What Is Pilot-to-Pilot?

Pilot-to-Pilot is an ALPA communications program targeted to the line pilot members. Its purpose is to convey information and to counter misinformation about the Association’s policies and programs at the national and local levels. Because face-to-face communication is widely recognized as the most effective form of communication, Pilot-to-Pilot accomplishes its mission through one-on-one conversations and small-group discussions among pilot members.

The Pilot-to-Pilot program is a vehicle for “advocacy communications”—those communications aimed at advancing a cause, building consensus, and fostering unity among the membership. The program emphasizes the value of immediate, two-way communications as a means of sharing goals and gaining valuable feedback.

Goals of the Pilot-to-Pilot Program:

- Disseminate factual information from the MEC
- Bring ALPA into the crewroom
- Increase pilots’ participation in their union
- Reinforce trust in MEC leadership
- Channel pilot conversation to pertinent matters
- Extinguish rumors before they begin
- Give pilots an easy venue for asking questions and receiving answers
- Obtain feedback on critical union issues from members to the MEC

When Is It Implemented?

Pilot-to-Pilot can be implemented as a program of the MEC Communications Committee or Strategic Preparedness Committee (SPC) at any time, as long as the MEC gives its full support and designates appropriate funding. This grassroots program strives to involve as many good ALPA-supportive pilots as possible. It should never be seen as a “club.” That being said, the MEC and pilot leader should select the core group of volunteers to ensure control of the program. All volunteers must be well respected, seen as credible, and able to deliver the MEC message.

Benefits of the Program

Pilot-to-Pilot has been evaluated as a very effective means of communicating, not only because of its unique one-on-one requirement, but also because the message, delivered by a fellow pilot, is seen as credible. People like to believe people whom they know and trust. Another benefit is accuracy. Because the message is greatly controlled, coming directly from the MEC to the Pilot-to-Pilot volunteer, there should be little or no distortion. As volunteers, pilots are empowered with information and become even more active in their union.
A significant benefit of the program is the huge volume of information generated by the Communications Committee or SPC in response to pilot questions. As the Pilot-to-Pilot coordinator receives feedback and questions from volunteers, he or she will answer each question per talking points or send the question through the appropriate process to get an answer and then distribute the answers back down the line. These questions and answers typically are collected and distributed to all union leaders and volunteers on a regular basis to keep them in tune with member sentiments, level of knowledge, and concerns. In addition, the Q&As are stored on the MEC’s website for quick member reference.

The only real requirements necessary to make Pilot-to-Pilot work are good pilot volunteers who are not afraid to discuss issues and answer questions. However, it is strongly recommended that each of these Pilot-to-Pilot volunteers obtain an ALPA e-mail address for easy distribution of P2P information and talking points. Pilot volunteers should also have access to the Internet on a regular basis to check the MEC’s P2P website, where all P2P messages are stored. A P2P website website coordinator must be assigned to regularly update the all-member and P2P volunteer sites. ALPA’s IT and Communication Departments will help establish these sites.

Many times an MEC P2P leader will hold conference calls with the cadre of trained P2P volunteers to explain talking points, give volunteers an opportunity to interact directly with an MEC officer or Negotiating Committee member, and clarify information. P2P volunteers are strongly encouraged to participate in these calls.

The first step toward creating a viable Pilot-to-Pilot program is the training of the entire MEC. Each representative and the three MEC officers must understand the system and buy into it in order for the Pilot-to-Pilot program to work. ALPA’s Communications Department has created a presentation that explains the program to the leadership. This training stresses that the Pilot-to-Pilot leader, in conjunction with the Communications Committee and with the final approval of the MEC, must establish objectives for the group’s Pilot-to-Pilot program, identify its key audiences, learn how to develop concise messages, create schedules, and evaluate the program’s performance.

Each pilot group puts its own stamp on the Pilot-to-Pilot program and modifies it to fit their needs. Once the MEC identifies the core group of volunteers who will lead the program, ALPA’s Communications Department will work with the MEC to train them. The intensive
Pilot-to-Pilot training (typically 1 or 1½ days) gives volunteers the tools they will need to serve as union ambassadors in the crew rooms. It is expected that the core group will continue recruiting additional volunteers, and that the Pilot-to-Pilot ranks will grow at a measured pace. These additional volunteers are typically then trained by the current Pilot-to-Pilot leader in small groups, or with ALPA staff assistance via the Web and conference calls, depending on availability of pilots.

The Pilot-to-Pilot leader will take on most of the administrative functions necessitated by the program. This pilot will need to be “in the know” and have access to the MEC, MEC officers, and Negotiating and other committees. Working with ALPA Communications Department staff, the Pilot-to-Pilot leader will create a vehicle for P2P messages, such as an e-mail template. Then messages are disseminated to volunteers on a regular basis, with special P2P conference calls planned to further explain information and give volunteers an opportunity to ask questions. MEC officers, Negotiating Committee members, contract administrators, communications specialists, P2P chairmen, SPC chairmen, and other key pilot leaders and staff join in this call.

P2P volunteers are asked to spread the word about union issues using their P2P talking points. Any feedback from line pilots is conveyed back to the P2P leader, who passes it on to the MEC. Subsequent MEC communications take into account member feedback, in addition to answering specific pilot questions and posting the Q&As on the MEC website. The P2P leader ensures that all pilot questions are answered in a timely manner.

In many cases the P2P talking points (sometimes called Just the Facts) highlight information already disseminated by the MEC, Negotiating Committee, or SPC to ensure that members pay attention to particular information. This can be done with an introductory message sent with the communication. The introductory message can call attention to the most crucial information contained in the forthcoming messages and clarify information sent out to the troops. Although it sounds like a lot of information, many pilot groups have indicated that during an intense negotiation, pilots are hungry for facts with a focus. Of course, each group tailors the amount of information and methods for acquiring that information to suit their particular set-up and needs.

Because the Pilot-to-Pilot volunteers have indicated a willingness to share union information with pilots and be “super informed,” we want them to be readily identified to other pilots. Line pilots should be encouraged to approach a Pilot-to-Pilot volunteer and ask questions. This recognition could come in several forms. Most pilot groups choose to use an ALPA P2P pin that they can put on their uniforms or a red ALPA P2P lanyard. ALPA’s
Communications Department usually has a supply of general ALPA P2P identifiers for small groups. Large MECs sometimes choose to order group-specific paraphernalia through the Communications Department.

Once the Pilot-to-Pilot volunteers receive training, Pilot-to-Pilot identification, and instructions for disseminating and receiving information, they are expected to stay well informed and stick to the messages or talking points they have been given. If they are unsure of the answer to a question, the pilots never speculate, but simply follow the group’s protocol for feedback and obtain the answer to the question through proper channels. As mentioned above, these answers become the basis of a P2P database and give the program a never-ending source of information to transmit back to the line pilots.