



IFR

Thoughts on leadership
by Karl Pister



THE
COACHING GROUP INC.
INSPIRING EXCELLENCE



While still in the early stages of normalcy with masking, social distancing and good hand hygiene, it is great to be getting back on the plane and back to meeting with people in person as society adjusts to the next stages of the pandemic.

I am a fortunate traveler in that I still have a love of flying. Before the pandemic I was in the air weekly. I still love the thrill of take-off, the whine of the engines, the ever changing view out the window. I have to laugh at a situation I had a couple of years back flying from Missoula to Portland. The cloud banks were amazing. We were flying amidst valleys and peaks of enormous clouds. I was taking pictures constantly. One person asked me if I was flying for the first time...yeah, I know.

And one fact of flying that has always fascinated me is instrument flying. When suddenly the fog or clouds or dark is so intense that the pilots have no visual reference. This can also happen to ships on the water.



One respected colleague, an experienced maritimer, told me that one of the most important things you can do during an instrument-only situation is not look up, but keep your eyes on the panel in front of you. Student pilots have to wear a vision- blocking hood during training so their eyes have to stay on the panel and not look up. The desire for the brain is so strong to get visual confirmation during a crisis, even when there is nothing visual to confirm! But little by little the brain learns to trust something new. Something vital. Something life-saving. It is known in the field of aviation as IFR - Instrument Flight Rules.

What are these instruments telling you?

Altitude - how high are you?

Airspeed - how fast are you going?

Vertical speed - how fast are you going up or down?

Attitude indicator/artificial horizon - where are you relative to the horizon.

Directional gyro - a super compass.

So where are we going with this?

38 years ago, in 1982, Johnson and Johnson was embroiled in a crisis that involved one of their flagship products, Tylenol. Someone had tampered with the product resulting in the death of seven people.



This was an unprecedented act. J&J had no crisis management plan. So what did their chairman, James Burke do? He went to his "instrument panel". He went back to the company credo which is:

We believe our first responsibility is to the patients, doctors and nurses, to mothers and fathers and all others who use our products and services. In meeting their needs everything we do must be of high quality.

He, based on that statement, in one sweeping decision, stopped production, halted advertising, and pulled the product nationally, costing the company, according to the New York Times, \$100 million dollars (over \$250M in today's dollars) and cementing their reputation as one of the most trusted organizations in America.

Their response is still seen as the gold-standard for ethical crisis leadership, nearly 40 years ago.

Now the connection between my two thought trains here?



Instruments are used in flying and maritime operations when things go dark and dangerous. Values are used in leadership, or should be, when things go dark and dangerous.

I want you to give some thought, between now and Friday, as to your IFR skills. If things went dark and dangerous for you in a leadership setting, where would you look to? What would you do? What values do you look to in the value equivalents of airspeed, altitude, horizon, and direction?

To be continued.



THE
COACHING GROUP INC.

INSPIRING EXCELLENCE



Karl Pister, PCC

Leadership Coach

karl@coachinggroupinc.com
(503) 381-8705

