

Lesson 10: Fear and Anger

What do fear and anger have to do with fear of flying? A lot!

For most of my readers, it will be quite expected to ask the question, “What does anger have to do with the fear of flying?” A smaller percentage of my readers know *exactly* what anger has to do with the fear of flying because they know that when they become afraid, they become angry. The anger comes after the fear. Sometimes the fear is not even consciously felt, only the anger. Most people around the angry flier would not even suspect that this person is afraid. Rather he or she would be described as anywhere from impatient to outright abusive and belligerent.

At the very least, the angry flier is bothersome to all around him. At greater extremes, the angry flier is frightening to other passengers and crew members and when out of control, the angry flier is a danger to the flight. Until now, this book has been about helping the frightened flier achieve higher levels of comfort. This lesson is aimed at safety as well.

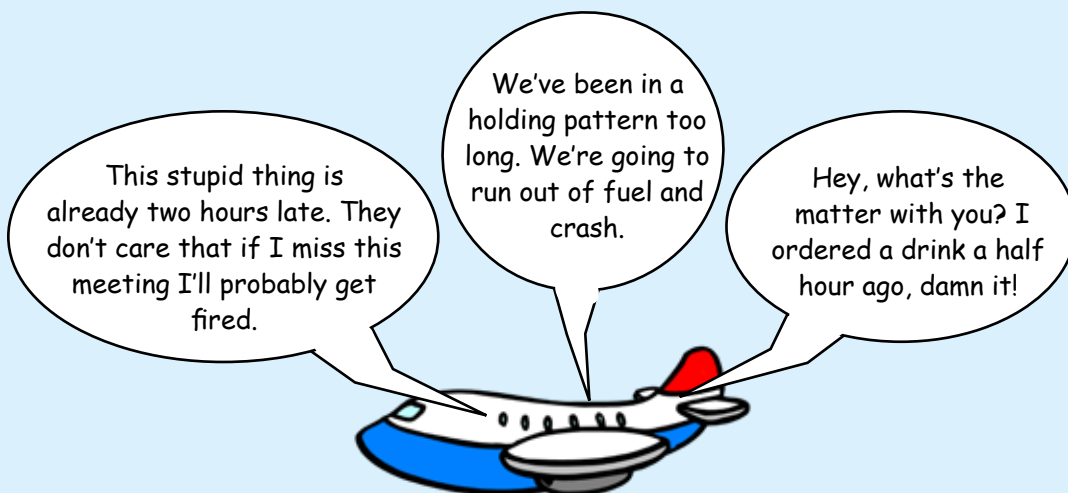
Separating Behavior and Emotion

Before proceeding with the connections between fear and anger, it is very important that I emphasize here the distinction between behaving in an angry manner and feeling angry. If you recall from lesson 1, I made a sharp distinction between your behavior and emotion. I pointed out that our self control lies in our ability to control our behavior, not our emotions. It is impossible to directly control our emotions in the same direct manner that we control our behavior.

While there are many circumstances where it is appropriate to act as we feel (e.g. act afraid when we feel afraid and act angry when we feel angry), there are also many circumstances in life where it is not appropriate to act as we feel. For instance, we might feel afraid of some impending examination or professional presentation, but we all agree it is not appropriate to act afraid of it. In a similar manner we might

Medication Vs. Relaxation

Illustration 10-1



feel quite angry if we are frustrated in some manner (standing in line, for instance) but it is nearly never appropriate to act angry in such a situation. It is always important, regardless of our circumstances, that we choose the most effective action for any situation, regardless of how angry we may feel. That statement is important enough to repeat and emphasize:

It is always important, regardless of our circumstances, that we choose the most effective action for any situation, regardless of how angry we may feel.

Such a goal obviously represents an ideal that most of us will never fully achieve. We all *lose our cool* or lose our temper at times. Ironically, it is more socially appropriate to lose our temper than it is for us to behave in a frightened or fearful manner (being called a *coward* is far worse than being called a *hothead*). Behaving effectively is nevertheless an achievable goal, as well as a goal against which we can judge ourselves and others.

