

Stop Giving Everything Away ... And Why Doesn't ALPA Ever Listen to the Pilots?



*Chris Beebe
MEC Chairman*

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Since becoming MEC Chairman eight months ago, I have found it both interesting and curious that a significant number of us believe that either the MEC or I have been in the process of giving our contract away to the Company. This comes on the heels of a contract that was approved by 84 percent of us in 1997 and is now similar to the election of Jimmy Carter in 1976. You might remember how few people were owning up to voting for him when he was elected by a clear majority of Americans. There is no doubt that some of us are consumed with this idea and will never accept what I am about to say. Additionally, I am sensing that some of us feel that ALPA as an institution is both uncaring and not listening. Let me tell you what I am doing to change that.

Let’s review the facts. Since December 8, when I was elected to this position, the MEC has given away—are you ready for this—NOTHING. In the period of time prior to December 8, back to the time our contract was signed, NOTHING was given away. Yet, there seems to be an opinion that all of, or at least most of, your union is either actively or continually poised on the verge of gutting our contract. Is this real or rumor? I remember a rumor in 1995 alleging that some on the Negotiating Committee had received \$2 million to bring in a contract favorable to the Company. Sheer nonsense!

At the beginning of this year, the MEC put together a list of outstanding pilot issues which contained 14 items. Today, only three or four have not been addressed. Most have been resolved, while others are no longer timely.

Although the MEC has been accused of merely conceding to management’s requests, we have repeatedly told management that outstanding issues the pilots need to be resolved must be addressed before considering their issues. This should be obvious, but taking this stand places our issues above all else.

Progress and accomplishments

Keeping our issues focused is paramount to addressing them. We should also be aware of our successes. Although some might consider this a case of placing a ray of sunshine where it has no place in being, let me tell you what has been done in just the last eight months:

- Split trip issues—These have been resolved.
- 25(F) Settlement Agreement—This was tentatively agreed to without the exposure of arbitration. Although the MEC has not yet approved this, its input was given to Doug Mowery, Chairman of the Grievance Committee, and he continues to work out the last few details.
- Flight 427 decision from the NTSB—Do not underestimate the impact of this ruling. The NTSB scripted a decision that was consistent with all of ALPA’s positions during the investigation, and recommended that other airlines adopt our training and operational procedures. Your Safety Committee deserves more than just a tip of the hat for this one. It was BIG, very BIG.
- Training—Your Training Committee, under the outstanding leadership of Chairman Tim Baker, has been successful in keeping

three pilots in the CPT from becoming a standard practice. Also, Tim is now working on the training bidding procedures agreed to in the contract and should implement them soon.

- LOA 44 issues—All issues have been resolved to our satisfaction. One big resolution is that the Reserve guarantee for flex months has been implemented and made retroactive to December, 1998. This is consistent with what was negotiated.
- Implementation of the new scheduling system—I'll bet you never thought I would bring this one up, did you? Keep in mind that the fundamental deal we made with the Company in this contract was a trade of some productivity for guaranteed growth. The scheduling system, and specifically the reserve system, is at the heart of this productivity gain. We still have several outstanding issues to resolve, but the large number of problems, such as the excessive R to S transitions, are due to crew staffing shortages. These problems are being addressed and resolved every day. One recent problem solved was correcting Crew Scheduling's practice of splitting Reserve pilots off their current trips to protect their RHOT trips.
- Critical month relief—The MEC has consistently turned down management's requests.
- Training Flexibility and additional flex months—In December, the MEC authorized the Negotiating Committee to engage in talks with the company to address this issue. No agreement was reached. Keep in mind that the 14 issues I mentioned above were to be the return for agreeing to this. In spite of the fact that no agreement was reached, continually remaining focused on these issues has produced the positive results already stated. Recently, the MEC again agreed to have the Negotiating Committee discuss this issue with the Company, but within very tightly drawn restrictions.
- Airbus integration—Think back about 12 to 18 months ago, when there had been no growth for 10 years. In fact, remember that the Company had parked 60 airplanes while they "right-sized." We now have 30 new A319s and 320s and our first A330 will arrive in the first quarter of next year. Next

year we will receive one new airplane per week. For those of you who allege that growth is due only to a training float, you're wrong. The Company's planned block hours for 1999 takes them to the obligation they agreed would occur at the end of 2002. And this is without the addition of 14 A330s we will get by 2002. Finally, the integration has been handled so smoothly that Airbus has called this "the most successful new airplane program ever." We appear to be headed toward being the largest Airbus operator in the world.

- Jumpseating on weight-restricted flights—ALPA informed the Company of an increase of occurrences of US Airways pilots having problems jumpseating on weight-restricted flights. The Company acknowledged that US Airways pilots cannot be denied boarding on flights that are weight-restricted. Following this article is a memo from the Director of Operations Control and Planning that reaffirms the Company's policy on this issue. Please cut it out, save it, and show it to the gate agents if you have a problem boarding an aircraft to ride jumpseat.

This is a sample of what has been accomplished. To complain about a lack of action, or misguided or negligent action, without considering our goals and achievements does a disservice to the pilots who serve on the MEC and the various committees who devote their time to representing you.

More to come—RJs and other stuff

Without doubt, RJs are one of the most controversial issues that the MEC is considering. When we ratified our current contract, RJs were just beginning to be an issue. However, the market has changed since then and now we—that's right, you and me—are faced with other airlines taking advantage of our passenger's preferences for jets instead of turboprops. Why are WE threatened? Because just as we have vulnerabilities to RJs being flown in lieu of mainline aircraft, we also are an airline that derives a tremendous amount of our passengers from feed. To ignore the possibility that a large amount of our feed could be lost to a competitor is irresponsible and the MEC has decided to address this head-on.

