

Top Ten Ways to Increase Female Success in General Aviation

#1 Solve the lack of money problem by creating a low-interest revolving loan program for general aviation training not associated with community colleges and university programs. Aviation manufacturers and aviation groups need to realize they have a vested interest in increasing the number of General Aviation pilots, especially females. By pooling resources, GA manufacturers and aviation organizations can partner to create a low-interest loan fund which can grow over time, with interest and principal paybacks, creating more funds for more GA students to learn to fly.

#2 Expand General Aviation training scholarships, grants, or low-interest loans. These need to be expanded for older women wanting to start or complete flight programs. Most of the current programs target a younger demographic, especially aviation career-oriented women.

#3 Develop a no-cost, readily-available database of female mentors for female general aviation pilots-in-training. Promote this female mentor network constantly through flight schools and the aviation media. Focus on the success stories, especially using social media networking.

#4 Create an on-line “Keep flying” support community for female pilots-in-training at no cost to them.

#5 Develop “Female Friendly Flight Training” with more simulator-time and increase women’s confidence level by building on what they already know, instead of going strictly by the FAA curriculum steps. Flight schools, instructors and the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) need to recognize women and men have different learning styles and strengths. Instead of the one-size-fits-all flight training syllabus, the sequence of instruction needs to be flexible to recognize this difference in learning styles. One style is not better than the other, they are just different.

#6 Individualize and personalize the flight training process with additional self-study options for women. To solve the lack of map reading and orienteering skills, offer interesting no-cost ways to learn geography and map reading with sites such as www.nationalgeographic.com or www.knowledgehouse.info

#7 Increase women’s confidence and competence levels with aviation mechanical systems, through low or no-cost self-study training DVDs for women to help them to close the “workshop gap” where women have not had the opportunity to develop mechanical skills.

#8 Make the flight school-FBO atmosphere more female-friendly with more emphasis on enjoyment of the flying and social experience. It is in the self-interest of flight schools to look at each female student as a potential “Amelia Earhart.” Walls of the flight-training facility should be decorated with photographs of smiling students of both genders and outstanding General Aviation pilots and aviation heroes such as WASPs. Cold, framed art of rockets and jet planes flying does not create a welcoming or social environment for women students and pilots. Each student should be treated as special and unique.

#9 Encourage pilot-in-training and instructor compatibility and allow the student to feel comfortable with an easy transition/change to a different flight instructor. Flight schools must understand that creating more pilots means a stronger FBO and airport community. Just as college alumni supporters “cheer lead” for their alma mater, women pilot graduates can make a huge positive impact on the FBO’s future success.

#10 Celebrate smaller milestones along the way to pilot certification. Reward the journey and make it fun. Many respondents reported the aviation community provided the important emotional support often lacking from family and friends. If only one-third of one-percent of the U.S. population hold private pilot certificates and, if only six-percent of those are women pilots, then, female pilots are, indeed “special.” The desire to achieve and to be “special” may be a major “benefit,” making the time, effort and expense of learning to fly worthwhile.

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