



Our Blessings, A Friend's Story and Mr. Fick

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I begin this with a disclaimer. I remember my senior year high school English teacher Mr. Fick saying "You know El, you're really not much of a writer." Over the years I've done nothing to prove Mr. Fick wrong, but I'll give this short article a try.

It seems the whole world is collapsing. Wars are raging, the economy is failing and unemployment rates continue to climb. But like the person that wins the Mega-Lotto or the unfortunate accident victim that is front page news, all this may as well be fiction because this type of stuff "never happens to me or to anyone close to me."

Recently my phone buzzed and the caller id told me it was one of my best friend's calling. All-right!!!!, I thought. Were we finalizing our Saturday night plans? Yeah baby, fun tomorrow night! Unfortunately I was way wrong.

My friend has worked for the same company for over 35 years. He started fresh out of high-school working straight mids then straight swings and finally after his 15th year he rotated into a straight day shift schedule. He's paid his dues, done his time and has started making retirement plans.

Unfortunately he wasn't calling about Saturday night. He called to tell me that in January his company will be shutting down. No more job. No more pay. Future plans drastically changed.

As the holiday season approaches and I reflect on what Rosemary Clooney sings in *White Christmas*, I begin counting my blessings and I realize how good we have it.

So the next time I get upset over my shift being changed, or having more work thrown in my lap, I'll think about my friend and realize things could be a lot worse.

As I proof read this, I think Mr. Fick might still be right.

Editor's note: Typically we review submissions and make modifications / revisions for typos, readability etc. This article appears virtually as submitted and we believe the reader will agree that it is not poorly written, the point is clearly communicated and this time Mr. Fick, El's writing is pretty slick.

A Craftsman at Work

Gary Knapp

On Monday, the greatest Chicago Cub pitcher of this generation retired. Notice I didn't say *my* generation, which dates back to Ferguson Jenkins. Greg Maddux, who retired on December 8th, 2008, won 355 games over a career defined by intelligence and guile, not brawn and sweat.

As I devoured the many articles singing the praises of Mr. Maddux, the parallels between his success and the craft of air traffic control became readily apparent.

The abilities that made Greg a future Hall-of-Famer are skills that can be applied to our profession.

During his press conference on December 8th, Mr. Maddux made the following observations, noted by the Chicago Tribune:

On how he got such movement on his pitches despite having smallish hands: "When I was just learning how to pitch when I was 15, 16 years old, I had a pitching coach, Ralph Medar, that taught me that movement was more important than velocity. I believed him. I don't know why I believed him, but I believed him. ... When I started learning how to pitch, I wasn't learning how to throw harder. I was learning how to get more movement on the baseball. I threw hard enough, but we learned movement was more important than velocity, and changing speeds was more important than velocity, and location was more important than velocity, and we learned in that order."

-The sequential learning of skills is paramount in our profession. Phraseology, separation, vectors, speed control. When correctly applied, the craft seems effortless. When misapplied, when we try to impart more "velocity", or do too many things at once, we lose situational awareness.

On consistently leading the league in fewest pitches per inning: "The key to doing that is just having stuff that's a little short that day and gets hit fair. It's very simple ... when hitters swing, they hit it fair."

-It is critical to be both economical and accurate in our clearances. Too much verbiage can overload pilots with information and lead to readback errors.

On how he survived in the steroids era: "I think if anything, you just gave yourself a little more room for error. Instead of trying to win 2-1, you try to win 4-3. You always figured, if I gave up two or less runs in six innings, I had a pretty good chance to win. When the run increase started happening, you just try to give up three or less in six or seven innings and try to go from there."

-A safe margin for error is critical to our craft. "Betting on the come" or not utilizing positive separation may lead to an operational error.

Another story was told concerning a New York Yankee scout visiting Wrigley Field, in anticipation of Maddux's pending free agency in 1992. The scout visited the Cubs' clubhouse. Greg was playing solitaire in the clubhouse, and did not acknowledge the visitor. Months later, the Yankee scout returned to watch Maddux pitch. Again a visit to the clubhouse, again

a game of solitaire by Maddux. This time, Maddux turned to the visitor and said: "Back again, huh?"

