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The happy “criminals”

Interview is one of the best ways to learn more about a person through two simple elements: asking and listening. Interviewing someone may not seem challenging, but a good interview requires preparation and flexibility simultaneously. According to the textbook, FieldingWorking, you not only need to prepare for the interview but also know how to let informant lead the interview. Keeping the two principles in mind, I interviewed Dan Skelskey, the head of the aviation club on February 21.

To start gathering information, I emailed Dan to set up an interview. Due to Dan’s busy schedule, we arranged the meeting at 9P.M at the undergraduate library, located at the midpoint between our homes. When I got there, a few minutes before the appointed time, Dan was already there, reading a newspaper. Reflecting his busyness, Dan looked a little bit tired. Dan, however, tried to be polite and greeted me.

He was wearing blue jeans with a black jacket, just like an ordinary guy and didn’t wear anything fancy that distracted my attention. While asking how he had been since the last meeting, we went downstairs to find a quiet place for interview. I offered him a cup of coffee, but he declined; he told me that he would not be able to sleep if he drank coffee. Since the library was not quiet enough for interview, we sat down on a low table in a hallway that connects library to another building.

I began interviewing with some closed questions and moved on to open questions. I tried not to make the interview boring and asked questions that would make the interview

enjoyable. The question about his motivation to be a pilot brightened up the interview. He said that he had always wanted to be a pilot as a kid, and the flight lesson that he got as a birthday present helped him to decide his career. After he started the lesson, it took a year and half for him to get a flight license. He said that the average time of acquiring the license is about a year but the time was delayed for he played football in high school, which required him many hours of practice. When telling the story, Dan, who had appeared fatigued before, became enthusiastically energetic. As I saw his eyes full of excitement, I realized how much he is devoted to aviation. It was, in a way, surprising because in my perspective, aviation is not a topic that would change my mood in a moment; but to him, it meant everything.

On the subject of avionic system used in aircraft he flights, I gained more information than I expected. Before the interview, I had researched on the avionics used in aircrafts that belong to UIUC, and GPS (global positioning system was only system I could find. He talked about ADF (automate direction finder), the most primitive technology used in aircrafts. I had seen some information about ADF while doing the URL research homework, disregarded the information for I thought it was no longer used.

When I asked him how aviation student's schedule is different from other students in other departments, he started his answer with complaints. He tried to think of an appropriate word that would describe his feeling.

“I think this is the crime that aviation students have to go through. I don't know if the crime is the best word. But this is kind of unfair.”

He explained me that they have to take six hours of flight class and 3 hours of

ground class every week, which add up to 21 actual credit hours. That explained me why he was always so busy and had no time but 9 P.M for an interview. While trying to jot down notes on his transition of mood, the word "ground class" attracted my attention (sometimes he called it ground school). I understood that would probably mean a class where he learns theories and lists of technology terms in aviation, so I did not ask what it means in the middle of his talk. However, it was certain that it is part of the language that aviation students speak. Expecting to him to say more words of “aviators’ language” naturally, I did not ask him for jargons that they use everyday. But, unfortunately, I could not hear any more jargons or even slangs used among aviation students.

Dan was a guy with firm goal of his future. He said that he would try to get any job that will increase his flight hours so that he will later be able to apply for major airline pilots such as United and Delta. (One has to have around 3000 to 4000 flight hours to become a major airline pilot). He told me that the options are various; he can be an instructor at flight school or small airlines’ cargo pilot who flights throughout the country. Looking at his twinkling eyes, I knew his determination would be the source of perseverance and strength that will enable him to surmount all the difficulties he may face.

Through this interview, I realized that an interview can be a tool that digs into one’s culture, thoughts and background. But, on the other hand, the tool can hurt informant’s feeling if it is misused. I tried not to go too far on asking questions whenever I thought the question was asking about his privacy. I realized doing a good interview is not as easy as I thought. Sometimes I asked questions that popped up in my head in the middle of his talk and felt I should have prepared better questions, after the interview.

I felt that I got one step closer to aviation students who had seemed to be in a different world. When I first started this project, I believed that they are not very different from me just because their interested field was not the same as mine. However, as I studied and observed them more, the larger gap I found between them and me. In my perspective, occasional flying would be greatly pleasurable, and I have heard that many people do that. However, flying almost everyday, no matter what your condition is, may be extremely unpleasant. However men, like Dan are the ones who can always enjoy flights. When I saw his eyes full of excitement and joy, I even felt a little bit envious because, I haven't found the specific career field that sparks such enthusiasm. I wish, by the time I finish this project, I will learn not only of aviation-related information but also find the field that I truly want to study as Dan did.

Glossary

Ground class/school

The class where aviation students learn theories and lists of technology terms in aviation.

Flight class

The class that all aviation students have to take each semester. The class does not give credits to students.

ADF(automate direction finder)

The primitive avionic system, that is still used in aircrafts. It is used in the airplane, Piper Archer.

GPS (global positioning system)

The advanced avionic system, that is used in Piper Arrow and Seminole.