

Junior

2016
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Weather: Cloudy



26-31C

Student
Standard



Reach for the sky



Back in 1505, Italian genius Leonardo da Vinci wrote: "Once you have tasted flight, you will forever walk the earth with your eyes turned skyward, for there you have been, and there you will always long to return." Flying remains a fascination and today in Hong Kong, former pilot Nigel Leung is helping many to achieve their dream.

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Text: Grace Cheung Photos: Nigel Leung, Grace Cheung, Sing Tao Daily, Xinhua

The sky's the limit for those with passion

A boy who grew up in a Tsz Wan Shan public housing estate has fulfilled his childhood dream. Now he is encouraging others to be brave and follow in his pioneering footsteps



NIGEL Leung was a pilot for Dragonair for about 10 years. In 2009 he started offering courses on aviation to teenagers. "I am always impressed with the different city views I see whenever I fly," Leung says, "but I want to let more people experience what I tasted as a pilot."

He is using his know-how to help youngsters gain admission to cadet pilot programmes run by international airlines. "I did not have any guidance when I first applied for the programmes, but I hope that under my tutelage teenagers will be on the right track."



From housing estate to the sky

Q: Why were you interested in becoming a pilot?

A: To be honest, I didn't intend to be a pilot. With excellent results in physics and mathematics, I went for aeronautical engineering which sounded quite special. While at university, I gradually developed a real understanding and interest in the aviation industry. Flying was my childhood fantasy. To be more exact, I had a liking for airports. I always thought of them as places where we embark on a journey to chase our dream and where we return home after achieving it.

Q: With such a strong academic background, has it always been plain sailing for you?

A: I did not come from a well-off family. We lived in a public housing estate. When I was 15 years old, I was fortunate to win a scholarship to continue my studies in Singapore (新加坡) and then London (倫敦). But I realised that what I had learned in schools was actually not required in society. There was a different set of rules in society. When I first applied to be a cadet pilot I failed because I did not have the skills that were needed. I realised that my 'tool box' was empty.

Q: So how did you finally become a pilot?

A: I didn't give up and I was willing to change. It is okay to fail but we have to learn from our mistakes. I used my savings to get hands-on flight experience in Australia before reapplying for the programme.

Nigel Leung's profile

- Academic background: Graduated from Imperial College, London with first-class honours in aeronautical engineering
- Aviation qualifications: Pilot with 5,000 airbus flight hours.
- Current status: Founder of Aero Institute and host of aviation show on RTHK.



What you require to succeed

Q: Do teenagers need a strong academic background to become pilots?

A: Learning to 'ASK' does not only mean asking the right question. It also means 'Attitude', 'Skills' and 'Knowledge'. What is most crucial is attitude. The most important thing is to be mature because you are responsible for the 300 passengers on your aircraft.

Q: What should we do if we face setbacks?

A: My dad told me not to dream about being a pilot when I graduated as there were not so many job opportunities in Hong Kong in 2001. It was not easy to get a job. But I kept telling myself that I should believe in myself and I persuaded my dad to let me try. Later when I had plans to start a school, he again objected, saying it was impractical. But he is now very glad of my achievements.

Q: Can you give our young readers some advice?

A: Set and accomplish goals for yourself, not for your parents or others. It is okay to be not so talented or skilful; what you need is passion and determination.



From pilot to teacher

Q: Why did you stop flying and then open an aviation school in Hong Kong?

A: Many people dream of flying but they do not have much information about the industry. Others are not equipped with the suitable skills. That's the reason I started the school in 2009. I hope to put teenagers on the right track so they can fulfill their flying dream.

Q: Is it expensive to learn to fly?

A: Flight learning requires money, but instead of grumbling about not having enough money, like most teenagers nowadays do, we can make use of our resources such as time. We can work part time and earn money. What matters is not money, but the passion to accomplish our goals. However, it is sad that most teenagers do not know their own potential.

Q: How have your students done?

A: In the past seven years, about 70 students have been successful when they applied for airline cadet pilot programmes.



Stay tuned with the air crew

LEUNG can be heard on RTHK talking about the aviation industry. He is joined on the show by people connected with flying such as flight attendants, air traffic controllers and aircraft engineers. The weekly programme 《機入飛機》 is part of the station's Community Involvement Broadcasting Service (CIBS). CIBS is a platform for the community to participate in broadcasting. Successful applicants have to host 13 episodes of the show.

