



We welcome letters to the Editor from pilots in good standing. We will edit them if necessary, but we will make every effort to preserve the author's meaning. Letters must include the writer's name and phone number. We will publish only letters that have not been sent to other persons or posted publicly—e.g., in crew rooms. Please keep your letters to 200 words or less.

WITH GRATITUDE . . .

Dear Ms. Sherman,

I would like to acknowledge the business card, expressing your thanks, that you so thoughtfully handed to me as you left my aircraft in BTV last night. This meant very much to me, and I would like to tell you why.

The tragedy, which was visited upon our nation on Tuesday, has touched me, like most Americans, on many, many levels. Because I have not flown this week, I stayed at home. I was glued to my TV set for two days, unable to process the depth of feelings and emotions that I was experiencing. Finally, I realized that I had to turn off the TV because the horror of the events was being imprinted too deeply into my psyche. So I got out and went jogging, mowed the lawn, weeded the garden, and played with our dog. But still, there was so much on my mind that I could not come to terms with.

I was a Navy pilot for 11 years and have been flying commercially for 18 years. Yet in all of those years, I had believed in the pit of my gut that, no matter what obstacle I was to face, I, with the help of my fellow crewmembers, would absolutely be able to get my plane, passengers, and crew on the ground safely. Now, however, things were different. As I was pulled downward by the events of the last few days, I sensed an immense fear welling up from my deepest fiber that I was no longer sure that this rock solid belief in my ability to provide safe passage to my passengers still existed. And the time to go back to work was getting very near.

I was overwhelmed and afraid, so I called my best friend, Chris Rudolph, at work. We spoke at length about the multitude of issues facing the world at this time, and about the goodness of most people. My spirits were lifted. I asked my wife, who is now for the first time reluctant to fly in one of our own company airliners, what she would want the Captain to do for her if she had to fly. She thought for a moment, and said that she would like the Captain to come through the cabin prior to leaving the gate, look at each and every passenger, and ask how s/he is doing. Last night was my first flight since Tuesday, and I took my wife's advice. As I walked through the cabin, looked into your eyes and those of each passenger, welcomed you on the flight, and asked how you were doing, the earth moved beneath my feet. I was connected to the pulse of life, goodness, and hope. I was restored. I was moved beyond imagination by the reception that I received from all of the passengers and from my very own flight crew. But above all, Ms. Sherman, I was able to once again believe that, if we all do our job with the utmost dedication and professionalism, I can again firmly believe in my ability to fly people safely to wherever they care to travel.

Your card, your thanks, and your feedback have meant more to me than you will know. I thank you from the bottom of my heart. God bless America.

*Conrad E. Wolff (PHL)
B-737-300*

A NEW BALLGAME

The other night, I was quite flattered to be told that I looked like I was in my 30s. I'll admit that the venue was a darkened place, and that I promptly regressed to the occasion and proceeded to act like I was in my 20s. Naturally, the following morning I woke up feeling like I was in my 60s. Lessee . . . looks 30, acts 20, feels 60 . . . yep, I'm in my 40s.

At one time, 40 was considered the onset of the celebrated "middle age." But I have come up with something a little more psychological to mark this fabled transition, rather than the onset of mere physiological metamorphosis. I would define middle age as the realization and, more importantly, the appreciation of the astoundingly instantaneous interval of time that it takes for one's life to go from living in a big house on Easy Street to being in an outhouse on Skid Row. The epiphany that it can take just a nanosecond to go from tooling down life's "Fast Lane in a Ferrari" to a lifetime of "Parking Privileges for a Craft-Matic," with more tubes in you than an FAA computer, is a pretty good sign that one has finally woken up to the aroma of a café latte, rather than that of lipsticked Virginia Slim butts floating in a beverage.

