ASK ALLEN

IT’S MUCH MORE THAN COMPETITION

The competition year is winding down and soon winter months and shorter days will arrive. I hope you’ve taken advantage and attended at least one competition in some form or another this year. If not, next year will offer renewed opportunities.

Local, regional and national competitions give you the chance to share ideas and concerns with fellow pilots. What an opportunity this is to anyone who is competing, helping or just spectating. If you’ve gone you’ve been presented golden opportunities to go home with more knowledge than you came with. Take advantage of them.

Certainly, meeting fellow pilots and partying is fun and memorable, but don’t miss the chance to take home knowledge in areas that increase your skills from pilots who have been there and done that. The sharing of information adds safety to your flying that is not measurable by any standards. So, be a sponge and start absorbing valuable knowledge. You’ll find in almost every case a willingness, by those people you consider sky gods, to share their knowledge and experience with you. It may cost you a cold beer or glass of wine, but go for it. Most of the time they’ll be honored that you ask for their advice or opinions.

As past chairman of the Parachute Industry Associations (PIA) parachute rigging committee every two years we hold an international parachute symposium. People from many countries attended. We typically had over 100 classroom topics that you can attend. I’ve been rigging parachutes for over fifty years and have never returned home from these symposiums without learning something new. I don’t limit myself to attending topics by only the most experienced people in my field. Some of the best tips I’ve picked up were from entry level parachute riggers. They bring fresh ideas and technology that I may never have given much thought about. When all is said and done and I’m heading home I realize I’ve had many light bulb moments. I find myself amazed, and have often said to myself “I can’t believe I never thought of that before”.

The opposite holds true also. Those of us whether a pilot or parachute rigger, in my case, who have acquired a vast amount of experience in our fields have a duty to pass that knowledge onto the next generation of upcoming individuals.

While I am not packing parachutes anymore, I feel a strong obligation to pass along some of my experience to any parachute rigger who is willing to learn. I receive about two or three phone calls or emails a month from riggers that are not afraid to ask for my opinion. These calls are not only to reinforce their beliefs but also to seek advice and learn. If this pertains to you, please do not feel embarrassed and think it is something you should already know. Don’t worry about asking the question more than once, if you don’t understand. The one thing these callers have in common is they are not afraid to ask for my opinion or advice. The importance of Continuing Education is crucial to keeping everyone as safe and up to date as possible.

In the September 2017 issue of Sport Aerobatics a fellow rigger and friend sent a letter to the editor expanding upon my article. His comments and insights, from years of experience, were to the point and added a very timely addition to my article that I had not thought about. Everyone can learn. The day you and I stop learning is the day you and I should hang it up. Thank you, Jerry.

Over the years I have witnessed many people after an accident say, “I knew that person was an accident looking for a place to happen”.

I believe the so-called experts in our respective fields have a duty to watch over each other not only for our own safety but also for the safety of others and our sports. We don’t need more regulations and big brother watching over us any more than they do. Peer pressure can do wonders, if presented properly. Why didn’t you step forward and say something?

At the top of my bailout seminar handout material are six words. “Learn It, Link It, Live It”. This is kind of like the old saying by Smokey the Bear. “Only You Can Prevent Forest Fires”. I’m sure at least a few of us remember that saying. I believe you and I can help prevent an accident through education and the willingness to share our experiences with those willing to listen and learn. I believe it is “Better to be proactive with safety and risk the consequences of possibly overstepping than to experience our own consequences of regret.”

How many of you at your chapter meetings or gatherings have an occasional guest speaker? I urge you to reach out to those people who are willing to share their knowledge with you. Don’t keep going down the same old road. One of my recent articles talks about this. It’s titled the “Normalization of Deviance” and can be found in the May 2017 of this magazine. Many groups have expressed their interest in my bailout seminar. That’s a great idea. We’ll get back to you. Seldom does that happen. I hope you’ll take the opportunity to contact me or someone else to make a presentation to your group. Make safety an everyday part of your mission.

I’ll leave you with a suggestion and a tip. The cold weather will soon be upon us. Many of you will hang up flying for the winter to pursue other activities, while there are those of you who will bundle up and continue to punch holes in the sky. With all the extra clothing on will you be able to quickly respond to an emergency? Will the extra thick gloves hamper you? Will you be able to jettison your canopy/door, undo your seat belt or even pull the ripcord on your expensive cushion? For more information about cold weather flying please take the time to go to my website [www.silverparachutes.com](http://www.silverparachutes.com). Once there go to the menu on the left. Scroll down and click on “Ask Allen Column”. Open my December 2014 column and learn more about the pitfalls of winter flying. Winter flying does present some unique challenges.

Keep warm and Happy Holidays, Allen