The MEC has voted to consider an RJ Options Paper that the Negotiating Committee is developing for the MEC's third quarter meeting

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in September. This does NOT mean we are entering into negotiations with management. It does mean we are researching the issue and determining how it may affect our collective future.

Consider the options: We can “just say no” as some of us are fond of saying, or we can study the issue. We can decide if it is advantageous to us and structure a proposal to provide for a more secure future for all of us. Your MEC has decided on the latter course of action. Instead of waiting until our amendable contract date of 2003 and allowing our feed to shrink (in fact it is already shrinking), the MEC will meet this challenge proactively.

In August, you will be receiving a series of documents. These will explain the RJ issues. My intent is to provide you with all the information currently in the possession of the MEC so you might make your own decision as to the validity of the RJ threat. It has been my experience that, given the same information, pilots generally reach similar conclusions which lead to unified decisions. This is NOT an attempt to espouse any particular position, but to provide a basis for you to discuss the issue and communicate your thoughts to your representatives.

A living document

The nature of our contract allows for discussion of a number of issues. Consider LOAs 51, 55, and 59 which allow for talks on RJs, a new crew domicile, or clarification of language already agreed to. In this respect, our contract is a living document, able to change as the needs of the pilots change. It brings with it a responsibility to consider what is indeed in our own best interests. It absolutely does not mean we are in any way obligated to concede anything to management. It goes without saying that our careers and our collective future are closely linked to the fortunes of US Airways. We can choose to either deal with these issues, or be eclipsed by them. It's as simple and as serious as that.

Who's listening to the pilots?

The answer to the this question is simple. The decision of what course to chart is up to YOU, the pilots. However, your points of view must be communicated to your representatives. This provides the MEC with direct, unbiased input from the pilots.

That's why we're redoubling our efforts. To help facilitate listening, we will be reactivating

polling of the pilot group. This will take two forms: a tracking poll to inform the MEC of what your opinion is of the job they are collectively and individually doing on your behalf, and soliciting your input on a variety of issues ranging from your satisfaction with specific issues, like the new scheduling and reserve systems. I am happy that the MEC has approved continuation of this critical resource.

One possible avenue we might pursue is to experiment with various reserve systems to allow YOU to decide which one is best. This has been instituted at United Airlines in anticipation of their upcoming contract negotiations. It could provide direction to our MEC and allow for modification of these systems. It seems that many pilots are unhappy with the new system. One suggested change has been to produce a first-in, first-out reserve system. While this might be seen as a cure-all, it is probably worthwhile performing an evaluation of it before running off in a direction that would prove counterproductive or produce even less satisfaction than the current system provides. In talking to pilots at the other airlines, the opinion is unanimous. The worst reserve system is the one you are working on at the time.

Utopia

Finally, many of us have a tendency to say, “You know what, those guys over at XYZ airlines really know how to run a union and make their company take notice.” As I write this, I am attending a collective bargaining conference including the Allied Pilots Association, the International Association of Continental Pilots, and the negotiators and MEC chairmen for TWA, United, Delta, America West, and Northwest. You can take away the names, and the problems are pretty much the same.

There is no utopian atmosphere either here or at any other airline. All companies seem to nitpick the contract and take an inordinate amount of time to respond to their union requests. A management-union relationship always produces its own inherent kind of tension. Nevertheless, we have come a very long way. As we invest our time and energy in the future, I am confident of our abilities, dedication, and wisdom.



“ The decision of what course to chart is up to YOU, the pilots. However, your points of view must be communicated to your representatives. ”



Save this memo and show it to gate agents if you have a problem jumpseating.



**Interoffice
Correspondence**

Date: July 21, 1999

To: All Central Load Plan Staff

From: Nigel Adams - Director, Operations Control & Planning

Subject: Flight Deck Jumpseat Policy

I have been advised by the leadership of ALPA that there is an increasing occurrence of US Airways flight crew jumpseat riders that are being threatened with denied boarding on weight restricted flights.

Our policy on jumpseat riders does not permit denied boarding of US Airways flight crew when riding jumpseat. The following references are clear on this issue and should be utilized in the event that this situation arises.

Flight Operations Bulletin 98-11, dated, 12/30/98, states: **"If a flight is weight restricted, jumpseat access is limited to all space positive and A1 codes have priority over all passengers and cargo."**

The Company Flight Operations Manual, 4-50, 04/30/99, states:

"Weight Restricted Flight. If a flight is weight restricted, jumpseat access is limited to all space positive and A1 space available codes and have priority over all passengers/cargo.

Examples:

1. Two A1 Jumpseat occupants (traveling on an aircraft with two jumpseats) have priority over all passengers/cargo.
2. An A6 jumpseat occupant does not have boarding priority over all passengers/cargo."

The administration of this policy must be a jointly coordinated process between CLP, Gate Agent and the Captain. You are responsible for insuring that there is no confusion or ambiguity on the topic. Attached is a copy of the FOCUS reference (F*PPD/68/12) which is consistent with the above statements.

A copy of this memo will be provided to all Station Managers/Directors for reference and clarification.

If you have questions please contact your manager. Station personnel can review with local managers if there are any questions.

Thanks in advance for your assistance.

Attachment

- c. T. Bralich - Labor Relations
- C. Skinner - ALPA
- G. Gibson - Flight Ops
- Regional Directors - Customer Service