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Partner Compatibility and Goals

Entering into an airplane partnership is like getting married. You have to like each other and, equally important, you have to have reason to believe that you will go on liking each other. For a long time. Furthermore, this belief has to be mutual. Having said that, there are marriages where each day is the Fourth of July and there are others where each day is Monday morning. Most end up somewhere in between. At the end of the day a marriage will endure only if the fundamentals were there to begin with. The same goes for an airplane partnership.

The Importance of Personal Compatibility

The single most important factor in the success or failure of an airplane partnership is the partners' personal compatibility. It ranks far above the suitability of the airplane, the right price, and the size of the prospective partners' wallets. You can make no greater mistake than to be seduced into a partnership with incompatible partners by the airplane of your dreams and the financial advantages of the partnership.

Some difference of opinion is bound to arise from time to time, even among the best of friends. If the relationship is strong, the issues are quickly aired and sorted out to mutual satisfaction. If, however, the partners are incompatible, sooner or later some form of conflict will develop that will prove to be not only downright nasty, but irreconcilable.



Fig. 2-1. The Cessna P-210 needs partners with similar goals and flying qualifications.

In the workplace much is made of the importance of learning to get along. You can't always choose your coworkers, and presumably you want to stick around because you enjoy or need your job, so the incentive to make every effort to coexist is great.

When you are setting up an aircraft partnership you have greater flexibility. No potential partner is being forced by some higher authority to coexist with someone not of their choosing. You can and should be much more choosy about who your "colleagues" will be. If there are potential partners with whom you don't get along, don't even bother to try. You don't need the aggravation and can afford to say no.

The problem is that many of us have a hard time determining up front whether we'll have problems with someone once we get into a partnership with them (just like some marriages). Knowing somebody casually tells us little about how they'll handle a partnership, and sizing up strangers with whom you come together only because you are looking for airplane partners is even more difficult. To minimize the chances of making a big mistake it is in the interest of all potential partners to carefully and systematically assess how compatible they are likely to be in the partnership.

A good way accomplish this objective is to openly discuss all the issues of putting together and operating the partnership, and then begin to plan its structure and conduct the financial and operating analyses of potential aircraft types. Clearly articulate what each of you

wants out of the partnership. Pay particular attention to any points of potential friction and open conflict and go through together in great detail how each of you would resolve these conflicts.

During the course of this exercise you'll each have ample opportunity to assess each other's personality traits and evaluate the compatibility of your respective goals and values. Before you collectively decide to take the plunge, be sure to go flying with each other. Behavior in the cockpit is revealing about compatibility in attitudes toward flying and treatment of an airplane, but bear in mind that the ability to fly well is not linked to any particular personality type.

It is in everyone's best interest to be totally honest with each other as well as themselves as you collectively go through this process. Be yourself. Tell your potential partners how you really feel about them and the issues, and expect them to do the same. If you say what you think they would like to hear or what you think is expected by social conventions even though your own opinion is different, you are asking for trouble.

Before you start scrutinizing your potential partners, look in the mirror. Do you consider yourself partnership material? Can you think of the last time you met someone halfway in a disagreement and were satisfied with the outcome? Do you feel resentment if something isn't going your way but have difficulty in initiating an open discussion of the issue? Do you hold a grudge when you don't get your way? Do you still feel a swell of anger or bitterness when you think of something unpleasant that someone did to you 10 years ago? Depending on your personality, an airplane partnership may be less than ideal for you. You can save yourself and others a lot of trouble by assessing your personality as critically as those of your potential partners.

Assessing Personality Traits

The complexity of human nature makes it difficult to accurately group people by highly detailed behavioral characteristics. However, it is possible to get a general idea of what broadly defined categories potential partners seem to fall into on the spectrum of personality traits, thus providing useful clues about how well they are likely to get along.

A partnership is a team, expected to work together in harmony. We can therefore rely on some basic concepts commonly used to study team behavior to get an indication of the potential partners' personality traits and their suitability to join together a partnership.

An important element of a team's ability to work well together is the ability of its members to communicate effectively with each other. How well a team member communicates is a good indicator of that member's personality traits and how well he or she fits into the team. One useful method of evaluating team communication breaks down communications traits into four categories and assesses where each team member fits. The categories are aggressiveness, assertiveness, responsiveness, and nonassertiveness. If during this preliminary stage of investigating the partnership options all the team members honestly communicate in a style that reflects their natural inclinations, the categories offer reliable indications of each member's underlying personality traits.

