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@2026 Dr. Shari

NBAA BACE **PDP L3 & L4**

Elevating Your Leadership Versatility and Influence

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L3 & L4 Objectives

Exercise effective leadership to achieve aviation department goals and company objectives.

a. Recognize characteristics of an effective leader (e.g., leadership styles and strategies)

b. Recognize and apply multiple motivational theories and techniques (e.g., Theory X and Theory Y, Maslow's, Alderfer's, Herzberg's, McClelland's, etc.)

c. Recognize and apply multiple mentoring strategies

d. Utilize sources of expertise within the department, company and industry

e. Assemble effective teams and recognize group dynamics (e.g., meeting management, interpersonal skills, conflict resolution, trust building, decision making)

f. Integrate diversity principles to maximize individual and group potential

g. Employ current principles to maximize performance (e.g., Just Culture, industry best practices, SMS)

h. Practice ethical, moral and legal behavior, both internally and externally to the company

i. Practice effective communication techniques (e.g., listening, speaking, correspondence, feedback, 360-degree communication)

Enhance personal and professional knowledge.

1. Employ strategies to increase professional expertise in the aviation department (e.g., technical, educational, and professional certifications; conferences; publications; local, regional, and national associations; and legislation)
2. Promote lifelong learning concepts to improve expertise
3. Recognize Individual employee needs
4. Develop personal growth plan

About this course

Leadership in business aviation has evolved far beyond traditional command-and-control authority. Today's aviation directors and managers must skillfully balance crew and maintenance performance, safety management systems (SMS), corporate objectives, and C-suite expectations—all while fostering an environment where team members perform at their peak.

Toxic dynamics, hidden agendas, and departmental friction directly undermine trust, compromise operational performance, and threaten flight safety. Conversely, resilient and emotionally intelligent leaders maintain strategic oversight, guide flight departments with clarity, and cultivate a culture rooted in collaboration, strict accountability, and exceptional service.

This NBAA Professional Development Program (PDP) course provides practical, actionable tools for your leadership toolbox. Key focus areas include:

- Interpersonal Dynamics & Emotional Intelligence (EQ)
- Mentoring & Executive Coaching Strategies
- Flight Department Team Development
- Ethical Decision-Making in High-Stakes Environments
- Targeted Communication Styles & Conflict Resolution
- Operational Resiliency & Personal Growth Planning

The objective is not to mandate a single rigid leadership style, but to develop the situational awareness, flexibility, and intent required to lead effectively across the entire business aviation landscape.

Introduction

While highly skilled aviators, technicians, cabin crew and schedulers are vital to a flight department's success, cohesive teamwork drives operational vitality. Much like an orchestra relies on a conductor to bring disparate instruments into harmony, business aviation relies on leaders who can align, motivate, and empower personnel while driving corporate goals forward.

Leaders who successfully unite team members behind a shared vision must master transparent communication, build organizational trust, and know precisely when to mentor, coach, support, or challenge.

Every crew member, technician, and administrative staff member brings a unique set of technical backgrounds, personal expectations, and communication preferences. Maximizing potential, job satisfaction, and safe operational standards is a shared responsibility between leadership and the team. Exceptional aviation leaders maintain the "view from the balcony"—evaluating the broader system, anticipating downstream impacts of operational decisions, and keeping the team aligned around safety, executive service, professionalism, and cross-departmental collaboration.

Throughout this course, we will examine:

1. Empowered vs. Toxic Leadership: Identifying behaviors that elevate or compromise safety culture.
2. Adaptive Communication Styles: Reducing miscommunication and misinterpretation in high-tempo operational environments.
3. Managerial vs. Leadership Dynamics: Balancing administrative/regulatory oversight with vision and talent development.
4. Ethical Decision-Making: Navigating complex, real-world scenarios facing business aviation leaders today.

Discussion questions:

1. *Developing the Non-Technical Edge: How does cultivating self-awareness and non-technical skills (EQ, communication, threat management) directly improve leadership performance and safety culture in a business aviation department?*
2. *Technical Mastery vs. Leadership Scope: Where does technical proficiency remain non-negotiable foundations, and at what point do they become insufficient for effective department leadership?*

Food for Thought: Opportunities are rarely accidental—they are created through situational awareness, proactive preparation, and intentional execution.

To get us started, let's hear more about 'opportunity is manufactured'

VIDEO LINK

Leadership … Origins and Evolution

Over the past century, leadership theory has evolved across many dimensions: functional roles, behavioral dynamics, and strategic execution. Practitioners have labeled leaders as operational administrators, influencers, information managers, decision-makers, or crisis commanders. Scholars have similarly categorized leadership through contrasting frameworks—transactional versus transformational, task-oriented versus relations-oriented, and command-and-control versus participative approaches.

While these models differ in approach, effective leadership within business aviation consistently fulfills five core imperatives:

1. Mission Alignment: Setting and clarifying flight department objectives aligned with corporate strategy.
2. Operational Drive: Energizing and directing flight crews, technicians, and support staff to achieve operational excellence.
3. Infrastructure & Resource Support: Establishing the structural processes, budgets, and safety protocols necessary to meet department goals.
4. Conflict Resolution: Mitigating interpersonal friction and cross-departmental misalignments before they impact performance.
5. Continuous Evaluation: Assessing progress, safety metrics, and individual contributions against organizational standards.

The Evolution of Leadership Paradigms

Early models—such as the Great Man and Trait Theories—suggested leadership was defined by innate personal characteristics. Over time, these concepts expanded to include:

- Cognitive Abilities: Risk analysis, situational assessment, and complex problem-solving.
- Social Competencies: Interpersonal communication, team motivation, and crew coordination.
- Emotional Characteristics: Emotional intelligence (EQ), composure under pressure, and optimism.
- Character Traits: Uncompromising integrity, transparency, and professional discipline.

Core Leadership Styles in Flight Department Ops

Traditional leadership models address power distribution, decision-making, and goal structures in aviation environments:

- Autocratic vs. Democratic (address how power is distributed, whose needs are met, and how decisions are made):
  - Autocratic leadership suits time-critical, high-risk scenarios (e.g., in-flight emergencies or immediate safety threats) where rapid decision-making and definitive command are required. Overuse, however, mirrors Theory X assumptions (assuming personnel lack intrinsic drive) and can foster "Captainitis"—a dangerous CRM breakdown where crew members hesitate to challenge authority. Watch my captainitis video https://youtu.be/Ec4ZDW1GB64
  - Democratic leadership thrives during strategic planning, safety committee meetings, and policy development, where trust is high and team members share corporate objectives.
- Directive vs. Participative (focuses on how decisions are made):
  - Directive leaders take an active, authoritative stance in setting standards and enforcing standard operating procedures (SOPs).

o Participative leaders build engagement by soliciting input from pilots, technicians, and dispatchers to build consensus. This reflects Theory Y principles, leveraging the intrinsic pride and professionalism of aviation personnel.

• Task-Oriented vs. Relations-Oriented (determines which needs receive the greatest attention):

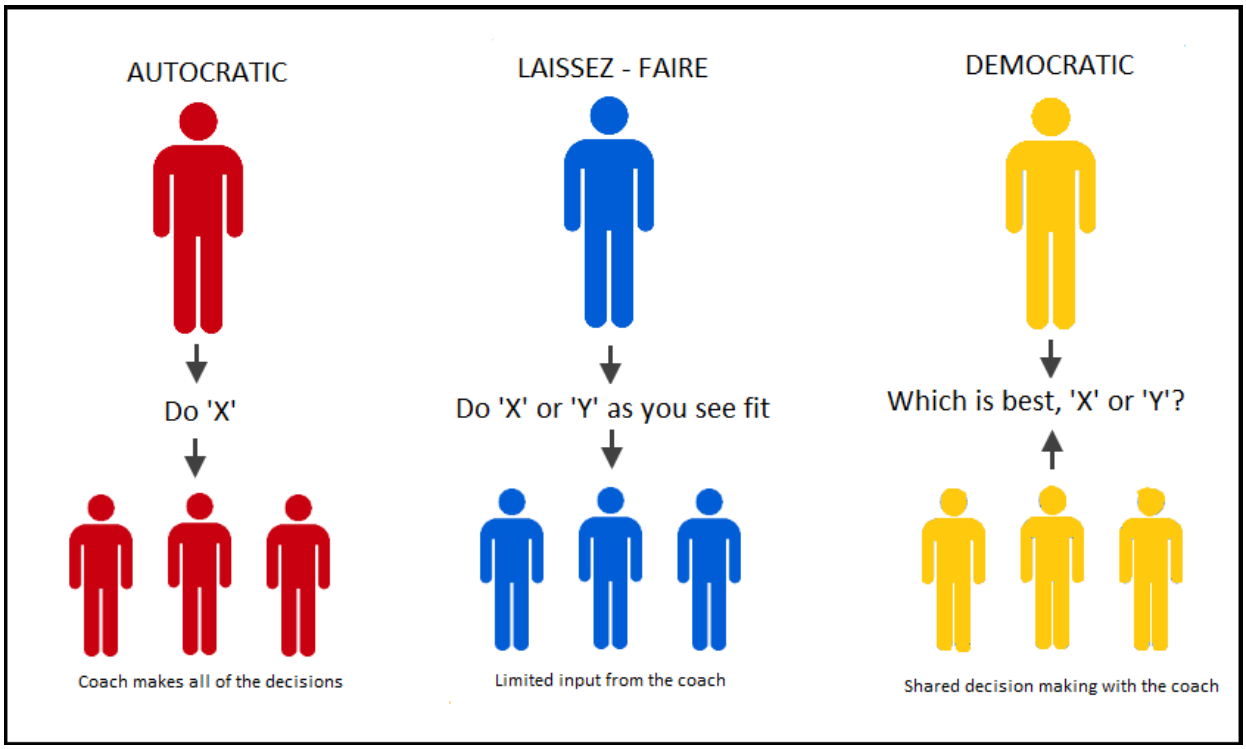
o Task-oriented leaders focus strictly on mission completion, schedule adherence, and peak operational performance.

o Relations-oriented leaders prioritize team cohesion, morale, and psychological safety—reducing interpersonal friction that could otherwise compromise crew communication.

• Initiation of Structure vs. Consideration (affects how decisions are made and how tasks and goals are structured):

o Initiation emphasizes rigorous workflow organization, adherence to safety management systems (SMS), regulatory compliance, and budget discipline.

o Consideration focuses on professional recognition, job satisfaction, and supporting individual career development.



Modern Leadership Models in the Knowledge Economy

As business aviation transforms into an increasingly complex, data-driven sector, enhanced leadership styles have emerged:

- Charismatic: Builds deep personal connection and buy-in through strong principles, confidence, and articulated vision. Followers often connect with this type of leader on a personal level.
- Transformational: Inspires people to achieve more than they believed possible, connects daily flight operations to overarching corporate purpose, and elevates department culture.
- Complexity-Based: Navigates operational ambiguity and rapid industry change, using controlled debate to foster innovation while allowing adaptive solutions to emerge organically rather than controlling every outcome.
- Servant: Prioritizes the growth, well-being, and operational needs of the team over self-interest—fostering high loyalty and reduced turnover. This may be one of the most selfless leadership styles
- Authentic: Leverages high emotional intelligence to understand how actions and decisions impact crew climate. Authentic leaders remain grounded in core values while adapting their approach to support their team effectively.

Leadership theory continues to evolve alongside the business aviation industry, as leaders adapt to changing regulatory, technological, and corporate landscapes.

Discussion Questions:

1. *Primary Style Identification: Which leadership style do you rely on most frequently in your current flight department role, and what specific operational demands drive that choice?*
2. *Situational Adaptation: In what aviation scenarios (e.g., flight deck decision-making, long-term fleet planning, safety audits, or interpersonal conflict) would shifting to a different leadership style yield a safer or more effective outcome?*

Quotes from successful leaders

- Herb Kelleher: "We'll train you on whatever you have to do, but the one thing Southwest cannot change in people is inherent attitudes."

- Lee Iacocca: "…people accept a lot of pain if everybody's going through the chute together."
- George Washington: "Achieving results is directly proportional to a leader's willingness and ability to interact with people."
- Eleanor Roosevelt: "Empower others by honoring their ideas with your serious attention and interest"
- Malcolm Gladwell: "Much of what people can do — if they are happy and well-rested — can be accomplished in some fraction of the time they currently spend on the job."
- Robert Sumwalt: "…Leadership is about influencing others. You must also be constantly trying to improve. You need a leadership obsession."

Here's a short clip on risk-taking attitudes VIDEO LINK

Remember: It all starts with you

Group discussion & debrief: Identify 2-3 merits and 2-3 shortcomings of your style. What other style could you use in certain situations?

Emotional Intelligence

In business aviation, technical competence is essential—but it is not enough. Flight departments operate in a high-consequence environment where safety, service, scheduling demands, maintenance readiness, regulatory compliance, and corporate priorities intersect. Leaders must communicate effectively with pilots, maintenance technicians, schedulers, passengers, executives, vendors, and internal stakeholders. In that environment, emotional intelligence is a practical leadership capability. It helps leaders recognize what is happening emotionally—in themselves and in others—and use that awareness to communicate clearly, make sound decisions, reduce defensiveness, and keep the team focused on safe, professional mission execution.

Emotional intelligence is the ability to recognize, understand, and manage emotions so they support – not interfere with - performance. The model I used in my dissertation included problem-solving, optimism, flexibility, stress tolerance, impulse control, and decision-making. Other EI models use different terminology, but most emphasize three leadership disciplines that are especially relevant to flight department operations: self-awareness, self-management, and relationship management.

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What is EI?

Simply put, EI means recognizing what you are feeling, understanding what others may be experiencing, and using that awareness to achieve the safest and most effective outcome. In business aviation, that may mean staying composed during a last-minute schedule disruption, listening carefully when a maintenance concern is raised, responding professionally and constructively to a passenger or executive issue, or helping crew members resolve conflict before it affects communication, trust, or performance. Focusing and eliminating distractions are essential elements when interacting with and leading others.

1. Self-awareness: recognizing your emotions, attitude shifts, assumptions, and triggers as they occur, and realizing how they may influence your judgment, tone, communication, and behavior.
2. Self-management: choosing a response that fits the situation by balancing emotion, facts, professional standards, safety considerations, and the operational objective.
3. Relationship management: noticing stated and unstated concerns in others, validating perspectives when appropriate, and responding in a way that supports trust, teamwork, accountability, and safe operations.

Each area includes specific behaviors that aviation leaders can observe, practice, and improve.

- When you understand your emotions, you can identify the words, behaviors, pressures, or operating conditions that tend to create frustration, impatience,

defensiveness, or anxiety. That awareness gives you time to prepare and respond rather than overreact.

- When you manage your emotions, you pause before reacting, test your assumptions, and respond with the composure expected in a safety-sensitive aviation environment.
- When you monitor how others receive your words and actions, you can adjust your approach, reduce defensiveness, and keep conversations focused on facts, safety, service, and solutions.