This awareness of just how tenuous our grip on life is, to my way of thinking (not necessarily borne out by some of my more dubious performances), what distinguishes middle age from the bold rashness of youth. Not that the self-confident bulletproof faith of young adulthood is necessarily a character flaw; it's just a manifestation of not having lived long enough to appreciate the fact that a given choice between being lucky or being good is really a no-brainer. But, in life's earlier time slots, it really is not unusual to look at life à la Hannibal Jones, if you keep in mind that the "A" in A-Team stands for "adolescence." Not that this is an all-bad thing. It is precisely this adolescent aura of immortality that the Armed Forces seek to cultivate when they embark upon their remedial education program that regularly takes the slack-jawed, stoop-shouldered magna-Cro-Magnon graduates from what is charitably referred to as our public education system, and transforms these Neanderthals into competent individuals capable of the responsibility of having their highly retained fingers entrusted with the "YIPPY-EYEO-KAI-YAY" end of weapon systems.

The events of the last few weeks have transformed our society. No matter what your age, most of us have developed a middle-age appre-

ciation for the swiftness with which life-changing events can occur. I am heartened that most of us have furthermore developed an appreciation for the fact that our old pat responses to events may no longer be the right thing to do. For example, our "common strategy," with its emphasis on acquiescence, has been replaced by one of "common sense," with its emphasis on the crash ax. This rethink has happened with a remarkable degree of bureaucratic alacrity.

Sadly, this new-found flexibility does not permeate all echelons of the corporate food chain. Our top management has responded to recent events by regressing to the trite and not-so-true "been there, done that" bromide exhorting staff beheadings and W-2 weight reductions for the walking wounded. Moreover, the idea of saving the airline by buying lots of little airplanes is still being seriously demanded.

While I cannot dismiss "downsize for sale" as still being the ulterior motive of our management, I find it difficult to swallow the Kool-Aid that we are a foundering carrier. With a "flawed route structure" and "fatal low-cost competition," US Airways' passenger traffic recovered faster than any other carriers' in the weeks after September 11. Furthermore, staff cuts and "scorched earth" furloughs create as many problems as they allegedly address. So I have come up with a plan of action for consideration by the entire pilot group, and maybe some corporate debate.

Our cost structure has been criticized as being 20 percent higher than our mainline competition. I feel that this does not reflect higher labor costs (not counting top executive compensation with respect to our mainline competition) as much as it does the fact that our average stage lengths are 20 percent shorter than our mainline competition. What I propose for discussion is the idea of having the "US" in US Airways stand for "Uniting the States." I feel that a few flights a day from underserved markets using large aircraft would: (1) lower our system-wide seat mile costs; (2) tap markets that would undercut Southwest's inroads into our system, and exploit their weakness in having to rely on four or five stops in their transcontinental service; (3) reduce the ATC delays that affect our on-time performance; and (4) earn widespread customer goodwill in freeing folks that hail from New Hampshire, come from Connecticut, or reside in Rhode Island from lugging themselves to Logan just to wing themselves west. I feel that a B-757 type aircraft flown in markets like Manchester, NH/San Jose,

CA; BDL/Long Beach, CA; PVD/OAK; ORF/SAN; and ISP/SNA twice a day would accomplish these objectives. Furthermore, markets like PIT and PHL to Salt Lake City are underserved perfectly for our purposes.

We can look back on our youth, our past, and our old ways of thinking and doing business. But this is a new ballgame, ladies and gents. It's time to think about developing some new pitches.

Eddie Hoffman (PHL)
B-767

"MOONLIGHT ON OUR WINGS . . ."

These are perilous times, indeed. Try walking to the store without being asked about the "dangers" of air travel, and how we feel about the profession we've chosen. In these times, it may be difficult for us to ferret out our own subjective feelings about this tragedy, let alone give a reasonable answer to the fears of our neighbors, passengers, and even our own families.