Deciding upon the most effective action is more difficult in some circumstances than others. One thing is certain, however: Acting on emotion alone, with no consideration of the circumstances or consequences, is never effective.

How Does Fear Produce Anger?

Fear turns into anger when there is no place left to run. As with any general statement, there are exceptions to the rule. It is, however, safe to say that any individual who experiences rage from the feeling of fear has experienced multiple and frightening attacks of both a physical and verbal nature during the formative years of his or her life. Simply put, the abused becomes the abuser. What is the reason? Self protection!

The abused has *learned* that anger is the best protection against an attacker. This learning generally occurred quite early in life and progressed to adult life with few or no experiences to help lessen the intensity of the early learning.

Does this mean that all abused individuals become angry in the face of fear? Certainly not. It also does not mean that all angry and abusive individuals have fear for the trigger. There are many sources of angry emotion and angry behavior. I will limit myself here, however, to the situation in which fear *is* the trigger for angry emotion and angry behavior.

Coping with Anger

For a time, early in the individual's development, angry emotions and angry behavior were an effec-

tive means of dealing with frightening attacks. I have interviewed countless hundreds of individuals who have told me that the only way they could cope with parental abuse was to become and stay angry. How many of my readers either know someone who has said or themselves have said, "go ahead, hit me, you can't make me cry!!", as a response to an abuser? Emotional anger is the protective shield for this situation.

As abused and neglected children grow and develop they carry with them the memories of the situations that made them both afraid and angry. Since one of the functions of the growth process is to learn to predict when abuse is coming, children tend to *read* or perceive their environment as far more threatening than it really is. What non-abused adults would perceive as simply frustrating or challenging, abused adults will perceive as potentially abusive and threatening. With the full impact of memories which still produce fear and well as protective angry reactions, abused adults react with anger to what is, in fact, *not* a potentially abusive situation. Read on, the worst is yet to come!

Perception of an Outburst

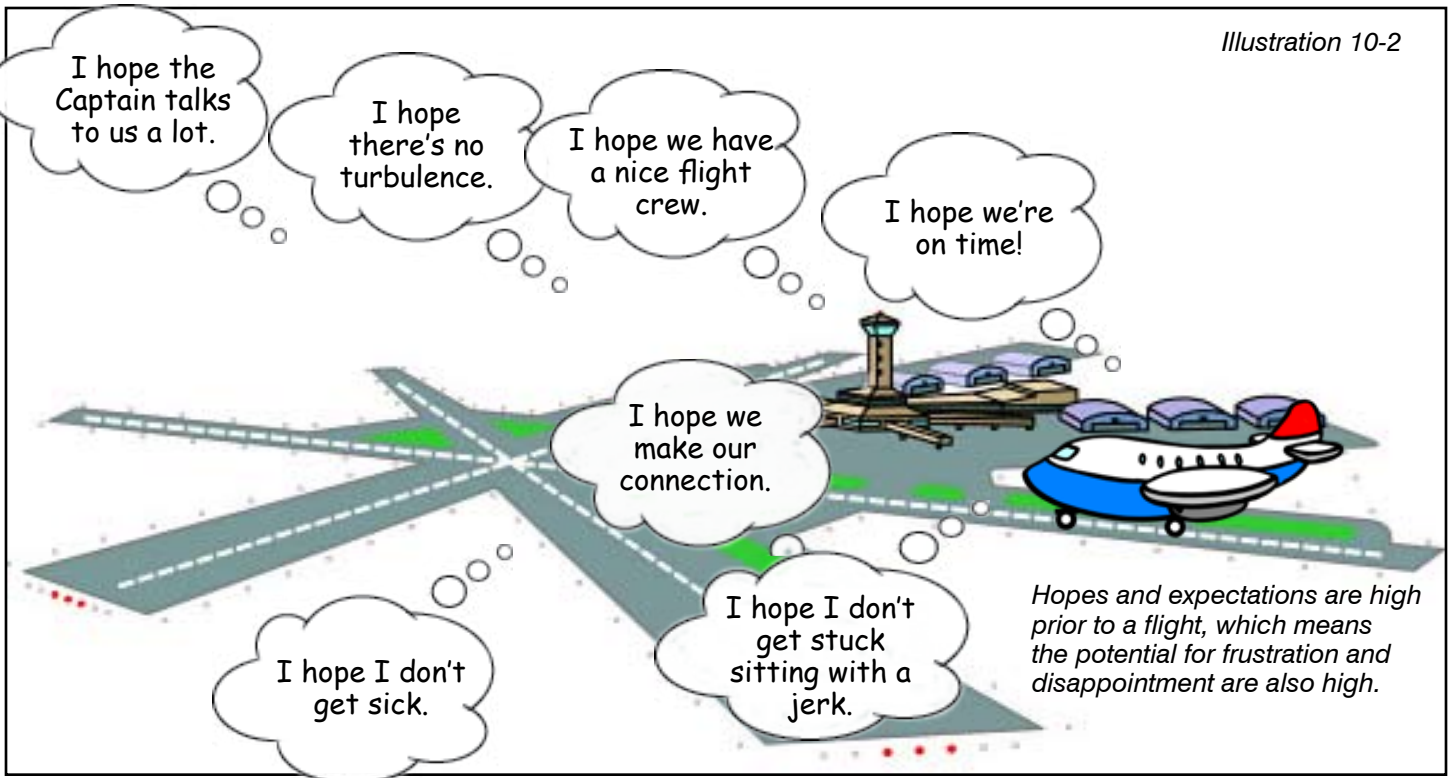
For the most part, our formerly-abused adult does not perceive his/her outburst as the wrong thing to do. Rather, he sees his actions as having prevented yet another situation of potential abuse toward himself. He insures his safety, in his opinion, by walling himself off behind a protective shield of anger.

