



# CHECKLIST for SUCCESS

A Pilot's Guide to the  
Successful Airline Interview



SEVENTH EDITION

CHERYL A. CAGE

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AVIATION SUPPLIES & ACADEMICS  
NEWCASTLE, WASHINGTON

*Checklist for Success: A Pilot's Guide to the Successful Airline Interview*  
Seventh Edition  
Cheryl A. Cage

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*To Young  
For your never-ending encouragement.*

# What People Say!

## **Mr. Don Skiados, Director**

*Air Line Pilots Association Communications Dept.*

As director of communications for the Air Line Pilots Association, the nation's largest trade union for professional airline pilots, I have had the pleasure of doing business with Cage Consulting, Inc. since its founding in 1988. And as a professional communicator myself for more than 30 years, I know the kind of quality products its founder, Cheryl Cage, delivers.

Her name has become synonymous with providing exceptional quality career guidance, from the interview process to keeping an individual's career progression on track. Her popular seminars draw on her vast knowledge and thorough preparation and provide information in a comfortable, friendly atmosphere. *Checklist for Success*, her book on the (pilot) interview process, has become the definitive "how-to" manual for our members, and she pioneered in the industry with the first interactive CD interview preparation guide. Our Association values the relationship we have established with Cage Consulting.

## **Captain Jim West, Allied Pilots Association — National Membership/Furlough Committee**

With over 2,000 American Airlines Pilots and their families' lives being changed with their furlough notice from American Airlines, APA's National Membership/Furlough Committee hosted Cage Seminars for our Furloughed Pilots. All who attended found the information very useful and the one thing I noticed at the completion of the seminars was that the pilots felt more confident about their future. Unlike other Aviation Consulting Firms, Cheryl has developed a seminar that provides the necessary tools to help pilots find employment in other fields while awaiting recall to the cockpit. I strongly recommend anyone who is facing the possibility of a furlough to contact Cage Consulting. The information gained is invaluable.

### **Captain David Smith**

*Chairman, United Airlines Pilot Council 33*

I wanted to send you a big thank you for the exceptional work you and your company accomplished on behalf of the United Airline's furloughed pilots. Your seminar entitled "The Resilient Pilot" was very well received. The feedback from the attendees included noting of the relaxed atmosphere, the interactive approach, and the real-life solutions that were provided to the participants. It is quite obvious that the perceived value of furloughed seminars to this pilot group. Thanks again for your time and effort in making this seminar happen.

### **Patty Taylor**

*Former Manager of Pilot Recruitment, American Airlines*

Because of Cheryl's excellent reputation in the aviation industry, in equal parts because of her books and her consulting services, Cheryl's name is always a draw. And, audiences are never disappointed! Cheryl's advice, enthusiasm, and optimism keeps the audiences' attention. Her easy-going style encourages members of the audience (no matter how shy) to feel comfortable asking questions and voicing concerns. I wholeheartedly recommend Cheryl as a speaker for any aviation, or general audience, career conference.

### **Captain Christopher Beebe**

*Chairman USAirways Master Executive Council (ALPA)*

I hired Ms. Cage to conduct Airline Interview Preparation and Resume Workshops for US Airways. Her workshops were thorough, organized, filled with specific ideas and suggestions, and delivered with optimism and motivation. Ms. Cage has a personality that invites openness and discussion. With her innate ability to assess personal situations, years of aviation involvement and education, Cheryl is well qualified to discuss today's airline interviewing process.

### **Captain Al Neil, American Airlines**

Thank you for your excellent presentation. As a mentor and mentor coordinator, sometimes I get bogged down with the responsibility, but when I hear an organized, well-thought-out approach to problems it sure takes a load off my mind. I am deeply grateful.

**CageMarshall Consulting**  
**[www.cageconsulting.com](http://www.cageconsulting.com)**

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# Foreword

I have had the honor of participating in the hiring program for a major airline for almost twenty years. During that period of time I have found that, for a pilot applicant, the most difficult step of the selection process is the interview phase. You might wonder why an applicant with superb technical skills and excellent experience is turned down due to an inability to interview successfully. In *Checklist for Success* you will learn why airlines consider the interview phase of the selection process to be such an important step in the overall evaluation of applicants. Let me quote a very compelling paragraph found in this book: "...solid technical skills do not always guarantee the best overall candidate. For example, in one National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) investigation, over 60 accidents where crew-coordination played a significant role were studied...Common factors among these accidents included: preoccupation with minor technical problems, inadequate leadership, failure to delegate tasks and assign responsibilities, failure to set priorities, inadequate monitoring, failure to utilize available data, and failure to communicate intent and plans. The National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) estimates that these 'human factors' contribute to 70% to 80% of airplane crashes."