To the pilots' spouses who stand at the door wondering if they might be left alone to care for the kids, we give a calm, steady smile that says, "Yes, we will return." And as we kiss the children and tell them goodbye, our demeanor tells them that, yes, flying is still safe, despite all that they've been subjected to on the radio and television. Our neighbors wave as we leave, but their nervous smiles betray to us their inner fears. We are on the "tip of the spear." They know it, and we know it. Internally, we know the dangers inherent in our choice of occupations. Yet, we continue to pursue the ambition that has filled our hearts with desire since childhood. For it is not necessary to ask a pilot "why." He already knows the answer in his heart.

That answer might be difficult to understand for those who have never flown at high altitude and witnessed a monstrous anvil-headed thunderstorm mushrooming 50,000 feet into the stratosphere . . . or seen the sunrise from 35,000 feet, appearing first as a flirtation of reddish gray, followed by a thunderous ovation of yellows, reds, and magentas, all mixed into an indescribable bouquet of color . . . or have never held in their hands the yoke that, at once, responds to our thoughts and tells us reassuringly that we, alone, control the fate of this flight . . . and it WILL be safe . . . for we are guiding it so

Yet, though logic tells us that we control our destinies, experience shows us that this is only "mostly true." The simple truth, known by all pilots, is that there are two kinds of emergencies: those that you can control and do something about, and those that you cannot. Engine fires, smoke, pressurization problems . . . bring them on . . . we stand ready and willing to take on the task. We didn't stand a chance against knife-wielding terrorists willing to die for their mistaken beliefs. Because we never expected it to happen, we never trained for it.

That was yesterday. Today, however, hijackers will find a very different and hostile environment on an American civilian airline. They will be given no quarter with which to plead their cases. They will find crews and passengers ready for them. We, as pilots, will rock and roll the airplane, and do whatever is necessary to disable those who would threaten the safety of our flight. While those in power struggle to make value judgments, already obvious to us, about reinforcing cockpit doors, installing video monitors in the cabin, adding air marshals, and arming the crews, we will protect our passengers and crews at all costs.

And as we walk through the cabin on those occasional "red-eyes" that our profession necessitates we fly, we'll take special pride and enjoy the peace we find, knowing that our passengers sleep peacefully while we enjoy the moonlight on our wings.

J.K. Georgedes (PHL)
B-767

A SUGGESTION TO MANAGEMENT

Dear Mr. Wolf,

I wrote you a number of times a few years ago with this suggestion. Mr. Wolf, you wrote me back and said you thought it was a good idea, and you would send the suggestion to Mr. John Long. It was never implemented, and I never heard from anyone again. Since we are in such dire straits again at this company, I thought it was a good time to submit this suggestion again.

Make an incentive program to verify correct medical billing and to find the least expensive medical treatments.

It is very simple. My wife used to work in the medical field in billing, and she found that a large percentage of bills were sent out incorrectly and over billed, with double charges and



just plain gouging by unscrupulous medical practitioners. (She used to work for a couple and they are under investigation.)

Here is the plan. Give the employee an incentive to review his bill and find the mistakes. There is no incentive now because insurance (US Airways) pays the bill. (“It’s not my money, so who cares” attitude). If the employee finds an error, give him a reward—let’s say 10 percent of the error s/he found. You could also apply this program to anyone that found a cost-saving service over what was originally prescribed. For example, years ago I tore my rotor cuff and had to receive physical therapy from a therapist to the tune of \$170 per treatment. I found a chiropractor that supplied the same exact treatment for \$35 per treatment. I saved US Airways thousands of dollars by doing that.

You could try it at one station to see if it works—e.g., a test program at Boston. Do it with the pilots or flight attendants or mechanics only. See if it works. You could save millions. Believe me, doctors do overcharge all the time.

At the very least, get a medical expert on staff and start sending out an informative letter to employees on how to remain healthy and how to save US Airways money in medical insurance. That alone could save you millions. Medical insurance is one of our biggest expenses here. And that money could be better spent. You could even get everyone’s e-mail address and send it to them that way. Save postage. How about a website!

Anthony Pietromonaco (PIT)
B-757