Some researchers have questioned how emotional intelligence is measured, especially when assessments rely on self-reporting. That concern is valid because people do not always see their own emotions and reactions accurately. Even so, the study of emotion is well established in leadership, psychology, and neuroscience. For practical leadership purposes, the key point is clear: emotional intelligence varies from person to person, and it can be strengthened through feedback, reflection, deliberate practice, and operational experience.

For business aviation leaders, emotions are data. They are not inherently good or bad; they signal that something matters. The leader's responsibility is to determine whether the emotional response is accurate, appropriate, and effective in the situation. Leaders who can remove labels, examine facts, and separate perception from reality are better prepared to make balanced decisions when safety, people, service, and company expectations are at stake.

As leaders, it is imperative that you recognize, manage, and learn from your emotions. Emotions are merely data that can or should be considered when deciding. They are neither 'good' nor 'bad', 'positive' or 'negative'. Think of them as being either 'effective' or 'ineffective', or 'appropriate' or 'not appropriate' in that specific situation. Reactions are based on perceptions and removing the label from your emotions and the situation can help objectify your perceptions.

You make decisions based on emotion and justify them with logic. EI helps ensure both are examined before action is taken.

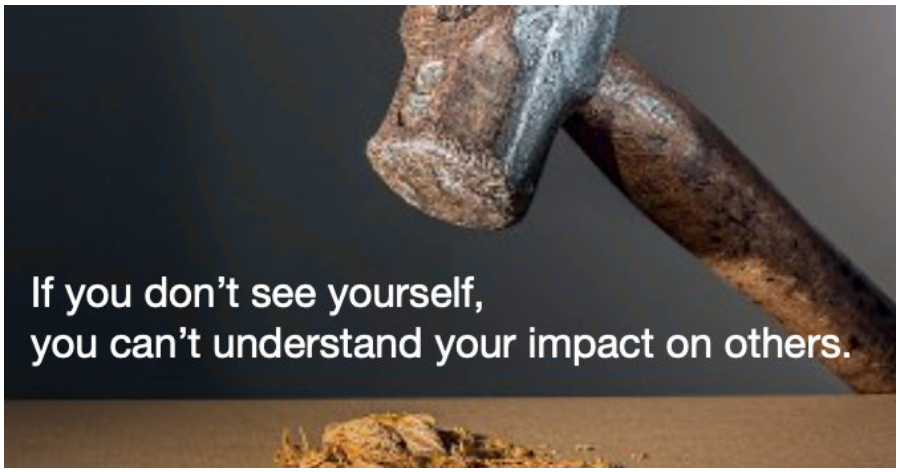
Self-Awareness

Self-awareness is a foundational leadership skill in business aviation where decisions and interactions can affect safety, service, trust, and operational performance. Effective leaders regularly examine their thoughts, emotions, assumptions, and actions without becoming defensive or judgmental. Before leaders can manage their own reactions or influence others effectively, they must first recognize what is happening within themselves.

In this course, self-awareness means recognizing what you are thinking and feeling as it happens, then objectively assessing whether those thoughts, emotions, and behaviors fit the situation. It also means asking why you reacted the way you did. That awareness shapes how you respond to a crew concern, maintenance delay, passenger expectation, scheduling conflict, or pressure from company leadership.

Discussion Question: Thinking about the leadership styles discussed earlier, which styles require the highest level of self-awareness in a business aviation environment, and why?

Individual Reflection & debrief: On a scale of 1–7, how aware are you of the root causes behind your thoughts, emotions, and actions at work? Which aviation leadership situations tend to test that awareness most?



TEA Tornado™

The TEA Tornado™ describes what can happen when self-awareness and self-control break down. Your thoughts influence your emotions; your emotions then reinforce your thoughts; and together they shape your attitudes, tones, decisions, and behaviors. In a

flight department, that cycle can affect briefings, handoffs, schedule decisions, safety conversations, maintenance coordination, passenger service, and team trust.

Your Brain Behind Your Mind (pdf'ed article)

To better understand emotional and social intelligence, aviation leaders need to understand how the brain responds under pressure. The attached article explains why reactions may feel irrational even when they are predictable. It also provides a foundation for understanding the connection between thoughts, emotions, and behavior and leadership effectiveness in business aviation—particularly when leaders are managing safety concerns, operational disruptions, team conflict, passenger expectations, or pressure from company leadership.

Discussion Question: Recall a high-pressure business aviation event that triggered a strong emotional response—such as a late aircraft owner change, an AOG maintenance delay, a marginal weather call, or an internal crew dispute.

- *The Narrative: What immediate story did you tell yourself about the situation or the people involved?*
- *The Impact: What emotion immediately followed? How did that emotion govern your tone, decision-making, and interactions with your team or stakeholders?*

Individual Reflection: There is a strong connection between your thoughts, your emotions and your actions and attitude. What we tell ourselves about the event commands how we feel about it, and subsequently our reactions to that event. What event brought about a deep or intense emotional reaction from you? What triggered them?

Toxic Leadership vs. Resilient Leadership

In our industry leadership directly dictates safety margins, operational reliability, service delivery, team trust, and organizational culture.

Toxic leadership is closely related to dissonant leadership. Toxic leadership is fundamentally rooted in self-interest—prioritizing personal status, authority, or executive optics over sound operational judgment and team well-being. They are poor listeners, lack empathy, impressed with their own importance, arrogant, exaggerate their achievements and are driven by their own perceived status. Toxic leaders often present as dissonant: they generate systemic friction, negative emotions, eroding the trust and psychological safety required for high-performing flight departments.

Dissonant leadership relies on false bravado, shifting standards, favoritism, and fear-based compliance. Dissonant leaders drive negative emotions; they destabilize the emotional footing that encourages people to shine. In an aviation environment, this culture is dangerous:

- It stifles open communication.
- It penalizes risk reporting.
- It conditions crew and maintenance staff to suppress concerns when something doesn't feel right.

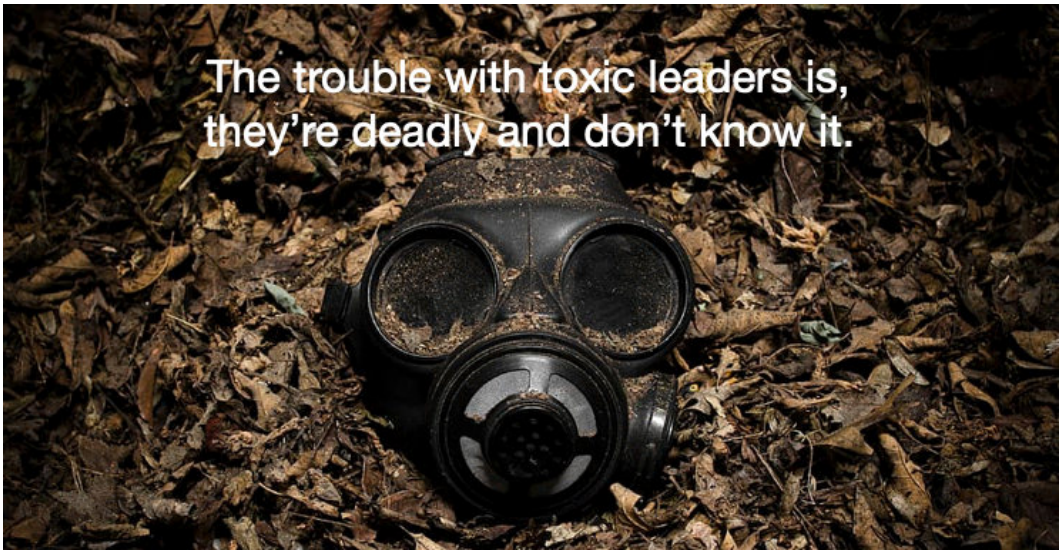
Toxicity does not require overt abuse. It frequently manifests itself as dismissiveness, passive neglect, chronic blame, or indifference toward crew fatigue and operational realities. Over time, highly skilled professionals become disengaged, performing tasks mechanically. In our industry, disengagement is not a morale issue—it is an active safety hazard.

A common justification for toxic behavior is "getting the mission done." As you know, mission completion must never supersede safety, ethics, or professional respect for the personnel executing the operation.

A toxic leader neglects their people's wants and needs, resulting in their people forgetting what makes them great. Those thoughts and actions are replaced with apathy, mindless actions and no pride in their work – all of these behaviors contribute heavily to a safety threat. This type of leader does not have to be abusive to be toxic;

that is extreme and obvious. Whatever actions this leader takes, those actions are destructive to both their people and the environment. These actions can cause an inordinate amount of stress, frustration, worry, hopelessness, and values degradation.

According to FlightSafety AeroSafety World, March 2012, a toxic leader has a "strong character, heightened ego, authoritative and domineering attitude with subordinates, …, deficiencies in situation awareness …" (p. 40). They will make



excuses and justify their thoughts and actions under the guise of 'getting the job done'.

Discussion question: Is toxic leadership a series of conscious or unconscious actions? Are they behaviors and decisions intentional and deliberate, or unintentional and hasty? Is there a relationship between unconscious actions and a lack of self-awareness? How does a lack of executive self-awareness directly compromise safety in a flight department?

Stress-Induced Defensive Behaviors

Toxic behaviors can be considered a defense mechanism. While these behaviors under pressure, leaders and team members may protect themselves in ways that feel justified and protective in the moment, they actively degrade trust and CRM/MRM efficacy. Which default behaviors do you recognize in yourself under pressure?

- Isolation: Withdrawing from crew, maintenance staff, or home life.
- Overwork: Extending duty hours unnecessarily to maintain perceived control.

- Irritability: Misdirecting frustration toward crew, line staff, or vendors.
- Transactional Compliance: Saying "yes" to executive passenger requests without evaluating operational risk.
- Adversarial Mindset: Viewing team members or others as obstacles rather than mission partners. Leadership & Self-Deception by The Arbinger Institute is an excellent book on this.
- Perfectionism: Pushing the team to extremes without rest or perspective.
- Deflection: Blaming delays, AOG issues, or conflicts entirely on external circumstances.
- Negativity: Focus-locking on operational failures while ignoring systemic successes.
- Martyrdom: Replaying a "poor me" narrative under high workload.
- Resistance to Support: Refusing delegation or operational help.

Operational Check:

Recognizing the defensive behaviors you default to—and exploring the reason behind them—is essential to changing your response.

- What underlying vulnerability or fear are you attempting to protect and defend? My research has revealed that some of the areas we hasten to defend are (this is not an all-inclusive list and these are not mutually exclusive): ego & pride, credibility & reputation, values & self-worth. More are available upon request.
- Do your stress responses strengthen or weaken your department's safety culture and team trust and communication?

Ethical Mandates

There are a multitude of ethical issues associated with toxic leadership:

Competence & System Accountability (Incompetence and inadequacies): Leaders are accountable for the standards, risks, and systemic single points of failure within their department. Effective leaders understand the depth and breadth of their

responsibilities. If a leader knows the department has a single point of failure and does nothing to address it, that is more than poor planning; it raises an ethical concern. Ignorance and complacency are core components of the Dirty Dozen human factors framework. Allowing known vulnerabilities to persist—whether in training, staffing, or maintenance—is an ethical breach. The ethical question becomes: how far does a leader's responsibility reach? How easy is it for a leader to fall into The Delegation Trap? True development delegates authority alongside responsibility and clear support. Offloading core leadership tasks onto subordinates without recognition, title, or compensation is not mentorship—it is an ethical failure.

In a perfect world, a person receives prior leadership training making the transition easier and smoother for everyone. The reality is when leaders are inadequately trained, they tend to follow the behaviors and attitudes of those they report to. Incompetence is when someone else handles the leader's responsibilities – with no additional remuneration. Incompetent leaders think they are offering an enviable opportunity to their staff by asking them to do part of their job. The only person being fooled is the leader. That may be true initially; however, when a person does their job plus elements of their boss' job, can that be considered unethical?

Integrity: Integrity requires complete alignment between operational and personal / professional values, spoken and unspoken words, and executive actions—in public and behind closed doors: admitting mistakes, following through on promises, and applying standards fairly. It is demonstrated in how a leader handles human error, risk, accountability, owner pressure, and difficult conversations and safety calls. Misplaced blame, emotional volatility, underestimating obstacles, and shortsighted decisions rapidly destroy leadership credibility. Can a toxic leader truly demonstrate integrity?

Intimidation & Psychological Safety (Inappropriate behaviors): Intimidation includes any verbal or non-verbal behavior that uses fear, rank, or implied consequences to enforce compliance (e.g., dismissive tones, public reprimands, implied career threats). It may be obvious—yelling, threatening, criticizing, or making disparaging comments—or subtle, such as a heavy sigh, dismissive tone, public embarrassment, or implied retaliation. An ethical boundary is crossed when the leader uses force or prevents action by causing fear of repercussions from his/her followers.

Authoritarian leaders may seek power and control; autocratic leaders may overemphasize conformity and obedience; Machiavellian-style leaders may believe the end justifies the means. These approaches can produce compliance, but they can also create embarrassment, withdrawal, resentment, silenc VIDEO LINK t. When a leader uses intimidation—even under the guise of "meeting passenger expectations"—they cross a critical safety threshold. Authoritarian or autocratic styles may yield immediate compliance, but they guarantee silence. Worth remembering: a silent crew can be a dangerous crew.If the corporate culture and mission do support this approach, everyone must then decide if they will remain in the company, knowing that these behaviors are expected, or leave and find a company that is more suitable to their values.

Extending toxic leadership to your department - how do you identify and manage toxic behavior when it occurs at the team level (e.g., a toxic crew member or technician)? How does peer-level toxicity impact department-wide safety communication? How should a leader address it? We will return to those questions later in this course.

Resiliency

Resilience as the Operational Counterweight to Toxicity

Where toxic leadership relies on rigid control, fear, blame, and self-protection, resilient leadership restores balance and trust, stabilizes the team, and maintains focus on safety, service excellence, and sound decision-making.

Resilience is far more than simply "bouncing back" from an operational setback. It is the deliberate capacity to adapt under pressure, absorb disruption, learn from friction, and guide a department through volatility—all without damaging professional relationships, compromising safety margins, or degrading standards.

Watch this short video from the Mayo Clinic on 8 habits of resilient leaders

VIDEO LINK

Resilient aviation leaders lead with realistic optimism: the discipline to candidly acknowledge facts, operational risks, resource limits, human emotions, and constraints while maintaining confidence in the team's ability to execute a safe and professional path forward.

This is fundamentally different from passive positivity or blind optimism. When schedule changes collapse, aircraft mishaps, crew members raise safety concerns, or executive passengers push tight deadlines, resilient leaders do not dismiss the challenge or penalize the messenger. Instead, they:

- Regulate their initial emotional response.
- De-escalate operational anxiety.
- Gather objective facts and leverage domain expertise.
- Communicate with clarity and authority.
- Model the composure required across the flight deck, hangar floor, and cabin.