This approach to life produces a very vicious circle and a very tragic cycle of behavior in the life of the abused person. The continued belief that "I would have been abused if I not reacted with abusive anger first" constantly prevents new learning. So long as this cycle exists, change will not occur, and the opportunity to neutralize the faulty lessons of the past will be lost.

How Does This Relate to Fear of Flying?

Applying this picture to aviation is really not too complicated. As you well know, traveling by air can be full of frustration. To begin with, any circumstance in life that calls for air travel is an important one. Business travel generally has large numbers of dollars and professional reputations at stake, family vacations are expensive and filled with hope for fun and good memories, even short getaways are filled with hope for stress relief from hectic and stress – filled daily schedules.

All but the most experienced, veteran fliers hope for the outcomes expressed in illustration 10-2. With



hopes so high, the opportunity for frustration and disappointment are equally high.

Let's use illustration 10-3 to compare the reactions of the non-fearful flier, the fearful flier and the fearful/angry flier under circumstances of frustration/and or disappointment.

We can all agree here that the flight situation portrayed is common one in aviation. Among a group of passengers, however, there will be dramatically different reactions. Since all would agree on the nature of the delay (a mechanical problem) the differences occur in the meaning attached to the delay by each passenger.

The non-fearful flier reacts to the frustration of the delay in the most neutral manner. The worst he sees is the necessity to fill the time (perhaps as a way of coping with impending boredom). The fearful flier views the mechanical problem as the beginning of a chain of events that will lead to disaster. She reacts with fear (and perhaps helplessness).

