

PBWC Connections

for women who aspire and inspire

Serious Altitude: 8 Success Factors at 30,000 Feet

An interview with Captain Karen Kahn

Having spent the last 40 years at 30,000 feet with other people's lives in her hands, Captain Karen Kahn has mastered the art of confidence, determination, communication and professional and personal growth. Today, she is motivating and inspiring PBWC Connections magazine readers on how they too can harness their inner Captain and soar through their careers and lives embodying these traits.

While counseling aspiring and employed pilots, she wrote *Flight Guide for Success: Tips and Tactics for the Aspiring Pilot* to help employed and aspiring pilots synthesize their aspirations and skills into a manageable action plan that would empower them to secure ideal employment or climb the corporate ranks. Today, she has broadened her message to share with businesswomen across America how the skills needed to run the cockpit (one of the nation's toughest and most stressful jobs) are applicable and necessary to succeed in any job.

Captain Kahn tells Connections magazine publisher Joanna Rustin that if you master the ability to handle these eight responsibilities, you can achieve success whether your office is at 30,000 feet or you're trying to get in on the ground floor.

Q: What's the key to managing the cockpit safely and what can businesswomen learn from your experience?

A: Prioritizing is the key to managing the cockpit safely. By doing what's important now and leaving the secondaries until later can save a life; that is why pilots rely on checklists. Although your position may not involve life or death decision-making, checklists may still be the key to saving your sanity and your job.

Your daily responsibilities may not have a clear-cut order. It's up to you to decide their timeliness. Begin by dissecting large projects and long-term decisions into manageable monthly, weekly, and daily tasks and plan around these deadlines. Always keep the big picture and your intended outcome top of mind; it will help you decide which smaller projects to tackle first.

Q: How do you juggle the constant challenges of flying an airliner and the moment-by-moment issues that arise?

A: A pilot's job involves a never-ending process of dealing with mini-crisis after crisis. From descent planning to averting traffic conflicts, pilots spend the majority of their time aloft honing their problem solving skill. To succeed in your role, you should consider this skill an invigorating challenge and fulfilling. If you don't, practice and work on your attitude. This way, when an issue or crisis arises, you'll be prepared to face it head on and, hopefully, resolve it efficiently.

Connections magazine is pleased to welcome our new contributor:



*Captain Karen Kahn
Author, Flight Guide for
Success: Tips and
Tactics for the Aspiring
Pilot*

Karen's One Minute of Wisdom

1. Prioritize
2. Problem solve
3. Delegate
4. Make decisions
5. Master political and people skills
6. Be assertive
7. Manage stress
8. Take initiative

The logo for PBWC Connections features the text "PBWC" in a blue sans-serif font above the word "Connections" in a large, bold, black serif font. A stylized blue figure of a person is integrated into the letter "i" in "Connections", with its arms raised and holding a blue snowflake-like symbol. Below the main text is the tagline "for women who aspire and inspire" in a smaller, grey, lowercase sans-serif font.

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Q: What are the similarities between working with a team in a cockpit and in business?

A: Many pilots who come from single-pilot cockpits, find it hard to include others in their flying routine and stumble when it comes to developing an integrated resource-management crew. It's no different from transitioning from being an individual contributor in a business setting, or climbing the ladder and managing larger teams. To succeed as a leader in either setting, it's imperative you rely on the resources of others. Start your team building efforts early. Communicate clearly about what each team member's objectives are and how they correlate to the overall team and company goal. Hold each member accountable for his/her performance and results and be willing to manage priorities and expectations of both your supervisors and subordinates.

Q: Does fear play a role?

A: One of the worst fears of all new captains - just like new managers or individuals who are just entering the workforce - revolves around making a wrong decision. It's nearly impossible to eliminate completely, in any field, the possibility of making a wrong decision. It's often what leads to breakthroughs. However, improving our decision-making skills will minimize the potential for poor decisions.

Challenge your decision-making skills by practicing the technique of asking "What If?" This tactic allows you to consider the situation, solicit varying input, and test your proposed solution without fear of error. Furthermore, you'll anticipate many outcomes to a decision and plan contingencies accordingly.

Q: What about politics?

A: You can probably fill in the blanks when it comes to political and people skills. You know they are needed to survive in any interpersonal environment, and the cockpit is no exception. Think about how you deal with difficult people and, if you are not comfortable with your solutions, resolve to work on those skills.

Q: What's essential to things working smoothly in the cockpit?

The importance of assertiveness can't be over-emphasized. The first officer's main job is to double as a watchdog and a diplomat. Too many disastrous consequences have resulted from someone unwilling or unable to speak up. Assertiveness goes hand-in-hand with being responsible. If you see something that needs attention, bring it to light immediately. You'll avoid potentially dangerous consequences later.

Q: How do you manage stress?

Cockpit stress, like other job stress, can be easily minimized by employing other skills discussed earlier. Organizing tasks into manageable smaller projects, prioritizing those projects, completing tasks on - or ahead of schedule, and managing your resources will go a long way toward making you look good, well prepared and efficient, while putting your supervisor at ease with your ability to the job. This in turn will significantly improve your outlook and reduce any signs of stress.

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Q: So many of us women focus on the big wins, but you have a great quote: "All jobs, flying included, can be summarized as a well-orchestrated symphony of mini-achievements." What should our readers keep in mind, whether they're leading a group, department, company or household?

The hallmark of a great first officer is initiative. If you want to get noticed and ahead, perfecting this skill is critical. You can accomplish more by planning, knowing your business, doing your homework and building strong relationships. In doing so, you will have the confidence to leverage opportunities when they arise and be proactive rather than reactive.

- Joanna Rustin



***Karen Kahn** has been actively involved in the aviation industry for 40 years. She was one of the nation's first female commercial airline pilots hired and one of few pioneer women pilots still working. She is the author of *Flight Guide for Success: Tips & Tactics for the Aspiring Airline Pilot*, a professional speaker, and an expert witness. She also provides professional advice, personal resource management, and airline interview coaching through her firm *Aviation Career Counseling* (www.aviationcareercounseling.com).*

She holds ratings through Airline Transport Pilot (ATP), including type ratings on the Boeing 757/767 and McDonnell-Douglas MD-80. She was the first woman to be type-rated in a Lockheed JetStar. Her other ratings include: CFII MEI, Flight Engineer, Turbojet, Seaplane, Helicopter, and the coveted Master CFI (MCFI) designation from the National Association of Flight Instructors. Kahn resides in Santa Barbara, Calif.



***Joanna Rustin** is Founder & Publisher of PBWC Connections and President of Rustin Communications, a marketing and public relations firm that helps emerging companies cast a larger-than-life presence in the market.*

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