



## CONSIDER THIS

### Yet another article on aeronautical decision making

by Bill Frank

**P**AVE, CHORD, CARE, the 5 P's, the 3 P's, SAFE, SELF, IM SAFE, ADAPT, TRACK, TEAM, AESOP. Feeling a little overwhelmed lately when it comes to aviation mnemonics? And these are just the ones associated with aeronautical decision making. No I'm not making this up and I am sure there are more out there. All of these mnemonics have a place in our decision making process. So what do you do with all of these reminders? Can you remember them? When do you use them? Which ones do you use and what does it all mean? If you think you're behind the power curve a little, don't feel bad, you're not alone. Risk assessment, judgment and decision making all go beyond just knowing mnemonics. Yet the bottom line can be deceptively simple. All it really involves is the right attitude about safety and taking the time to consider your actions before you act. So where does this take us?

Let's face it. Flying is a risky business. If you don't believe that, just try to get life insurance. The old adage that the most dangerous part of your journey is the drive to or from the airport is simply not true. John and Martha King have spent a lot of time and effort to get us to recognize the risks and to get us to acknowledge that we are the weak link. You know the statistics; 70 to 80 percent of all aircraft accidents involve pilot error. Even good pilots occasionally make bad decisions. Cirrus aircraft are high performance machines capable of extended cross-country flights. The aircraft is designed with numerous safety features and is inherently safe. It's how we operate the aircraft that creates most of the safety issues. Cirrus was actually criticized in an aviation trade publication for the introduction of safety pages on the recent MFD software upgrade. The gist of the editorial was that most pilots will simply scroll through these pages without even considering them. Unfortunately, that thought is not far off base. The intent of Cirrus was obviously to improve flight safety by encouraging the pilot to pause one more time before

taking off and reconsider all the aspects of the flight. That is to be commended from a manufacturer. The reality of this is, however, that the very pilot who needs to consider these pages the most thoroughly is the one who is least likely to do so. As the Kings have pointed out – the perceived necessity to be a certain place at a certain time is the single most important factor in overall risk management. Once again it boils down to having the right attitude about risk management, without which all the memory jogs are worthless. Good decision making starts with the correct attitude. Let's consider how to employ some of the aspects of judgment and decision making.

### Preflight

Preflight is where the big picture is formulated. I'm not just talking about the weather, but the really big picture: plane, pilot, flight plan, mission, alternatives, etc. There is a long list of mnemonics that can be used, but I find a numeric system rating the risks of the flight to be the most helpful. An excellent one can be found in the appendix section of your Cirrus flight training manual (or email me and I will send it to you).

No matter what method you use, keep it objective. The idea is to take the go/no go decision and let you off the hook by mitigating the subjective, emotional aspects that too often rule the decision process. Once a level of risk is assigned to the proposed flight, you are in a better position to make a final decision based on this objective assessment. Developing a set of airline-like standard operating procedures and defining personal minimums, further removes the subjective aspects of the go/no go decision. If it is a moderate risk flight and is outside of the SOPs, or your personal minimums, then the decision to cancel is already made. You can tell your passengers that the planned flight is outside of your operating limitations without feeling guilty. The safety attitude has to be that you will abide by these self-imposed limitations without cheating.

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## In Flight

In this phase of the flight there are again many good mnemonics to utilize and I encourage you to use whichever one works best in your mind. As before, break it down to the basics. What you really are trying to accomplish is a continuous assessment of the progress of the flight. Most of us have the fuel scheduler on the Garmin 430 set for a reminder to check fuel or switch tanks every 20 or 30 minutes. Why not use that reminder to reevaluate the flight. Heck, even change the message to read "check fuel/check flight" or "switch tanks/assess situation" – be creative. Consider plane, pilot and flight conditions. What has changed, what hasn't? Is the flight going as planned? Reevaluate your decisions, are they working? Do you still have a workable plan B? Here is where a mnemonic can help organize your thoughts. Print one up, laminate it and slip it into the side pocket of your airplane. Pull it out and review it every time you switch tanks. Keep it simple, usable, objective and effective. Above all, get in the habit of doing it on a scheduled basis.

## Post Flight

Don't limit the safe flight attitude to preflight and en route. A little private post flight analysis does a body good. Ask yourself what you learned. Which did you do right? Which could you have done better? Most importantly, what lessons learned can you carry forward and what will you do differently the next time? Committing to a safe flight attitude is a continuum, not just an end point.

Good decision making requires that you think about what you are doing. That may sound a little too obvious; except that if the process is to be successful, it demands that you pause and consider the situation and the available options. Just like scrolling through the safety screens on the MFD. You have to pause and think about it, if it's going to do any good. Prepare to detect change. When the situation changes, assess the risks created by that change. Recognize the change, consider your options and take action. Focus on realistic options, and then evaluate the outcome of your decision. Develop, train and maintain good piloting skills to allow more time to be spent on the mental aspects of decision making. Use all available resources (good single pilot resource management) in making your decisions.

The bottom line is that you have an obligation to yourself, your passengers, and even the people on the ground to fly safe. It takes the right attitude and a conscious effort to exercise good judgment. Make that commitment to fly safe. **GOPA**

About the author: *Bill Frank* owns Turbo Cirrus N787WF (#2178) He has over 3,400 hours total time, 1,600-plus of those hours in Cirrus aircraft. He has COMM/INST, CFII, MEI and CSIP ratings and can be contacted at Aeromax Flight Services, (715) 482-3773 or at bill788wf@yahoo.com.

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