



## Becoming a Bush Pilot: 5 Tips for Your First Job.

Being a commercial pilot is not as romantic as the movies portray. Some pilots feel like they've become glorified taxi drivers. Others, after flying smaller aircrafts to log hours for jobs on the big airliners and cargo planes, may even become bored with the monotony and give up their dream altogether.

Then there are the passionate pilots who love the adventure of flying in adverse conditions, the pilots who want a challenge and aren't just interested in earning the big bucks. We call them bush pilots.

There's a reason bush pilots all over the world have earned respect from fellow pilots. To be a bush pilot, you do not fly by the numbers. Most of the time, you don't use registered airfields or any airfields at all. It requires seat-of-the-pants flying in challenging and unpredictable conditions. At first, it looks downright dangerous and frightening, but with the right training and experience, it's neither.

But it's also not the right career or lifestyle for everyone.

"You need to be prepared to be away from home for extended periods, expect to live in varying types of accommodation, ranging from hotels and motels, a make-shift room at an outpost to tents and even sleeping in the back of the aircraft," said Dave Stein, Chief Pilot, Air-Hart Aviation. "And don't expect a huge salary to start. As a dock-hand/new pilot, expect to earn about \$2500 to \$3000 a month. However, in many cases, your lodging will be included."

Stein also warns students that many operators shut down for the winter. There are some operators that will run on skis or have a fleet of landplanes they operate as well so you could work all year, but if they operate floatplanes only, you could be laid off for several months.

### Getting Your First Bush Pilot Job

If you are serious about becoming a bush pilot, you probably have already decided to get at least 50 hours on floats. "Unlike other float training ops, we offer PPL and CPL on floats and are seeing more and more students get as many hours as possible," said Stein. "Many operators have 50-hour minimum insurance requirement so you should strive for that. But at the very least, you will need a rating."



Former 50 Hour Bush Course student DJ Whitehead working hard in La Ronge, SK

He added that some of the larger operators will hire with just a rating as they have a large pilot roster of experience pilots to leverage against and are willing to provide company training for the additional hours, however, most will have a minimum requirement of 50 hours.

Your first aviation job is one of the hardest to get but also one of the most exciting. There are a lot of factors that come into play. This issue of *News on the Fly*

is focused on some tips to help you start your bush pilot career.

Bush pilots often work for fishing and hunting resorts as well as for commercial operators flying supplies into the northern communities. Canada has hundreds of thousands of lakes, and hundreds of small time fly-in fishing camps and float-plane air services.

Stein believes one of your best options for getting your first job through someone you know. Ideally, you have networked over years of training and have friends working for other operators and can use your connections.

#### Tip #1: Know Your Audience

Make sure you tailor each resume and cover letter with specifics about their operation. Do your research and know the fleet they operate and the chief pilot/owner by name. "I once got a cover letter from a pilot who wrote that he has always dreamed about 'working as a floatplane pilot

on the West Coast'. I responded: 'You should apply for jobs there then'. He either didn't do his research or used the same cover letter and forgot to tailor. Either way I wasn't impressed," said Stein.

## Tip #2: The Road Trip

Your school may have provided you with a list of operators. This is a good start and you should feel free to apply with cover letter and resume everywhere, but be prepared for a road trip. Operators get inundated with resumes emailed to them and unless you happen to send just at the right time, your resume may go completely ignored.

"It's always best to go in person. Take a road trip to some of your preferred locations and hand in your resume in person," said Stein. "The chief pilot then has an opportunity to meet you and decide if you are going to mesh with their operation."

Keep in mind that during the offseason, there may not be anyone around at the operation. Call or email the locations you are planning to visit first to find out when they typically start back in the office/area. Every operator is different and you don't want to miss an opportunity or get all the way there to discover no one will be there for another month.

## Tip #3: Plan to Work the Dock

"Do not go into an operation with the assumption that you will be flying," explained Stein. "Be humble and say you are looking for a dock job and are willing to take on any jobs to get a chance. If you have some previous experience related to the job that is if it's a fly in fishing operation and you've worked in a fishing camp, make sure to highlight that."

As a dockhand you will be catching incoming floatplanes, fuelling, loading and washing. If you do get to fly at all, you will likely start flying non-revenue flights in the smallest and least expensive aircraft the company owns. One example is to fly bait, ice, beer and other supplies to the fly-out camps.

Stein noted that for some of the smaller operators, there is a good chance you will be flying right away but don't presume. "We have had some of our 50 Hour/CPL grads get flying jobs right away based on their float hours, so it does happen. But even then you are going to be pilot, dock hand, errand person, and maybe even office cleaner."

## Tip # 4: Dress Appropriately

"This may seem like common sense but don't wear a suit and tie to meet with the chief pilot of a float operation. Dress casually with no ripped clothes," says Stein. "I always say dress a step up from what you would if you were working there. If you are male, shave and if you have any visible piercings it's best to remove them."

## So You Got the job, Now What?

### Tip#5: Work Hard & Treat the Plane Like You Own It

"Even when you think no one is watching, work hard," said Stein. "You could be working the dock with other pilots, and with all things being equal, it's the one who works harder who may get the first chance to start flying."

Stein added that there are a lot of variables that come into play such as how many float hours you have.

"You could have 200 hours on floats, but if you are lazy and a complainer, the guy with 50 hours on float with the hard working attitude is going to get a seat before you."

Stein cautioned to never complain to guy working next to you. "There's a good chance you'll become good friends with some of the other dock hands, and you may think you are safe complaining about the boss to them, but it's never a good idea."

We are seeing a lot more bush jobs, spurred by movement at the higher levels. For those students who think the bush pilot life is for them, the road to becoming a bush pilot can be daunting but it's also very rewarding.

*Dave Stein, Owner, Air-Hart*

Stein also reminds his students that maintenance is expensive and if the Chief Pilot sees you do something careless, it's going to upset him.

"I often have to tell students to treat the airplane like it's their own. A lot of our students had training previously at a large school, were perhaps they have never been told to treat the airplane well. But the reality is, if the Chief Pilot sees you do something careless with the plane, he may start screaming at you or he'll just make a mental note that you don't respect the aircraft and won't give you a chance."

## Aviation Industry Picking Up

Stein is encouraged by the movement in aviation industry.

"We are seeing a lot more bush jobs, spurred by movement at the higher levels. For those students who think the bush pilot life is for them, the road to becoming a bush pilot can be daunting but it's also very rewarding. If you are committed and focused, there's no reason you can't live your dream."

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