Over the years I've had the opportunity to talk to a number of candidates about the employment process, some after an unsuccessful interview. All of the advice that I could provide is contained in this book in a very well written format. Your careful reading and study of this material, although it cannot guarantee success, will certainly enhance your chances.

Let me provide one other very important quote from the book: “An employee with a positive attitude is invaluable to any employer...A positive attitude lays the groundwork for good communication and positive team interaction.”

Again, this is very sound advice and is exactly what we are looking for in the hiring process.

By considering *Checklist for Success* you have taken an important step toward improving your competitiveness, which will increase your chances of being hired into one of the most rewarding, best professions available.

W. H. Traub  
*Vice President*  
*Flight Standards and Training (Ret.)*  
*United Airlines*

# Introduction

## to the Seventh Edition

It is one of the great joys of my life that I seem to have written a book, and provided services, that have helped people achieve their goals a little quicker and with a bit less stress. The fact that my work continues to be relevant after 31 years is an added bonus. This seventh edition of *Checklist for Success* is updated with different ways to uncover your stories and more tips to help you alleviate simple, but damaging, mistakes.

But I did not do it alone. I had the partnership of Angie Marshall who took over as President of Cage Marshall Consulting in 2004. Angie was Cage Consulting's second employee back in 1994 (I was the first) and we've been together ever since. Angie is, without a doubt, one of the main reasons Cage Marshall Consulting has survived for over 31 years.

During my time away (working in politics and slogging through the death of my husband) I never, not for one millisecond, worried about the business. Angie cared for each and every client with dedication and kindness. The business not only survived, but dramatically thrived under Angie's leadership.

I also want to thank all our clients, past and future. It is a real pleasure to work with such dedicated, smart and motivated individuals.

Safe travels,

Cheryl Cage  
Tucson, Arizona  
2020

# Introductions Through the Years

## First Edition (1994)

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The decision to write this workbook came from a simple, but difficult situation. In 1988, I developed an Airline Pilot Interview Preparation Program. Happily, this program seemed to bring success to more than a few of my clients. Through referrals from this first group of pilot clients my phone started ringing. A client list, which was small and manageable in 1989 became overwhelming in 1990. Since I worked with each and every client I found myself having to say, “My calendar is full and I am unable to take any new clients at this time.” It was either that or work 7 days a week, 18 hours a day. (I tried that for a few months, and I do not recommend it!)

Every time I had to say no I felt terrible. I found myself in this uncomfortable situation more often than I care to remember and finally came to the conclusion that although I couldn’t clone myself, I could clone my program. I decided to put the program in workbook form. My objective was to design a manual which would allow pilots to prepare for airline interviews on their own. I wanted to write a “user friendly” manual that could be referred to by pilots of *any experience level*. This workbook is the result.

## *The Process*

Cage Consulting began as a general job search service. My clients were professionals from all fields. My introduction to working with pilots came when I offered my resume services to a small group of pilots living in the Denver area. These pilots had recently lost their jobs due to the bankruptcy of their airline.

While working with these individuals I sensed a pervasive belief that technical background and experience were all that was needed to secure a new airline job. This was outdated thinking and it disturbed me.

That distress proved legitimate. Even with the wealth of experience these professional pilots had to offer, without exception this group was unsuccessful in their initial attempts at landing new cockpit positions.

*Flight departments  
were no longer  
just searching  
for people with  
technical proficiency  
in flying.*

What these pilots had failed to understand was that the selection process had changed over the years. Flight departments were no longer just searching for people with technical proficiency in flying. Airlines were interested in hiring individuals with highly developed management, communication, and team-player skills *in addition to* technical skills.

To discuss one's abilities in these introspective areas required a different kind of preparation than these pilots had ever experienced.

Having watched these professionals stumble—and not wanting to see it happen to others—I was motivated to develop my Pilot Interview Preparation Program, and ultimately to write *Checklist For Success: A Pilot's Guide to the Successful Airline Interview*.

The initial program in 1988 was based on my work with business professionals, discussions with pilot interviewers at the major airlines, and my own airline background. Since 1989 the program has been continually reviewed, updated, and expanded. I have discussed the interviewing process with flight officer interviewers, chief pilots, and aviation medical experts. I have spent many, many hours debriefing my clients after their interviews.

