



## MID-SOUTH COMMUNITY COLLEGE

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### FedEx Pilot Encourages MSCC Aviation Students to Stay Focused

Prospective pilots should consider their career progression as their No. 1 hobby and No. 1 job to succeed at the highest levels, says a former Navy pilot and current captain with FedEx Express.

Brad Smith, senior MD-11 crewmember at FedEx, visited the Mid-South Community College campus recently to speak with students in the MSCC/Upper Limit Aviation Professional Pilot Program.



“Getting a job and moving on with your career should be the complete saturation of your brain,” said Capt. Smith, who has worked at FedEx for 24 years after serving 7 years in the Navy. “The only way to get where you want to go is to have a plan and a clear path and follow it.

“You guys are all still pretty young, so stick with your plan of trying to get through this training because age is your enemy. You need to get started as soon as possible. I’m ready to retire, and I’m looking for somebody in this room to take my place. The first hand up gets it,” he joked.

Smith related the story of a pilot who landed a job with FedEx with a straightforward approach. The young man had the opportunity to attend a barbecue with

several FedEx employees. Someone pointed him in the direction of the chief pilot of the MD-11s, and he approached him.

“He introduced himself and said he wanted to get a job with FedEx,” Smith said. “The chief pilot asked if he had applied online, and he said, ‘Yes sir.’ The pilot then asked him when he updated it last. ‘Last week. I update it every week,’ came the reply.

“‘Where do you live?’ the chief pilot asked. ‘Horn Lake, Miss.,’ the young man replied. The guy was hired in about two weeks because of his aggressive approach to interpersonal communication. He knew how to talk to somebody and had all of his ducks in a row. That’s what you need to be able to do.”

Smith told students to blanket potential employers with resumes and cover letters and make checklists of when and where information was sent. “You need to find out the protocol for applying, get correct names, and address people properly. You need to thank them for their time and follow up routinely.”

The captain also encouraged pilots to keep their feet on the ground, so to speak.

“When you get to the stage where you’re flying really high-performance machines, you think you’re Teflon coated stainless steel,” he explained. “And it’s just not so.

“You have to prepare your body; you have to eat properly. You wouldn’t take an airplane flying without full fuel, and you wouldn’t take it without a pre-flight. Check yourself out and make sure you eat, drink, and are ready to go. It’s one of the things I didn’t do several times and scared myself to death. I’m lucky I didn’t die.”

Smith showed an early interest in anything and everything mechanical.

“They called me ‘wingnut’ as a kid,” he said. “My father was in the Army Air Corps and was an aircraft mechanic in the Pacific. He was very mechanically inclined, and I think I got that through the genes.”

For his seventh grade science project, Smith disassembled a lawn mower, wired the parts to board, and labeled all of them. He owned his first motorcycle at 15 and later bought a 1967 Pontiac Firebird.

“If you have wheels and motors, pretty soon you put them together,” he said. Smith replaced the Firebird’s original engine one night and even installed aircraft landing

lights in the high beams. “So now I’m starting to mix aviation, mechanics, speed and travel. It’s all how I got to where I am.”

After graduating from high school, he enrolled at University of Illinois as a mechanical engineering student. “I flunked out miserably,” he recalled. “It was just not me. I could not study and apply myself.”

He decided to go into aviation and earned his private pilot’s certificate after 33.5 hours in one semester. Smith later earned airframe and powerplant and commercial instruments certifications. A little farther down the road, he completed a bachelor’s degree at Illinois State University with 475 hours of flight time – “not enough hours to get a job doing anything.”

He then signed up for the flying program in the Navy and trained in Pensacola, Fla.

“At that point, everyone’s goal was to be a jet pilot,” he said. “I tried flying the TH-57 (helicopter), the Bell Jet Rangers, and I could not hover that thing to save my butt. It was the hardest thing I can ever imagine doing, so I have a lot of respect for what you guys are doing. My hat is off to you because you have some motor skills that I could never master.”

Smith attained his goal of becoming a jet pilot and made 408 aircraft carrier landings. His service including numerous flying missions as well as a 9-month deployment in the Indian Ocean.

He married five years into his Naval career and left the service two years later.

“I enjoyed my seven years in the Navy, but Mary and I knew we wanted to start a family,” he said. “The Navy was not as conducive to that as commercial aviation.”

So Smith sent out 77 resumes in hopes of finding a commercial job. FedEx hired him a month after his 29th birthday. He has served as a captain for 24 years, both on 727 and MD-11 aircraft, logging 14,500 hours of flight time and more than 2,000 landings. He even flew the 727 that FedEx donated to MSCC for the Aviation Maintenance Technology program.

“I’m very, very thankful that I’ve had the opportunity to do all this stuff,” he said.

For information on MSCC’s aviation programs, visit the campus at 2000 West Broadway in West Memphis, call (870) 733-6722, see the website at [www.midsouthcc.edu](http://www.midsouthcc.edu), or email [admissions@midsouthcc.edu](mailto:admissions@midsouthcc.edu).