-The acute awareness of your surroundings, aural and visual cues are important in air traffic. Unanswered landlines, calls for a D-side and a voice getting louder. These are all cues that a controller may need assistance. Pay attention to your sector and your surroundings.

Lastly, many stories are told of Greg Maddux's copious preparation and daily rituals. He routinely watched batting practice of the opposing team in order to "get an edge". His textbook knowledge of opposing batters and their tendencies is legendary.

-Our profession requires daily preparation and routine. Pre-duty briefings, briefings regarding airspace changes, 7110.65 updates and procedural changes are of utmost importance. Those that are the best at "our" game know the rules inside and out.

I wish to extend my congratulations to Greg Maddux and to three Chicago Center co-workers on their pending retirements-Scott Daniel, Pat Siwak and Linda Tjossem. First ballot Hall-of-Famers in their profession, as well.



Jaimee Frank

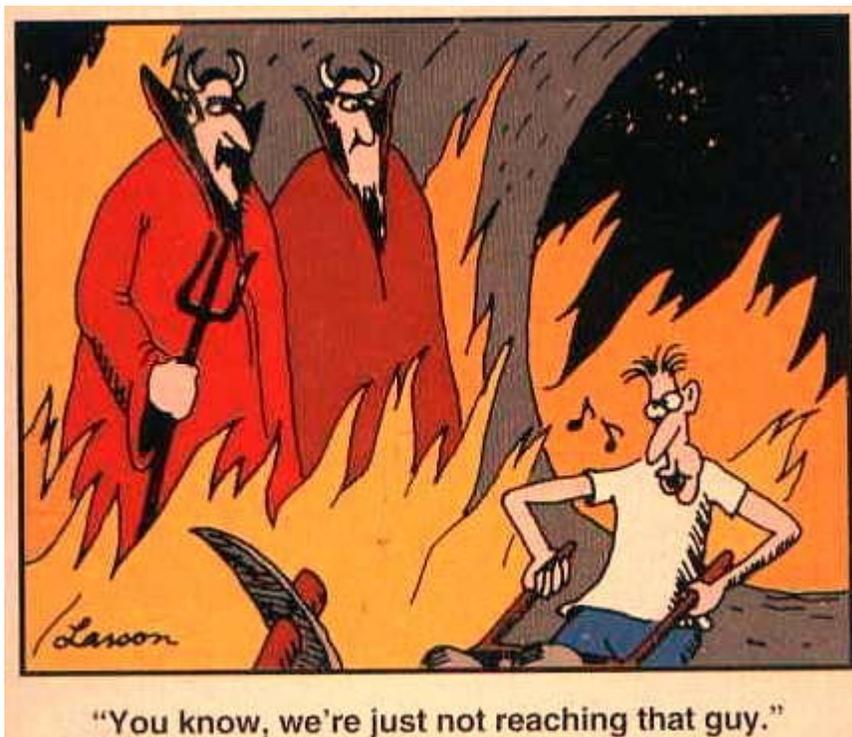
My name is Jaimee Frank. I was hired at ZAU in March, 2005 and have been a CPC since January, 2007. I also used to hold the elite status of being CPC/OJTI/CPC-in-training until I got checked out again in October, 2008. My husband Kevin also works here in the Northwest Area. We live in Yorkville with our two kids Zoe (4) and Max (almost 2).

I decided to become a controller because my husband was already working here and seemed to really like his job (and I really liked his paycheck) and all my four year degree had gotten me was a job waiting tables at Applebee's. I went through the MARC program, waited around for a while, and now here I am.

Here are the things I really like about ATC:

- I don't have to bring my work home with me.
- It's really kinda cool to tell people what you do.
- I like the people I work with, and I really like meeting new people, which there never seems to be a shortage of around here.
- I rarely have to drive in any type of "rush hour" traffic.
- I'll be able to retire before I am too old to enjoy retired life.

Below is my favorite Far Side cartoon.
I try to have this attitude at work.



How to Save a Life

John Etherington

On a recent arrival at work, I began the dutiful task of checking the Briefing Tracker to see what had changed since yesterday. On this day within the Tracker there was a curious item about the conducting of a seat belt safety survey here at Chicago Center. The memorandum stated that this survey was "for statistical data collection only" and would be conducted by an Environmental and Occupational Safety and Health Specialist.