Aggressiveness

Aggressive communicators are self-centered and intolerant. Theirs is the "I, me, and myself" style. They have little use for the opinions and rights of others and are poor listeners. They believe they have all the answers and are intolerant of alternatives proposed by others. They want control and frequently attempt to exert it by putting down alternative opinions offered by others. The put-down can be subtle, especially in the initial stages of a relationship, so careful attention has to be paid to exactly what their final position is on a conflicting issue.

Aggressive types are obviously poor candidates for such a cooperative venture as an airplane partnership. As long as everything goes their way they can function effectively, but as soon as something is not to their liking they show signs of intolerance.

The era of political correctness has put aggressive types under considerable pressure, and many have become quite clever at masking their true personalities when dealing directly with others on an issue important to them, such as putting together an airplane partnership. Once the partnership is established, unpleasant personality traits that were not immediately apparent may surface.

To lessen the chance of misinterpreting the personality of potential partners who may be the unduly aggressive type, it can be revealing to observe their behavior in social and professional situations outside the scope of the proposed partnership. If it differs significantly from their approach to dealing with the partnership, be careful.

Assertiveness

Assertive people are less self-centered than aggressive types. They are primarily focused on their own, personal objectives, but realize that others can contribute greatly to accomplishing these objectives.

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Operations and Maintenance

Operating the partnership is largely a matter of implementing the partnership agreement (which is the basis for all the operational elements) and maintaining a good flow of information among the partners. The extent to which you and your partners keep records will depend on the partnership's size, its level of activity and the personal inclination of the partners to be meticulous and well informed. It is fine to get by with minimal record keeping, as long as all partners recognize the limitations of such an approach and nobody pretends to be surprised when the muddled scribbling on the backs of envelopes causes great confusion and disagreement.

Scheduling, keeping track of hours flown, recording and resolving maintenance squawks, and monitoring aircraft performance are the key operational elements of an aircraft partnership.

Scheduling

Many partnerships do the scheduling by word of mouth, but if there are more than two partners it is a good idea to take turns being the scheduling coordinator and keeping some form of written schedule. The schedule you design will depend on the arrangements you and your partners have for using the airplane.

Many partnerships have some priority system where one partner has the airplane for a day, a weekend, or a whole week, and the other partners have access to the airplane only if the partner with priority decides not to fly. Such a system is usually on a set rotation and



Fig. 8-1. *Your operations procedures should address operating on the grass.*

can therefore be published in advance and sent to all the partners. The scheduling partner is then responsible for coordinating the use of the aircraft over and above the needs of the priority pilot.

It is the responsibility of the pilot with priority to let the scheduler know when and if the airplane will be available during their priority period. The scheduler can then allocate the airplane among the nonpriority partners on a first come, first served basis. For partners without priority, and if there are periods (say, during the week) when nobody has priority, it is advisable to block out some comfortable window of time that will allow leisurely use of the airplane, making it available for others on a reasonable time frame. Dividing the day for nonpriority partners between morning use and afternoon use usually works quite well.

It is a good idea to provide the scheduler with a scheduling calendar used exclusively for the airplane to avoid confusion and to maintain a booking record. If your partnership is on a priority system, the priority information should be entered in the calendar in advance. It is also strongly recommended that the scheduler have an answering machine and be committed to returning phone calls within a specified period of time. An e-mail system is even better if all have access. There are few things more frustrating in an aircraft partnership than an unreachable scheduler.

If your partnership does not have a priority system, it is still advisable to agree on standard time slots of generous duration, de-

pending on the type of flying you and your partners generally do. If your flying is mainly local or instructional, half-day limits are convenient. If you all take day trips frequently, full-day availability should be your standard. If there is frequent demand for the airplane for longer periods of time you should be on some form of priority system instead of an ad hoc arrangement.

Trial and error will prove what works best for your partnership, but it is important to have a good scheduling system to keep everyone happy and maximize the use of the airplane.

Flight Log

Keeping an accurate log (Table 8.1) of when the airplane was used and by whom is indispensable for an effective billing system. The best solution is a flight log kept in the airplane to be filled out by the pilot immediately after every flight. This log can be used to record a variety of information, but at a minimum it should include the following:

- date of flight
- route of flight
- pilot's name
- beginning tachometer time
- ending tachometer time
- total duration of flight
- remarks

This log should be the basis for charging partners for the hourly use of the airplane. It should be proofed frequently against payments received by the partner keeping the financial records. It should be standard procedure for partners to know the hourly rate to be paid for the airplane and to send the partner handling the financials a check for the appropriate amount immediately after each flight (with the appropriate notation, i.e., N37RW, 1.7 hours, \$58.00).

Invoice and Check Box

Some partners are notorious for slovenly administrative habits, including being chronically late sending in the checks they owe. Others are frugal and hate to waste a postage stamp every time they have to make a payment for a few hours of flying. For these people