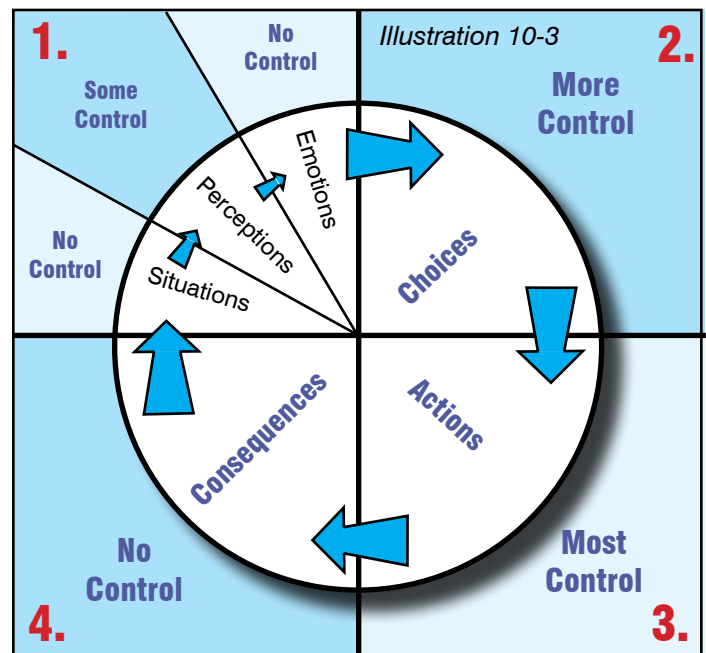
The fearful and angry flier reacts to the delay first with fear, but then follows quickly with anger over what he sees as the neglect of the mechanics in charge of the aircraft's maintenance. It will be the central lesson of this lesson that the manner in which both the fearful flier and the angry flier deal with their emotional reactions will decide whether the emotions continue, perhaps to the point of expression, or lessen in intensity. Since this lesson is about the fearful/angry flier we will apply the lesson to him first.