Mitigating Toxicity by Developing Resilience

Resilience is driven by high emotional intelligence (EQ), sharp self-awareness, and disciplined response mechanisms. While toxic leaders react impulsively out of ego, stress, or fear of losing authority, resilient leaders process those same pressures and

choose actions that protect the safety culture, support the crew, and advance the department's mission.

Developing resilience is an iterative leadership practice. When high-tempo operations lead to missteps, resilient leaders assess the outcome objectively, repair affected relationships, adjust strategies, and apply those lessons moving forward.

Two foundational pillars drive this practice:

Pillar 1: Regulating Your Own Executive Conduct

Resilient leadership begins with recognizing personal emotional triggers before they influence tone, operational decisions, or interpersonal dynamics.

In our industry, operational pressure can be a rollercoaster or near-constant: compressed turnaround times, shifting weather windows, unexpected maintenance findings, high-profile passenger demands, competing priorities, and budget constraints. Understanding your emotional outbursts is good; managing those reactions is more arduous. The acts of counting to 10 and taking deep breaths do have validity; much like physically moving across the room, or from one room to another – these activities focus your attention on a specific action and allow your rational mind to regain control. These activities stop you from feeling self-consumed and like a victim of circumstances.

Reactive / Toxic Response	Resilient / Tactical Composure
Deflects blame, uses intimidation, dismisses input, or escalates stress.	Pauses, separates verified facts from assumptions, evaluates safety margins, and chooses actions that maintain crew engagement.

Tactical Composure: Simple tactical pauses—stepping back from the immediate noise, taking a measured breath, or briefly changing environments—allow executive presence and analytical judgment to re-engage. Far from being a sign of hesitation or weakness, these techniques are practical tools for maintaining command presence under stress.

Pillar 2: De-escalating Operational Reactivity in Others

Resilient leaders stabilize the operational environment. Emotional energy is contagious across a flight department: a leader's frustration, impatience, or anxiety rapidly propagates down the line. Conversely, calm, clarity, intellectual curiosity, and grounded confidence are equally contagious.

When a crew member, technician, or dispatcher is defensive, overwhelmed, or visibly stressed:

1. De-escalate Before Correcting: We talk to stabilize our own emotions. Because we mirror the emotions of others, we can succumb to negative emotions or easily get caught up in happier emotions. Focus on understanding the driver behind the emotion before attempting to correct the perspective.
2. Identify Core Issues: Listen for underlying facts, operational barriers, concerns and assumptions, and perceived risks.
3. Validate & Reframe: Acknowledge the emotional reality ("*I see why that schedule change creates a pinch point*") to lower defensiveness.
4. Anchor to Standards: Re-center the conversation on objective data, risk mitigation, available resources, and immediate next steps.

Attempting to counter high emotional reactivity with pure logic without acknowledging the underlying stress usually fails. De-escalating the emotional noise first creates the cognitive space required for rational, safety-focused problem-solving.

Overall discussion: What action can you take to building your own leadership resiliency? How can you help building the rest of your department members' resiliency?

Strategic Leadership Communication in Flight Ops

"60% of all management problems are the direct result of faulty communications" - Peter Drucker

In business aviation, communication is not a soft skill; it is a safety, service, and leadership skill. A flight department depends on accurate information moving clearly among pilots, maintenance technicians, schedulers, dispatchers, flight attendants, executives, vendors, and company stakeholders. Motivational tools and leadership theories are useful, but they are not enough if leaders cannot recognize communication styles, listen for meaning, and adjust their message so others can act with confidence.

Communication breaks down long before an engine fails or a rule is broken. Steep authority gradients, executive pressure, or workplace hierarchy often dictate what team members are willing to say out loud.

Communication failures often begin with small gaps that seem harmless in the moment. A scheduler may assume a crew has seen the latest itinerary change, a pilot may assume maintenance understands the operational urgency, a technician may assume leadership understands why an aircraft cannot be released, or an executive assistant may assume "as soon as possible" means the same thing to every department. When assumptions replace confirmation, the result can be confusion, frustration, delay, or unsafe pressure.

Examples include a crew receiving an incomplete passenger manifest, a last-minute catering change not being relayed to the flight attendant, a fuel stop decision not being clearly explained to the passenger-facing team, a maintenance discrepancy being summarized too casually, or a duty-time concern being treated as a personal preference rather than a regulatory and fatigue-risk issue. In each case, the technical problem may be manageable, but unclear communication can turn it into an operational, service, or safety problem.

Operational Mandate: Silence is compliance, not agreement. In a mature safety culture, personnel are expected—and empowered—to clarify, confirm, challenge, and speak up before an unaddressed assumption becomes an operational incident.

Discussion question: Departmental Dynamics Profile

- *Initiators: Who in your department proactively steps up for additional responsibilities, cross-training, or SMS roles?*
- *Decisive Operators: Who naturally takes command when an operational disruption or weather divert occurs?*

- *Collaborators: Who instinctually seeks consensus across flight, cabin, and ground crews before moving forward?*
- *Analysts: Who requires structured data, procedural details, and time to evaluate risk before committing to a plan?*

Effective communication starts with listening. You can create favorable results by listening to *understand* and *learn*, not to *respond*. Listening involves your *ears* – to hear the words, your *eyes* – to observe the nonverbal communication (such as body language and facial expressions), and *mind* – to interpret what is intended.

Real listening leads to win-win communication. It fosters trust, understanding, and respect. When you listen, you will understand the root cause of the problem, not just the 'surface irritation'. You will realize what's important to both parties and be able to respond in a positive way and offer meaningful suggestions on how to change and/or improve the situation.

A leader's communication objective is clear: help people understand *what* must be done, *why* it matters, and *how* it aligns with departmental standards. Every message must reinforce safety, regulatory compliance, professionalism and teamwork, service excellence, and operational reliability. The challenge is that a message is never only what the leader says. It is filtered through the listener's experience, assumptions, emotions, workload, and communication style. When leaders truly listen, they connect with their people. They begin to understand how team members think, what they value, where they feel pressure, and what information they need to perform well. That connection does not mean agreeing with everyone or avoiding hard decisions. It means creating enough trust that people will share concerns early, offer ideas honestly, and stay engaged in the department's mission.

Active listening builds the trust required for crew members to report safety concerns early—long before they escalate into high-stakes operational failures. It helps the leader identify the root cause of a problem instead of reacting only to the surface irritation.

Different people prefer different communication approaches. Some want the bottom line first. Some respond to enthusiasm, possibilities, and recognition. Some need collaboration and discussion. Others want a clear plan, supporting details, and

predictable steps. Effective leaders adjust their approach without changing the standard. The safety expectation remains the same; the way it is communicated may need to differ.

Your communication style influences your behavior, your leadership style, and your decision-making process. When you match your communication approach to the listener, you reduce friction, build rapport, and increase the likelihood that the right action will be taken. This is especially important when communicating under pressure, such as during a late aircraft swap, a maintenance delay, a crew fatigue concern, a passenger service issue, or a conflict between departments.

However, a message is always filtered through the receiver's experience, stress level, assumptions and biases, workload, and personal communication style. Effective leaders adapt their delivery while keeping the standard non-negotiable.

Under operational stress matching your delivery style to your listener reduces cognitive friction, prevents defensiveness, and accelerates accurate execution.

Pivotal Executive Choice: If forced to prioritize one primary communication objective during a high-pressure scenario, which drives your default response?

1. Ensuring Results (Driver): Focuses on operational throughput, speed, and bottom-line impact. Emphasize cost/benefit, profit/ loss, risk/reward
   - *Blind Spot:* Moving too quickly can bypass CRM checks or ignore human factor constraints and may not show all detail necessary
2. Promoting Ideas (Influencer): Focuses on team morale, optimism, and celebrations.
   - *Blind Spot:* High energy without clear operational constraints leaves scope creep unmanaged and disorganized.
3. Coordinating Action (Communicator): Focuses on exchange of ideas, cross-departmental buy-in, and team cohesion.
   - *Blind Spot:* Consensus-seeking slows down critical time-sensitive decisions.
4. Planning Execution (Analyst): Focuses on risk management, regulatory compliance, data, and SOP adherence.
   - *Blind Spot:* Debating micro-details can lead to operational stagnation.

You can do this by assessing:

a. Is person more direct (action-oriented) or indirect (thought-oriented)?

b Is person more open (connecting with others) or guarded (detaching from others)?

"When dealing with people, remember you are not dealing with creatures of logic, but with creatures of emotion" ... Dale Carnegie

Remember the 5 possible messages that you can send when you speak or write:

What you say or write

What you think you say or write

What you mean to say or write

What your listeners hear or read

What your listeners think they hear or read

When communication breaks down, the friction is rarely the data itself—it is the underlying relationship dynamic or perceived intent.

Don't like the state of your communications? Change your relationship – or at least the perception of your relationship. Ask yourself these questions:

What are your expectations from this conversation or relationship? What are their expectations? Is yours realistic? Is theirs realistic?

What are your barriers to change (self-awareness)? Finding common ground? What are their barriers to change (defensive behaviors?)?

What are the costs to stay involved in the same place? Time, ego, strategizing, venting, rationalizing, avoiding, emotional energy draining activities. Do you want to keep it going (perpetuate) or change it?

Discussion Question: Which communication style is your natural baseline and which style do you regress to under high operational stress? How does that shift impact crew trust and safety margins?

Group Discussion & debrief: Which combination of communication styles produces the best operational results in your flight department? Where must your department adapt its communication habits to eliminate silence, improve reporting, and sharpen operational execution?

Motivating, Mentoring & Developing Others

One of The Core Responsibility of Aviation Leadership

Flight departments operate in a high-stakes, knowledge-based, and safety-sensitive environment. Success requires personnel who can think critically, communicate clearly, exercise sound judgment, and take full ownership of their responsibilities.

Effective business aviation leadership requires translating motivational theory into daily, practical actions that empower pilots, maintenance technicians, schedulers, dispatchers, flight attendants, and support personnel to execute with confidence and professionalism.

VIDEO LINK

Understanding What Drives Your Team

Earlier motivation theories often assumed that employees either avoided responsibility and needed close supervision or naturally wanted responsibility and development. Today's leaders need a more flexible view. Some team members are motivated by achievement, such as mastering a new aircraft, earning a certification, improving dispatch accuracy, or leading a safety project. Others may be motivated by influence, responsibility, and the opportunity to shape department decisions. Still others value affiliation, belonging, teamwork, and trust. Maslow's hierarchy reminds leaders that people cannot perform at their best if basic needs such as safety, respect, stability, and belonging are not being met.

Modern aviation leaders must adopt a flexible approach to motivation, recognizing that team members are driven by different factors:

- Achievement: Mastering a new aircraft type rating, earning a professional certification, improving dispatch reliability, or leading a Safety Management System (SMS) initiative.
- Influence & Responsibility: Shaping operational decisions, managing projects, or leading teams.
- Affiliation & Trust: Team cohesion, mutual respect, and a supportive workplace culture.

Leadership Principle: Motivation relies on meeting foundational needs first—psychological safety, operational stability, mutual respect, and belonging.

Uncovering Driver Values

To understand what motivates individual team members, ask targeted, open-ended questions:

1. "What skills, experiences, or contributions do you want to pursue that you aren't currently doing?"
2. "What future responsibilities or decisions do you aspire to take on?"
3. "What aspects of your current role create friction, drain energy, or hinder your performance?"

Keep asking respectful, deeper questions until you understand what the person values. One of the strongest internal motivators is worthwhile work—tasks that are clearly tied to department goals, safety standards, and corporate values. In business aviation, this translates to mitigating risk, delivering exceptional passenger service, mentoring junior crew members, and maintaining aircraft availability.

Tailoring Recognition

As a leader, you know you need to align rewards with what the individual values. While some team members respond to intrinsic motivators (mastery, autonomy, purpose), others value extrinsic rewards (schedule flexibility, professional development budgets, title advancement, or formal recognition). Unaligned incentives degrade commitment over time.

Discussion question: What energizes/motivates you? What energizes/motivates your team members? What de-energizes or deflates you? How about those that work for you?

Developing Others: The Teachable Point of View

To grow future leaders, aviation managers need a clear, articulable teachable point of view—a synthesis of experience, core values, critical decisions, and lessons learned. When asked how to lead safely and effectively, your framework should highlight the standards, operational habits, and conservative judgment you expect from the department. values, habits, and judgment you hope to instill in others.

Mentoring should be embedded in the leader's role. A mentor serves as an advisor, sounding board, and developmental guide for someone with less experience or someone preparing for greater responsibility. If a team member wants to become a chief pilot, lead technician, scheduler manager, safety representative, international captain, or department leader, mentoring helps translate that goal into specific actions, skill development, feedback, and experience. Mentoring is usually development-focused and may continue over months or years. What nuggets will you share (without sounding egotistical)? What values do you hope to instill in others? https://youtu.be/_QpUH7i7EhM

Mentorship bridges technical competency and leadership capability. It prepares individuals for promotion or expanded roles by focusing on long-term personal and professional growth.

Empowerment, Boundaries, and Alignment

Leaders cannot force motivation because true motivation is internal; they can only create the conditions where motivation is more likely to grow. That means understanding what matters to each person, what they fear, what makes them defensive, what they avoid, and what excites or energizes them. Motivation becomes stronger when a person can connect a goal to meaningful action steps, clear expectations, useful feedback, and a sense of progress.

One of the most effective ways to support motivation is to mentor and empower people. Empowerment means assigning meaningful responsibility, granting appropriate authority, setting boundaries, and allowing people to make decisions within their role, while offering steady coaching and not abandonment.

Mentoring Competency Checklist

A strong aviation mentor must consistently:

- Listen Actively: Hear out concerns before delivering solutions or feedback.
- Maintain Safety & Ethics: Keep organizational standards at the core of every dialogue.
- Demonstrate Emotional Intelligence: Exercise self-awareness, empathy, and impulse control under operational stress.
- Challenge Norms: Push team members out of their comfort zones to build perspective and critical judgment. Critique traditional thinking to expand perspective and scope of responsibilities

Pitfalls to Avoid

- Mentor insecurity or viewing a mentee's growth as a threat.

- Mandated, unnatural mentoring pairings that lack mutual trust or clear objectives.
- Unstructured meetings that lack actionable outcomes.
- Misalignment between mentor and mentee regarding what defines success.

Remember: when you are mentoring someone, the focus is not on proving your expertise; it is on supporting their growth. Business aviation leaders strengthen their department when they intentionally develop all employees, not only the most visible or easiest to mentor.

Here's a short video on your influence as a leader: VIDEO LINK

Remember: when you are mentoring someone, it's not about you, it's about them. Be certain your support the growth and development of all your employees.

