

Lisa Stephenson

San Francisco Tower (SFO)

When were you hired by the FAA?

I was hired in May 2008.

Are you a Certified Professional Controller? If so, how long did it take you to reach this level?

Yes, I am a CPC. It took me approximately 9 months to get fully certified.

What was your training experience like?

Training was good, yet stressful at times. In the FAA a lot of responsibility is left on you as far as your training. No one is going to hold your hand and force you to study. Basically, your career is in your hands.

What should new trainees expect?

New trainees should expect training and sometimes your trainer to be difficult. Also, expect to be working not so great hours. Shift work can be very difficult on families and a social life.

What did you do before coming to work for the FAA?

Before coming to the FAA, I attended CTI school, became a pilot, and joined the military. I was in the Air Force as an air traffic controller for 6 years. I was stationed in Florida, South Korea, and Missouri before I was picked up by the FAA.

Why did you choose to become an air traffic controller?

It was kind of by luck actually. Although ATC was my first choice as a job, I joined the Air Force without a job assignment and was lucky to get it. While I was in the Air Force I realized what a good career air traffic control is outside of the military and decided to get out and find a job in the FAA.

How important is NATCA to you as a controller and in the world of ATC?

NATCA is important to me because at times they seem to be the only people on our side when it comes to certain work related issues. They are the ones that will stick their necks out for you when you need it.

Why have you gotten involved with NATCA?

NATCA worked hard to get me, as a VRA hire and ex-military member, the ability to use my GI Bill benefits while training. It helped to off-set my low pay while I was still training.

What's an average day in your facility like?

An average day at SFO would be showing up at work on time (of course), going to the tower cab after dropping my lunch off in the break room and working one of the positions in the tower (local, ground control, radar coordinator, cab coordinator, or flight data/clearance delivery). We work anywhere from 1 to 2 hours, go on break, come back up to the tower and give the next person in line a break, work another 1 to 2 hours, take lunch, come back to the tower etc..... basically we just cycle through working for a while and taking our 3 breaks of the day.

What do you like most (and least) about this job?

I really enjoy working in the tower. Although I know not everyone will agree, I love the windows and the ability to be able to walk around rather than being stuck in a chair working a radar scope. I love being at the airport and being able to go downstairs for coffee and see all the passengers with their bags getting ready for their trip. It is very rewarding. The one thing that I dislike about working in this job is the work schedule. My days off are Wednesday and Thursday, and probably will be for a long time. I also work both Friday and Saturday nights, and it's practically impossible for me to get a holiday off, unless it just happens to fall on my day off anyway.

Do you have any advice or words of wisdom for the people coming up behind you?

My advice would be to work hard during training. If you are having a problem with a specific item in training or maybe a trainer, don't be afraid to speak to your NATCA FacRep, it's your career on the line.