This workbook will take you from application and resume preparation through to the actual interview. It is my sincere hope that the information included in this workbook will make your journey to the cockpit a bit easier.

## Fifth Edition (2002)

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### *The Impact of World Events on the Pilot Selection Process*

At 0915 on September 11, 2001 I sat snugly in Row 13, Seat C of a United A320 enjoying my first cup of coffee. The flight had just departed Dulles International Airport and I was feeling extremely satisfied with my life. I was returning home after hosting a very successful 50th Wedding Anniversary celebration for my parents, and Cage Consulting was on the road to having our best year ever.

Twenty minutes later the world looked very different. Once I knew my family and friends were safe my thoughts over the course of the next four days (as I “planed, trained and automobiled” my way home) were mostly about my clients and the career challenges they were going to be facing.

Interestingly, I never considered that aspiring professional pilots would change career plans. This thought never occurred to me for one simple reason: the overwhelming majority of individuals who pursue a pilot career do so because it is what they are driven to do. They love the ongoing challenge of flying. Pilots are highly motivated individuals regularly forced to handle difficult situations and pilots have *always* had to struggle in an intensely competitive job market. No, I knew that the majority of people destined to become pilots would simply view this as another (albeit an unusually large and lengthy) career setback.

So, what has the impact of that day in September had on the pilot selection process?

Obviously, the numbers of pilots interviewed and hired were dramatically lower. However, although there was increased public discussion about background checks of individuals in safety-related positions, the already intensely structured and demanding pilot selection process itself did not need, nor did it undergo, a dramatic change. In terms of change to the pilot selection process the introduction of the

Pilot Records Improvement Act mandating a five-year background check had more of an impact on the applicant and the process.

Airlines are still looking for future captains, individuals with strong leadership, conflict-resolution and decision-making abilities. The method of preparation I have advocated since 1988 remains the same today: gain an understanding of the interviewer's responsibilities, embark on a strong course of self-evaluation and become adept at describing your traits using personal stories. If you do your homework your chances for a job offer will significantly improve.

The turmoil experienced by the aviation industry has been well documented; there is no need to rehash what is widely known. You have most likely experienced your share of turmoil along with thousands of other aviation professionals, me included.

So, we've shared the turmoil. However, more importantly, we share the desire *for you to succeed in your chosen field*. It pleases me to know that you have elected to view this turmoil as a temporary setback to your career path. I hope *Checklist* will help to make your path a bit smoother.

Cheryl Cage  
Marana, Arizona  
September 2004



# Points to Consider

In preparing for an interview you will discover a great deal of “simple” advice (for example: provide all applicable documentation when discussing a problem area; keep your resume to one page; wear a suit; never say “I have no answer to that question”). Each piece of “simple” advice is like a piece of a jigsaw puzzle. Taken separately they can be confusing. Put them all together and the picture becomes clear.

Although I have worked hard to present this advice and information in a logical order, there are times when a comment may seem out of place in Chapter 1, only to make perfect sense upon completing Chapter 3.

For this reason I ask that you read the entire workbook before beginning your chapter-by-chapter preparation.

## **When Should I Begin My Preparation?**

Preparing for an interview is not like cramming for an exam; it is a skill that gets better with time. For this reason, if you are even thinking about applying for a new job, begin your preparation.

Remember, your applications are a huge part of your interview. Many times, mistakes are made right at the beginning because information is presented incorrectly on your initial applications. Application reviews should be considered part of your interview preparation.

## **Military and Civilian Applicants**

Although terminology, supervisor titles, and job responsibilities may differ, examples gathered from a military career and a civilian career share a great many similarities. Every pilot, of every training background, should focus on being able to share their approaches in the

areas of interest to a pilot interviewer. (More information available in Chapter 6: Self-Evaluation.)

### **Airline Interviews**

This workbook is written from the perspective of interviewing with a major carrier. However, the same approach should be used for any pilot interview.

### **He or She?**

For no other reason than clarity, masculine pronouns are used throughout this workbook.

# 1 Getting the Interview

## “To Interview” Criteria

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Waiting for a pilot interview can be a frustrating and anxiety-ridden experience. During this waiting period, trips to the mailbox take on a whole new dimension.

*Your application is constantly being judged based on the competition at the time.*

Applicants invited to an interview are selected based on criteria deemed important by the individual airline. This “to interview” criteria basically consists of concrete information such as flight time, type of flight jobs held, ratings, and education. This criteria can change depending on the experience level of the available applicants. It is important to remember that your application is constantly being judged *based on the competition at the time*.