I began to wonder if there was some new seat belt wearing technique that they were looking for as we employees filtered through the gate. Was there some new development in passenger vehicle restraints that I had missed? Maybe I should be looking into those cars and trucks around me to see what's going on. But, instead of peering into the car next to me, I decided to look at the statistical angle.

Being a DOT employee, I know that our department has been promoting seat belt use and I thought that the collection of statistics at the Center might be part of some DOT measuring, "Do our own employees get our message to buckle-up?" So to that end, I started looking for information at DOT.gov. There, after briefly daydreaming of the next DOT Secretary, I found a link to the FAA's co-DOT agency which looks into seat belt use, the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA).

Browse a bit and you'll find the methodology used by NHTSA to collect seat belt use data by "sending trained observers to probabilistically sampled intersections controlled by stop signs or stoplights, where vehicle occupants are observed from the roadside." Maybe Chicago Center was being visited by just such a trained observer.

I kept looking into the statistics and found that in 2007 across the United States 15,147 lives were saved by wearing seat belts. This fortunate group could have had more members if everyone was 100-percent compliant in wearing their passenger restraints. For 2007, an additional 5,024 individuals would have lived if they were using their seat belt at the time of an accident. Specifically for Illinois, an additional 105 people would have survived to possibly see the end of 2007.

With Illinois registering at 90.5-percent compliance, as measured in June 2008, we are among the twelve states achieving 90-percent usage or higher. Illinois' highest compliance is in our local counties of DuPage, Kane, Lake, McHenry, and Will, all at 92.7-percent.

Our northerly neighbor, Wisconsin still lingers at 75.3-percent seat belt use. But progress is possible. Illinois' first seat belt survey conducted in 1985 showed only 15.9-percent of people were wearing seat belts. Illinois was the third state in the nation to adopt a mandatory seat-belt requirement for front seat adults and our compliance climbs every year.

A few other statistics caught my attention. For drivers aged 16-24, 80-percent wear seat belts when by themselves, but only 75-percent do so with other 16-24 year-olds in the vehicle with them. People aged 70 and older increased their seat belt use and 75-percent of pickup truck occupant fatalities during nighttime hours were unrestrained. I do wonder what our Chicago Center survey would tell us.

Passing the Torch

Pat Siwak

When I told my "Crew Chief" at ZKC in 1983 that I just submitted a mutual swap as a D-side to go to ZAU, he told me I was crazy, they were a bunch of animals there; I should just stay where I was. But, I was 23, knew better, and wanted to be home with family. So in January, 1984, I arrived at ZAU's doorstep, eager and ready to start my new journey. I was quiet, shy and believe it or not, soft-spoken.

I have perused many opportunities....some might say, "checked many boxes".

I started in the North Area with some of the finest mentors and folks one could ever hope for. The crew concept worked...we were family...you were trained by your senior person and then you trained the junior person below you on the crew. It was expected, no excuse was accepted. The trainees studied together, ran "problems" together, and looked out for one another when someone was struggling. The belief was you needed to earn respect by doing your job. If you didn't, either you were not there long or you knew it, because the entire crew would let you know.

Since then, I have had the pleasure to work with many of you....either by midnight shifts, crisis management, or just by being me – trying to help, welcomed or not. Some might even say "bossy", "controlling" or even "bully". I like to think of it as honest.

My path has taken me to: the TMU as a Traffic Management Coordinator, to Quality Assurance as a specialist, back to the TMU as a Supervisor Traffic Management Coordinator, to the Northwest Area as an Area Supervisor, to the South Area as an Area Supervisor, back to the TMU/Watch Desk as STMC that covered the Watch Desk, to the North Area as an Operations Supervisor, to the West Area as we created the Eighth Area, to the Matrix as Training Supervisor of the North and West Areas while a Front Line Manager of the South Area and then finally back to the West Area.

The titles may have changed, but many of duties were the same. Sometimes, I even forgot what my title was....and....it wasn't age related as some of you might argue.

One of the jobs I enjoyed the most was the seven years I assisted in the Regional Office as a collateral duty while I was a supervisor. Some of you here today were customers of mine at one time or another... either in Hardship's, IPP's, Third Level Grievance's, Accident's/Incident's, EEO, Settlement's or just general HR issues. These were some of the most rewarding times of my career. It makes you feel good when you can help someone that needs it...or maybe....just wants it.