Leadership Scenario Activity

- *Objective: Practice developmental conversations around real-world aviation challenges (e.g., preparing a lead technician, managing a conservative safety call, or resolving inter-departmental trip friction).*
- *Format (Triads):*
  - *Role 1 (Mentor/Coach): Leads the conversation using active listening, emotional intelligence, and clear action planning.*
  - *Role 2 (Mentee): Brings a realistic operational scenario or growth objective.*
  - *Role 3 (Observer): Provides structured feedback on communication clarity, support, and focus on standards.*

Develop yourself, develop others, and elevate department performance—one intentional conversation at a time.

Building & Leading Empowered Teams

An empowered flight department is built on trust, clarity, accountability, and respect. Your team's performance depends not only on individual technical skill, but also on how people are treated, how decisions are communicated, and whether team members believe their judgment is valued. In our industry, empowerment affects safety, service, reliability, morale, and the company's confidence in the department. An

empowered flight department relies on trust, operational clarity, mutual accountability, and respect. Empowerment directly dictates safety outcomes, dispatch reliability, passenger service standards, and corporate trust.

Leaders build an empowered environment when they:

- Validate Expertise: Value input, questions, and safety concerns from every functional role.
- Model Professional Composure: Demonstrate the calm, disciplined leadership expected during operational disruptions.
- Provide Explicit Boundaries: Define authority, decision gates, handoff points, and deadlines clearly.
- Establish Clear Consequences: Enforce positive and negative accountability for adherence to safety and operational standards.

Discussion question: Where can your flight department use intentional empowerment and mentoring to elevate safety, service, accountability, or succession planning?

High-Performing Teams & The 4 Stages of Development

Individuals working together to attain a common goal comprise a team. A flight department achieves synergy when pilots, technicians, schedulers & dispatchers, and

flight attendants align toward shared goals: safety, regulatory compliance, aircraft readiness, exceptional passenger service, and flawless trip execution.

When members function efficiently as a group, the combination of their knowledge, skills, and expertise makes a productive team. The strength of the team is in its synergy, the concept that "the whole is greater than the sum of its parts". It is the leader's function to build an effective team.

What values make up your team or does your team adhere to? Mutual respect, trust, acceptance, patience, empathy, no jealousy, loyalty, and active communication. In other words, individuals must have the social intelligence to thwart any oncoming or forthcoming conflict.

4 Stages of team development: VIDEO LINK

1. FORMING: team members are assembled, roles are introduced, and people look for focus and direction.
2. STORMING: differences, frustrations, unclear expectations, or competing priorities surface and must be addressed constructively. *This stage drives the greatest personal and department growth if managed constructively.*
3. NORMING: standardizing communication habits, expectations, routines, and shared standards become clearer.
4. PERFORMING: executing with high trust, coordination, accountability, and shared identity allow the team to perform at their highest level

ARTICLE LINK

It's the second stage, storming, where the most growth (personally and professionally as well as individually and team-wise) occurs. This is where diversity and perceived slights (remember, one's perception is one's reality) can explode into major arguments and create a hostile and/or toxic work environment. Let's address how to deal with these situations.

Practical Storming-Stage Exercises for Flight Departments

"Say It Better" Communication Practice: Examples of unhelpful storming-stage statements:

- "Maintenance is always the reason we cancel trips."
- "Scheduling never gives us enough information."

- "The pilots just don't want to fly."
- "Leadership only cares about the executive."

How can each statement be re-phrased into a more constructive version focused on facts, impact, and next steps?

Conflict Trigger Reflection: identify:

- One behavior that quickly frustrates them
- One situation that makes them defensive
- One communication style they find difficult
- One response they want to practice instead

This reveals how self-awareness helps you keep the storming phase productive.

Post-Event Debrief Simulation

Use a scenario such as a passenger complaint, maintenance delay, missed handoff, or weather-related cancellation. Conduct a short debrief using three questions:

- What happened?
- What made the situation harder?
- What should we change before the next operation?

This connects storming to learning culture and Just Culture.

"What Does Respect Look Like?" Team Charter

Define what respect looks like during disagreement in a flight department. Create 5–7 behaviors, such as:

- Ask before assuming
- Challenge the plan, not the person
- Confirm handoffs
- Explain operational constraints
- Speak up early
- Close the loop

This can become a bridge from storming into norming.

"Red Flag / Green Flag" Discussion

Identify behaviors that indicate storming is becoming unhealthy versus productive.

Red flags: blame, sarcasm, silence, side conversations, withholding information, personal attacks.

Green flags: clarifying questions, respectful disagreement, fact-checking, shared problem-solving, clear ownership. This helps leaders recognize when intervention is needed.

Active Listening & Tactical Communication

Listening is the single most effective method to solve problems and strengthen empowered teams. When leaders listen well, they can identify the real issue rather than reacting to symptoms, gossip, or assumptions. Listening helps leaders ask better questions, involve the right people, and gather facts before making decisions that affect safety, service, staffing, maintenance, scheduling, or passenger expectations.

Effective leaders listen to solve root causes rather than reacting to operational noise or surface symptoms. The storming stage is often where the most personal, professional, and team growth occurs. It is also where leaders must pay close attention. Differences in role, experience, communication style, schedule pressure, fatigue, or perceived slights can escalate quickly if they are ignored. A leader's job is to surface issues early, separate facts from interpretations, and prevent normal disagreement from becoming a hostile or toxic work environment.

Effective listening requires three types of openness:

- Openness to people: include different perspectives in decision-making. What affects schedulers, maintenance technicians, pilots, flight attendants, or dispatchers may not affect you or others immediately, but it may affect the operation later.

· Openness to alternatives: involve the people closest to the work. Team members who experience day-to-day routines, constraints, and problems can often identify practical solutions that you may not see from a distance.

· Openness to debate: create space for respectful disagreement. Do team members feel safe questioning a plan, raising a concern, or offering an opinion that is not fully aligned with yours?

Listening and asking clarifying questions also reinforce several leadership principles:

· Company and department values: values must guide decisions regardless of role, title, personality, or pressure. Those values are applicable regardless of individual differences.

· Accountability and measurability: confirm what was heard, what will be done, who owns the next step, and how progress will be evaluated.

· Transparency. explain how you reached your decision (getting from Point A to Point B) and providing evidence, your vulnerability shows (which can take courage). Understanding another's vulnerability and not using it to their detriment shows empathy, another essential principle.

· Celebrating differences: recognize that people may vary in experience, needs, communication style, decision-making pace, and risk perception.

Listening Rules of Engagement

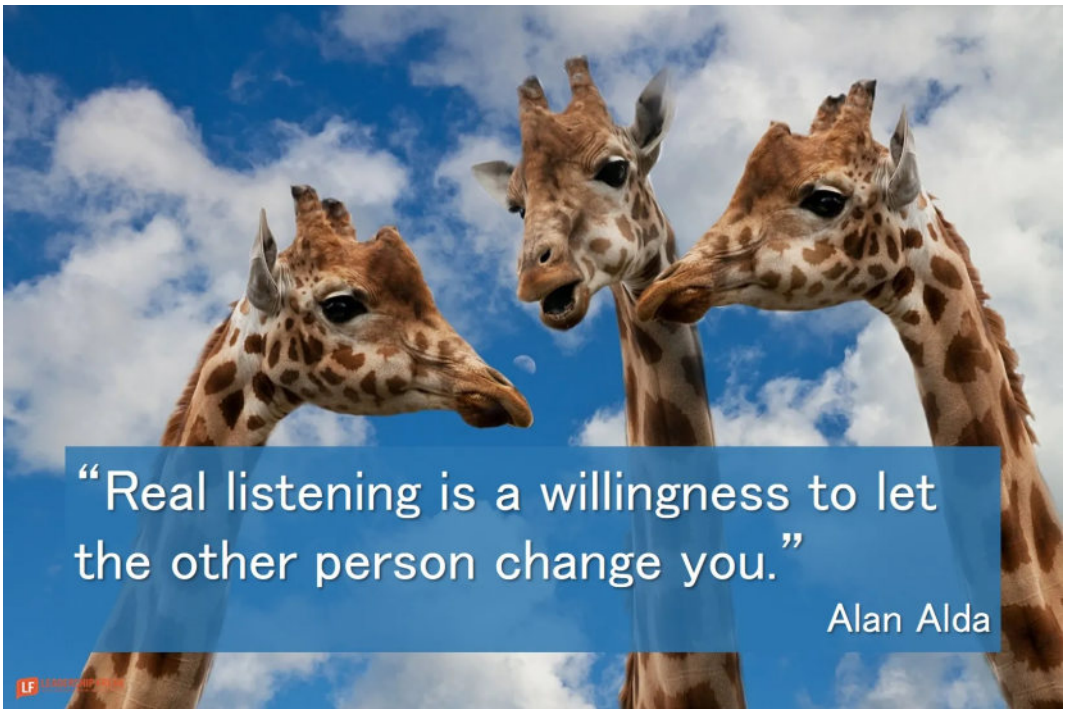
· Demonstrate Full Engagement: Put away devices, maintain eye contact, and take notes.

· Avoid Ambiguous Signals: Be cautious with terms like *"OK,"* which can be misinterpreted as agreement rather than acknowledgement.

· Paraphrase for Clarity: Picking up meanings that are not explicitly stated and not misinterpreting their meanings. Use phrases like: "From your operational perspective..." or "Correct me if I'm wrong, your main concern is..."

· Observe Nonverbal Cues: Hesitation, silence, fidgeting, looking at the ground, or deep sighs often signal an unstated safety or operational concern.

In other words, *don't tell - ask!*



Conflict & Disagreeing Tactfully

Do you get tense and angry if things don't go your way, or do you become intimidated and freeze? Are you competitive, cooperative or are you an avoider? Are you poised and can lighten the mood, or do you succumb to the negative atmosphere? What is your underlying emotion – dread? Resentment? Worry? Insecurity? Anticipation? What about your team members – do you know what triggers their TEA Tornado™? Can you anticipate their reactions?

Are you able to 'separate people from the problem'? People are concerned at some level about respect, power, identity – how will you address those aspects? Emotions tell people what is important to them – what to obtain or what to preserve – emotions bypass details for the more holistic view.

Conflict is unavoidable in flight departments because people must balance safety, service, schedules, resources, regulations, personalities, and company expectations. The leadership question is not whether conflict will occur, but how you respond when it does. Do you become tense, angry, competitive, avoidant, or intimidated? Can you

stay composed, ask useful questions, and help the team move toward a professional solution?

A key leadership skill is separating people from the problem. Team members may be concerned about respect, authority, identity, credibility, or fairness. Emotions often reveal what people believe they need to protect or preserve. When leaders acknowledge those concerns without allowing emotion to drive the decision, they are better able to focus the team on facts, risks, options, and next steps.

Conflict spikes when team members feel powerless or uncertain about workload, schedules, or authority. Someone may believe another person stands between them and what they need, want, or believe they deserve. When that happens, people can begin to see others as obstacles instead of partners.

How do you mitigate conflicts?

- Adopt "Yes, And..." Thinking: Validate the operational concern before adding constraints or alternative facts ("*Yes, I understand the client wants to depart early, AND duty day limits prevent us from extending crew hours without a rest window*").

Handled well, disagreement can reveal assumptions, biases, communication gaps, and process weaknesses; it helps to recognize your own hot buttons and especially *why* they are your hot buttons. It can also strengthen belonging because team members see that different views are allowed and respected. That difference can separate a fully engaged, accountable department from an apathetic environment with low energy, low innovation, and limited trust.

- Focus on Process, Not Blame: Recreate event timelines step-by-step to expose process weaknesses rather than faulting individuals. Recreate the situation step by step. This can clear up misinterpretations and allow the team to discuss specific decision points. Consider multiple solutions, including ideas that seem unlikely at first. Evaluate the pros and cons of each option, then end with actions that reduce the chance of a similar problem happening again

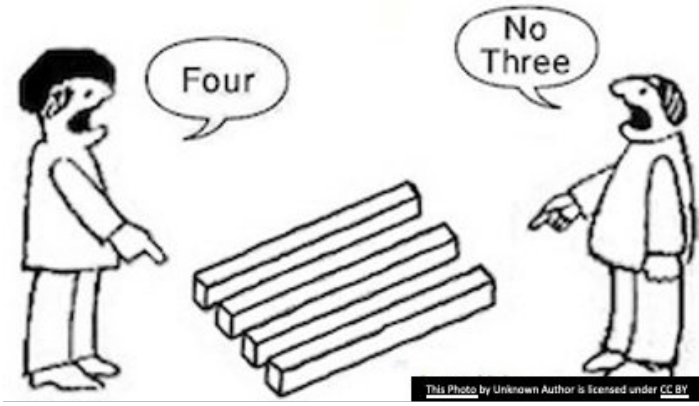
- Listen to the speaker's entire reasoning. This involves looking at the situation from the speaker's point of view. Begin with "I understand." and explain their primary point. You can also say "I see where you're coming from." or "I hadn't thought of that. Have you considered?" Do NOT use these words: But or Yes, but; However, or No.

You can say "Yes, and" instead. State your facts before voicing your opinion; that provides the other person with facts and evidence to support your view.

Here's a video on how to manage difficult employees without resentment (remember: 'difficult' is subject to individual interpretations) VIDEO LINK

Even those with a high degree of interpersonal situational awareness, people do not reach an agreement with their listeners. This is the time for a civilized, polite disagreement – "agreeing to disagree".

Handling disagreements effectively can showcase biases (unconscious and conscious, real and perceived) which can be immediately recognized and fixed. It also provides a sense of acceptance (of differing views) and a sense of belonging from your team members. Those final two can make the difference between full-fledged commitments with fully engaged people and an apathetic environment with no energy or innovation.



ACTIVITY: "Facts vs. Story" Scenario Debrief

Let's discuss a short aviation scenario, such as a late aircraft swap, maintenance delay, or crew fatigue concern. Ask participants to separate:

- *Facts: what is known and verifiable*
- *Stories: assumptions or interpretations*
- *Emotions: what people may be feeling*
- *Leadership response: what should happen next*

This reinforces the idea that conflict often escalates when assumptions replace facts.

Ethical and Moral Behaviors

Ethical behavior is essential to empowered aviation teams. Leaders' actions are visible, interpreted by others, and sometimes taken out of context. Team members also have ethical responsibilities: to act with integrity, follow standards, raise concerns, and alert leadership when they observe unsafe, unfair, or unethical behavior.

Bias can occur at any level. Common examples include:

· Giving special consideration to certain team members and rationalizing the decision

· Rating ourselves more favorably than we rate others

· Assuming our own thinking is normal, fair, or superior while dismissing others

· Failing to acknowledge, discuss, or mitigate risk

· Allowing overconfidence to reduce curiosity, especially in familiar situations

· Believing we can control events that are actually uncertain or system-dependent

· Blaming individuals when a larger system or process problem contributed to the outcome

Unethical leadership can quickly become toxic and trigger destructive behaviors such as:

· Stifling criticism or discouraging questions

· Failing to develop team members

· Looking for someone to blame instead of examining the system

· Ignoring incompetence, unethical behavior, or patterns that undermine the team

Mitigating Ethical Biases

· Avoid Special Treatment: Consistently apply department standards regardless of seniority or status.