A clear example of this fact: in 1982 Braniff became the first major airline to go into bankruptcy. Until that time the majority of major airline pilot applicants came from the military, commuter airlines, and corporate flight departments. Because of the seniority system, it was virtually unheard of to have an airline pilot leave one carrier to start over with another. Deregulation, the tidal wave of bankruptcies, and the airlines’ newly enlightened view of “seasoned” pilots changed all that.

After 1982, the traditional applicant (who came directly from the military or the commuter/corporate world) became overshadowed by the scores of experienced ex-airline pilots flooding the market. It was not unusual for these ex-airline pilots to have 20 years of airline experience and over 10,000 hours of flying time. Because the airlines had this abundance of highly qualified applicants to choose from, not surprisingly, the traditional pilot-applicants were put on the bottom of the “to interview” list. The high experience level of these displaced airline pilots caused the *criteria* for being invited for an interview to change.

No matter what circumstances the airline industry is facing (massive hiring or massive furloughs), the same basic premise is a constant within the “to interview” selection process. If you are a pilot with a bachelors degree, 1,500 hours of flight time, and in your first year of working for a commuter, but the majority of available pilot applicants possess a bachelors degree, 2,500 hours, and three years of commuter experience you can assume that you will not be selected for an interview *until those applicants have been reviewed*.

## Increasing Your Odds

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For these reasons it is imperative that you continue to update your skills and background. You must never stop working to increase your marketability. Some ideas:

- Keep flying and building your hours
- Earn additional ratings and certifications
- If you are in the military, earn your civilian ratings
- Continue to upgrade at the earliest possible time
- Complete your bachelors degree or higher education degrees

In addition to specific training and education there are other steps you can take that may help put your name closer to the top of an airline’s “to interview” list.

- Find out if there are any “airline specific” steps you can take to increase your chances for an interview (for example: a letter of recommendation from a pilot or other employee).

Make sure you ask the right people if a particular process is acceptable. One of my clients was given the advice from a company pilot to “just take your application to the employment office and wait until someone will talk to you.” Luckily, my client asked around and discovered that this type of action was actually looked upon as overly aggressive and not very polite. Someone within the Personnel Department would have been the logical person to ask if this approach was acceptable.

- If a company pilot offers to hand-carry your application into the employment office, make sure you know how this individual is viewed by the company.



*I had one client who had his application hand-carried to the airline's employment office by a senior captain. Unfortunately, he found out too late that this captain had been involved in numerous altercations with the employment office concerning applicants he felt should be hired. (Although this client was not harmed in this particular instance, it caused him a great deal of concern and many sleepless nights.)*

---

*There is no magic formula for securing an interview.*

- Update your applications on a regular basis. Be sure to follow the airline's update schedule. If they allow an update once every six months, do not send a new application every three months.
- By all means exploit your network! If the brother of your college roommate's wife is the V.P. of Flight Operations for an airline you want to work for—seek an introduction.

There is no magic formula for securing an interview. However, by following these steps you can rest at night knowing you are doing everything possible to get your foot in the door.

# CHECKLIST for SUCCESS

## A Pilot's Guide to the Successful Airline Interview

**CHERYL A. CAGE**

Even with a wealth of technical experience, many pilots find the pilot selection process frustrating. In addition to technical experience today's airline pilot must also demonstrate highly developed leadership, decision-making and communication skills. Discussing one's abilities in these introspective areas requires a different kind of preparation than most pilots have experienced.

This is where *Checklist for Success* comes in. Written by Cheryl Cage, whose name has become synonymous with exceptional career guidance, *Checklist* takes you from application through to the interview. Cheryl not only offers a step-by-step interview preparation program, but illustrates her points clearly by stepping aside often to reflect on her own experiences in counseling aspiring pilots, furloughed pilots, and career changers. The program Cheryl provides in *Checklist* will help lower your stress level and shorten the time it takes to reach your highest career goals.

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### PRAISE FOR CHECKLIST for SUCCESS

All the advice I could provide is contained in this book. Your careful reading and study of this material will certainly enhance your chances.

—W.H. Traub,  
V.P. Flight Standards and  
Training (Ret.), United Airlines

This material could easily make the difference in the outcome of a pilot applicant's interview. Every applicant should read and follow the advice Cheryl Cage has offered.

—John Rensch,  
Past Pilot Interviewer,  
Captain B-777



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