

Instructor Notes

Helen Krasner



Different Instructing Styles

Or - It ain't what you do, it's the way that you do it...

Part 1

Most instructors develop a particular way of teaching, based partly on experience and also on their own personality. For example, some of us tend to talk a lot, others to say very little. Some people structure each lesson precisely, others prefer to 'wing it', doing what seems appropriate at the time. Some of these approaches work better with some students than others, and good instructors realise this and adapt their preferred patterns of behaviour accordingly. But many of us don't do this very much, and don't always even realise the necessity for doing so. That is, unless something or someone points it out to us rather more clearly than is usually the case.

The four main instructional styles

Early in 2006, I attended an Instructor Refresher Seminar, which is something all instructors have to do from time to time. On the second day we had a seminar on this particular topic, ie instructing styles. According to the speaker, research had shown that instructors varied as to how much they took charge or how assertive they were, and also in their emotional expressiveness or ways of displaying their feelings. Using these two dimensions of behaviour, he identified four main instructional styles.

Instructors with high assertiveness and low

expressiveness use what he called the 'Telling Style'. These are the people who naturally take charge, who enjoy authority, and give lots of direction to the student. They are time and deadline conscious folk, who always focus on the end result. Those with low assertiveness but high expressiveness are almost the exact opposite; their 'Facilitative Style' places great value on developing rapport with the student, looking for positive things to say, and encouraging the student to learn through their own actions. Instructors with both low assertiveness and low expressiveness plan things carefully and logically, prefer things to run smoothly, and don't like change. This is the 'Programmed Style'. The last of the four, the 'Inspirational Style', describes those instructors with both high assertiveness and high expressiveness. These instructors show lots of enthusiasm, and attempt to elicit lots of excitement in the student. They perceive themselves as creative and innovative, preferring to take on challenges and problems as they come and not be tied to rigid lesson plans or agendas.

A long time ago I acquired a degree in psychology, and I worked for a while as an occupational psychologist, back in another life before I discovered helicopters. So I found this all fairly interesting. But it was all rather theoretical, I

thought. Did it have much to do with real life in a flying school? I didn't really think so. This is how I tend to feel about a lot of psychological theories...there's a reason why I left the profession! But in this particular case my prejudices were about to be challenged.

After the explanation, we were shown short video clips to demonstrate each instructing style. These used actors for the student and instructor, and showed scenes in which each instructing style was exaggerated to the point of caricature. It was a good way of doing things; the short films made their point and were most amusing - a welcome diversion in what was becoming for many of us a long couple of days of sitting at a desk.

The Telling Style

The first clip was an extreme version of the Telling Style. A sergeant-major type instructor, dressed in uniform with four gold bars, took charge and told the student exactly what to do. He gave lots of direction, and was conscious of time and deadlines to the exclusion of what the particular student wanted or needed. I had encountered instructors somewhat like this in my early days as a student, and I hadn't liked it at all. I felt for the student in the film, laughed at the blustering instructor, but knew that this was not my way of instructing anyway.

The Facilitative Style

The second clip caricatured the gentler Facilitative Style by showing a student lying on a couch, being asked by a casually dressed psychiatrist-like instructor how she felt the lesson had gone. Her protests that she didn't know and wanted him to tell her how she was doing didn't seem to get through to him. In fact, despite the fact that he was encouraging and positive, he never seemed to actually state any precise facts. It was very funny. I saw myself in this particular instructor to a certain extent, since I do try to understand my students and encourage feedback from them. However, I remember having an instructor of this type when I was learning to fly, and finding him quite annoying. He would continually ask me how I felt about the lesson we had just done, and I, lacking in confidence and wanting desperately to be told I might make it as a pilot some day, needed direction, not gentle understanding. So I don't think I make that particular mistake, and I was congratulating myself on that fact during the video clip.

The next clip showed the Programmed Style - but to know more about that, see the concluding part of this article in the next FTN.

Instructor Notes

Helen Krasner



Different Instructing Styles

Or - It ain't what you do, it's the way that you do it...

Part 2

In the first part of this article, Helen Krasner described how an instructor refresher seminar brought her face-to-face with different styles of instruction. In this concluding part she describes how the seminar also made her assess her own 'Inspirational' style of instructing.