· Guard Against Overconfidence: Treat routine domestic trips with the same operational rigor as complex international missions.

· Avoid Systemic Blame: Focus on fixing flawed processes rather than blaming individuals when failures occur.

Leadership and EI

Emotionally intelligent leaders build environments where team members feel safe speaking up, reporting errors, and managing high-stress scenarios. Key predictors of leadership success include self-awareness, stress tolerance, and empathy.

Think of your best leader. What made that person effective? Did they show empathy, self-confidence, composure, and good timing? Did they support you while still holding you accountable? Did they look out for your growth, your performance, and your future? Now think of your worst leader. What behaviors stand out—selfishness, arrogance, intimidation, inconsistency, or lack of concern? What emotions do you remember from each experience?

People often feel more valued, more committed, and more motivated under leaders who demonstrate emotional intelligence. In business aviation, emotionally intelligent leaders help people speak up, recover from mistakes, manage pressure, and stay focused on safe, professional performance. Leaders with low emotional intelligence may unintentionally create defensiveness, silence, turnover, or disengagement.

Emotional intelligence is now considered a core leadership capability. Leaders must be able to recognize what team members may be thinking or feeling and respond appropriately, whether the situation involves a crisis, a safety concern, a difficult passenger issue, or a significant accomplishment. Research from the Center for Creative Leadership has identified self-awareness, stress tolerance, and empathy as predictors of strong leadership performance. Leaders who appear aloof or emotionally disconnected may lose trust even when their technical decisions are sound.

Appreciating how others feel, especially during challenging operations, demonstrates respect and strengthens the working relationship. The next discussion question asks you to reflect on your reaction to the video, "It's not about the Nail"

Many people feel more valuable, a stronger sense of self-satisfaction and are motivated to do more for the 'best boss' than they were for the 'worst boss'. Your 'best boss' had a higher degree of EI than your 'worst boss' did. EI has been called 'people skills' or 'people common sense'.

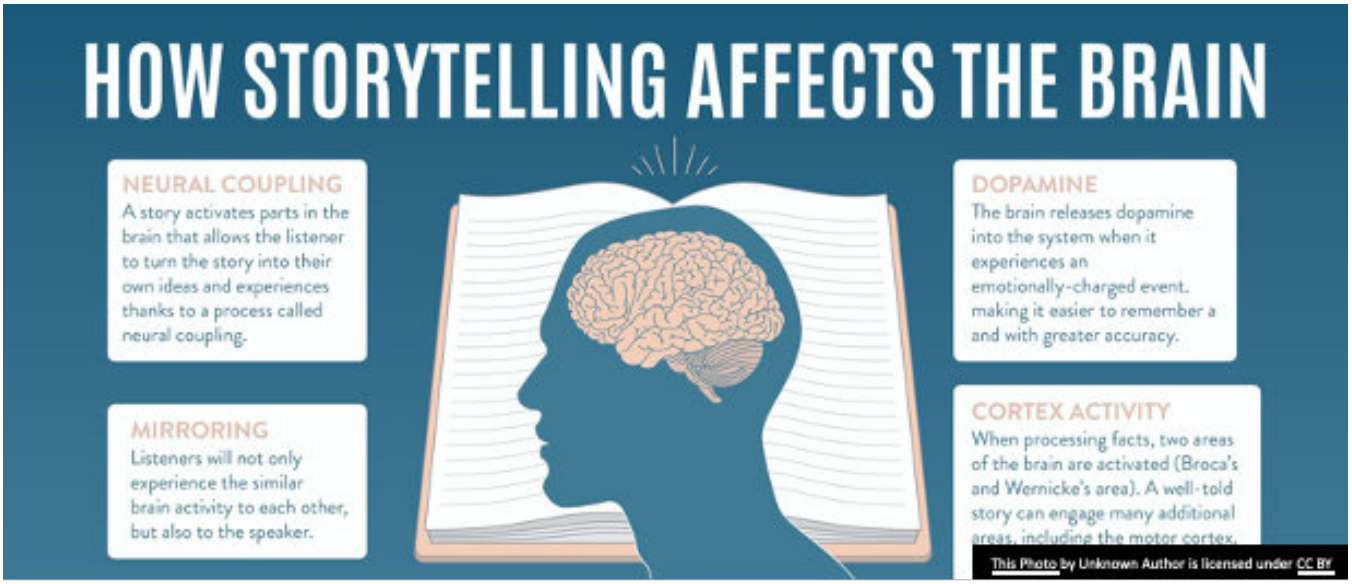
EI has become more prominent in today's view of leadership skills. As a result, leaders must be able to ascertain what their team members are thinking and feeling.

Studies by Center for Creative Leadership have determined that self-awareness, stress tolerance and empathy are predictors of high leadership performance. A leader has the responsibility to their team to respond appropriately to an emotional situation, whether it is a negative crisis or a positive accomplishment. Leaders that appear aloof and unemotional can suffer a lack of trust and higher turnover from their team members.

Appreciating how others feel, especially during challenging times, demonstrates respect for the other person and strengthens your relationship. The next discussion question is your reaction to this video: VIDEO LINK

Discussion Question: What was your initial reaction to the video, and how did your thoughts change after you had time to reflect on its message? If you watched it with someone else, what did that discussion add to your perspective?

VIDEO LINK



Tapping Internal & External Expertise

Business aviation leaders do not need to have every answer. One mark of an empowered leader is knowing when to use sources of expertise to develop themselves, strengthen the team, and improve department decisions.

When facing a problem, decision, training need, or development opportunity, using experts can shorten the learning curve and improve the quality of the solution. Experts may include internal team members, experienced leaders, safety professionals, aircraft

manufacturers, maintenance providers, training organizations, or industry mentors. Within the department, experts can also serve as mentors or train-the-trainer resources, reducing single points of failure.

Everyone has strengths and weaknesses, areas that fuel their passions and excitement, and areas that they approach with dread. Your role as a leader is to capitalize on passions while keeping weaknesses in check. Remember that it takes more energy to perform a task we are anxious about than it does for us to complete an activity we are invested in. The more energy we expend, the less we have of it, and the faster we become mentally tired.

Sources of expertise may include current employees, retired employees who left on positive terms, industry publications, aviation associations, regulators, manufacturers, training providers, universities, libraries, peer-reviewed articles, and professional conferences. Regardless of the source, evaluate information for currency, relevance, authority, accuracy, purpose, and possible funding influence.

When consulting experts:

1. Define the core operational question clearly.
2. Ask questions that challenge your existing assumptions.
3. Close with: "What else should I know before making this decision?"

Regardless of where the information came from, the information must be evaluated for currency, relevance, the authority of the author, accuracy, the purpose for which the author published the article, and who funded the research. This is commonly known as the CRAAP$ test.

Before you speak to an industry expert or begin researching, you'll need to have a clear understanding of what it is you are asking. Be certain that you are looking for the best solution, not necessarily searching for validation that your idea is the best. In your list of questions, be certain to ask 'contrary' questions; that is, questions that will bring up different views or examples that can contradict your solution. You may want to send the questions ahead of time if your expert prefers that. Your final question should be along the lines of "is there anything else I should know or be aware of" or, depending on the topic, "if you were in my position, what else would you like or need to know to make the best decision?".

GROUP ACTIVITY: Your group will be given a scenario or a challenging issue. You will brainstorm and come up with their expertise source list. You will take it one step further to implementation which will include meetings with team members and mentoring or shadowing specific personnel.

Operational Systems & Learning Culture

Business aviation relies on systems to reduce risk, improve consistency, and support decision-making. Many industry systems provide excellent guidance, but they must be adapted thoughtfully to fit the size, mission, aircraft, staffing, and culture of the specific flight department. Used well, these systems strengthen—not replace—leadership judgment.

Leading flight departments integrate foundational systems—such as Safety Management Systems (SMS), Just Culture, Maintenance Management Systems, and the Dirty Dozen framework—into a broader Learning Culture.

The most important underlying system may be a learning culture. In a learning flight department, curiosity is encouraged, questions are welcomed, and training is treated as more than a box to check. Learning becomes valuable when people discuss what was learned, connect it to real operations, and share insights across roles and departments. This creates pride, ownership, and commitment to the department's mission.

Drivers of a Learning Flight Department

- The driving forces behind a learning organization include:
- Encouraging every team member to take ownership of training, proficiency, and skill development
- Fostering honest, open, and curious discussions where people can share views, admit errors, and explore better ways of operating
- Keeping an open mind when reviewing events, industry lessons, operational changes, and differing perspectives
- Continually evaluating industry lessons learned and adapting department SOPs.

Final Reflection:

By nurturing an environment where everyone feels valuable, recognizes their contributions as an integral part of the team, and ideas are not automatically shut down, you as the leader can discern between 'noise' and cues that a matter may become more serious and demand your attention.

Discussion: Would you describe your flight department as a learning organization? What structural or cultural changes would strengthen learning, accountability, and empowerment in your team?

There is no end. There is no beginning. There is only the passion of life.
– Federico Fellini

Critical Thinking

How do you know what you need to do to increase your professional knowledge and continue your learning journey? What tools can you use to be sure you are on the 'right path'? You can ask friends, family, industry leaders, mentors or coaches. You can explore associations, university courses, assess your own leadership acumen, rely on your gut instinct or you can just plain guess. One essential tool [and thinking pattern] to use is critical thinking, Socratic questioning, and asking the Universal Intellectual Standards questions.

Two of the most effective and extensive resources to assist you in grasping the overall picture (which is essential in leadership) is critical thinking and Socratic Questioning. For clarity purposes, let's define these terms:

- Critical Thinking: Self-guided, self-disciplined reasoning that analyzes and evaluates thought processes to eliminate bias, assess evidence, and improve operational outcomes.
- Socratic Inquiry: A structured method of disciplined, open-ended questioning used to test assumptions, probe logic, and clarify intent before an unexamined risk turns into an incident.
- "Is a self-guided, self-disciplined thinking which attempts to reason at the highest level of quality in a fair-minded way. People … are keenly aware of the inherently flawed nature of human thinking when left unchecked. They strive to diminish the power of their egocentric and sociocentric tendencies. They use the intellectual tools that critical thinking offers – concepts and principles that enable them to analyze, assess, and improve thinking" as defined by the Critical Thinking Organization

In short, according to Richard Paul, "Critical thinking is the art of analyzing and evaluating thinking with a view to improving it." Let's review these videos about critical thinking: What is Critical Thinking and The Intellectual Standards

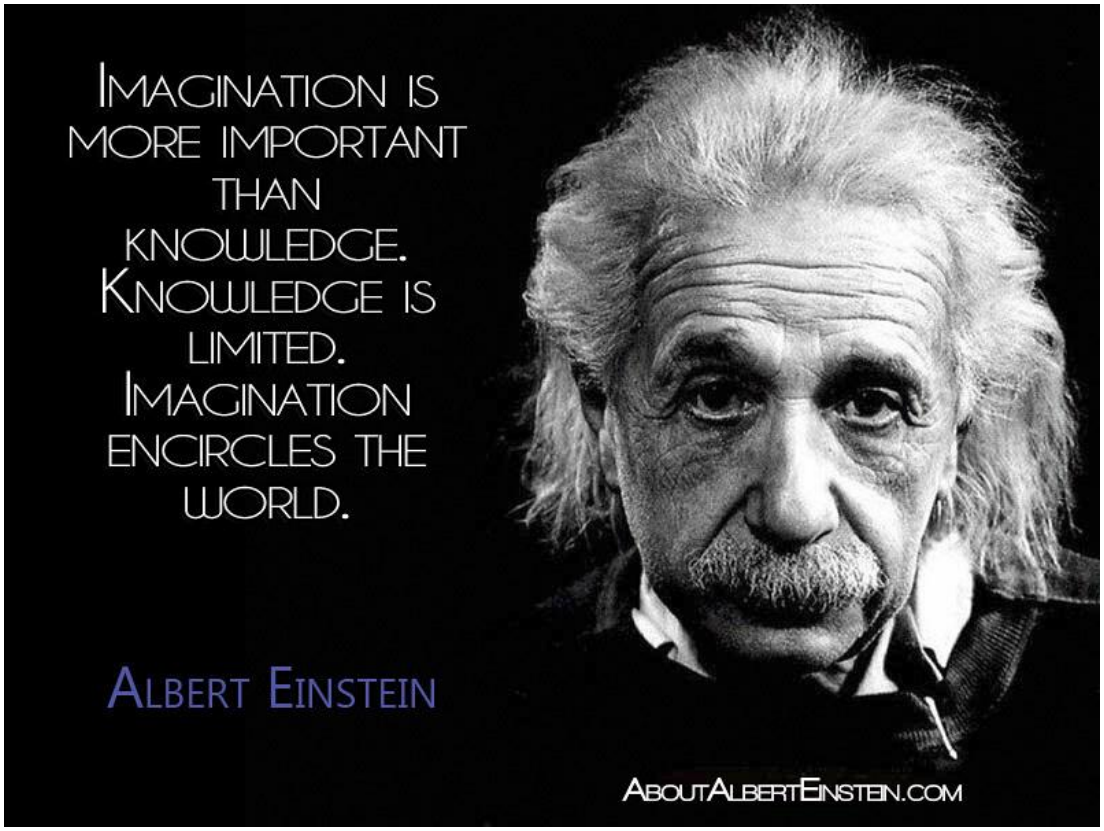
Discussion question: On a scale of 1–10, how would you rate your critical-thinking skills? What examples support your rating?

Let's review these videos about critical thinking: What is Critical Thinking and The Intellectual Standards

Universal Intellectual Standards

The intellectual standards are questions used to determine the depth of your thought process. Paul & Elder's (2006) Universal Intellectual Standards provide a diagnostic framework for evaluating information quality, risk, and operational logic:

Standard	Diagnostic Question	Aviation Application
Clarity	Can you elaborate or provide a specific operational example?	Clarifying ambiguous hazard reports or vague passenger
Accuracy	How can we independently verify or test this data?	Validating interpretations, weather data, or performance
Precision	What are the exact metrics, tolerances, or fuel/time margins?	Establishing precise weight & balance or duty-time limits.
Relevance	How does this variable directly impact the mission or safety?	Filtering operational noise during emergency or high-workload
Depth	What systemic complexities or root causes are involved?	Analyzing recurring maintenance squawks or scheduling
Breadth	Have we evaluated this from the perspective of Maintenance, Dispatch,	Conducting cross-departmental risk assessments before major



Logic	Does this operational plan follow from verified facts and SOPs?	Ensuring risk mitigation strategies align with actual root causes.
Significance	Is this the primary hazard, or a secondary symptom?	Prioritizing critical safety items over minor cosmetic issues.
Fairness	Are we evaluating this issue objectively without bias or defensiveness?	Conducting just-culture safety reviews following human error.

