Captain’s Authority Is A Key Element of Flight Safety

Captain Dan Ashby
Chairman
Captain’s Authority Is A Key Element of Flight Safety

- Captain's Authority affects every airline pilot
- Captain's Authority directly affects flight safety
- My presentation will cover:
  1. History of Captain's Authority
  2. Erosion of the Authority
  3. ALPA’s Response to the Erosion
  4. Safety Implications
  5. Questions
History of Captain’s Authority

- Operation in unnatural environment, sea, air or space requires single, responsible authority
- Maritime Laws and Tradition established the Sea Captain as unquestioned commander of the ship
- Sea Captain was responsible for safety of ship, crew and cargo
- Tradition is that with responsibility comes authority and accountability
- Aircraft PIC’s responsibility and authority derived from law of the sea
History of Captain’s Authority cont’d)

- Prior to 1930’s, no need to mandate aircraft commander
- 1930’s Flying Boats with several crewmembers created need for commander
- Federal Aviation Regulations gave PIC:
  - Responsibility and final authority for operation of aircraft
  - Authority over other crewmembers
  - Authority limited to flight time
- This authority worked well until the 1990s
- One reason for outstanding safety record in U.S.
Erosion of Authority

- In the 1990s, management began erosion of Captain’s authority
- Improved communications
  - ACARS
  - Data links
- Communications facilitated others who wanted to make decisions for PIC
- Bottom line managers wanting to make cost effective decisions
- Pursers, maintenance control, security personnel and station agents want to exercise authority
- FOMs “watered down” the authority of the PIC
- However, PIC continues to have full responsibility for safety of flight
- Erosion and management’s challenges to Captain’s authority raises safety concerns
ALPA’s Response To Erosion

- ALPA Board of Directors established Captain’s Authority Committee
- To study issues relating to a Captain’s authority and responsibility
- Committee has three members:
  - Captain Dan Ashby, Chairman
  - Captain Lindsay Fenwick
  - Captain Hap Carpenter
- Committee’s actions:
  - Encouraged MEC’s and airlines to revise FOM’s to strengthen Captain’s Authority
  - Delta and United made significant changes to FOMs
  - Revised ALPA policy
  - Petition to Amend Federal Aviation Regulations
Committee determined Captain’s Authority needed to be expanded
Committee recommended and ALPA’s Executive Board in October, 2001 adopted first policy on Captain’s Authority
ALPA’s policy on Captain’s Authority:

- The Captain, serving as Pilot-in-Command, is the final authority for the safe and secure operation of the aircraft; directs the activities of all crewmembers to achieve maximum safety and operational effectiveness, and has final authority over all crewmembers during aircraft movement and all flight-related decisions both before and after the flight
ALPA’s Response To Erosion (cont’d)

- The Captain's Authority begins when he/she reports for duty or initiates pre-flight planning and terminates when the Captain is released from duty or has no further responsibilities regarding the flight or clearing international customs.

- Policy consistent with recent ICAO Amendment

- ICAO on November 1, 2001 changed ANNEX 2 (Rules of the Air) definition of Flight Crew Member to read:
  - A licensed crew member charged with duties essential to the operation of an aircraft during a **flight duty period**
ALPA’s Response to Erosion (cont’d)

Flight duty period is defined as:

• The total time from the moment a flight crew member commences duty, immediately subsequent to a rest period and prior to making a flight or a series of flights, to the moment the flight crew member is relieved of all duties having completed such flight or series of flights

⇒ ICAO change is significant as it expands period of Captain’s Authority from time aircraft’s doors are closed to the flight duty period
ALPA’s Response to Erosion (cont’d)

- July, 2003 ALPA petitioned FAA to amend FARs
- To give PIC authority over all decisions affecting flight during PIC’s duty period
- This change would give PIC authority for Pre- and Post-flight decisions
- Would conform FARs to ICAO and ALPA policy
- Committee is urging FAA to act on Rulemaking Petition
- Committee available to assist MECs and air safety representatives about Captain’s Authority
Safety Implications

- Captain’s Authority is major element of safe flight
- Accident rates are lower in countries that have strong Captain’s Authority
- Worldwide accident rates support this contention
### Hull Loss Accident Rates
**By World Regions - By Accident Location**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Departures, millions, estimated (% of total)</th>
<th>Accidents (% of total)</th>
<th>Accident rates (^1)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Africa</td>
<td>3.2 (2%)</td>
<td>45 (21%)</td>
<td>14.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asia (excluding China)</td>
<td>15.4 (10%)</td>
<td>40 (19%)</td>
<td>2.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>China</td>
<td>5.6 (4%)</td>
<td>7 (3%)</td>
<td>1.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C.I.S.</td>
<td>0.3 (0%)</td>
<td>4 (2%)</td>
<td>---(^3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Europe</td>
<td>39.3 (25%)</td>
<td>29 (14%)</td>
<td>0.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JAA</td>
<td>36.3 (23%)</td>
<td>20 (10%)</td>
<td>0.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non JAA</td>
<td>3.0 (2%)</td>
<td>9 (4%)</td>
<td>3.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latin America and Caribbean</td>
<td>11.9 (7%)</td>
<td>46 (22%)</td>
<td>3.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle East</td>
<td>2.9 (2%)</td>
<td>8 (4%)</td>
<td>2.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oceania(^2)</td>
<td>5.2 (3%)</td>
<td>1 (0%)</td>
<td>0.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>USA and Canada</td>
<td>76.7 (48%)</td>
<td>30 (15%)</td>
<td>0.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Totals</strong></td>
<td><strong>160.5</strong></td>
<td><strong>210</strong></td>
<td><strong>Overall 1.3</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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\(^1\) Accidents per million departures — Departure data estimated

\(^2\) Australia, New Zealand, Micronesia, Melanesia, Polynesia, etc.

\(^3\) Insufficient fleet experience to generate reliable rate

\(^4\) Note: Excludes sabotage and hijack
Conclusion

- We need to support and strengthen Captain’s Authority to maintain outstanding safety record