The next video clip showed the Programmed Style. This was a classic. The restrained, buttoned-up instructor was trying to teach his student how to use the flight computer, and insisting that the 'wind down' method was the only one that could possibly work, despite the fact that the student had previously learned 'wind up' from another instructor. She was clearly confused, but the instructor just wanted it done his way and no other. We all laughed; I think we were thoroughly enjoying ourselves by then.



The teachers taught - an instructor seminar in action. © Ontrack Aviation Ltd

Next came the Inspirational Style. This instructor was enthusiastic to the point of being completely and utterly over the top. "Today", he told his student, "we'll do Normal Circuits". You could almost hear the capital letters and exclamation marks in his voice as he uttered this great revelation. And once in the air the poor student could barely concentrate with the instructor exclaiming eagerly, almost non-stop: "It's wonderful to be up here, isn't it? Isn't it a fantastic day; just look at those clouds. Oh, isn't it just great to be up here. Aren't you looking forward to doing those Normal Circuits I told you about?" Again, you could hear the capital letters, and feel for the bemused student.

But then suddenly, I stopped laughing.

This last clip was incredibly funny, possibly the most amusing of the lot. Indeed, we were all doubled up with laughter by this time. But then suddenly, I stopped laughing. For I realised that this was actually a fairly accurate representation of my own preferred instructing style. It was grossly exaggerated, certainly. But it still showed the way that I tend to do things. I am usually pretty enthusiastic, and I quite naturally use that when I'm teaching. And I have always prided myself on being adaptable and flexible. In addition, I liked instructors like that when I was learning, so I tended to assume that everyone would, and that it was the best way to be. Thus I tried to use spontaneity, change, and excitement to make things lively and interesting for my students. Indeed, I was using this approach more and more as time went on, since it is quite difficult for a new instructor to teach in this way until he or she is fairly familiar with the syllabus. It seemed to me to be an approach that worked, and clearly some of my students loved it. But...perhaps not all. I now began to see, even though the video clip was clearly an overblown version of this instructing style, that perhaps it would not suit everyone.

In fact, according to the notes we had, this particular style is usually less effective with those students who are themselves low on expressiveness and assertiveness, who like a carefully developed plan of action. Yes, I thought to myself, the quieter, more thoughtful of my students quite clearly didn't like this way of doing things. They couldn't cope with my

outward expression of my passion for flying, and certainly couldn't join in. They enjoyed flying, but in their own quiet way. My behaviour could be complete anathema to these students. An announcement that we'd be doing Autorotations – and I'd used spoken capital letters too – and that they wouldn't scary at all, but great fun, went down like a lead balloon with these types. They wanted a briefing and clear instructions, but no more. My saying that we'd do Quickstops (spoken capitals again), and that they'd really, really enjoy throwing the helicopter around the sky, produced excitement in some students, it was true. But others didn't like this way of putting things, this type of terminology, this whole – to them – crazy approach.

good instructors need to vary their style...if they are to teach effectively.

In the discussion after the video clips, we talked about the positives and negatives of each type of approach. In fact, very few of us seemed to like the Telling Style. But as someone pointed out, ex-military students, plus some young people straight out of school, expect that type of teaching and thrive on it. The Facilitative Style works particularly well for nervous students, and the Programmed Style would suit those people who like an ordered, systematic, step-by-step approach. Indeed, there is a place for all styles of instructing, and good instructors need to vary their style, at least to a certain extent, if they are to teach effectively.

So I definitely learned something that day. And these days I try to adapt the way I teach to the student's background and personality, and I vary my approach according to what might suit them best.

Well, I try to do that, at any rate. But of course, I can only do it to a certain extent, since I am the way I am. And, for me, it's quite hard to tone down my enthusiasm for helicopter flying – and my students will just have to put up with it.

Instructor Seminars

23/24 April 2007, Wellesbourne
1/2 October 2007, Wellesbourne

Instructor Courses:

FI(R), CRI(SE/ME), IRI, Seaplane, Aerobatic, Night, FIC Preparatory, Conversions

Modular CPL(A) Flying (SE)

PPL Examiner Courses (SE/ME)

Formation Flying
PPL Groundschool
AOPA (UK) Aerobatics
SEP (Sea) Class Rating

On-Track
Aviation Limited

Tel/Fax 01789 842777

ontrack@talk21.com

www.ontrackaviation.com