Further information can be found at University of Louisville's Critical Thinking Framework webpage. Additional questions can be found at the end of this manual.

Keep these questions in mind as we progress through this course.

Why do we bring this up? What relevance does it have to these course objectives and to leadership overall? Let's explore further:

Applied Operational Scenarios

- Conflict Resolution: Uncovering root causes (including individual perceptions and interpretations) can only be achieved by asking questions that engage the sensible mind and disengage the emotional brain, separating objective facts from subjective emotion, and eliminating defensive positioning.

- Strategic Planning: Seeing the 360* view of the situation, evaluating second- and third-order operational impacts on crews, maintenance schedules, budget forecasts, and executive travel.
- Individual Development: Setting evidence-based performance benchmarks and structured career roadmaps. Asking questions that provide insightful responses can aid in the motivation of those achievements.

The Universal Intellectual Standard questions can help ensure nearly all avenues have been considered. This is especially beneficial when creating new processes, revising existing procedures, or considering any type of change.

Practical Application Self-Assessment: Identify a recent operational challenge or decision. How systematically did you challenge assumptions and evaluate evidence before acting? How would applying the Universal Intellectual Standards alter your approach next time?

Take a moment and jot down several actions you will consider implementing based on this discussion.

Knowledge Architecture

What are the benefits of gaining valid and trusted knowledge? One study has shown that increasing knowledge focuses an individual on their own personal and professional career enjoyment. Learning provides the confidence to tackle challenges and to take control of their lives, which motivates them to do more of the same. In addition, it expands their thinking enough to provide creative and innovative solutions. Leaders operate at the intersection of two distinct forms of knowledge:

There are two primary types of knowledge: explicit [facts, or information that is either true or false and can be readily explained] and tactic [knowledge gotten from experiences and repetition]. Other sources expand on these two types to include factual, conceptual, procedural, and metacognitive We mention this only to make you aware of these types.

Let's start with the basics as it helps to define the terms we will use in this course.

These definitions came from the Cambridge dictionary:

Knowledge: understanding of or information about a subject that you get by experience or study, either known by one person or by people;
Expertise: generally, a high level of knowledge or skill.
Askdifference.com defines them similarly:
Knowledge: General understanding or familiarity with a subject, place, situation, etc.; a state of having been informed or made aware of a situation.
Expertise: Great skill or knowledge in a particular field; advice, or opinion, of an expert

From an opinion piece in the journal Frontiers in Psychology, "expertise is consensually defined as elite, peak, or exceptionally high levels of performance on a particular task or within a given domain" (p. 1). From the Collins Dictionary, expertise is gained through 'training, practice or study'.

If you trust or consider these as valid sources, professional knowledge can be trivial, slight, limited, moderate, usable, a foundation; or inaccurate, indefinite, believable, or solid. It can be theory or real-world based. The results of knowledge can be untested, experimental, a guess, dependable or trustworthy.

Expertise, on the other hand, can be equally vague or ambiguous. Who defines 'great skill' or 'high level of knowledge' or even 'exceptionally high level of performance'? There is no doubt that expertise increases your personal power.

Other sources expand on these two types to include factual, conceptual, procedural, and metacognitive We mention this only to make you aware of these types.

Depending on your end goal and your learning style, different types of where to gain knowledge may suit you better. Is it the academic degree you are desiring, or would a specific certification be more advantageous to your career? Are you looking

for a wide breadth of information or specific topics? Do you prefer to 'go wide' or 'go deep'? Your professional and personal standards and the structure and processes you work in contribute to how and what you monitor in your field, and in safety overall. This will increase and solidify your beliefs and experiences, which will go on to form better habits and methods.

As a leader, it is your duty to strengthen your professional expertise as well as the expertise in your team members and direct reports. Encourage them to seek additional knowledge and education in their current role and the role they aspire to achieve. In this manner, you will be passing on your high-performance standards and the necessity to continue learning and cultivating curiosity.

Discussion question: What is your definition of professional knowledge? Professional expertise? Are they the same?

Professional knowledge

Depending on your end goal and your learning style, different types of where to gain knowledge may suit you better. Is it the academic degree you are desiring, or would a specific certification be more advantageous to your career? Are you looking for a wide breadth of information or specific topics? Do you prefer to 'go wide' or 'go deep'? Your professional and personal standards and the structure and processes you work in contribute to how and what you monitor in your field, and in safety overall. This will increase and solidify your beliefs and experiences, which will go on to form better habits and methods.

Distinguishing Knowledge from True Expertise

- Professional Knowledge: Information acquired through study, training, and certification (e.g., FAA licenses, A&P ratings, NBAA PDP courses, academic degrees).
- True Expertise: The consistent, ethical, and adaptable application of knowledge under variable operational conditions. Expertise is demonstrated through sound judgment, composure under pressure, and the deliberate development of others.

As a leader, it is your duty to strengthen your professional expertise as well as the expertise in your team members and direct reports. Encourage them to seek additional knowledge and education in their current role and the role they aspire to achieve. In this manner, you will be passing on your high-performance standards and the necessity to continue learning and cultivating curiosity.

Below are a few sources where you can gain professional knowledge:

- Schools
  - Academic degrees – bachelor's, master's, doctorate
  - A&P
  - Certified dispatcher
- NBAA PDP courses
- Conferences & conventions
  - BACE / EBACE
  - Other NBAA conferences
  - Heli-Expo
- Industry associations
  - AOPA courses
  - FAA courses
  - FlightSafety Foundation
- Industry publications
  - Business Aviation Insider
  - AIN/AINOnline
  - ProPilot
  - FlightSafety Foundation's AeroSafety World

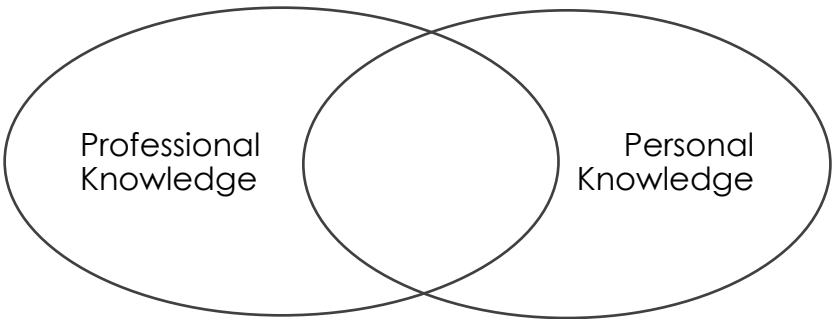
Consider courses (including MOOC's) in other industries. Health care has been compared to business aviation; specifically, the OR/ER operations (behaviors and reactions) and the relationship to safety. Remember CRM began with studies in psychology (and many pilots at that time considered it 'psychobabble'). Emotional intelligence has roots in neuroscience and behavioral science. Art and creativity have been linked to relaxing and maintaining your composure. Sports and muscle memory are connected. You do not have to become proficient or a subject matter expert in

these areas. Learning about other disciplines can help your subconscious mind relate to your current role (both personal and professional). Be curious – without being judgmental. Some information you can immediately release from your thoughts, other material you may need to mull over before accepting or rejecting that information.

Discussion Question: At what point does knowledge morph into expertise? How do you maintain your professional expertise? Your team's professional expertise?

Personal Knowledge & Emotional Self-Awareness

Technical capability alone does not guarantee effective leadership. Personal Knowledge encompasses far more than professional knowledge; it's a deep self-awareness: recognizing stress responses, communication defaults, interpersonal triggers, and cognitive limitations. It also overlaps professional knowledge quite a bit. Common knowledge seeps from one area to another. Think of a Venn Diagram.



Is your definition of personal knowledge limited to your likes and dislikes, or your tangible assets? Would you include your communication style? Your triggers? How you react to stress? Your level of situational awareness? What satisfies you? What makes you happy? How to destress? How you study? Why you want or need to improve? Your learning preferences (by seeing pictures and diagrams, by doing or moving, by hearing the words, by reading or writing, or a combination of these)?

The Compartmentalization Fallacy: Personal stress and professional execution are interconnected. Fatigue, personal anxiety, or unmanaged emotional triggers directly impair situational awareness, risk tolerance, and communication clarity on the flight deck and in the hangar. Think about this: you become aware at work that you interrupt others and do not allow them to finish their thought. You are now conscious of that behavior at work. Do you interrupt any family member or friend in the same manner? You are having money challenges at home – your child needs money for college or one of your parent's health is failing. Do you get preoccupied with those situations throughout the day, especially when your mind is not actively engaged in an activity that requires your full attention?

As you can see, the lines between strictly professional and strictly personal can be blurred. The overlap between professional careers and personal lives continues to grow, especially when crew members spend days with each other. Because we cannot multi-task nor can we compartmentalize for very long, our professional habits and behaviors can become more like our personal habits and behaviors.

Discussion Questions [individually or in groups]:

1. *How do you distinguish between technical knowledge and true leadership expertise in your department?*
2. *What evidence confirms that a team member has successfully transitioned from knowing procedure to executing sound operational judgment?*
3. *Is it better or more important to have professional expertise or personal knowledge?*
4. *Does mentoring or coaching enhance your professional or personal expertise? Why? How? Why not?*

Take a moment and jot down several actions you will consider implementing based on this discussion.

Enough of these questions for now. Let's shift mental gears.

My mission in life is not merely to survive, but to thrive; and to do so with some passion, some compassion, some humor, and some style. – Maya Angelou

Lifelong Learning & The "Explorer Mindset"

Business aviation demands continuous adaptation due to evolving avionics, international regulations, workforce expectations, and safety management standards. What does lifelong learning or lifelong learners mean to you? What are you learning? How are you learning it? Are your lifelong learning pursuits 'creating new skills' or 'improving existing skills'? An October 2021 Harvard Business Review article states it's the former, not the latter, that is considered lifelong learning. One criterion of acquiring this type of knowledge or skills is a healthy dose of curiosity. Real, lasting learning drives creativity and innovation, as current knowledge and skills can be quickly outdated and replaced. Practicing lifelong learning is not a fear of losing your job or being passed over for a promotion. Effective leaders adopt the Passion of the Explorer (*Harvard Business Review*):

1. Perseverance: The commitment to take as long as it takes to complete their 'project', regardless of what that 'project' is.
2. Growth Orientation: Viewing unforeseen encounters as fuel for their passion. Lifelong learners see these encounters as opportunities to learn more and to make a larger impact
3. Intellectual Humility: Seeking specialized expertise from line technicians, dispatchers, or mentors while maintaining a commitment to personal growth. They are not shy in asking others who have experience in this area. Although lifelong learners

enjoy the trial-and-error process, at some point they want to progress faster to bring their vision to reality. That's where expertise comes into play.

According to Utah State University, a lifelong learner enjoys learning to improve their personal and professional knowledge and skills. It is not necessarily a formal-type education; it can be a creative endeavor because it's pleasurable and it means something to you. Lifelong learning boosts a person's self-esteem and confidence, along with their thinking processes and memory; it also builds social connections and the motivation to continue to expand one's efforts.

Lifelong learning is not only for the knowledge-based industries; it's also for the information seekers and inquisitive investigators. These types of people have a strong urge to fulfill their internal destiny – to make their lives more fascinating (if only to themselves). They are curious and enjoy following rabbit trails and 'what if' scenarios. Their view of failure is not demoralizing or a step backwards; it's 'one more way they did not succeed'.

Lifelong learning encompasses both personal and professional knowledge. It's the strong desire fueled by curiosity, resourcefulness, imagination, willingness to fail, and to connect with others in this pursuit.

Discussion questions: In your view or experience, what are some characteristics of a lifelong learner? What else would you call a 'lifelong learner'?

Take a moment and jot down several actions you will consider implementing based on this discussion.

Passion is energy. Feel the power that comes from focusing on what excites you. -- Oprah Winfrey

Allowing passionate employees to venture off on another direction to solve a problem or create a new process or innovation may go against your company's or department's culture of efficiency and standardization. "This is the way we've always done it", "that is not our process" and other types of phrases are motivation-killers to those passionate creative types. Starting a massive overhaul is also not the answer; it is best to pinpoint one area of your processes or your department that has a major or

i-major performance issue, or even an area that you believe would be beneficial to be improved. Perhaps it is a safety issue that has been around for a while, or a bottleneck in a process, or information redundancy between pilots, schedulers, maintenance personnel and/or the admin staff. Think of the excitement that can be generated, and the loyalty and value your team will feel.

How do you get started?

It depends on you, your learning style and where you are in your pursuit. You can search TED or TEDX videos, or any of the MOOC platforms. If you have access to a university's library (perhaps you are an alumnus), you can search for more academic and research-based information. If there is an association that caters to your interest (NBAA for business aviation, professional associations for a variety of industries), search their website or reach out to their president or executive director. Universities have extension offices that offer workshops and webinars on a variety of topics.

As with all resources on the internet, be cognizant of the credentials of the author or the company when reading content; you want to be certain they are valid, legitimate, accurate and credible. Before introducing new technologies, management philosophies, or operational changes, leaders must evaluate information credibility using the CRAAP framework:

- Currency: Is the regulatory or technical data up to date?
- Relevance: Does this directly address our flight department's specific mission profile?
- Authority: What are the credentials, track record, and independence of the source?
- Accuracy: Is the data backed by verifiable operational evidence or flight testing?
- Purpose: Is the information designed to educate objectively, or to market a product/service?

One final question to ask: Is the author getting paid for the research or for writing the white paper? If so, by whom? And why?

Discussion questions and share your rationale:

1. *Do you believe lifelong learning is possible? Why or why not? Give examples.*

2. *Can you have professional expertise without being a lifelong learner?*

3. *Is there a benefit for a logical, process-driven thinker to embark on a creative endeavor such as painting? Is there a benefit for a creative person to take up a logic-driven venture such as drafting a timeline or systematically trouble-shooting a problem?*

4. *Can you convince or motivate someone to be a lifelong learner?*

5. *As a leader, what are your responsibilities to yourself and your team regarding life-long learning?*

6. *Where can you apply life-long learning to develop your professional expertise?*

7. *Where can you apply life-long learning to increase your personal knowledge?*

8. *What value will life-long learning bring to you and your team members overall?*

Take a moment and jot down your take-aways based on this discussion.

