James B Taylor

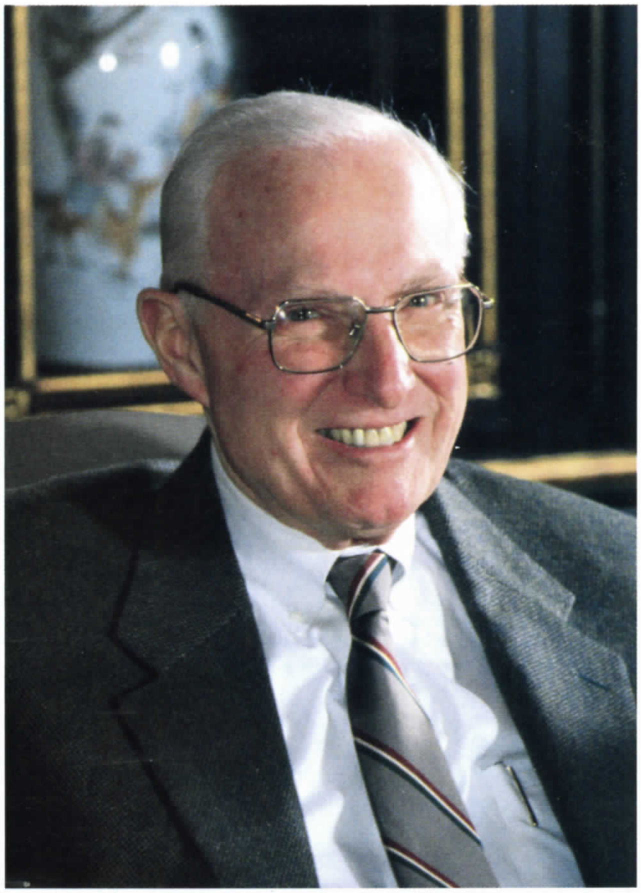
Bizjet marketeer is Star Performer for February 1991

Professional Pilot's Star Performer for February is Jim Taylor, a man who has been responsible for marketing some of the most successful corporate jets in history. James B Taylor grew up in aviation, following in his father's footsteps as a naval aviator. A test pilot, flight instructor and carrier-based fighter pilot in World War 2, he started his marketing career in 1946, selling airplanes for business travel. His career includes senior management and marketing positions at Pan Am, Cessna, Canadair and Gates Learjet.

Throughout his career Taylor has set industry standards by focusing attention on customer requirements. This philosophy, along with the introduction of direct marketing – sales and service – to the business aviation community made Pan Am/Dassault Falcon, Cessna Citation and the Canadair Challenger all world leaders. The Challenger obtained 110 firm orders before the prototype first flew.

Taylor's latest assignment was president and CEO of Gates Learjet. In 21 months he initiated drastic cost reductions, eliminated all debt, retired money-losing projects, converted a US Air Force leasing program (80 C21As) into a sale, developed two new Learjets, and turned the company toward profitability.

After retiring from Learjet in 1988, he established James B Taylor Associates, management and marketing advisors to both the business and commercial aviation industries in the US and abroad. He also serves as vice chairman and advisor to Flight Services Group and AirTrade International. *Professional Pilot* is honored to have Jim Taylor as a Star Performer.



Jim Taylor

Future of business aviation depends on effective communication of its extensive utility

WHENEVER the economy shows the slightest sign of weakening, news pundits and government officials who should know better rush to judgment on editorial pages and television screens. They blame it on everything from the federal deficit to consumer confidence and even the White House staff. In recent months, however, the threat of an all-out war has dominated their gloomy outlook. And these are the same vociferous doomsayers who advocate less defense and more welfare.

Unfortunately, contemporary print and broadcast media have little in common with objectivity. Biased reporting is generally based on personal prejudices or self-serving political agendas. This sad fact of life is even truer today than in 1803 when Thomas Jefferson, once a champion of the media, warned that "the abuses of the freedom of the press have been carried to a length never before known or born by any civilized nation."

