

The Sextant



Navigating Your World

X.LMMXXII

RECENTLY RELEASED FROM PRISON? YOU DON'T NEED A JOB, *YOU NEED A BREAK!*

You're released from prison. Now you need to find a job. Realistically, you don't need a job – you need a break.

As I have mentioned in previous Sextant articles, your success at landing employment will largely depend upon you being an open book with no hidden agendas.

Now, how do we create this, no hidden agenda – open book persona? I actually stumbled on it by accident. Let me share my personal experiences.

After I was released early August, I spent a solid month canvassing office and industrial parks looking for work – any work.

I was driving along a back access road through Cleveland Hopkins Airport and noticed a row of small airplanes. It was a flight school. I had a curiosity for airplanes, and there was this faint possibility (fantasy) that I might go to school for aviation based upon an interview I had with a counselor to whom I was referred by my parole officer.



I had all but completely dismissed attending college toward an aviation career as even a realistic possibility. Nevertheless, I stopped, parked my car, and started walking around looking at the little Cessna 152's. Admittedly, I also stopped because I was feeling a little beaten up that particular day with the extreme heat and several bombed interviews.

I paid little attention to a maintenance man who was mowing the grass. I figured he would eventually come over and kick me off the premises, but until he did, I just kept looking at all the airplanes.

Sure enough, I noticed the maintenance guy was mowing a path straight in my direction, and when he was within five feet of me, the engine stopped. He hopped off the lawn tractor and walked up to me. He looked like he just crawled out of a 110-degree grease pit full of grass - the sweat pouring off of him.

Unexpectedly, he greeted me with a broad smile and an enthusiastic, "Hi, how are you! Are you a pilot?" I just laughed and said, "I wish!" "Well, this place is a flight school," he said. "If you want to learn, they can teach you."

He reached out his hand and introduced himself, "I'm John Kovach." I shook hands and said, "Hi John, I'm Dave Koch." His voice was pleasant, he was easy-going, and for some reason, he just seemed like he was genuinely interested in me.

"Are you interested in learning how to fly?" John asked. I said, "Well, I have a few limitations." "Like what," he asked. "Well, money for one - it's pretty thin right now," I responded. He rubbed his chin for a few seconds in thought and said, "There are all kinds of student loans and grants, and other programs that can help pay for training, so that can be taken care of."



There must have been something in my demeanor, a look on my face, something that he noticed – that my limitations weren't just about the money. He asked, "What else is holding you back?" I just responded with a shrug of my shoulders and said, "I just don't think my future includes getting a pilot's license."

This man of probably sixty-plus years must have felt something in his gut. He put his hand on my shoulder and in a warm personal tone that felt like it was coming from God, he said, "Tell me your story son - maybe I can help."

We walked over to a couple of chairs that were placed in front of one of the hangers. John went inside and came out with a couple bottles of soda. As he handed me a soda, he said in a really gentle tone, "Tell me your story, son."

John sat and just looked at me – totally silent, smiling and not at all intimidating. As I sat there, sipping the cold soda, I looked in his eyes. His expression was one that made me feel like no matter what I said, he wouldn't pass judgment.

'What the hell,' I thought. I'll probably never see this guy again for the rest of my life. There's no loss in telling him and besides, he just bought me a soda that I couldn't afford to buy myself.

I looked at him and said, "I don't think they give pilot licenses to guys who just got out of the can." His eyes smiled almost as though he knew what I needed to tell him. "Prison or just county jail," he asked. "Oh, it was the real McCoy," I replied, "Both federal and state."

John rubbed his chin for probably a minute as he thought. Then he said, "I don't think that would pose any limitations. I'm pretty familiar with the Federal Aviation Regulations and I cannot think of any that would prevent you from



pursuing an aviation career.” Then he asked, “What did you do?”

