



Stanford eCorner

From On-Air to In the Air

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Three-time Winter Olympian Bonny Simi recounts how she parlayed her athletic accomplishments into the next chapter of her career, as a local TV sports reporter. She describes how her curiosity about flying soon turned into a passion, and how working in TV news and as a pilot instructor simultaneously shows that pursuing goals in parallel can hedge risks.



Transcript

- So as I mentioned, one of my goals. So I ended up competing in the Olympics in 1984 in Sarajevo, Calgary and Albertville. And one day I was just about to graduate finally from Stanford and the local TV station, ABC News, KGO up in San Francisco came to interview and said, "So what are you gonna do "when you graduate?" I was majoring in communication with a focus on broadcast journalism, why? Because I had written when I was 14 years old that I wanted to work for ABC TV. Also because I couldn't take Physics 51 'cause I was always gone winter quarter. And I couldn't get away from it. I think it's still called Physics 51. Engineering and I wanted to be a Civil Engineer but I couldn't do that one. So I majored in Communication because it didn't require Physics 51. But as I'm standing there in front of the camera and the guy says, "What are you gonna do "when you graduate?" and I said, "I wanna work for ABC TV, "will you hire me? And he said, "Sure." (laughing) No kidding, he was a Stanford Grad. And he said, "Why don't you cover some stories?" 'Cause I was just, this was in '87.

I was just headed to the 1980 Olympics. And they allowed athletes to do stories. So I was gonna file some stories from Calgary, so I just sort of reached out and did it. Now, I could've completely failed. But fortunately, he liked the stories and they, KGO liked the stories. So as soon as I graduated, they hired me full time. So I worked in San Francisco for ABC TV. And I enjoyed it, I was in the Evening News doing everything, I did Sports, everything but football, baseball, basketball. And so covered recreational sports and Olympic Sports and all that kind of stuff and while I was there, I started thinking about flying. Why, why? Because I wrote it down when I was 14 years old.

And I, so I went down to the Palazzo Airport. I didn't know anything about aviation whatsoever. I just knew that I wanted to try it out. I was not thinking about being an airline pilot. I was in my career, my career was in television. So I simply went because I wanted to learn how to fly. Now I suppose if I thought about it and said, well, I wanna be an airline pilot. Oh, I can't be an airline pilot 'cause there aren't very many female airline pilots and that'll be really hard. I probably would've done it more because I just like to knock down barriers. But I literally just went to learn how to fly.

And it's one of those things like I tell people now, if you leave today and you write down that you want to learn to fly as one of your goals. I just tell you, go to the airport, take three lessons. After three lessons you'll know if you want to continue it. Three lessons, the first lesson is pretty scary. All these dials and gauges but over time. So I took my three lessons and I learned that's a Cessna 152, Palo Alto. I remember getting in the cockpit the picture on the left, thinking it is so confusing. So many dials and gauges. But I became so passionate about it. I actually began thinking about becoming an airline pilot while I was at the TV station.

Now this is one of those other career moves and career things to think about. You can do some things in parallel. Because if you do some things in parallel it does de-risk it a little bit. So I was working at the TV station while I was building my hours. It

takes a long time to build the hours to become an airline pilot and you don't make much money. So a great way was to do it in parallel. So I was doing corporate flying flying here in the Bay area while I was working at the TV station. A couple years went by and I got a phone call, it was a Saturday and I was teaching some students that Saturday. The news director, the same guy who had hired me, called and said, "I need you to come in "to do a story." It was going to be a slow news day. And I was going to have to cancel all of my students.

So I thought about it, and I said, look, I was going to make like a hundred bucks for teaching that day or 500 bucks to do the story on the evening news. And I said no. The reason I said no was because of the passion. I realized at that moment that my passion was around aviation. And I firmly believe that you need to follow your heart. So that is when I continued and decided I would strive to be an airline pilot. I applied to United at the time and eventually was hired.