



# Fault Lines

By Capt. Chris Beebe, ALPA Vice-President–Finance/Treasurer



I recently had the opportunity to appear on CNN to explain how and why pilots react so calmly to crisis in the cockpit. The reporter's producers had told her to get the Hollywood version of pilot decision-making, but over and over, I patiently explained how we really work.

I told her that pilots react to problems by analyzing their situation, finding a solution, and developing a plan to implement that solution. We learn through years of training and experience that we have decisions to make in limited time with limited control, and that we must remain calm. She didn't get the story her producers wanted, but pilots got theirs.

The same model for solving problems in the cockpit works for our union. We have learned through years of ALPA work that we can control only our own actions, and that we must focus our efforts on developing a plan while we are in the middle of whatever conditions we are flying through.

This hard reality is obvious to me, and it's probably obvious to most of you who are reading this.

But some of our members seem to think that ALPA has miraculous powers over market forces, fuel costs, and management decision-making that we have failed to use.

And some seem to believe that when times are tough and we can't use those magic powers, we must act emotionally *right now* to blame someone else and let the world know how bad we have it. In spite of how good such rash action might feel at the time, nothing in my experience as a pilot or as a union leader leads me to believe that it ever works, especially during tough times.

Before a member of ALPA judges how effective we have been during this historic downturn in our industry, I think it's helpful to remind ourselves what a union—any union—can and cannot do. Expectations are the key—what your fellow union members can expect from you and what you can expect from your union.

Let me start with what a union *can-*

**In spite of how good rash action might feel at the time, nothing in my experience as a pilot or as a union leader leads me to believe that it ever works, especially during tough times.**

*not do*, no matter how hard we try. A union cannot reverse economic trends, insulate our companies from government policy, manufacture unity, reverse consumer buying trends, turn back the clock on technology, break the law (including our own), or force its own members to act in their own best interest. In fact, no union can guarantee anything absolutely, and if they say they can, they are lying.

So what *can* a union do? It can organize employees to act collectively, analyze information for its members' use, provide services not easily available outside of their labor community, negotiate contracts and other agreements, defend the rights of its members, provide common goals, communicate to its members on issues of concern, influence governmental policies, and inform key groups such as consumers, the news media, and opinion leaders.

A union allows us to achieve collectively what we cannot achieve individually.

To be effective, a union *should not* cling to its past or rely on old solutions to solve new problems. Instead, it *must* continue to reinvigorate its agenda, seek to involve its members, and—in this day and age—go global. The world is becoming smaller, and issues like harmonizing maintenance and pilot-certification standards will increasingly be played out on the world stage.

We are up against more and increasingly aggressive forces that are trying to tear us down. Managements are pushing every button they can to ratchet down pay and benefits, increase your hours, shave dollars on operations and maintenance, and undermine your confidence. Government is only too willing to let the carnage continue. In the end, the *only* ally we have is us, the only power we have is the collective strength of ALPA.

Our union (or any union for that matter) is more than a collective bargaining agent, it is an *ideology*. ALPA is all about democracy and a commitment to defend what is ours and to look after one another as best we can.

Oddly enough, when times are good, we seldom relate the amount on our paycheck, or the number of days away from home, or retirement, or medical benefits, to ALPA. But, when times are bad, it's "ALPA that did it to me."

Just remember, ALPA is us. And ask yourself, what could I have done to make it different? How could I have been part of something that overcame a problem? If instead, the ALPA "work" you have chosen consists of whining in your crewroom, posting inane accusations on a web board, or wearing your ALPA wings upside down, you have made yourself a big part of the problem and not part of the solution. And we may all be paying for your contributions for a long, long time. 🌐