

Fresh Air Matters... with Capt. Yaw

'Let sleeping dogs lie' makes good sense, but not 'Let sleeping pilots lie'! This is not a glib comment, but one sparked off by the recent event in the US where two pilots may or may not have fallen asleep in flight – or may have been using their laptop computers instead of flying the plane - with over one hundred and forty passengers on board their aircraft. The crew of a Northwest Airlines passenger jet 'missed' Minneapolis airport and did not respond to radio calls for over an hour, leading to the above speculation. The pilots finally responded when cabin crew called them on the intercom. Admittedly, they *only* overshot the destination by two hundred and forty kilometres, and *thankfully* they had enough fuel to turn around and land safely, but it is still a headline that the aviation industry does not welcome. It may not have had such 'incidental interest' as an incident, but may well have become an accident... with all of the news attention that would have been rightly deserved.

This brings to my mind CRM. CRM is Crew (or Cockpit) Resource Management and was established as a concept by NASA (the North American Space Agency) in 1979. The basic concept is, that the majority of aviation accidents have their roots in human error. Of course, ALL accidents everywhere have the same cause, but aviation is more safety conscious than all other sectors, apart, perhaps, from the Nuclear Power industries! NASA found that problems came from interpersonal relationships and communications, leadership issues and decision-making.

The good CRM-aware crew knows that they can, if they work together, use all the eyes, ears, grey-matter, instruments and tools that are in the aircraft as a common resource – multiplying the total awareness, information management, etc.; thus enhancing appropriate decision-making – in a timely manner! It also means that nobody gets upset when they are prompted about not having done their task as part of the corporate body. Suitable sharing of tasks is, of course, essential – as is taking responsibility for tasks given! In the above example, we wonder whether the cabin crew should have responded quicker to the unexpected delay – and been more aware of the potential for an in-cockpit challenge. Perhaps they did not feel 'a part' of the CRM team. Perhaps personal relationships were not what they should be. It is easy to say 'perhaps' – but I am sure we all have similar situations in our offices and homes.

When we fly in small planes, we engage the passengers in the look-out and ask them to tell us if they see, smell or feel anything that they are concerned about. That works fine for a two-, four- or six-seat plane, like in a family car. However, when you have a few hundred people up the back, it is not possible to get them all to participate in the flight awareness... or is it?

Some years ago, a similar event occurred and the passengers *were* aware of the problem of an overshoot from Paris to Brussels, from the in-flight entertainment 'flight show' programme linked to the GPS. The crew only found out they were in the wrong country when they were met at the door of the plane... If only a passenger had asked 'Why have we overshoot France and appear to be landing in Belgium?', perhaps embarrassment could have been avoided – and, more importantly, the safety chain kept in tact.

Just imagine you are in a fifty-seat bus, and the person at the back realises that the bus has taken the wrong turning. I am sure that they could get up and inform the driver, and I am sure that the driver would not be impressed. After arriving at the 'wrong' destination, the driver may check and - if he finds the passenger was right - he will rarely admit that a 'mere passenger' tried to help him. Because of this type of attitude in all industries the 'uninitiated-non-experts' do not like to contribute in matters that are considered beyond them. In my experience, the 'non-expert' may spot things that the experts miss – and I am

always ready to give an ear to the concerned individual, even if ninety-nine times out of a hundred it is nothing. On those ninety-nine times, I have an opportunity to educate a concerned person and help inspire more interest; on the hundredth time, it may be something that would otherwise have been overlooked, and it may just save a life.

When student pilots start doing their own pre-flights, they often identify little things that are not 'structural'. For example 'I see that there is some paint missing from the wing. Is it a problem?' So we take a look and mostly it is nothing more than a spot of mud or little flake of paint that is insignificant. BUT it could have been a sign of a nick or a bump, or corrosion or sabotage or... or... or... BUT it rarely is. Nonetheless, I consider all passengers, students, children and old folks a part of my Crew, and they are a resource I can use and manage to ensure a safer and more friendly environment – it just takes a little effort, and gives a lot of rewards.

Of course, we all know that there are many people who enter aviation for the wrong reasons. We call them 'Braids on the shoulders, and girls on the arms' pilots. The same exists in so many professions. What is important, is not the reasons behind why we enter a profession – but how we ensure safety and stimulate interest in the profession to ensure that others will come behind us and build a more professional industry. However, the right attitude at the outset is a valuable key to the best possible outcomes.

I will admit that I have an easy task: writing about it. It is much harder to practise it. I will also admit to having a great crew that I work with: my airfield team carries out FOD walks and report problems; the Airfield Manager goes out to test the surface of the runway, and quickly gets on the phone or the radio to warn about wind changes or precipitation; most times we have spotted it already, but it is wonderful to know that somebody else is working towards the corporate safety shield. By all of us 'joining hands', we can ensure safety for all of us, as much as we can.

The problem comes from those who say 'it is not my job' or 'I will do it tomorrow', and those who distract others from their given tasks unnecessarily – they can cause major accidents or failures.

We have all failed to do what we should, when we should, at some time. But perhaps we do not always recognise that others do the 'pick-up' of our tasks for us, and we need to 'pick up' for them some times. Have a good week using the concept of CRM to make sure you land when and where you are meant to, and remember: In the word 'TEAM' there is no room for 'I'.

Capt. Yaw is Chief Flying Instructor and Chief Engineer at WAASPS – The Best Flying Experience in West Africa (www.waasps.com)