzled airline captains retire after thousands of hours without a single mishap. Are they just lucky? Or might it be that they broke accident chains before they could morph into accidents simply by being problem preventers?



*Your car is hydroplaning, the rear end is starting to swing and you're in traffic. You're handling it because you are fully situationally aware and have a Plan B; all behaviors you have carried over from your IFR flying.*

## TECHNIQUE



*You do an orderly preflight to prepare for IFR operations. You detect problems before they put the flight at risk. Why not do the same with your daily life?*

On the ground being a problem preventer means repairing a soft car tire before it goes flat or getting a flu shot to avoid getting sick.

### Time Management

Life moves only so fast. Haste is one of the best ways to cause things to go awry. Rushing an approach briefing, ducking under the glideslope, and not waiting for a needle to center exemplify haste that can bite you.

Learning to fly IFR meant learning to pace ourselves and take advantage of low workload times to plan and act ahead. We are at our best in flight when we fly in an organized, timely, purposeful way so as to retain present awareness and prepare for the next phase of flight.

It's simple time and workload management. We can do the same on

the ground to lower stress, maximize efficiency and as one astronaut put it, "maintain an even strain".

To help prioritize timely action ask "is time working for or against me?" IFR, time almost always works against us; consider fuel consumption. Everything seems to take longer as delays crop up waiting for the fuel truck or getting a clearance. One of my Swedish students laments, "Always a ting", always something in the way. When time works against us, action is required soon-

er than later.

Time occasionally works with us. Recently we slowed our arrival into an airport to let fast-moving weather go by. We delayed a flight into a big airport to avoid the morning push.

Do the same on the ground; first get things going that will take time and work on other things in the meantime. It will all come together with minimal effort.

### Haste

An airline chief pilot noted that many accident/incident reports coming across his desk contained the phrases "We were in a rush" or "We were in a hurry". That observation alone speaks volumes. Moving no faster than needful minimizes rushing, a principal cause of accidents.

We know it's true in all phases of

our lives. When I see a pilot – or anyone – rushing, it's a red flag to me.

I had a student, a high-powered hedge fund salesman. Pressure and rushing were his daily lot. He brought it all to the airport. I never saw a pilot preflight so fast. In the air he rushed everything; he made a lot of mistakes. I warned him about rushing repeatedly in strong personal terms. He failed his instrument ride because the examiner directed him to hold at a certain fix. He became impatient and left the fix without clearance. Busted.

Rushing raises the likelihood of error. "If you don't have time to do it right the first time, how will you find time to do it right the second?"

### Be Precise

Driving a car has parallels with flying an airplane. In your car, drive more precisely and smoothly, and watch your mileage go up. Your speedometer becomes your airspeed indicator. Stop at or behind the stop line, as if it were the hold bar before the runway. The habit of precision will flow with you back into the airplane.

### Discipline in Everything

Life today is unforgiving. If I let myself get lazy or sloppy I get nicked for it. As a result, I try to bring more discipline into my personal life and that flows directly into my flying. It can work for you, too.

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## APPLYING IFR TO DAILY LIFE: THE CHECKLIST

To become instrument pilots we had to learn a certain level of discipline in our flying lives so that we could successfully deal with some pretty nasty weather while keeping the needles centered when it mattered and thus find a runway and land on it.

That discipline made us better, safer pilots. The specific areas we had to master

to make us better pilots can also help keep us alive when we are away from airplanes.

We can improve our chances of living to a ripe old age and sitting in a nursing home complaining about the time we were in the office instead of flying if we carry over the following practices from IFR flight to our daily living:

- Risk Analysis
- Situational Awareness
- Always Have an Out
- Anticipate Problems
- Make Time Work For You
- Avoid Rushing
- Be Precise
- Make and Use Checklists