

# Moving Up – Managing Your Transition

A quarterly report addressing topics of interest to the transition turbine pilot.

Hardware Store

## Confessions of an Aircraft Salesman



by Mike Dwyer

I remember the first time in business that I decided to never tell another lie.

I had just attended a conference in New York City and listened to Stephen Covey teach “The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People.” I was thoroughly converted, I bought all the tapes, read his books, and told my wife that I was now going to live with perfect integrity. I then threw myself back into the family

business a changed, even possessed, man. So rigorously did I take my conviction, I would even interrupt myself mid-sentence, Tourette-style, to correct an embellishment, white lie or potentially advantageous exaggeration.

I particularly remember one conversation and sale that revolved around the delivery of our machined parts that went something like this.

**Customer:** We need these parts in two weeks. If you can't deliver, you can't have the order.

**Mike:** Yes sir, we can deliver the parts in two weeks if that's what it takes to win your business..... FOUR WEEKS!!!

**Customer:** Excuse me, what did you say?

**Mike (mumbling):** We can deliver in four weeks.

**Customer (confused):** You said two weeks and then four weeks. Which is it? Four weeks and you lose the order.

**Mike:** Two..... FOUR!!!..... We can deliver the parts in fffffooooouuurrrr weeks.

Let me also assure you that, prior to my seeing the light, the minute distortions that I occasionally let slip were not of the nature, frequency and severity that are making headlines today and landing chief executives behind bars.

These were more minor inconsistencies and relatively harmless attempts at keeping everyone happy and not being able to say no when that would have been the more prudent course of action. But as Sister Judy used to say at St. Bridget's Junior High, "The more light you let in, the more dust you find."

Now, why does this morality play belong in a column about transitioning to higher performance aircraft? In giving counsel about transitioning to turbine aircraft, I thought it might be instructive to shed some light on how to evaluate the aircraft sales professional that is representing the product that you are moving up into.

Speaking from 15 years of moving customers primarily up the airplane food chain, it is interesting to note that for step-up aircraft that are flown by the people writing the checks, you need a certain



combination of ability and character in who you are buying from.

Here is the short list of attributes to look for:

1. A proficient pilot
2. Technically strong
3. Successful
4. Honest
5. Good humor

### 1. A Proficient Pilot

There is something about a cockpit that brings out the best in us. There is something about flying together that creates a bond that transcends commerce and self-interest. Great salespeople in any discipline focus on the client rather than the transaction. But in flight there exists a higher, mmmmm, something.

It starts in the walk-around and blossoms when buckled in the seats as each piece of the panel is quietly and patiently discussed. It's as though Ernest K. Gann or Gordon Baxter or Charles Lindbergh or all of your previous flight instructors are listening to make sure that you don't miss anything. Here is a phenomenon in aircraft sales, regardless of the

time of the day, status of the negotiation, next flight to come, or compressed schedule, that the pre-flight and engine starts take as much time as they take. Calm settles over the participants and all is secondary to the flight ahead.

Regardless of the type of flight that you embark on for your demo, point-to-point, airwork, pattern work, a new destination or aerobatics, there is one characteristic that sets all great demo pilots apart. A great demo pilot can fly the airplane to the limit of its capabilities and make it look easy.

If it is in the envelope, it's no problem. If not, it's "No Sir." Just like a flight instructor sizes you up in a few minutes, you have the same opportunity with your airplane salesman. Grace and ease and confidence are contagious in a cockpit and you should be feeling it by the time the PIC in the right seat is handing over the controls to you. You know that everything will be okay on the flight and that allows you to enjoy the airplane and be part-pilot at the controls and part-kid on a roller coaster.

Only one person in the airplane should be perspiring, palsied and fidgeting. If the demo pilot is gripping and regripping the yoke, taking audible cleansing breaths and incessantly adjusting everything, take a closer look. Rosaries are definitely a no-no and I don't like pictures of the significant other stuck behind the altimeter, especially if they have an X over the face and a descriptive expletive emblazoned on the bottom.

Most of all, listen for the voice. The voice is everything. It is the embodiment of the voice saying that "we are at our best when things are at their worst." Every demo pilot, in the third turn of the inverted spin, engines on fire, altimeter unwinding, wants to sound just like you-know-who.

We all saw "The Right Stuff." Chuck Yeager or Sam Shepard get

all the credit for all of us imitating that unhurried drawl that talks through the recovery like we were clipping our toenails. Again, you just know that everything will be okay.

