

Getting Ideas

By Tom Johnson SSF Trustee

Flying big Boeings for the man, you run into some interesting people with unusual stories.

My F/O announced to me that she and her partner were celebrating thirty years together. I told her that thirty years married to the same man is quite an accomplishment.

"We're not married", she told me.

"Why the wedding ring", I asked in astonishment?

"It's so the stupid ones don't get ideas" I was informed.

Her response kept me laughing halfway across the ocean and got me thinking whether I had ever been the stupid one who got an idea?

It also got me thinking how her wearing the ring affected the behavior of others. And therefore, how my behavior, words, and actions affect those I came into contact within our soaring community. I also wondered how to properly respond when confronted with someone getting a stupid idea.

We got to the hotel and, of course, I took one of the complementary newspapers. The paper had the Miss Manners advice column in it. You know, the lady who provides etiquette advice for us all. I wonder if soaring could use a Miss Manners type advice column?

So....

Dear Miss Oudie: When I come to a good thermal and everyone is turning to the right, how do I inform all of them to reverse their turn and start thermalling correctly to the left?

Dear Gentle Thermaller: There is a difference being the first one to the thermal and setting the turn direction and coming to the party late and expecting others to bow to your whims. Miss Oudie is not sure you are making this distinction, which may be the reason that your well-mannered friends are annoyed by your rude and unsafe flying.

When entering a thermal, I simply follow the lead of those already established. Saying "I am so sorry, but I'm afraid I can't turn the same direction" is impolite and unsafe.

Dear Miss Oudie: When I get back to the gliderport and multiple gliders are in line to land on Runway 17, how do I gently inform them to wait so I can land on Runway 35 and roll up to my trailer?

Dear Gentle Lander: Just what the gliderport needs: another pilot with a complete lack of kindness and consideration for others. Miss Oudie observes that you seem to believe that your convenience is paramount to the safety of others.

It is no great insight to notice that soaring etiquette is performative. If you have to land long, wait for the recovery to end, and then haul your sailplane 4000 ft to the trailer, then that is what you do to enable the safe operation for all of us. If you inconvenience someone, even inadvertently, in your case landing against the flow, you apologize as an acknowledgment of what you have done. Accompanying



this by a token present, donuts at the next pilot meeting for example, gives it extra charm. A handwritten letter shows appreciation for others' efforts.

Dear Miss Oudie: My student and I were next in line for the tow after a 30 minute wait when one of the local super-ship pilots approached us and announced their readiness to launch immediately, as the soaring day was going well and others were already on task. There were also three other aircraft in line after us. How should I behave in this situation?

Dear Gentle Gridder: While a pithy response is very well justified by you, Miss Oudie would caution against this. You should not inform the super-ship pilot that a lack of preparation on their part does necessitate an unwarranted and inconvenient response on my part.

Instead, you should use this as an opportunity to inform the pilot that thoughtful and timely preparation leads to the safest and most desirable outcomes. Rushing leads to mistakes and mistakes can lead to accidents, damaged gliders, and damaged egos. Show the pilot, and your student, that proper preparation is essential to safe flying, and to showing consideration for your fellow pilots.

Dear Miss Oudie: A pilot of a 1-26 was thermalling very low over the approach end of our active runway. When the pilot landed, I asked why they were doing this when active towplane and glider operations were underway in the area they were thermalling. The pilot responded that practicing low altitude saves near a landable field was safe and necessary for successful cross country flying, because the pilot had thought out all of the possible threats and contingencies. When I informed the pilot that the behavior shown was akin to practicing bleeding, the pilot left in a huff. How should I have responded?

Dear Gentle Observer: In cases such as this, Miss Oudie finds herself having to caution people to not consider another's intent before responding emphatically.

Tales of low saves, for whatever reason, do not require a carefully crafted response. An emphatic "**No!**" -- while moving away, if necessary -- is both required, acceptable, and wise. And whether the pilot has a PhD in soaring or is on their first solo, behavior like this must be addressed immediately.

To acknowledge the pilots' actions as benign and acceptable, you are saying to yourself and the community that dangerous operations are okay. As a fellow pilot and friend, you could add "thank you" after you have reached a safe distance.

Well said to all, Miss Oudie.

And yes, to answer the question at the beginning, I have been the one with a stupid idea. Often it seemed like the thing to do at the time. Unfortunately, I did not have someone like Miss Oudie to keep me in check.

So, please be on your best behavior. Be conscious of how your actions affect others when you do this wonderful sport we call soaring.

Now if I could only get an idea how to fly faster on task.....

