
Communication Rooted in Trust Supports Astronauts

The astronauts who handle numerous missions while serving on the International Space Station (ISS) acquire the skills they need through rigorous training conducted on Earth, overseen by astronaut training instructors. Japan's Kanako Daigo trains astronauts to meet such situations as emergencies in the Japanese Experiment Module (JEM) Kibo and is also responsible for communication with astronauts in orbit as a flight controller.

Daigo's interest in the sky above began with a love of the airplanes she flew on when she lived in Malaysia as a young girl. At university, she took part in a satellite-building project, and she became interested in human space flight around the time she graduated.

Since receiving accreditation as an astronaut training instructor in 2006, she has been involved in the training of many astronauts, mainly at the Tsukuba Space Center (TKSC) of the Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency (JAXA). In comparison with the Lyndon B. Johnson Space Center (JSC) of the U.S. National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA), this center is relatively small by such measures as the scale of its facilities and number of instructors, thus offering an environment where it is possible to give close personal attention to each astronaut and build family-like bonds of trust. In training, Daigo never forgets the perspective of the astronauts, who vary in nationality and background, and she strives to convey the information they seek in a clear and easy-to-understand manner.

"The most important objective for us is to bring the astronauts back to Earth safely, with their missions successfully completed," Daigo says. "Our job is to provide training so that they thoroughly understand what they need to know. Different astronauts require different skills, and it's important for us to concentrate on the required information and convey it to them in a concise and timely manner."

Daigo takes the same approach to her communication duties. As one of the few people in direct contact with astronauts in orbit, she is conscious of being their "eyes on the ground," selecting from the mass of information available on Earth and making sure to convey it at the right time, based on her understanding of the situation in space.

Her efforts have been highly assessed by the astronauts, and in 2012 she received NASA's Silver Snoopy Award, presented to those who make major contributions to human space flight. The letter accompanying the award badge reads, "The exceptional manner in which you have carried out your responsibilities enabled us to operate the JEM in a safe and efficient manner and played a very large role during a very challenging but highly successful mission."

"I received the award just when Japan had finally managed to establish its own approach to human space development, and so I was happy that the astronauts praised the training methods," Daigo says.

Although she has accumulated considerable professional experience, Daigo is still learning much from her real-time interactions with people around the world responsible for managing the ISS. "The people who manage the ISS are all one team. There are no nationality, organizational, or gender barriers. Everyone strives to do his or her part individually, and we all support each other as team members if problems arise."

Daigo's job as an astronaut training instructor is a professional status that exists in only five countries: the United States, Russia, Germany, Canada, and Japan. Through her activities, she says that she wants to spread the word about the appeal of space. "I'll be happy if I can make many people feel that space is not something unusual, but that it's a close and familiar presence."



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1. In front of a full-size model of the Japanese Experiment Module (JEM) Kibo at JAXA's Tsukuba Space Center (TKSC). Astronauts from around the world come to TKSC for training related to Kibo, which is part of the International Space Station (ISS). 2. Daigo talking directly with astronauts in orbit as part of her communications duties. (Photo courtesy of JAXA) 3. Training inside the model of Kibo at TKSC. Daigo does her utmost to provide training that will give busy astronauts a sure grasp of what they need to know in a limited time period. (Photo courtesy of JAXA) 4. The badge given to recipients of NASA's Silver Snoopy Award shows the character Snoopy wearing a spacesuit.



Kanako Daigo

Joined Japan Manned Space Systems Corporation in 2005 after graduating in aerospace engineering from the College of Science and Technology, Nihon University. She was accredited as an astronaut training instructor in 2006, and became the main trainer for assembly of the ISS JEM Kibo in 2008. In 2012 she received the Silver Snoopy Award from NASA for major contributions to human space flight. She is currently the lead instructor for Kibo-related training and is also working to train her successors.



Explore Space Through Mutual Trust
on the International Space Station

Video clip will be available at
<https://www.youtube.com/user/pmojapan>