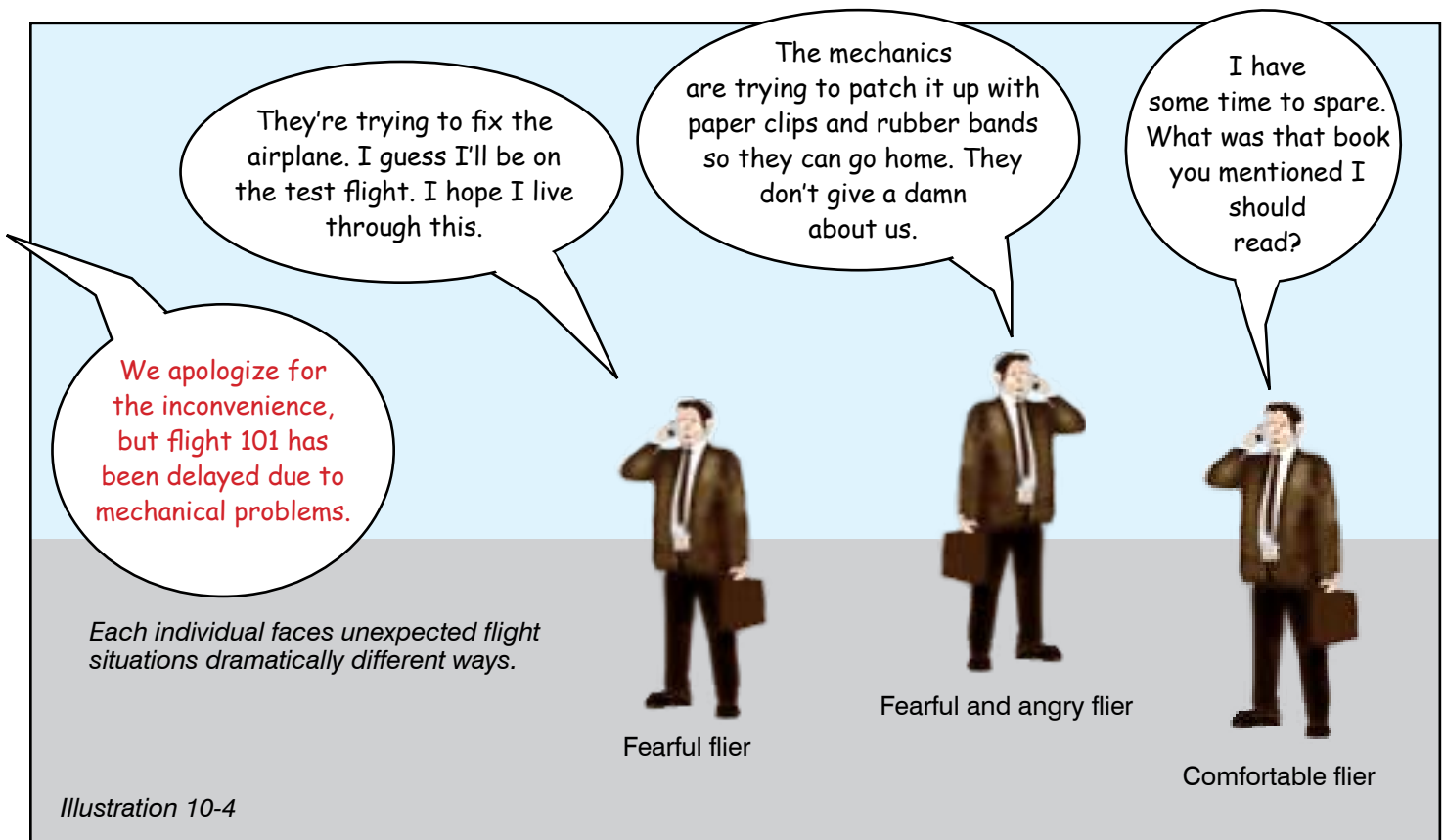
Functional Memory

Just about every expert in the psychology of human behavior portrays life as moving forward in circular fashion. I will present here my own little twist on this portrayal, after which we will apply it to the fearful/angry flier.

Borrowing from chemistry for a moment, we can view a behavior or an emotion as only one piece in the make-up or structure of an "event." We can repre-

How Memory Happens





sent an event in circular fashion with four distinct, but related parts. We can then trace the development of that event by defining each of the related parts. If we change any part of the event, we change the nature of the event itself.

Choices and Actions

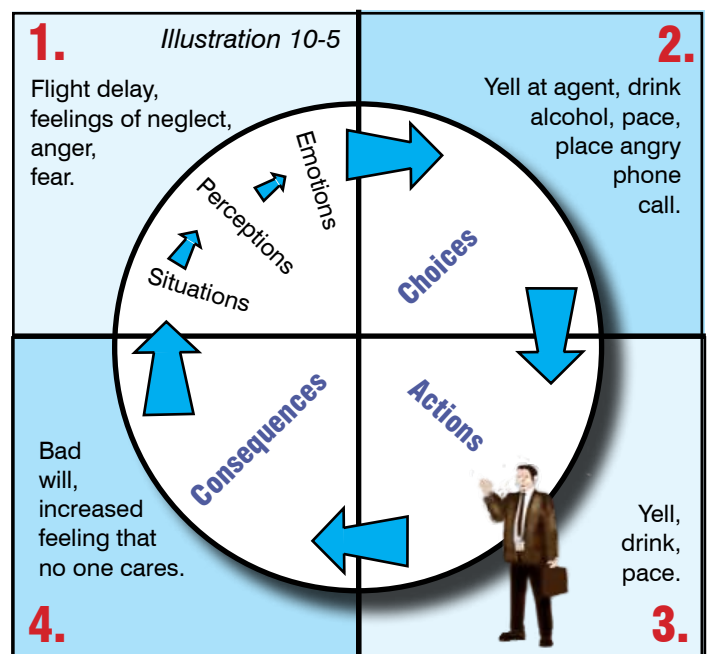
Let's begin by reviewing illustration 10-3. A distinct life event begins with a set of situations to which an individual reacts emotionally. The type of emotional reaction he or she will have depends upon how a particular circumstance is perceived. Based upon these circumstances and emotions, an individual then has a number of *choices* to consider as he or she moves toward the *action* portion of the event. While the *choices* portion of the event is based upon the perceptions and emotions, it is limited by the abilities of the individual to take action. Thus while an individual with a gun may shoot a charging animal, the same individual without a gun would run from it. Thus, choices are limited by available actions.

