

Corporate Safety Culture



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Airline managements develop many types of culture. Management’s relationships with employees, customers, Wall Street, the media, and creditors are all important factors that comprise a company’s corporate culture. Safety’s role in the organization is an important characteristic of an airline’s overall culture.

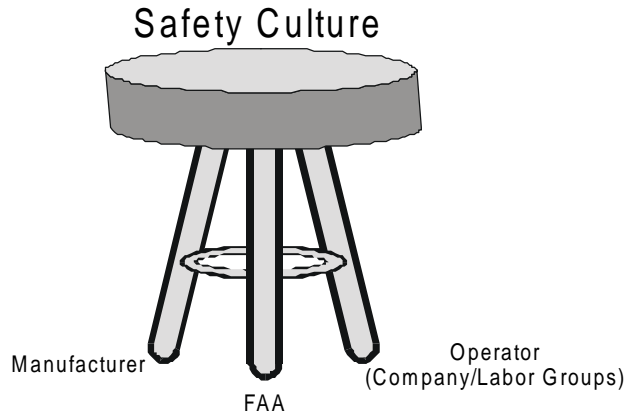
Within a socio-cultural context, the foundation of an airline’s safety culture can be thought of as a three-legged stool. Those legs consist of the manufacturers (Airbus, Boeing), the regulators (FAA), and the operator (airline and employee groups). If any one of those legs does not promote the highest levels of safety, both internally and in its interaction with the other legs, the safety of the entire operation is compromised.

At the top of a company’s organizational chart, the CEO defines the corporate safety culture of any airline. Senior management then extends this corporate safety culture via the policy-making process, involving the decisions of the vice presidents, company directors, flight managers, chief pilots, and line personnel.

President and CEO Rakesh Gangwal, in his address at our ALPA/US Airways Safety Forum this past November, stated: “It continually needs to be ingrained in each and every one of us that in every waking moment there is no issue more important than the safe operation of our airline.” But a safety culture goes beyond words in a speech. Safety has to be backed

up by actions. An airline with a strong safety culture must balance its profit goals with safety goals. Determining how to deploy corporate resources such as money, equipment, personnel, and time in order to achieve these goals can be a very delicate and complex balancing act. Further complicating the issue is the fact that profit goals are easily measurable in terms of dollars, market share, on-time performance, etc. On the other hand, safety goals are difficult to quantify. What is the meaning of having only X number of incidents and accidents last year compared with Y number the year before?

As crewmembers, we are also a part of the safety culture. In April 1997, Dr. Najmedin Meshkati, Associate Professor in the School of Engineering at the University of Southern California, gave a presentation at the Symposium for Corporate Culture and Transportation Safety, hosted by the National Transportation Safety Board. In his presentation, he noted three requirements for individual employees to achieve a safety culture. First, one must have a questioning attitude: “Am I operating the airplane in the safest manner possible? Is this procedure the safest way to do it?” Just as important, management must embrace this questioning attitude, and respond accordingly when we question policies or procedures and suggest better ways of doing things in order to enhance safety. Second, individuals should exercise a rigorous and prudent approach. This means having a thorough knowledge of our airplanes and



procedures, complying with these procedures on every flight, and constantly expecting the unexpected. The third requirement involves communication. Not only must we have the means to communicate our safety concerns to management, but management must also have effective means to disseminate the information back to us.

As crewmembers, we insist that management takes safety as seriously as we do. We must also be cognizant of any negative changes in the Company's safety culture. When procedures are changed for the sole purpose of saving fuel costs, we must ensure that these procedures do not compromise safety. When ATC proposes or implements capacity enhancement programs (LAHSO, PRM), we must ensure that our procedures continue to enhance the safety of our operating environment. While we are sensitive to competitive pressures in

the industry, we cannot allow these pressures to compromise the safety of our operation.

In a rapidly growing industry such as ours, maintaining our current standard of safety will no longer be acceptable. If all we do is maintain our current safety standards, statistics indicate that the number of accidents and incidents will increase. Eventually, using today's accident and growth rates, the industry will experience a major accident every week. Such a result is unacceptable. Therefore, every new program, procedure, or piece of equipment that comprises our transportation system must *improve* or *enhance* the safety of the operation. As an airline, US Airways can no longer afford the same quality of safety programs and culture we have enjoyed in recent years. We must improve our safety culture. On behalf of our families, our fellow employees and the traveling public, we cannot accept anything less.

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