



How I got my job... as an airline captain

Iris de Kan, 32, is an Easyjet captain from the Netherlands, living in London. She tells us how her career took off

Leave your comfort zone behind

I wanted to be a pilot since I was six, when I'd watch planes fly over our back garden. I joined a flying school in the Netherlands straight out of high school and did one year of theory, followed by one of flying.

The theory was difficult – I hadn't learnt such advanced physics at school and I was suddenly studying engineering and aerodynamics. It also

meant skipping university – so while my friends were partying, I had people's lives in my hands. If I'd thought about the responsibility too much I wouldn't have coped, but it feels natural now.

Be a leader, not a manager

As a pilot, I'd look to the left seat (where the captain sits) and ask what to do. Now I'm a captain, I turn left and see my own face in the window. I got

my first pilot job a week out of flying school – a Spanish airline invited me to apply because of my good training results. After six years working in Barcelona and Greece, I joined Easyjet in

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2014. They tested me rigorously – I had to do a flight simulation, landing the plane with one hand and doing computer calculations with the other.

Technical skills aren't everything though – you need to be good with people too, especially as your co-pilot is often a stranger. I was promoted to captain three months ago. Now I'm in charge of the plane, I create a positive working environment by treating

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What Instagram account do you love?

It's by a British blogger called Lauren, @huntersandheels. She inspires me to do my best to look after myself and my daughter.



What's your favourite place to fly to?

Croatia or the Greek Islands. The views on the approaches there are stunning. But Barcelona is my ultimate favourite place to visit.



Best bit of advice you've received?

My mother told me to never give up, and not let failures stop me.

everyone well. People work better if you're nice to them.

Don't be ashamed of failure

The first time I tried to become a captain I failed the final flight simulation. I couldn't perform at my best as I was so burnt out from studying and working. I was gutted. Everybody fails and we should be more open about it. The important thing is to learn and try again. My bosses told me to relax and believe in myself. I took a week off, tried again and succeeded.

My first flight as a captain was to Geneva – it was windy and I struggled on a tough landing. I felt a huge sense of achievement afterwards, which I think was made sweeter by failing the first time.

Challenge expectations

Some people think women can't be pilots because it's not “family-friendly” – but pilots do the same shifts as cabin crew, a traditionally female-dominated job. Sometimes I work 8pm to 3am, but 99% of the time I sleep at home. I want to be there for my daughter, so I like doing short-haul.

A male flying instructor told me being a pilot wasn't “for the ladies”. In 2015, you could fit all the female captains in the world into an Airbus A380 [around 450 seats]. It's improved since then, but there's still a long way to go.