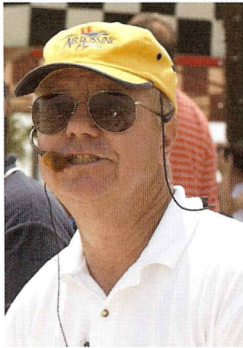




A Bad Day in the Valley



It was my first show of the season—Thunder in the Valley, Columbus, Georgia. March had come in like a lion, and it was still roaring. The day had dawned cold and windy. A cold front had moved through during the night and cleared the skies, but the wet clouds were replaced with an arctic blast.

The wind, a steady 25 knots with major gusts, cut through spectators and performers alike. The jumpers were grounded, the scheduled airlines were all late, the wingwalker was flash-frozen on the wing and had to abbreviate her act, the Air Force jet demo craft broke and the pilot had to switch planes at the last minute. In other words, short of an accident, everything that could go wrong did.

The wind had blown my enthusiasm to the next county. I was wearing all the clothes I had brought with me. Everyone on the flight line was miserable, but we soldiered on. The show must go on!

Sunday was much better and we had a good show. But when I read the comments about this show on the *World Airshow News* forum (www.airshowmag.com), I was met with some stinging criticism of the event, and my own performance. Ouch!

After my initial defensive reaction cooled, I realized that no matter the circumstances, the criticism was justified. This customer had paid

This customer had paid his money and expected a good show. He was not offered a discount to compensate for the weather or mechanical problems.

his money and expected a good show. He was not offered a discount to compensate him for the effects of the weather. He was not offered a refund for the abbreviated acts and the delays caused by operational and mechanical problems. I personally had failed to meet the customer's expectation of the standards we had established for this event.

If you've read my column in the past, you know I have often written about our industry's need to improve the quality of our presentations. Yet at this show, I failed my own expectations, and did not meet my own standards.

I wrote a personal note to my critic, apologized and expressed my appreciation for his honest comments.

Yes, appreciation. In the short term, the sharp sting of criticism hurts my little ego; in the long term it makes me a better performer, for it is the constructive critic that humbles me and reminds me I can always do better.