

Fresh Air Matters... with Capt. Yaw

I am not a proponent of 'courses, workshops and sit-'n'-chat-alongs'; never have been, never will be. I am, however, an avid supporter of appropriate short, sharp, relevant and effective courses that directly improve the performance of staff and operations. Consequently, I am very conservative when it comes to sending staff on courses, and monitor each event closely.

I am happy to share with you the experiences of sending two of my valued staff on a course at the recently-completed Ghana Civil Aviation Training Academy – or GATA. I have heard about this Academy coming on line for over a year, and never in my wildest, most enthusiastic dreams believed that it would be as good as it is. On the aviation training front GCAA is making fantastic inroads – and being suitably-equipped to appropriate standards for the twenty-first century is part of that.

The training academy has a number of classrooms/training rooms but is dominated by the Simulator Room. I must hasten to add that it is called 'the SIMULATOR room' and NOT 'the STIMULATOR room'. I am amazed at how many people get confused between the two, and much as the simulation can be stimulating, it is important to get the name right to avoid confusion and potential embarrassment! The Simulator Room is a veritable real-time Air Traffic Control Simulator of the Tower position at Kotoka International Airport. There are four enormous liquid-crystal, high-definition screens arranged behind the Controllers' desk, with two Controller 'seats', and then two 'pilots' rooms behind.

The quality of the digital view from the 'Tower' is amazing, and you quickly forget that you are not in the hot seat managing the minute-by-minute air traffic, both air and ground, that paints the day's activities of a Controller. Air- and ground-traffic is programmed, with or without emergencies such as fires, etc. and comes alive in real-time in front of the trainees. We are all aware of the 'sim-sessions' for pilots, but 'sim' has its place for so many other professions, especially in aviation and the oil industries.

Recognising the need, importance and safety aspects of training is essential in giving this facility its due credit. I discussed in detail the needs and contents of this course in Radio-Telephony, or 'RT' as we tend to call it, that I was sending staff on, and was happy that the Authority, its staff and trainers all understood the need, intention and desired outcome from the programme. I have never supported any training that lacks assessment, that is a 'holiday' or lacks 'relevance' to the delegates' position and/or progression. Once we had a suitable course, it was time to select candidates to send on this aviation course.

Rosina has worked at the Airfield in the Eastern Region for a couple of years, and is very capable of managing the five thousand movements per year that goes with the job. Rosina also acts as Safety Officer and carries out training for the security staff and others in relation to Airfield safety matters. Well aware of the importance of her position, she also flies to survey the facility from above, and knows the importance of good RT from the ground and in the Air; as well as for ground movements, such as emergency vehicles. Mary, on the other hand, has only had three months working at an airfield, and is still under twenty years old.

These two candidates arrived on the Monday morning at 08:00, apprehensive, excited and anxious to do well. I had warned them that I expected them to shine brighter than a super-nova, and they knew that I meant it!

Each evening, I called the candidates and got my update on the investment. It is sad that so many companies send staff on courses and do not support them morale-wise whilst away. Not one communication went without comments, questions and reassurances that they were doing well and being taught well – and making the highest efforts.

Four days later, I went back to the GATA to the Graduation Ceremony, except I arrived early... They did not know that 'Boss' was outside the room, watching and listening to their final Simulation exercise and discussion. I have to say that I was more than impressed at the participants in the course (eleven in all), and especially at the standard of training, adapted to the needs of the students and relevant to the safety and security theme that is woven inextricably through all that is related to aviation.

Our two intrepid learners had never been on an international flight or inside the international airport before – but they had lots of time on a small airfield in rural Ghana. Rosina and Mary were the two youngest candidates, and all but one of the other candidates were male. It was therefore a thrill that made my heart jump, my chest pump upwards and outwards and my shoulders rise in unison when it was announced that Rosina had scored one hundred per cent, and Mary had only missed out one word in one question that had cost her the prize of a perfect score. The two of them beamed and shone visibly as they went forward for their certificates, and the staff from GCAA/GATA took pleasure in seeing the combination of practical experience and theoretical underpinning knowledge stretched under harsh, but realistic, simulation conditions achieving the desired goal of creating better personnel in our Region.

Clearly, this training is worth nothing if it has no effect on performance. The day after the course, it was busy with a lot of movements at Kpong – probably as many as Kotoka had on the same day. From the first depression of the Press-To-Talk or 'PTT' button on the ground radio, it was clear that this course had imparted confidence and new knowledge to our young ladies.

Crisp, clear and without anything that would let you know that you were not flying in the vicinity of an established busy aerodrome anywhere in the world. The air-band transceiver emitted the information and interactions necessary for safe operations. A few new phrases were interspersed seamlessly and appropriately, backed by a more confident tone. This training, because it was appropriate, relevant, realistic and succinct had yielded fruit within 24-hours of the course completion. I consider that a good investment in staff worth investing in!

As I flew through the Harmattan skies eastwards in a training aircraft with a student new to the air, the radio came alive with the 'RX' or receive indicator strong and steady as the question was asked 'Alpha Alpha, what are your intentions?'; smiling, I responded with the appropriate aviation-related response. But the only meaningful response one can give to such a question, when staff take their training so seriously and achieve so well, is 'To provide you more opportunities to grow'.

Those who are undertaking a training course this week, how serious are you about it, and will you be able to use it to make this world, our nation, your company, and your person grow positively?

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