

ROTORCRAFT

CHECKRIDE Training Musings

By Matt Johnson

STANDING AMONG GIANTS

Sir Isaac Newton wrote in a 1675 letter to fellow scientist Robert Hooke, “If I have seen further, it is by standing on the shoulders of giants.”

Newton was intelligent in more than one way. Sure, his scientific inquisitiveness and academic prowess were qualities that most of us dream of possessing. But Newton was more than an intellectual giant; he knew how to capitalize on resources. In addition to his brain power, Newton used another often overlooked power that helped him become a household name in the areas of mathematics and physics. That power was the superpower of mentorship. Newton wasn’t afraid to seek advice and further study from others, and with every shoulder of every giant he figuratively stood upon, he could see “further.” Most would agree that the use of mentoring “giants” worked for Newton.

Fortunately, the power of mentorship was taught to me at an early age, and I’ve never been shy about using that power by seeking guidance from those who have mastered their profession. I’ve spoken about and taught about the power of mentors in the aviation industry for many years, but I got a genuine reminder and appreciation for this power over the past year.

When Lyn Burks messaged me in the summer of 2022 and asked me to call him, I was a bit perplexed (and anxious). I had written a few articles for him over the years, and the overwhelming majority of the time, we simply conversed back and forth via email on editorial assignments. Upon reaching Lyn, he said he had an opportunity that he wanted to discuss, and my name had come up. Still somewhat bewildered, I patiently listened. In short, I learned that Randy Rowles was taking a new assignment with the magazine, and his “Rotorcraft Checkride” column duties needed to be filled; Lyn explained that my name came up to fill that void. I can honestly say this was one of the few times in my life I found myself lost for words; to say I was humbled would be a vast understatement.

Let’s take a walk back. Over 20 years ago, which seems like yesterday, I decided to pursue an aviation career. It would be a colossal undertaking — financially and mentally — and would surely be a significant time-eater. I was in a successful law enforcement career at the time, but I got the “bug,” as many can relate to. One morning after a night shift, I stayed up and made calls to various flight schools around the country, trying to find not only a good “fit” but anyone who would talk to me about the career change and my aspirations. A few calls were futile at best, but then I called a flight school in Florida and spoke to Randy Rowles. At the time I knew absolutely nothing about him. An hour later, my hopes were renewed, and I felt I could handle the proverbial Sisyphean task of tackling a career change to “make it” in the

aviation industry. Little did Randy (or I) know at the time, but at that moment and for the selfless hour of his time, Randy had become a mentor no matter where I ended up for my training because he offered to provide guidance during my flight training journey. I took Randy up on that offer. With nearly every certificate and rating over the next three or four years and every job prospect I was considering, he was one of the first to know about it as I eagerly reached out to him and became a sponge soaking up every bit of knowledge I could from him about all things aviation.

Fast forward more than 20 years, and here I am, a DPE for more than a decade, and I am now humbly taking over this very successful column from my very first aviation mentor! I salute Randy for his years of advice, guidance, and candor. I wouldn’t be here without the Randy Rowles professionals in our industry who understand the power of mentorship.

No doubt I have some big shoes to fill and an incredibly heavy torch to carry along in Randy’s footsteps, and I will certainly give it my best to meet Lyn’s expectations as he has built an incredible publication. I hope you will join me in each edition as I bring my thoughts, musings, and observations as a DPE to this column. I hope to offer insight to both checkride applicants and CFIs alike. Just as Randy did for me, I hope to give back to all of you.



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Matt has been an FAA designated pilot examiner for over a decade, conducting exams ranging from Private to ATP and CFI. Additionally, he is a single-pilot IFR air medical captain, Part 135 instructor and check airman. He can be reached at HelicopterDPE@gmail.com and via Twitter @HelicopterDPE