Personal and Professional Growth Plan

Jim Bailey, CEO of the Americas company, hires "for a set of characteristics that allows the individual to pivot as the world evolves...critical thinker, fast learner, work well in teams and cultural adaptability .... And reinvention"

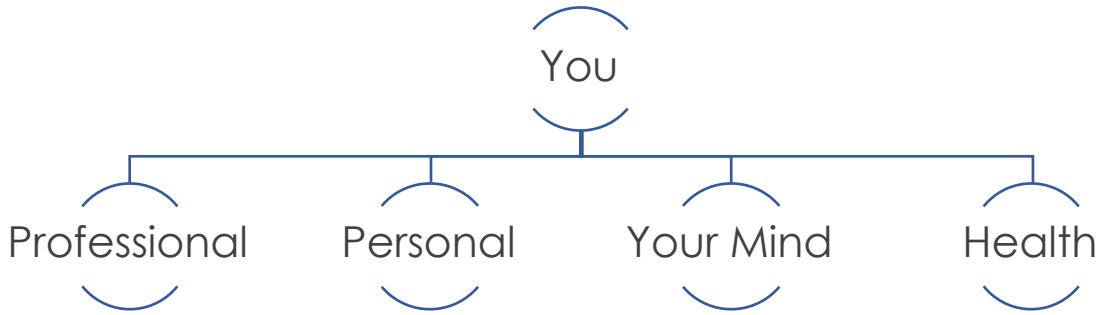
As we have done with other topics, let's begin with a basic definition of this type of growth plan; you can modify it to fit your organization and your life. Personal and professional development is a means of consciously and deliberately improving yourself, your habits, and your behaviors. It is the energies you put into this self-improvement, whether it be in your career, lifestyle, life's outlook, and relationships. Self-motivation drives your activities, along with the quest to enhance your character, career path, or expertise/knowledge. It is not a one-shot activity; these behaviors should be practiced throughout your life. It's a trial-and-error and exploring methods to improve habits and quality of life. As with many other quests, it can be the journey that provides the most insight and satisfaction. Your Growth plan is a means to achieve this end.

A personal and professional growth plan gives business aviation leaders a practical way to step back, think bigger, and respond to challenges with more intention. In our world, safety, service, efficiency, and judgment are always connected. When we rely on the same assumptions or the same way of solving problems, we can miss better options. A fresh perspective—from a peer, mentor, crewmember, dispatcher, maintenance leader, or client-facing colleague—can help us see what we may not see on our own. The goal is not just to get through the next challenge, but to use it as an opportunity to lead better, make stronger decisions, and build more sustainable performance.

Why should you or your team members create a personal/professional growth plan? For one, writing down your aspirations helps cement those desires into your mind, and it works with your unconscious to achieve those aspirations. Secondly, it can give you a feeling of control over your future and helps direct your thoughts and actions. It can give you a roadmap when faced with decisions on what course of action to take. Having a set goal can improve how you manage your time, insuring you are focused on the activities that will bring you the most value for your time [known as high value activities]. Lastly, having a written plan of action provides you with an overall picture, which can decrease your stress, recover and maintain balance in your life and increase your self-assurance.

An additional benefit of a personal / professional growth plan is to shift our mindset to consider our challenges in a different light. We cannot change our situation if we continue to address it with the same solutions or look at it the same way. Think of the challenge when an 18-wheeler was too high to go under a bridge. The fastest solution was to let some of the air out of tires so the vehicle would not be as tall. The engineers did not think about that – they were focused on the bridge. Looking at a situation with fresh eyes or asking someone's opinion that is not involved can provide a springboard to different solutions. We can be more long-term solution-focused that truly addresses the challenges. Look at these challenges and situations as opportunities for growth and expect a positive outcome, not a situation to quickly resolve so you can go on to the next one.

There is no single right way to build a growth plan. What matters most is that it is honest, useful, and easy to revisit. A good starting point is a simple question: "What matters most right now?" For someone in business aviation, the answer might include technical skill, leadership presence, communication, crew resource management, client experience, regulatory awareness, resilience, or long-term career direction. From there, the plan can be organized around a few practical areas: professional capability, relationships, mindset, and health. Those areas help connect personal growth with the real operational demands of aviation. We have found that these four below encompass all the other categories.



Discussion questions: In building your grow plan today, what would you want it to help you improve both professionally and personally?

One helpful tool for this conversation is the GROW model. Developed in the 1980s by Performance Consultants International, GROW is a simple coaching framework that helps leaders move from intention to action. In business aviation, it gives us a way to connect personal goals with everyday operational behavior. It can work alongside SMART or CLEAR goals, but its real value is in the questions it raises: What is working? What is getting in the way? What options do we have? What are we willing to commit to next?

Many of us have experienced goals that looked good on paper but did not change much in practice. That often happens when goals are assigned without enough context, ownership, or follow-through. The GROW model helps slow the conversation down long enough to look at the current reality, the desired outcome, the choices available, and the next step. In aviation leadership, that kind of thinking matters. It helps us anticipate obstacles, understand risk, involve the right people, communicate more clearly, and adjust thoughts and behaviors before small issues become larger ones.

Business aviation also asks a lot of people. Schedules shift, client needs change, operations move quickly, and the pressure to be flexible is real. A grow plan can help leaders see where their time, energy, and attention are going—not only at work, but also in the rest of life. When we can see the gaps more clearly, we can make better choices, ask for the right support, and protect the mindset needed to lead safely, effectively, and sustainably.

Discussion questions: What roles are pulling on your time, energy, and attention right now? Think in terms of "I am a …."

At its simplest, GROW asks four questions: Where are you now? Where do you want to go? What options could move you forward? And what will you do next—with the right people, resources, and accountability in place?

The GROW Framework Breakdown

Goals (Target State): SMART or CLEAR goals are the basis for the GROW model. This is the desired outcome and the basis for the GROW model. The following questions can be helpful:

- What specific capability, rating, or competency do I intend to develop?
- What is the purpose ("Why"), and how does it support the flight department's safety and operational objectives? Or is my target state more of a personal nature?
- What do I want to be remembered for?
- What would make me feel that this time has been well spent?
- What will I be doing in five years that I can prepare for now? 10 years?
- What challenges am I facing now that additional skills can help with?
- What is my purpose for setting this goal? Why is it important to me?
- Is this goal internally or externally initiated?
- What role will this fall under?
- Is this a learning or performance goal?
- How will I know that I have achieved this goal?

Reality (Current State): Recognizing the subjectivity and allowances for mediocrity and/or procrastination is the first step in gaining an objective, non-judgmental perspective.

- What is my current baseline performance, evaluated through objective metrics and peer feedback?
- What operational constraints, resource gaps, or personal assumptions are hindering my progress?
- What are the obstacles that can be encountered?
- What assumptions am I making and what apprehensions or hesitations do I have?
- What has not worked so far? What excuses have I used for not making progress?
- Where does it fit in my life and how will it impact my current life?
- Is it feasible to achieve?
- What are the points of failure and how can they be mitigated?
- What will I sacrifice in pursuit of this goal?
- What is the effect of what I am doing?

Options/**O**pportunities (Strategic Paths): We feel less overwhelmed when we are in control. Part of feeling – or being – in control is having options. Brainstorming options give way to opportunities.

- What pathways exist to achieve this objective (e.g., NBAA PDP courses, cross-departmental shadowing, mentoring, formal safety training; university classes, fitness classes, churches, etc. for personal use)?
- What are the risk/reward trade-offs of each option?
- What strengths can I use to move forward?
- What are different ways that I can achieve this goal?
- If someone else came to me with any of my obstacles, what would I tell them?
- Am I using a variety of methods or what I've always done?
- Is the process or the outcome more important?
- If failure was not an obstacle, how would I approach this?
- Who could help me answer these questions and alert me to additional barriers?
- What are my concerns or fears about pursuing this goal?
- What are the upsides and downsides of each option?

Way forward/**W**ill (Tactical Execution): As you have seen, this process is not for the weak-willed; it cannot effectively be rushed and can also quickly lead to overwhelm. This section lays out a 'go forward' plan, including initial steps and identifying your support groups.

- What are my immediate three action steps, and what is the exact timeline for completion?
- What specific metrics and objective observers will hold me accountable?
- Whatever my first steps are, can I think of anything that might stop me from doing it?
- How do I want to be held accountable?
- Who do I need to include in this journey to cheer me on or as an objective observer?
- What else do I need to consider before starting?
- Do I really want to do this? How do I know?

- How is this meaningful to me?
- Am I taking on too much by pursuing this now?
- What could stop my forward progress?

By detailing steps toward a desired outcome, everyone will know what is expected from them (raising accountability) and how they as an individual contribute to the success of your flight department / company. You can use this to increase initiation with your team members.

One final point: be sure to include the 'why' in your response to many of these questions. Why do you really want to do this? Why is it feasible to achieve? Why is now the best time to begin this pursuit? Why is this important and how will it affect your life? This can keep you motivated and adds additional insight and thought into this process.

Discussion questions: What's the value in creating a GROW plan? How can it best be used? Based on what you know now, would you recommend having a personal GROW plan different from a professional GROW plan, or could they be in the same table?

It's about being intentional and not leaving your future to chance

Employee Development via Modified SWOT Analysis

Retaining elite aviation talent requires individualized development. Conducting a modified, non-judgmental SWOT Analysis during performance coaching aligns individual aspirations with department needs:

To help determine individual needs and wants, consider using a version of a SWOT analysis for each of your team members. They can do it themselves and then review it with you. The following questions can help create this document:

Your Strengths:

- What role do you typically play in a group setting?
- Are you a better idea person or worker bee?
- What makes you a valuable team member?
- What do others consistently compliment you on?
- What words would others use to describe you?
- What is your strongest or most evident attribute?
- What do you value most and how do you demonstrate those values?
- What personality traits do you have that benefit you?

Your Weaknesses:

- What role do you typically shy away from?
- What tasks do you delay doing?
- What area would you like to improve the most in?
- What trait or action do you admire in others that you don't believe you possess?
- If time or money were no object, what one area would benefit your improving upon?
- What resource gaps do you not have available to you?
- What stops or prohibits your progress in your performance or relationships?
- What personality traits do you have that impair you?

Your Opportunities:

- How can you expand your perspective and capitalize on unforeseen opportunities?
- What role do you aspire to?

- Who can help you reach that role?
- What changes could affect your pursuit?
- What types of training could expose you to additional opportunities?
- What is your Plan B for unexpected obstacles?
- How can technology help or hinder your pursuit?
- What personality traits can open up additional opportunities?

Your Threats:

- Do you sabotage yourself?
- Do you have the full support of family, friends, team members and your boss?
- Can any opportunity you identified turn into a threat?
- What resources might be difficult for you to obtain?
- What industry changes can impede your pursuit?
- What other action can hamper your efforts?
- What will you do when your motivation lags or falters?
- What personality traits can threaten your pursuits?

Completion Checklist

What exactly is the process or the checklist to complete this plan?

1. Reflect on your personal and professional life as it currently exists. What do you want? Where do you want to be in XX years? How can you give back to biz av, your department, company or NBAA? Look at the outcome, not the process – that will come later. The clearer and more vivid you can define your outcome, the less confusing the rest of this process can be.
2. With each outcome, define your 'why'. Why is it important? Don't take your first or even your second response. Keep asking yourself '…and…?', or you can ask yourself 'why?' several times, to get to the true reason that outcome is important. The closer to that reason you can get, the better your chances of succeeding. The more compelling your reason 'why', the better chance there will be of your goal pulling you towards that outcome. Of course, once you discover the real reason 'why', it may become irrelevant, and you drop the goal.

3. Determine if you have any inner conflicts with these goals. Is there a disconnect between your goal and your passion? Are you pursuing this because someone else wants you to or has recommended it, or because you really want to bask in the success glow of that achievement? Is there hesitation, apprehension, or a lack of confidence in your ability to achieve this goal? These may be difficult answers to admit to yourself; however, doing so early in this process is better than wasting your time and resources on an activity that is irrelevant.

This self-reflection can be done while you are in the car, waiting for a meeting to happen, exercising, or in your moments of 'downtime'. It does not have to be a formal declaration; however, even though it is not a formality, it does need to be documented for your future reference.

Don't fall into the trap of the Sunken Cost Fallacy. This fallacy is based on loss aversion – that is we don't want to lose or give up anything. We believe that abandoning a project is a loss, and of course we don't want to lose - even if the project is failing. It could also be construed as we made a mistake and put a lot of time into the project before we realized it. Did we fail to research enough? Did we waste time, effort, energy and money on this failed project? In these trains of thought, we accept that future costs and benefits should matter, and we irrationally let those arguments sway our current choices. https://youtu.be/xXpzfy5oKWg?si=bMvSx9lo07i15sBU

There is a table in the appendix where you can add some of the questions above or your own questions to begin your GROW professional / personal growth plan. I have added one question in each column as an example and to get you started.

Discussion question: Would you share your GROW plan or your SWOT analysis with others such as your family or your team members? Why or why not?

Individual then group activity: Individually, each person completes their first iteration. Group discussion: 2-3 people to share theirs from each category/box. Include the why it's important and anticipated results.

Take a moment and jot down your take-aways based on this discussion.

Recognizing individual employee needs

As a leader, the responsibility for grooming, training, and enhancing your employees' rests on your shoulders. We know the adage 'people join because of the company's reputation, and they leave because of their manager'. You do not want to be that manager or that leader that causes your team members to leave. Remember even though our industry is quite large in terms of number of people employed and the amount of dollars we generate, it is quite small with regards to individual reputations. You do not want yours sullied.

To help determine individual needs and wants, consider using a version of a SWOT analysis for each of your team members. They can do it themselves and then review it with you. The following questions can help create this document:

Your Strengths:

- What role do you typically play in a group setting?
- Are you a better idea person or worker bee?
- What makes you a valuable team member?
- What do others consistently compliment you on?
- What words would others use to describe you?
- What is your strongest or most evident attribute?
- What do you value most and how do you demonstrate those values?

— What personality traits do you have that benefit you?

Your Weaknesses:

— What role do you typically shy away from?

— What tasks do you delay doing?

— What area would you like to improve the most in?

— What trait or action do you admire in others that you don't believe you possess?

— If time or money were no object, what one area would benefit your improving upon?

— What resource gaps do you not have available to you?

— What stops or prohibits your progress in your performance or relationships?

— What personality traits do you have that impair you?

Your Opportunities:

— How can you expand your perspective and capitalize on unforeseen opportunities?

— What role do you aspire to?

— Who can help you reach that role?

— What changes could affect your pursuit?

— What types of training could expose you to additional opportunities?

— What is your Plan B for unexpected obstacles?

— How can technology help or hinder your pursuit?

— What personality traits can open up additional opportunities?

Your Threats:

— Do you sabotage yourself?

— Do you have the full support of family, friends, team members and your boss?

— Can any opportunity you identified turn into a threat?

— What resources might be difficult for you to obtain?

— What industry changes can impede your pursuit?

— What other action can hamper your efforts?

— What will you do when your motivation lags or falters?

