



Professionalism Takes Teamwork

By Capt. John Prater, ALPA President



When I was first elected ALPA's president, I wanted to meet directly with our members. So I left Washington, D.C., and spent much of the first 6 months in crew rooms and hotels with our pilot groups and their local leaders. I met with pilots from Atlanta to Alaska, Ottawa to Vancouver, and learned about the issues they faced on their own turf. While in St. Louis, though, I witnessed the one thing that unites us all.

If you're familiar with Lucky Lindbergh's adopted field, you know that McDonnell Douglas/Boeing and the military often test the latest and greatest jets there. During my discussions with the pilots, one of those sexy fighters circled the terminal low and fast. At that moment, I stopped talking about contract negotiations, and, as one, we gazed out the window in awe of this winged machine. At that instant, each of us aviators wished to be in that cockpit.

That's when I realized a passion for flying unites every pilot. It doesn't matter if it's a soaring hawk, a single-seater in full burner, a droning Connie, or the NextGen airliner—we simply love anything and everything that lifts off from the ground. It's not only our passion, it's our profession. And we're passionate about that, too.

I have no doubt that pilots still fly the line with pride and passion, despite having faced conditions incredibly disintegrating to our profession since that dark day in September 2001. We've lost a whole litany of benefits, work rules, and job protections. Yet when professionalism comes into question, the finger of responsibility seems to always be pointed directly at each of us.

I'm here to tell you that pilots alone should no longer shoulder the load for the state of the industry. ALPA pilots set *the professional standard*. We wrote our Code of Ethics back in the 1950s, and today's ALPA pilots honor that code every bit as much as our predecessors. I've discussed at length the extremely high levels of pilot professionalism with Congress, the FAA, the NTSB and the news media for at least a year now. I told them how this union works to impart the significance of our Code of Ethics with each member through committee work, mentoring programs, and membership programs. Recently, these discussions have led me to ask: Where are our managements' Codes of Ethics?

What canons do they follow when they refuse to let tired pilots get the rest they deserve or call in sick when they're not fit to fly? What rules do they reflect on when they pun-

ish pilots who report deficiencies in the system or refuse to fly unairworthy airplanes? What sort of ethics do they embody when they sit behind their desks and tell you that outsourcing your job is the best thing for you?

Our managements set the tone for professionalism at our airlines. They can build us up or tear us down with the environment they foster. Good or bad, the culture at your airline will highly influence almost every management action—whether it's addressing a safety or security issue, negotiating a fair contract, or encouraging professionalism in your everyday routine.

It's high time that managements own up to their responsibilities. It's been too easy for them to use line pilots as scape-

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goats and not address their role in supporting professional pilots and improving an already safe transportation system.

Instead of shifting blame, our managements should create an environment in which their frontline employees aren't afraid to report operational discrepancies or call in sick or fatigued. They should work to provide their employees a better quality of life and a higher satisfaction in their chosen career. They should make us part of the team and gather our input for ways to improve operations at our airlines.

No matter how many articles our peers write or copies of the Code of Ethics we distribute, we cannot tackle the professionalism standard of this industry alone. It takes an *equal amount of respect* from everyone involved—especially airline managements—to build the trust our pilots need to fuel our passion for the profession.

We've seen progress at some airlines, applaud those that operate every day by this safety culture, and will continue to call out those that do not. I'm confident that the pride you felt upon soloing, or getting your first airline job, still smolders. ALPA pilots have not lost our pride in the profession or our passion for flying. Quite the contrary—ALPA members, united together, will proudly protect our profession and refuse to let anybody take that pride from any one of us.

Together, we are ALPA—proud, professional airline pilots.