As applied to the fearful/angry flier, we would want to first understand the choices this individual considers with regard to possible actions, and potential consequences. As you can see, things could get pretty complicated at this point. In the interests of simplicity we will study two extreme cases first. Case #1 illustrates the angry/fearful flier who ultimately reacts

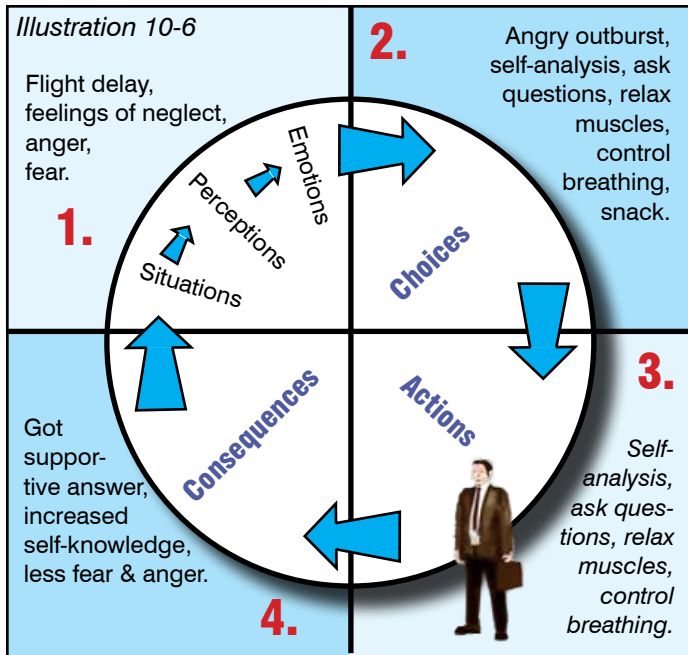
with an angry outburst. Case #2 illustrates the angry/fearful flier who reacts with self-understanding to the feeling of anger created by the flight delay, and follows the self-understanding with relaxed and friendly behavior instead of belligerent, angry behavior. Of special note in both of these instances is the *consequences* section of the event wheel.

The consequences of an action are twofold. First,

Case #1: The Dynamics of an Angry Outburst



Case #2: Changing Functional Memory: Reducing Anger & Fear



The above illustration details the sequence of events that would result in less, rather than more, anger in the fearful/angry flier. Under this set of circumstances, fear levels would also be reduced. In this illustration, the fearful/angry flier rejects an angry outburst as a possible action, and utilizes his control at this point to choose other options for the action-element of the life event. Choosing the above actions results in a set of consequences which in turn change the circumstance/emotion element at the start of a new event.

they can either create reassurance or displeasure. Second, they determine whether a sequence of events can either get better, or worse.

Consequences of an Outburst

Before studying a behavioral event that will reduce the likelihood of an angry outburst, let's look at the consequences of the angry outburst in order to understand how these consequences in fact increase the likelihood of more (and perhaps more intense) outbursts.

If you recall, the fearful/angry flier reacts to the flight delay with both fear and anger. He is afraid the mechanical problem signals doom for the aircraft. He is angry because the mechanics just don't give a damn. After his angry outburst, the feeling that no one cares is intensified according to the illustration 10-5. It is important to note that it is *unimportant* whether or not the gate agent and other passengers are irritated by this man's outburst. Any normal human will undoubtedly react in some manner to a passenger's outburst. It is

the manner in which the fearful/angry flier interprets the reaction from those around him and the meaning he gives to it that is important.

Since the feeling of anger grew from the perception of not caring, the consequence of perceived *not caring* will intensify the angry emotion – and begin a new life event cycle with an increased risk of an abusive/belligerent outburst.

How Can We Change the Cycle?

If you will review the life event wheel for a moment, you will notice that I detailed how much control was available at any part of the cycle. I placed the greatest amount of control at the point of behavior; the next greatest amount of control at choices, then perceptions. I indicated that we had no control over consequences or emotions. Some of you might argue that we do have control over consequences. I would agree somewhat with such an argument when the life event wheel is applied outside of the flight environment. We do try to control consequences in many areas of our lives. But if you think about it, once we have behaved, it is far more difficult to control consequences than if we had considered consequences in advance of behavior. We'll save these subjects for a later discussion.