Since that day many years ago, I have had a wonderful career. As many folks are struggling with this country's economy this holiday season, I realize that I have been very fortunate. I have had job security, a pretty decent pay check every two weeks, choices of hospitalization plans, great vacation time and enough money to enjoy one and the fact I had sick leave for when I really needed it. But the biggest thing, MOST of the time, I enjoyed coming to work because of you. I enjoyed the stories, for those of you working AROUND me when I worked

HAWKS – watching my back and/or poking fun with me working traffic, and the overall friendships.

On January 4, 2009, I will be leaving the United States for life's next adventure. Wayne Smuda, Andy McMullen and I are going to continue our air traffic control careers in the Middle East Bahrain to be exact. We invite you all to keep in touch via email www.pcsiwak@gmail.com and if you're ever in the neighborhood, we will always have room for visitors.

The advice I would like to pass along to the workforce and my peers alike is to follow your dreams. Be responsible for your career. Own it, learn the rules and regulations and how the system works. Sometimes it is best to say "I don't know" and ask for help. But listen when help is offered. Never take no for an answer if you don't understand it. Don't stop learning and never stop sharing knowledge. Keep your network open and honest. Meet people and embrace opportunities. Remember to treat people well and fair....those you meet on the way up will never forget how you treated them....don't be surprised....you may meet them again some day as they climb past you on their way up.

Receiving the Torch Career Day at Lewis University

Michelle Flagor

On Saturday, December 6th I had the opportunity to visit Lewis University for Career Day. Front line manager Mike Costanzi gave a Power Point presentation describing the duties of an air traffic controller and gave details about Chicago Center. I was able to assist Mike and answer questions during and after the presentation.

This was a wonderful experience for me. I observed how to both entertain and educate an audience that had little knowledge of air traffic. Mike is a very gifted speaker and easily held the attention of his audience. I also learned of the changes to the hiring process since I started with the FAA, such as the ability to be hired "off the street" and different locations that offer programs for those interested in joining our team.

Overall, I found this type of outing to be very important to the recruitment of new employees into our facility and others in the area. I personally gained the skills that are needed to handle a large group and made several contacts at the University. I was flattered that I was able to represent the FAA and hope to be able to participate in events of this type in the future.

Welcome to ZAU

Richard Cieplik
Reggie Cribbs
Patrick Geary
Robert Lincoln
Lorena Salazar
Jacqueline Travis

Retirements

Linda Tjossem

CPC

James Cnota
Michael Cseri
Jamie Diez
Kelly Rentschler
Oscar Torres
Arthur Wilkerson

Accurate Cru-X/ART Entries = Correct Pay Check + Time Worked Statistics

Rodney Orentas

Accurate and complete Cru-X/ART entries are important for all of us as individuals because they are the basis of the FAA's timekeeping system which ultimately generates our pay checks. The old computer adage of "garbage in, garbage out" very much holds true in this case no matter what day of the week or shift we might work. If we do not account for our time accurately, we should expect to have a myriad of pay/leave problems that may take a significant amount of our own, as well as our supervisors', staff personnel's, etc., time, effort, and various levels of attendant inconvenience to remedy. The effects of such issues can also snowball and escalate into a series of significant stressing events in our lives. Those of us who have personal experience in this area may have some rather intense recollections of the accompanying frustration, anxiety, and follow-on issues. Hence, conscientious effort and careful attention to detail are key to avoiding these headaches and receiving pay checks that are consistently correct.

However, there is another side to this coin. Just as it is important for us as individuals to ensure that our Cru-X/ART and CruSupport entries are accurate and complete, it is no less important for us to have accurate time worked statistics, i.e., time on position, OJT time as trainers or trainees, currency time, etc. We, as employees, are evaluated individually, as areas, as facilities, etc. on these statistics and all levels of management and Congress reviews and bases decisions that are important to us on this data. Hence, it is vitally important that we ensure that we capture all such data accurately and completely every shift (including mids), every day.



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In this season of giving, as we reflect on how fortunate we are, please consider helping those less fortunate with contributions to the Combined Federal Campaign or charities of your choice.