



The Importance of Getting Involved Now

My Fellow Pilots,

When I started this column, my goal was to encourage a constructive dialogue about what's happening at the table. I believed that a number of good opportunities to make progress were getting lost among rhetoric and hyperbole. Pilots were telling me that they wanted less emotion and more factual information. That's what I have tried to deliver.

I'm happy to say that the responses I've been getting thus far have been heartening. I'm hearing a lot of great feedback and have been part of a lot of thoughtful conversations about the future of our airline. The pilots I hear from – by a large margin – are starting to look forward instead of looking back.

The point of my column today is that I'd like to ask each of you – even if it's just for five minutes – to set aside the emotion and rancor of the past several years and think about how we can constructively solve the challenges we are facing. I realize that it's a hard thing to do. We are all human and our emotions influence a lot of what we do. But when it comes to making important decisions, any expert I've ever heard discuss the subject will say that people make far worse decisions when guided by emotion rather than logic. The same holds true for how you conduct yourself in the cockpit. When you've dealt with a serious situation, I know each of you has relied on your years of training and experience to solve the problem and get on the ground safely. No one is going to lose their cool and allow the heat of the moment to distract you from your job.

What I'm asking you to do today is the same thing. Approach this round of negotiations and the next contract between the airline and the APA in a similar fashion. Push away the noise and only focus on the facts. Don't view the airline as the enemy or an opponent that has to be defeated. Try not to think in terms of who wins and who loses, but instead think about smart and innovative solutions that can bridge the divide. Approach the issues in a way that ties the long-term success of our pilot corps to the long-term success of the airline. I'm confident that if we and the APA can approach it that way, we have a much better chance of getting a deal that we can both be satisfied with.

Some may ask why I am suggesting this at this point in negotiations. For one reason – I've heard from a lot of pilots that say they didn't feel like they had enough time to review and understand all the finer points of the 2003 agreement. I know a lot of pilots believe they were forced into making the decision they did because bankruptcy was staring us in the face. I can understand that feeling. We had a lot of work to do in a short period of time and the activity was tense and compressed. But, in hindsight, voting to approve that contract was absolutely the correct choice to make. Yes, there was pain with the pay cuts and seat movements. But approval of that contract likely saved thousands of jobs, protected our pensions and strengthened our airline.

I encourage you to be informed, read everything you can about the airline, our competitors, and the issues our industry is facing, as well as the opportunities that are out there. Pass your thoughts along to your negotiators at the APA and become an active participant in the process.

For those of you who know me, you know that I consider myself to be an optimist – a glass half-full type. That's just my nature. So even though we've been negotiating for quite a while with not much to show for it, I still believe we can get this done in a way that benefits both pilots and the airline. At the end of the day, we want to get a deal that works for everyone – a well thought out, sensible deal that we can both live with. That's what I'm working towards and I hope you will, too.

Strength and Honor,

Captain John Hale
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