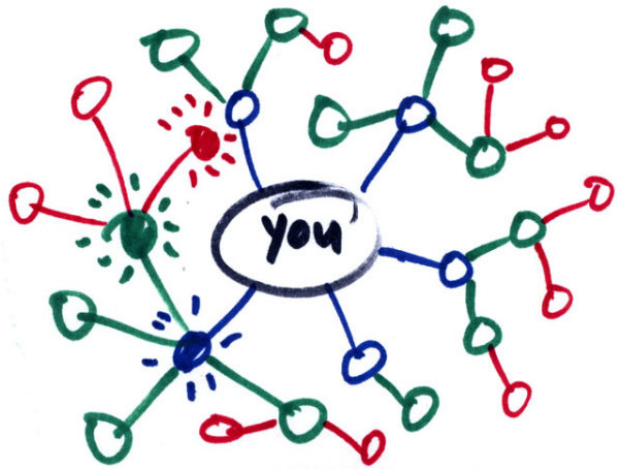
— What personality traits can threaten your pursuits?

Discussion question: What else can you see that would be a strength, weakness, opportunity or threat for you or your team members?

Individual then group activity: Individually, list team members and yourself, and 2-3 needs you can identify. Where is your evidence? Group discussion: Share your list with your group without mentioning names. Discuss how you would approach your team member about your thoughts, and how to phrase it so they take it constructively? What tools can you use to provide evidence?

Take a moment and jot down your take-aways based on this discussion.

Let's connect the dots …



So far, we have talked about and defined critical thinking, Socratic questioning, what the Universal Intellectual Standards are, the categories and some applicable questions. We moved on to personal knowledge and professional expertise and how to increase competency in each. Lifelong learning was our next topic, which tied in nicely to creating your own growth plan. The SWOT framework is a tool you can use to identify employee needs.

Even though these were introduced as separate topics, they are not mutually exclusive of one another and, used collectively, create a powerful and effective tool for overall self-improvement. There is one additional area to cover that some people consider necessary and others consider merely 'icing on the cake'. It's the level of your emotional intelligence.

Emotional Intelligence (EQ) as an Operational Capability

In high-consequence environments, Emotional Intelligence (EQ) serves as a critical human factor control. EQ is the capacity to recognize, evaluate, and manage one's

own emotional state while reading and constructively influencing the emotions of others.

Simply put, EI is recognizing and managing your own emotions, sensing what others are feeling, and using that information to achieve the most beneficial outcome. Breaking it to specific elements:

1. Self-Awareness: Real-time recognition of emotional states, stress levels, and personal triggers before they affect decision-making or tone.
2. Self-Expression: Clear, professional, and objective communication that balances firm operational standards with respect.
3. Interpersonal Skill: Decoding unstated cues, lowering defensiveness, and building the psychological safety required for transparent error reporting. Emotions must be addressed and expressed before logic and objectivity can enter the discussion.

Each of these has sub-elements that comprise the higher-level competencies.

- By understanding your emotions, you can identify the words or actions that cause frustration, anger, or other unproductive or untimely emotions. You can then prepare yourself to avoid over- or under-reacting.
- When you accept your emotions without judgment, you can raise your self-confidence while improving your emotional reactivity.
- By managing your emotions, you curtail your initial reactive impulses. You then can objectively assess the situation, acknowledge any assumptions, and respond to the situation calmly and rationally.
- Monitoring how others perceive your reactions gives you flexibility to adapt your emotions and behaviors to the situation, minimizing defensiveness. Remember that we judge ourselves by our intentions and we judge others by their behaviors. Others judge us, and make decisions about our character, by our actions, not our intentions.
- Uncovering and diffusing the emotional source or root cause of the conflict allows for a higher level of creativity between team members.
- Appreciating how others feel, especially during challenging times, demonstrates respect for the other person and strengthens your relationship.

Some researchers have disputed the validity or the effectiveness of emotional intelligence. They challenge the soundness and legitimacy of any instrument when one assesses themselves; how accurate can a perspective be if emotions and reactions are viewed through a person's own lens? Others have decided that the study of emotions is not a serious research topic. While the former may be true, the latter has been proven erroneous as emotions are studied by leadership, psychology, and neuroscience disciplines. What has been generally agreed upon is that EI is a separate intelligence in which the level varies from individual to individual; it can develop as a person ages and can be learned and improved upon.

Discussion question: A United Airlines CEO took a private jet from New Jersey to Denver since he was unable to book a commercial flight. He paid for it himself. Based on that one action, how would you rate his EQ? Provide examples and alternate action to support your statements.

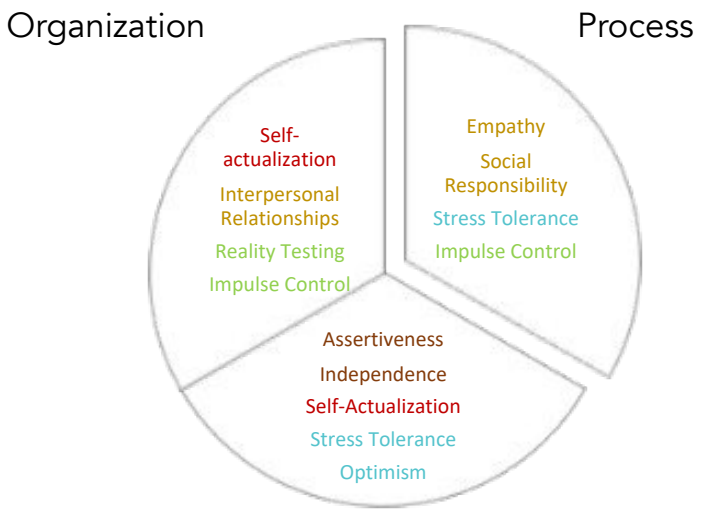
How does his actions compare to Frank Siller, the Chairman/CEO of Tunnel to Towers?

Leadership Orientation & Behavioral Towers

Based on the EQ-i 2.0 framework, leadership performance manifests across three primary orientations and four behavioral towers:

1. Primary Orientations

- People-Focused: Emphasizes trust-building, empathy, conflict resolution, and crew well-being.
- Process-Focused: Emphasizes standard operating procedures, compliance, goal execution, and operational discipline.
- Organization-Focused: Emphasizes culture, strategic alignment, cross-departmental relationships, and resource management.



Self-
awareness and self-confidence are considered 'interacting with self' traits. With these two, you can exert self-control when others are demonstrating the fight-flight-freeze reactions. Those are the foundations of a successful and effective leader. Mastering the interactions with others is next. Why? You can master your interactions with others to achieve the results that you know need to be realized. It is then that you can create your own future, and you can guide others to creating their own future. Lastly, with these combined, creating your future can become clearer and accomplished more easily.

This is especially important when you are faced with unusual or out-of-the normal circumstances. These two combined are the pulse of your leadership abilities. It is the voice that tells you 'now is the time for self-control and remember how others will view your actions'. It allows you to plan your course of action, not react to external environmental forces. It provides your team with a sense of trust and security in you.

If you are distressed by anything external, the pain is not due to the thing itself, but to your estimate of it. This you have the power to revoke at any time. – Marcus Aurelius, Roman emperor, 2nd C A.D.

Leadership Behavioral Towers

The same model offers four leadership 'towers' regarding leadership behavioral tendencies.

- Centered & Grounded: Emotional poise, high stress tolerance, and composure under operational disruption.
- Action-Taking: Decisive, timely execution and assertiveness when operational choices must be made under time constraints.
- Participative: Collaborative engagement, empathy, and active listening that build consensus and strong CRM/MRM dynamics.
- Tough-Minded: Firm focus on standards, safety margins, and core values—maintaining boundaries without becoming hostile or dismissive.

Think of the great leaders of our time and of times past: Captain Al Haynes and Major Ernest Shackleton immediately come to mind as illustrating these traits. They both reined in their impulsive reactions, and they maintained their composure and assertiveness without 'barking' orders. Even though they were aware of the possible devastating outcome, they supported and verbalized the notion of survival.

Discussion question: Select either the Orientation categories or the Tower elements. Rank the bullet point areas from most important to least. Explain your thinking.

Individual activity: Review the above seven bullets and jot down one instance where you either excelled and one where you could have done better. Provide evidence to support your statements.

Take a moment and jot down your take-aways based on this discussion.

The Liability of Overused Strengths

In leadership, highest does not equal best. An overused strength without emotional intelligence and situational awareness can become an operational liability. Although that does not necessarily apply to your emotional intelligence. It does apply to second- and third order effects in scoring high in any of these areas.

For example,

- Scoring too high in stress tolerance could be interpreted as your not completely understanding the severity of the situation
- An individual scoring too high on the independence scale may not see a need to be a team player
- An individual that scores high in flexibility may appear indecisive
- Scoring too high in assertiveness may be seen as inflexible and stubborn

Let's go back to professional expertise. Give an example and 'act it out' when an individual is considered an expert and scores high in aggressiveness and low in self-

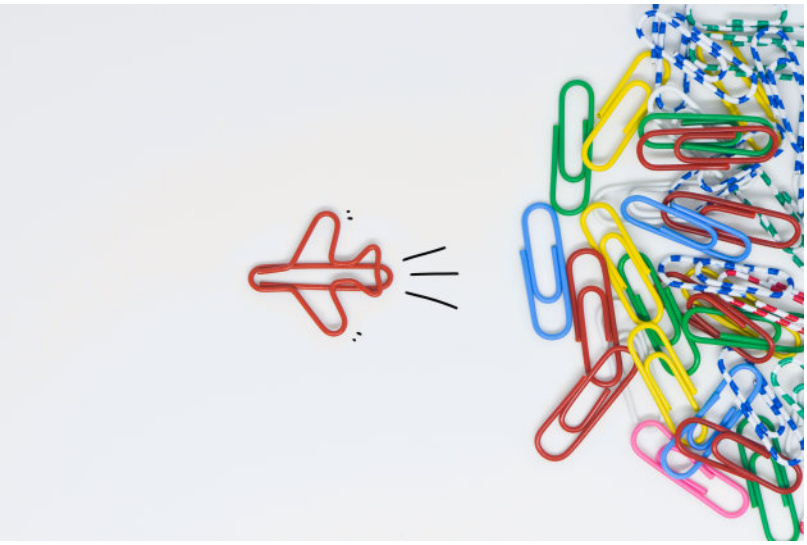
awareness. How about Captainitis? That person scores high in what areas and low in what areas?

Discussion questions: What traits, EI and otherwise, influence the success in setting and achieving strategies to increase professional expertise in the aviation department? What traits further lifelong learning?

What elements have the greatest impact on influencing and leading others? Research has shown a 'star performer' scores higher in assertiveness, empathy, happiness, self-awareness and problem solving. Agree or disagree? Give examples.

Our reaction or response to an event is a progression of our perception of the event, our beliefs about the people and the event, and our perception of the consequences of taking specific action. What elements contribute to each of these?

How will you now approach your own personal growth plan, and that of your employees?



L3 & L4 Module Conclusion & Executive Summary

Effective business aviation leadership demands continuous integration of critical thinking, emotional self-regulation, structural growth planning, and uncompromising safety standards.

Leadership growth requires examining personal habits, inviting objective feedback, and holding oneself accountable to the highest professional standards.

"Try not to become a person of success but rather try to become a person of value." – Albert Einstein

Final Reflection & Action Plan

1. What specific leadership behaviors will you adjust in your daily flight department operations based on this module?
2. How will you apply the Universal Intellectual Standards and GROW framework to elevate safety, service quality, and team performance across your organization?

Feel free to reach out to me if you have questions or challenges. I have numerous articles on all these topics and more. I wish you much success!

Try not to become a person of success, but rather try to become a person of value - Albert Einstein

ABOUT DR. SHARI FRISINGER

Dr. Shari Frisinger is a recognized behavioral analyst specializing in conflict resolution, stress responses, and human factors in high-consequence environments. Known for her work addressing the subtle dynamics when people don't "play nice in the hangar," Dr. Shari helps business aviation leaders decode *why* personnel think, react, and perform under operational pressure.

While the human brain operates in predictable ways, high-tempo flight department environments—tight schedules, AOG delays, weather disruptions, and executive expectations—can trigger responses that appear irrational, defensive, or counterproductive. Dr. Shari bridges neurobehavioral science and practical flight operations, demonstrating how the brain perceives threat and pressure, and translating complex behavioral concepts into actionable safety and leadership strategies.

At the center of her work is the TEA Tornado™ framework—a model examining the continuous loop of Thoughts, Emotions, Attitudes, and Actions. By developing self-awareness around these behavioral drivers, aviation leaders can:

- De-escalate Interpersonal Conflict: Resolve friction between flight crews, maintenance technicians, dispatchers, and executive leadership.
- Elevate CRM & MRM: Reduce authority gradients and communication breakdowns that compromise safety margins.
- Strengthen Command Presence: Shift from reactive emotional impulses to deliberate, tactical leadership decisions.
- Optimize Departmental Performance: Cultivate psychological safety, operational reliability, and exceptional client service.

Dr. Shari is a longtime member and contributor to NBAA. She presents PDP courses and education sessions across major industry platforms, including: NBAA Business Aviation Convention & Exhibition, conference such as Schedulers & Dispatchers, International Operators, and Maintenance Management.

As a past adjunct faculty member at Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University, Dr. Shari's research on human factors and emotional decision-making in aviation safety has been widely featured in elite industry publications, including FlightSafety Foundation's *AeroSafety World*, *DOM Magazine*, and analysis papers on two major commercial accident investigations: Colgan Air 3407 and the United Airlines 232. Her article on how emotions affect decisions in aviation accidents was published FlightSafety's AeroSafety World Magazine.

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React and the situation manages you. Respond and you are in control™
It's not what you said, it's what they think they heard™

Standard	Possible Question	Possible Question	Possible Question
Clarity:	Could you elaborate?	Could you illustrate what you mean?	Could you give me an example?
Accuracy:	How could we check on that?	How could we find out if that is true?	How could we verify or test that?
Precision:	Could you be more specific?	Could you give me more details?	Could you be more exact?
Relevance:	How does that relate to the	How does that bear on the question?	How does that help us with the issue?
Depth:	What factors make this difficult?	What are some of the complexities of this question?	What are some of the difficulties we need to deal with?
Breadth:	Do we need to look at this from another	Do we need to consider another	Do we need to look at this in other
Logic:	Does all of this make sense	Does your first paragraph fit in	Does what you say follow from the
Significance:	Is this the most important problem	Is this the central idea to focus on?	Which of these facts are most
Fairness:	Is my thinking justifiable in	Am I considering the thinking of	Is my purpose fair given the situation?

GROW Phase	Operational Diagnostic Question	Leadership Commitments
Goal	What core leadership capability will elevate my	
Reality	What objective data or feedback highlights my current	
Options	What specific resources, mentoring, or training pathways	
Will	What three concrete actions will I execute within the next	

Using the table below, add some of the questions above or your own questions to begin your GROW professional / personal growth plan. I have added one question in each column as an example and to get you started.

Goal	*Reality*	*Opportunities*	*Will/Way Forward*
What is my purpose for setting this goal? Why is it	What parts of my life will be impacted by	Is the process or the outcome more important?	What are my first three steps and when will I take