Pilot proficiency is not a must for sales professionals in all aircraft transactions – just primarily when you are moving up beyond your current abilities. I have sold a great deal of airplanes to pilots with more skill and experience than I have. The chief pilot and/or senior executives, for that matter, at Time Warner don't care what I think about the stick-handling characteristics of a Gulfstream. They will draw their own conclusions about the airplane based on what is important to each. If the flying characteristics of the aircraft are important to you, then it is important that the salesperson be a competent stick.

When representing new turbine aircraft for a manufacturer, the sales professional and demo pilot typically are two different people. This is a function of logistics, safety, proficiency, liability and all of the realities that govern marketing jet aircraft. The principles are the same. If the sales process is a team approach, don't leave the demo without the demo pilot's card. They are happy to be called upon later and can lend valuable insight once the flight has had a chance to settle in.

### 2. Technically Strong

On one of my first sales calls for Cessna, competing against Beech's salesman Sam Howard, I was asked how many inverters the CitationJet had. Carl Lupinaci asked the question. Carl was the chief pilot for Heinz at the time and he was asking on behalf of a friend who flew a Cheyenne. Operating under the principle that if I don't know the answer, I can find it and report back, I replied, "Carl, I would have to know what an inverter is to answer that question."

I have never forgotten Carl's answer. He said, "Mike, if my insurance agent glazes over on annuity, I find another one." This was an embarrassing lesson. The reality is that while sales professionals earn their daily bread by selling and not flying, product knowledge is like endurance to an athlete. You can never have enough. The more product knowledge, the more efficient the sales process.

By the way, the original CJ had two inverters for the AC avionics suite, a third was added if 110 VAC outlets were installed in the back of the airplane, which was the point of Carl's question.

It never hurts to have done some homework before a demo and know some of the answers to some key questions so that you can get a feel for your salesperson's depth of technical know-how.

### 3. Successful

There are a couple of schools of thought here. One school is, give me the sales guy who is the new kid. A salesman who is hungry to make the sale may work harder, be more responsive and maybe even, admit it, be a little easier to push around.

In the step-up mode, I think it is important to have references and success stories in your resume. Everyone has to start somewhere. But all things being equal, I want my salesperson to have a solid track record of past success. Aside from the wisdom that comes to the table, it is comforting to know that your aviation advisor doesn't have to make the sale this month to continue eating.

### 4. Honesty

You can't have a conversation about business ethics until it is your money with which you are playing. Commission sales people have the opportunity to prove their integrity on a very regular basis.

I have said some very interesting things to sell airplanes. Here is one sample:

While at Mooney Aircraft, an NFL lineman-sized prospect came out to Long Beach for a demo. We spent 10 minutes just getting the door closed. This was only accomplished after he turned toward me and leaned toward the center of the aircraft, making it impossible for him to reach back and grasp the yoke.

**Prospect:** The seat belt doesn't fit.

**Mike:** No problem, I can order an extension.

**Prospect:** Do you have an extension with you?

**Mike:** No. Would you feel better if I took my seatbelt off?

**Prospect:** We can't fly, can we? And if we can't fly, I can't buy this airplane.

**Mike:** No, we can't fly. I could include a Slim Fast diet subscription with the order.

There is a "never say die" attitude that sales people have to possess to stay employed, but there is a very clear line that a professional should never cross and that line begins at safety of flight issues. While we all have intuition about how honest people are being with us, airplanes present us with a built-in acid test for truth.

Every airplane design is a compromise that is crafted to fit the market niche that the manufacturer is pursuing. Short runway performance needs a certain airfoil. If speed is king, we need a small cross section and big motors. If comfort is king, a wide cross section and big motors means a lot of fuel to carry and burn.

If you want to see in the dark, it costs a lot of money. No aircraft does everything well. A salesman should accent the positive and discuss features and benefits, but he should also discuss the weaknesses of the design which, with strong

product knowledge, he knows very well. I would much rather have a knowledgeable, honest salesman discuss the pros and cons of his own model than listen to him discuss the weakness of a competitors product.

Discussing an airplane's blemishes is a great way to find out if your sale representative is focused on the client or the transaction. You may want to continue to work with a transaction-oriented salesperson for a variety of reasons. However, understand that you have to supplement your buying process another way.

#### 5. Good Humor

This is just my own preference and driven from the observation that people get into the airplane business because they want to. Let's face it; this is a fun and exciting business. To lose a cool job contest at a cocktail party, I have to run into a race car driver or spy.