Since I wasn’t interviewing for a job, I didn’t dance around the question. I just gave him the full report. No face down cards – no hidden agendas. I just laid it out and spilled my guts. He listened intently. I saw real and deep concern in his eyes as he listened and rubbed his chin the entire time.

After I finished, John asked, “So, what are you doing now?” I explained that I had been looking for work – a job – any job.

“Any luck?” John asked. I just shook my head, no. “So, you’re available to work,” he asked. “Definitely,” I replied.

John looked at me and smiled and asked, “Do you think you could cut the grass?” I shook my head and said, “Sure!” Inside, my first thoughts were, ‘geezzz, a job cutting grass? Is this my destiny?’

As for getting a pilot’s license, I thought that was a far-fetched assertion. However, a job and income sounded good, even if it wasn’t the greatest job in the world.

John went on asking, “How about keeping the hangers clean, scrubbing the hanger floors, washing the airplanes, fueling airplanes and keeping the offices clean?” The whole time John was posing these questions, I just kept nodding my head and replying, “Yes, sure, yes, sure.”

John took the last swig from his soda and said, “Good, when can you start?” I was silent for a few seconds and just stared at him. Then I said, “Well, I appreciate that sir, but I wouldn’t want to take your job from you.” He just smiled and said, “Oh, that’s okay, I have plenty of other things to keep me busy.”

A little puzzled, I gestured and asked, “Like what?” He calmly replied, “Oh, I’m the president of this company, I own



this flight school, and I'm a FAA Examiner." If you're serious about wanting to get your pilot's license, I can help you with that too."

As he was walking away, he looked back at me, smiled and winked, and said, "I know this might not be your dream job, but look at the bright side of it – you're starting out with presidential duties (pointing toward the lawnmower that he, the president, had been riding most of the morning). I'll see you next Monday at 8:00 AM sharp."

It turns out that John was also a retired Cleveland Police Officer having served a couple of decades on the force. The flight school was his second passion and career. Perhaps this accounted for his perception that my issue was more than just money.

Looking at this guy, you wouldn't think he had two nickels to rub together. To abbreviate the story, he hired me, and he and his wife helped me with securing some student loans and grants, along with another individual (*Jim Graves*) I will discuss later.

I cut the grass, I washed the airplanes, I cleaned the hangers, I pumped fuel, and I learned to fly. This was the beginning of what became an exceptionally rewarding career as a captain flying some of the finest corporate jets on the planet.

Think about why the president of that flight school was cutting the grass, cleaning the hangers, washing airplanes and fueling airplanes.

It is because those were jobs that needed to be done, but they were jobs that no one else wanted. Be willing to take that job that no one else wants. It can lead to great things...



Although this first job may not have been my ideal career choice, I took pride in my work. I never missed a day of work, I was never late, I was responsible, and I was accountable.

When I washed an airplane, it looked like it just rolled off the factory floor. I even took the time to clean the instrument faces with Q-Tips. The flight instructors and the customers frequently commented on what a great job I was doing and how good the fleet of training aircraft looked. I took the same time and pride when I cleaned the hangers.

My meticulous work habits paid off. The day I took my FAA flight check ride and received my flight instructor's certificate, the Boss (John) congratulated me and said, "Wear a shirt and tie to work tomorrow. Tomorrow, you're a flight instructor."

I took pride in my work, no matter what the work was, and it eventually led to earning my Airline Transport Pilot Certificate, the highest FAA pilot certificate attainable, and Type Ratings in the Learjet, Cessna Citation Fanjet and Israeli Westwind. It started with washing airplanes, scrubbing floors, pumping gas, and cutting grass – a job that no one else wanted.

I also made a whole new set of friends while I was working at the flight school. Among my best friends, Don was an eighteen-year-old who was working for a competing flight school a few hundred yards away, and he was also learning to fly.

Eighteen is probably about the average age of people working at flight schools in the line service jobs as they learn to fly. I was twenty-five at the time that I met Don.