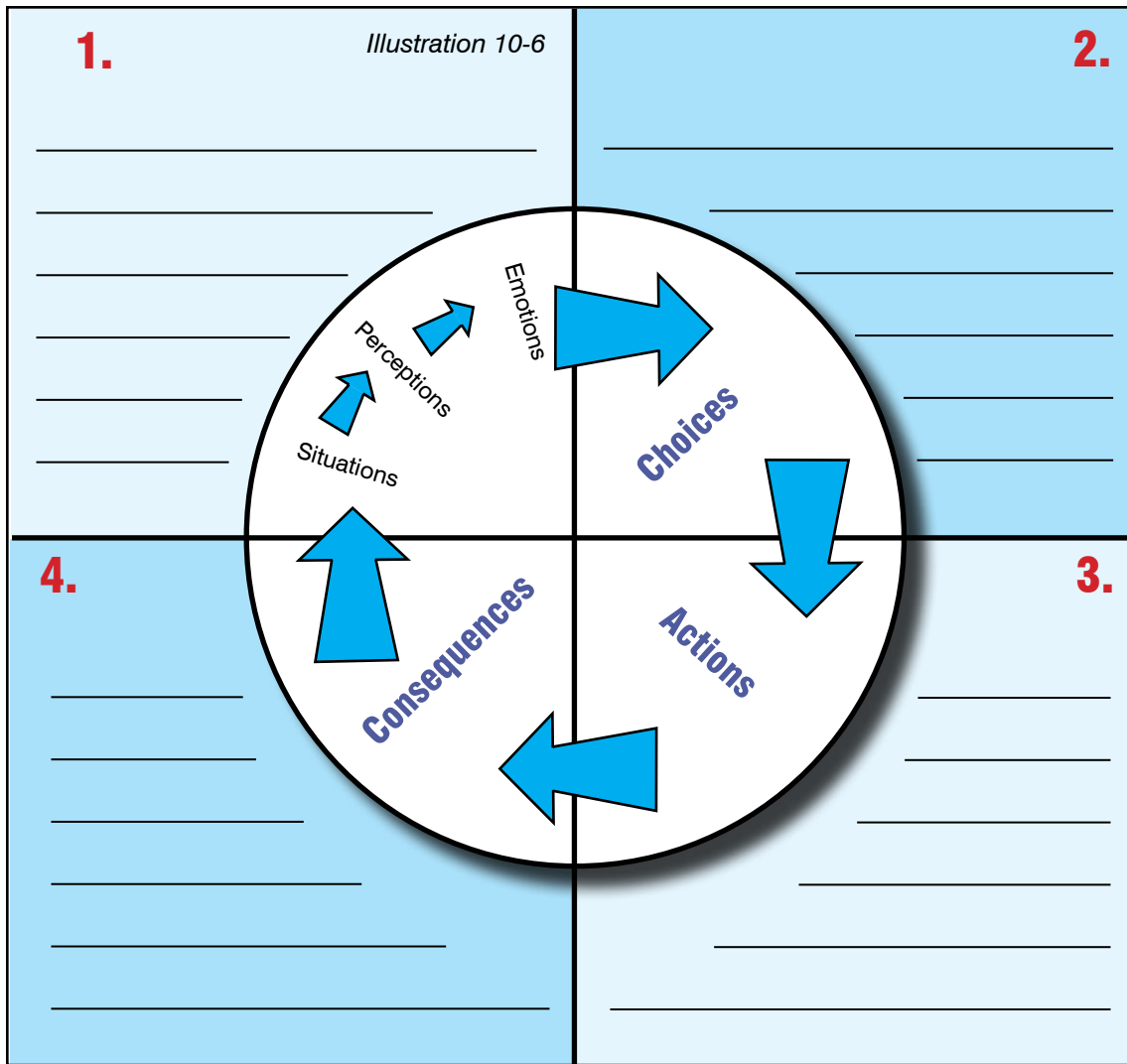
Expanding Our Choices

The key to change, especially in the flight environment, is for us to exert our efforts in the choice and action areas of the wheel. We will expand our choices through acts of self-understanding, as well as looking deeper into our perception of the situation. The more we understand about ourselves and the situation around us, the greater are our available choices.