It isn't too much to ask that your sales professional enjoy what they do and that is why so many friendships are formed in this business. Don Bass, one of the founders of AvPro, an outstanding sales company in Annapolis, Md., calls the airplane resale business a cottage industry. A very sophisticated one at the highest levels, but a cottage industry nonetheless, because of the relationships that are formed in the airplane buying process.

If you spend some time around

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Don or have bought or sold planes with him, you will find that he is not just a consummate pro, he also has a lot of fun at work. Enjoying your work is not the only attribute that brings customers back time after time, but again, I think it has a special place in the move up market.

#### One Last Test

All the best to you as you embark on the interesting and fun project of upgrading to your next aircraft. There are legions of great, motivated, successful salespeople to help you.

To end this confession of an aircraft salesman, here is the simple test that I want to continue to earn a perfect score on. Every now and

then, the spouse of an airplane prospect will privately look me in the eye and ask, "Would you put your children in the plane with him?"

I am very proud to say that I have answered the question both ways. And that has made all the difference.



*Mike Dwyer is the president of Guardian Jet, a consulting and brokerage firm that offers maintenance oversight and pilot services along with an umbrella of services for light jet operators. Mike has held sales positions at Mooney Aircraft, Cessna Citation and Gulfstream Aircraft before starting Guardian Jet with a team of specialists. He is an ATP with 2,500 hours of which about 2,000 has been spent demonstrating aircraft to new owners. Mike earned a CitationJet type rating in 1994. For more information, visit [www.guardian-jet.com](http://www.guardian-jet.com) or call (203) 458-2500.*

# Pearls of Wisdom From Two Aircraft Sales Pros

I have asked two of the best turbine sales pros in the game today to answer some questions and pass on some pearls for moving up into kerosene-burning aircraft.

**Mark Gardner**, with Cessna Citation, has been with the CJ program since the first deliveries. If you saw my first *Twin & Turbine* article, you may recall that Mark got me through my type rating course as my sim partner. He uttered the famous quote after a particularly harrowing emergency sequence: “Boy, we were really hauling a\*\* when we hit the ground.”

Talk about calm, if you can keep the drawl, even after you are dead, you have the “right stuff.” He is the kind of understated guy that says he hacks at golf and after four holes, you notice he’s at par. (Not a good guy to bet against.)

#### **Mark’s comments:**

“It all comes down to trust. Our customers figure out pretty quickly if we know what we are doing. You start with great product knowledge and the ability to communicate it. Our clients are very busy people and can sort out quickly if we are honest and do what we say we will do.

“With owner-flown airplanes, it is very important to be able to fly. You have to have a sense of where the customer is starting from and be able to speak to what they need

to do to be safe. This will become increasingly important with the delivery levels of the Mustang. It is very satisfying to see a customer move up from a CJ1 to a CJ2 when the CJ1 was their first airplane. The transition is a smooth one and you know they mastered their first jet successfully.

“I think you have a lot of chances to build credibility, especially when asked about competitive aircraft. All 5,000 of the King Airs flying can’t be bad. When you compliment what other aircraft do well and then discuss your own product’s virtues and how that fits a particular operation, your credibility increases.

“It is also satisfying that when a prospect occasionally buys a competitive aircraft without my permission, the relationship doesn’t end. That’s the true test of long-term relationships.

“It helps to have a sense of humor. Given a choice, people like to do business with people who are likeable. I have done this long enough to sell two and three airplanes to the same customer. While no sale is easy, just in case my boss is reading this, it is rewarding to reap the benefits of all the hard work you have done in the past.

“Lastly, I enjoy representing a great company and product; it gives me a lot of confidence to work at Cessna.”

**Sam Howard** is a 20 year veteran of Beechcraft sales in the Northeastern United States. Sam started in the Beech world when men were men and the salesman was the demo pilot and dispatcher. He flies his own Bonanza and has thousands of hours in turbine aircraft. A very obvious testament to Sam’s professionalism and character is the regard that his customers hold him in. I competed with Sam for years and know firsthand what a pro he is.

#### **Sam’s comments:**

##### **Funniest closing argument:**

I once told a brokerage executive, “Think of a King Air as a commodity purchase which will rebalance your portfolio.”

##### **What to look for in an airplane salesperson:**

It is very important to listen to your customer and always be honest, even (especially) if it hurts. Being creative and never giving up are the attributes that I think pilots moving up should look for in a salesperson.

##### **Advice for pilots moving up:**

If your goal is to fly a turbine single-pilot, find a way to ride in the right seat of a single-pilot operation flown by a professional pilot. Don’t even work the radios, just watch. Watching a professional fly is valuable experience that cannot be obtained while receiving dual in the left seat.

