

FOCUS ON THE BIG PICTURE

Bernard Eckey looks at how we should focus on regular training to enhance our skills

WHEN you are really in love with an inspiring sport like gliding you will develop an almost insatiable appetite for increasing your knowledge of the subject. The more you know about gliding the more you want to learn about it and an upward spiral of understanding develops. Some pilots learn best by reading, detailed explanation and coaching while others learn mainly by practice.

Regardless of the method, the acquired knowledge is necessary and vital for success.

After you have attained an advanced level you can learn without instructors or coaches. You are no longer dependant on others and by mastering the art of self-education you find success. The road to success is never straight and often full of potholes. Failure is an element of learning and bouncing back is critically important. There is nothing wrong with making the odd mistake as long as we admit it, learn from it, and strive for future improvement. No glider pilot has made it to the top without persistence and

a string of failures along the way. And one more point for consideration – if you are socialising with achievers, you will become an achiever by adopting the attitude of achievers.

Confidence and over-confidence

Unshakable confidence in your own skills is undoubtedly of utmost importance for success in any sport, but when it comes to gliding it is of particular relevance. Regardless of whether we look at the sport from a competition aspect or just from a recreational perspective it shows time and time again that success and a healthy dose of confidence go hand in hand.

That said, I'm quick to add that we can

expect pilots to be confident only if their ability matches the task at hand. An early solo pilot lacking confidence in his or her own soaring skills is unlikely to keep a glider up for any length of time. Equally, a cross-country pilot with insufficient confidence will either turn around at the first sign of trouble or outland frequently. But confidence only develops with repeated and regular successes. Unfortunately, this psychological aspect of our sport is often under-estimated. How can low-confidence pilots get on the road to success? Here are a few suggestions for the early solo pilot.

- Choose to fly when the conditions are not too difficult – nothing is more disheartening than performing three consecutive circuits only to see your fellow club member climb into the same glider during the better part of the day and disappear for a lengthy flight.
- Ask your coach (or a pilot with proven soaring skills) to fly with you in a two-seater, share the flying and copy soaring techniques which have proven successful.
- When flying single-seaters, follow a pilot with proven soaring skills and take mental notes on where he locates the lift and how he centres the thermal.

For budding cross-country pilots the following suggestions might prove to be confidence boosters.

- Deliberately move just beyond the gliding range of your airfield. Making it back is bound to make a profound contribution to increased levels of confidence. Making it back easily will instil a real sense of achievement and hopefully encourage you to repeat such a success at the very next available opportunity.
- Fly on days when other pilots choose to spend the afternoon in the clubhouse. Successfully keeping the glider airborne will boost your confidence levels and you will be better able to rely on your own skill and judgement.
- Never make the same mistake twice. It's not only the dumbest thing one can ever do but it is also a frequent reason for

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disappointment and a consequent lack of confidence.

● Analyse less-successful flights even more thoroughly than successful ones in a bid to avoid the decisions which have led to an undesirable outcome.

Now let's briefly turn our attention to over-confidence. There are pilots who, after a successful flight or two, seem to think they know it all. In their own minds, they are ready for long-distance flying and believe that records are no longer safe as soon as they get access to a competitive glider.

These pilots need just as much help as their more timid counterparts. Disappointment is waiting around the corner and may lead them to drop out of the sport very early without the successes they imagined. When over-confidence is paired with disregard for safety, the alarm bells must ring. An attitude such as "Regulations are for others to adhere to" and "I'm too good, an accident won't happen to me!" is a sure recipe for disaster.

A confident pilot can properly assess his own abilities and limitations, and may sometimes say "NO" in a marginal situation. This is by no means equivalent to an admission of inadequacy, but points to a realistic, responsible and mature attitude.

Commitment

We are spoilt for choice when it comes to aviation activities, but for very good reasons we have decided on gliding. But gliding is a time-consuming sport and family or friends often apply pressure to spend more time with them, or on other non-gliding activities. Unfortunately, spare time is often in short supply and therefore we are often forced into a delicate balancing act. However, especially during post-solo training it is absolutely essential to place gliding on top of our list of priorities until a level of proficiency is reached which allows a quick and trouble-free return to our sport if and when desired.

Failing to draw on our commitment to the sport and failing to prioritise in favour of gliding is all too often the reason for slow progress or even drop-outs. Making two steps forward and one step back is undesirable in any sport, but in gliding it is especially counterproductive. We must be quick to capitalise on opportunities for skill enhancement – a critically important issue during the early part of our gliding careers. Every now and then we must take ourselves aside and investigate whether our commitment is as high as it should be.

Commitment to achievement and progress is influenced by external and internal sources. Role models, coaches, friends, team mates and a host of other people are prime examples of external influences. If we socialise with dedicated glider pilots we are putting ourselves into an environment which is likely to lift our level of commitment. Mixing with top achievers will further benefit our level of commitment and will provide additional learning opportunities. Positive experiences or unexpected success can also energise us and become extremely powerful motivators. Meeting a gliding hero in person and learning from him or her is also sure to positively influence our commitment to gliding.

When it comes to internal sources for commitment, we have to draw on our own inner being. Usually the strongest and most consistent form of motivation and commitment comes from within us.

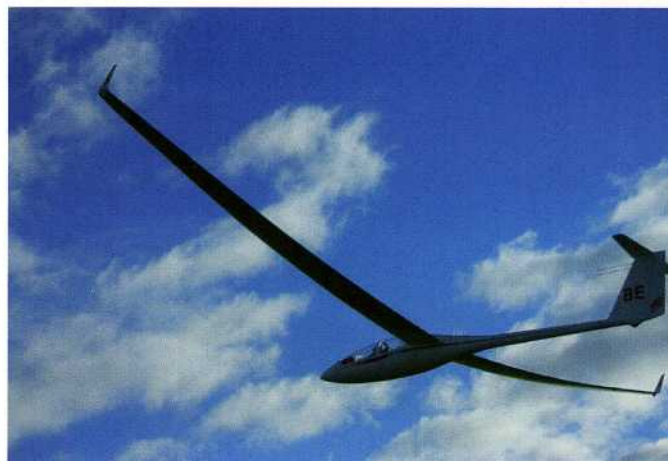
Commitment is something personal and is related to what an individual would desperately like to achieve. Therefore our internal 'fire and drive' is a much better motivator than any of the above external sources.

If we keep the 'big picture' first and foremost in our mind and focus on enhancing our skills through regular and ongoing training we will pass up any temptations for distractions. We will eventually be rewarded by the many wonderful experiences that gliding offers to those who have acquired above-average skill and knowledge.

Possessing and implementing the highest level of commitment is what our top pilots do in preparation for tasks such as international competitions and record flights. It makes these pilots different from most others, but being successful at this level is all about being better than others. Top achievers simply do things more thoroughly and professionally than everyone else and an undivided commitment is a big part of this. Our sport tends to reward deeply committed pilots by better flights.

■ This article is an excerpt from Bernard Eckey's *Advanced Soaring Made Easy*. The revised and extended second version is available at £35 from www.bgashop.co.uk

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