What does this have to do with business aviation? Plenty. Public perception of our industry has long been a problem. One of the chief reasons is that too many misguided journalists are bent on bashing most of us who fly. Consequently, the job of creating a greater public awareness of the airplane's economic worth as a business tool is extremely difficult at best.

A good example of business aviation's validity is Air Force One. Granted, it's operated by the military and funded by the public, but it is also the only vehicle around that can give our president the capability of personally conducting the "business of America" anywhere, anytime – comfortably, conveniently and securely. That kind of flexibility is what business aviation is all about.

True, business aviation has its share of abusers. But if we had told our story properly in the first place, it is doubtful a "luxury" tax on aircraft would have ever surfaced. Only a last ditch blitz by business aviation interests prompted the Congress to water down this onerous tax provision.

One thing it proved: if the cause is right and just, then a concerted constituent effort to effect change can work. That the House and Senate would even consider such a burden on an essential industry is a travesty too ludicrous to comprehend.

Many companies unwittingly contribute to our negative image by trying to hide the fact that they own and operate a flying machine. Aircraft ownership needs no more justification than an automated drill press or high speed data processor. Corporate names and logos were once conspicuous on company planes. But today those same corporations fly "closet" aircraft.

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Why would a corporation using a plane to increase operating efficiency be so ashamed of it? The answer is clear. Its management and board have allowed a few misinformed shareholders, a biased and jealous press, and some sanctimonious elected officials to intimidate them beyond all earthly rationale. The popular notion that private planes are perks for CEOs or toys for the rich is pure, unadulterated "horse pucky." All of us in aviation know that business flying is a vital part of the national transportation system. We also know that anything impeding its progress will result in the loss of jobs and millions of dollars in revenues. But who else knows? Again, we have a great story to tell, but so far it would appear we haven't told it very convincingly.

For example: airports. We are losing airports faster than we can build new ones. (Trial lawyers have all but killed the lightplane business; let's not let environmental activists kill more airports.) Bill Piper once said, "Having an airplane and no airport is like having the only telephone in town." We should also promote the joint use (military/civil) concept and additional runways at the existing airports – both promising ways of handling increased traffic.

Still another issue should be addressed more vigorously. The unreasonable user fees and non-airline aircraft operating limits at some main line airports must be removed if business aviation and its business users are to achieve their full potential. Airspace allocation inequities are not only unfair, they are brazenly discriminatory.

Despite fears of prolonged recession, the restrictions to airport and airways access, and the prospect of continuing soft domestic market, business aviation is alive and well. Sales of corporate-type aircraft abroad, in fact, now represent over 50% of some US manufacturers' total production.

It's a paradox. Here we are shipping more and more business aircraft overseas so that more and more makers of foreign products can compete better in US markets. Now, if this doesn't appear to be significant, check our balance of trade. With very few exceptions in the turbine field, most business aircraft today are flying with technology 30 to 50 years old. If our industry is going to expand, it must spend more on research and development. This shouldn't break anyone's budget. Many of the most dramatic advances in military aircraft and commercial air transports are already available to business aviation.

Business aircraft operations and marketers should send this message to manufacturers: invest in the future. To succeed in tomorrow's competitive world, plane builders must be technically paced, not dollar paced. And they can still do it at a profit. We should also articulate the case for "federal standards only" and support it with irrefutable evidence. If the regulation and control of all civil flying were vested in one authority, the FAA, and not partly in the 50 states and scores of local governing entities, our business would benefit enormously.

In sum, the senior executives in all facets of our business hold the key to solving the industry's identity crisis. They must take more active roles in the political process. And perhaps they should also take a crash course in how public attitudes are formed and how responsible leverage can be exerted upon those who help shape individual beliefs and public opinion.

It boils down to forceful, persuasive communications. For unless we can effectively spread the word that business flying is a national resource and not a luxury, our struggle for growth – if not survival – will continue well into the next century. And I don't think any of us want or can afford that.

James B. Taylor