One of my co-workers told me that Don had inquired, "Who is that old guy pumping gas." Don is now bumping 50, and I'm pretty sure I raise the "old guy" thing during every



conversation we have, and I am quite sure that I will continue to reference the twenty-five-year-old – old guy thing forever.

As a side note, your first job is probably going to be one of those jobs that no one else wants. If you want to get started on a new direction, be willing to accept the job that no one else wants.

Taking that first crummy job is a little tough on the pride. Call it double jeopardy, collateral damage, or call it whatever you want. I called it reality. You don't have a great deal of control over that. You do however have total control over whether you earn pay raises and promotions. That is controlled by how you perform in that first job. Provided that you perform to the best of your ability, even if you do not receive the promotions and pay raises you have earned, you have acquired the experience and good references that you can take to a new employer.

Once you take that job that no one else wants, you've started the building process of a new and good resume. You have created a *new most recent significant event*. Either way, that first job that no one else wants will become vacant based upon your decision to perform. You will either get promoted out of that job, you will leave it for a different employer, or you will fail to perform and get fired. You control all of the outcomes, but I guarantee that that first job you take will eventually become a vacancy.

Do your best job, maintain a good and positive attitude, and your job will become vacant because you will be promoted. Do a poor job and your position will also become vacant, but the promotion will not likely be a part of the reason.

What were the keys that made my new career in aviation possible?



Did all of this just happen by luck? Was it because the opportunity found me, or was it because I found the opportunity?

This all came to fruition because I was simply out there and available, so when an opportunity came along, I was poised and positioned to see it. When the opportunity became available, I was available to seize it. Just get out there. But this is only part of the significance of my story.

Besides just being out there and making yourself available to opportunity, another key here is this. I didn't feel nervous talking to John Kovach (*the maintenance guy*) who was mowing the lawn at the flight school because I perceived him to be just a maintenance man – not the president and owner of the business.

When John asked, “What is your story son,” I just laid it out and told him. I spilled my guts out. I didn't sugar coat it. I didn't hide any of it. I didn't dance around it, and I didn't try to justify it or blame anyone else for it. I just laid it out. I was totally and brutally honest.

John apparently sensed my candor, and when he did, he opened up his arms and offered to help. It made him feel good because, together we were going to go out and slay some Dragons – conquer these challenges. And we did!

People want to be a savior. People innately want to rescue other people from distress. You can use your conviction and your status as an underdog as a tool. Just realize that you will only alienate people if they become skeptical because they think you're hiding something or that you have some hidden agenda.

From that moment forward, I have just simply been completely open and forthright about my past. If asked about my conviction, I disclose it – fully and without anything



hidden. Even if I am not asked about it, if the circumstances dictate that the other party may have the right to know, I disclose it before fully consummating whatever agreements are on the table.

During my tenure as President & CEO of Fiber Network Solutions, my bank was considering closing on a high seven-figure credit and lease line.

My conviction wasn't the first thing that we discussed. However, because my particular convictions involved bank fraud, I felt that a lender of this magnitude had a right to know. I certainly would rather my bankers hear it from me before the line is granted, rather than hear about it afterward from some other source.

The line was approved. In fact, my felony convictions have never prevented me from achieving anything I wanted. Just lose the chuck-n-jive and be open and honest.

During my career as an employer of growing companies that hired hundreds of people, I could quickly spot someone who was trying to pull the wool over my eyes, or who was otherwise hiding something – either during the initial interview, or during performance evaluations of current employees. Hidden agendas are a real turn-off. It is very difficult to justify making an investment in someone who is creating a feeling of skepticism and suspicion.

Conversely, I interviewed and gave performance evaluations to people who spilled their guts and laid their cards out all face up. Guess who got the jobs, pay raises and promotions.

Think about how you have reacted at times when you felt someone was handing you a bunch of rhetoric that just didn't add up. You generally get a feeling of skepticism and distrust.



My advice for the interview will be discussed in future Sextant articles.

Stay tuned for Part Two...

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