

Safety's Human Face

By Capt. Duane Woerth, ALPA President



According to the Advocacy Poll we conducted earlier this year, more than a quarter of our members have been at their airline less than 5 years. Another 30 percent have been on their property between 6 and 10 years. More than half of our members were not with their current employers in 1995.

Those facts are on my mind as we head into August, when we hold our annual Air Safety Week and public Air Safety Forum. Most advances we have made in safety have come through learning and applying lessons from tragedy. We have counted on cementing those lessons by never forgetting our history and by institutionalizing what we have learned.

As a member of a senior generation of pilots, I have a special duty to pass on that history and teach what I have learned. These are tough times, of course. We are all under much more stress than we have ever been under before. Our contracts have been weakened, and the resulting work rules sap our energy. With the financial stress, security concerns, and mounting ATC delays, our remarkable safety record cannot be taken for granted.

In the end, the only way to protect our industry and our profession is to ensure that every one of our cockpits holds at least two fully qualified, professional pilots, plus a flight engineer, where appropriate. Only in that cramped space does the partnership of our profession pay off. The skillful use of cockpit resource management, in which coordination and teamwork prevail, is our strongest asset in the fight to keep air travel as safe as possible.

We must take care of each other. We must watch out for each other. And we must be willing to speak up when we see something even a little bit out of line. When I was a junior pilot in the right seat, I could guarantee that a crusty captain with thousands of hours would nick me for even the most minor miscue. Only with the passing of years did I come to fully appreciate what a service that was to me and to my passengers.

As I said, we have learned the hard way that pilots need the human touch (as much as we can't stand to admit it). In the wake of tragic losses and some instances of troubling behavior, we have developed a host of resources, tools, and approaches for taking care of each other.

These resources that the Association provides include Professional Standards Committees, the Human Intervention Motivation Study (HIMS), Critical Incident Response Programs (CIRPs), the ALPA Aeromedical Committee, and



Pilot Assistance Committees under

ALPA's Human Performance umbrella. Combined, the many committees and subgroups that form that umbrella have shielded countless lives—by spotting, addressing, and correcting inappropriate behavior long before that behavior got out of hand.

We are at a turning point for these programs. Many of the people who developed them, the true believers, have

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retired. Their successors continue the work, but we need to continue to fill the ranks, because these programs do not run themselves. As the guard changes, two factors are working against our continued success.

First, because pilots are under such stress, they have less time to volunteer, and what little energy they still have after work is emptied on the long commute home or the days waiting on reserve.

Second, and more troubling, younger pilots don't remember the tragic stories that sparked these programs, because they weren't there to live through them. It's natural to conclude that our safety record is assured, and that human performance work can be put on autopilot. We cannot let that flawed conclusion sink in, or we are condemned to repeat past mistakes.

We must all recommit ourselves to keep these committees and programs healthy and vibrant. To do so may take some creativity and a spirit of invention; the old ways may need to get a fresh look. We have to leverage the web, interactive media, instant messaging, and other technical capabilities to recruit the next generation of volunteers.

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