Of course, direct control of our behavior with muscle relaxation and breathing control is essential for everything we do in the aviation environment. Self-understanding and a deeper understanding of our situation (the *perception* part of the wheel) will have a significant influence on both the circumstance, as well as the emotional reactions to the circumstance in the long run. With these facts in mind, let's discuss the fearful/angry flier who has engaged in some of the above activities.

The life event under study here began for both fliers when the gate agent announced that there would be a flight delay due to mechanical problems. Anger and fear were the emotional reactions in each person. The second flier, however, considered a wider range of choices for his behavior in advance of any action.

By reacting to his fear and anger with self un-



A Practice Memory Wheel

Make copies of this page if you wish, so you can experiment with multiple situations.

In area 1, write the situations, perceptions, and emotions relating to an event.

In area 2, write the choices you may have had as the event unfolded.

In area 3, write the actions you took (or feel you should have taken).

In area 4, write the probable consequences of your actions.

Understanding and curiosity (such as asking the gate agent a question) he was able to act in a manner that produced pleasant consequences. The pleasant consequences in turn reduced his fear and anger by allowing him to see some concern on the part of the gate agent as well as to understand the nature of the delay in greater depth. By beginning a new life event (circumstance) with less fear, this fearful/angry flier is well on his way to managing the flight delay in as comfortable a manner as possible under the circumstances.

Imagine the thousands of life events which occur during the course of a day. As an exercise, I encourage you to list on paper five distinct life events that have occurred in the last week. See if you can understand where in the sequence of life elements (e.g. circumstances, perceptions, emotions, choices, behavior, consequences) you tried to exert your self control. If you find that you spent the greater amount of time trying to control your emotions or your consequences, you must exert your efforts on different areas of life's elements. You should certainly not give

up attempts to control your behavior.

You should, however, place more energy in the area of choices and circumstances than you have in the past. In aviation, you have very limited control over your circumstances. If you choose to fly, control over your circumstances will be limited to schedules, weather, airports, airlines etc. If you find some circumstances more fearful (and anger producing) than others, try and choose the circumstances that offer the least upsetting elements. Practice making choices and direct control over your actions in the less challenging environments first. With positive consequences completing numerous events you will become more capable of the more challenging flight situations.

I encourage you to use the blank Life Event Wheel (Illustration 10-6) as an aid in achieving a picture of where you might make changes that will be helpful in controlling your anger and your behavior. Remember, invest your energy heavily in the choice and action elements of the wheel. Mother Nature will take care of the rest!

Lesson Summary

- It is very important to understand that *feeling* angry and *behaving* in a belligerent and angry manner are two distinct elements of human behavior. It is quite possible in a life event to feel angry without behaving in a belligerent and angry manner.
- It is always important, regardless of our circumstances, that we choose the most effective action for any situation, regardless of how angry we may feel.
- Fear turns into anger when there is no place left to run. The fearful/angry flier has had many life events in which he or she felt there was no place left to run. Because of this, when an unexpected event occurs in the flight environment that causes the emotion of fear, it quickly turns into the self protective emotion of anger.
- The fearful/angry flier must increase his/her choices in order to act without belligerence and abuse in a frightening situation.
- By acting in a manner that creates positive consequences, the fearful/angry flier will become both less afraid and less angry.
- It is important to exert efforts at change in the choice and action part of the Life Event Wheel. Self understanding will change the way a situation is perceived, which in turn will eventually change the way we feel about a situation or circumstance.
- Control of muscle tension levels and breathing will change the way we feel by creating different consequences.
- Practice and repetition are important in order to build many Life Events with positive consequences.