

STRENGTH IN UNITY

Airline Pilots Securing Their Future Through ALPA

The ALPA Code of Ethics: A Unifying Factor (Part 1)

Google the word “ethics,” and you’ll see that you could explore 209 million web pages in English relating to the topic. That’s almost as daunting as a midnight discussion of what ethics really means today, in this profession, in this culture, in this space you’re occupying now.

In 1956, the ALPA Board of Directors wrestled with that question from an airline pilot’s point of view and voted in a set of standards that still retain their place in the ALPA Administrative Manual: Section 95, Part 6.B—Code of Ethics and Canons. It contains principles that separate the professional pilot from the weekend pilot, the team player from the lone wolf. “These canons from the 1950s,” says Capt. Paul Rice, ALPA’s vice-president-administration/secretary, “are principles that airline pilots still strive to uphold.”

Ethics are principles of conduct that favor the communal good, that describe the best aspirations of a profession—a moral framework for making decisions. Capt. Rice points out that these principles are not rules but guidelines that allow for educated debate.

When pilots become ALPA members, they receive a copy of the Code of Ethics. In today’s environment of bankruptcy, fatigue, and pension bashing, the Code might be the last thing pilots think of referring to when they’re reacting to the next dire situation. But as the Center for the Study of Ethics in the Professions notes, “It is only in the context of real life and real ethical ambiguity that the codes take on any meaning.”

This article is the first in a three-part series, reflecting on the Code by sections. This month features Sections 1 and 2 (see opposite page), with a nod here to the Preamble: “The tenets of the Code shall apply to all members without regard to gender.” When the Code was written, most airline pilots were male, so it uses the masculine pronoun, but it is meant to include everyone.

Section 1 zeroes in on the pilot’s “first and greatest” responsibility, the safety of passengers “who entrust their lives to him”—a reminder that flying an airplane is serious business. The subtext of Section 1 outlines the ethical behavior expected of ALPA pilots in carrying out that business. “The Code of Ethics defines how an airline pilot conducts himself, flies an airplane, goes about his work,” Capt. Rice says.

Section 2, which could be a touchy one during these contentious times in the airline industry, declares that an airline pilot “will faithfully discharge the duty he owes the airline which employs him.” Capt. Jack Wilkes (Alaska), chairman of his MEC’s Central Air Safety Committee, be-

lieves in that dictum, and it’s gotten him and his Committee some criticism from his pilot group. “Carrying the water for the Company” is his “personal favorite.”

But Capt. Wilkes has at least two reasons to stick to his beliefs. One is that this section of the Code of Ethics is inextricably tied to the first section, on safety.

He acknowledges that pilots have reasons to be bitter these days. He says, “We took an average 26 percent pay cut, and in a manner we didn’t think was fair. Rather than negotiate an agreement, management demanded the whole

“The Code of Ethics means I must do everything in my power to protect the life and livelihood of each of our pilots.”—Capt. Jack Wilkes (Alaska)

enchilada. It created such angst that some pilots are demoralized and just show up for work, nothing more.

“So anything positive you put out about the company gets a lot of backlash. It’s perfectly understandable—we on the Committee have those emotions ourselves. But that’s where the Code of Ethics comes into play. You have to put it in the proper context: We are professional pilots. ‘Carrying the water for the Company’ is one way to describe exactly what the Safety Committee does, with a proviso: that we get the same respect and consideration in return.

“When managers of this company have the integrity to stand up and work with us, not against us, I am going to work with them,” he said. “We are making significant progress with individuals within Alaska Airlines. When someone here steps up and does the right thing, we aren’t going to walk away just because we don’t like the way the ‘Company’ is treating us. We are the Company. We’ll be here long after management goes on to something else.”

Capt. Wilkes said, “I’m in my 34th year as a pilot, I’ve never done anything else. I’ve been an ALPA pilot for 17 or 18 years, but I’ve always been professional, always had the same Code of Ethics in my back of my mind. No matter who’s in charge, we’ll still be professional. The only way to make sure we keep our crewmembers, our passengers, and the people on the ground safe is to follow that Code, and not allow what’s going on to distract us from that—to literally Schedule with Safety. The Code of Ethics means I must do everything in my power to protect the life and livelihood of each of our pilots. I personally believe in that Code and practice it no matter who is rotating through the front office. We want to be sure that if we stop the airplane because it’s an unsafe operation, that’s the reason we do it, and that we will always stop the airplane when it is unsafe.

"The second part," he continued, "is loyalty to the company that pays your salary. We have an obligation to our employers, but that doesn't mean we do anything management says. It means we do everything we can to preserve the company. If we can get the crewmembers to focus on the Code of Ethics, it's a unifying factor, and the more unified we are, the better off we'll be in both safety issues and representation issues."

Jim Johnson, supervisor in ALPA's Legal Department, agrees that Section 2 of the Code of Ethics envisions a mutually beneficial two-way street between the pilots and their management, especially on safety issues.

"The pilots have an obligation to comply with the letter and, in my opinion, the spirit and intent of the agreement," he said recently. "However, they have a right to expect management to do the same and not violate the agreement and let the grievance process sort it out downstream.

"An example of working with management on a trust

basis is the Aviation Safety Action Program in which pilots make voluntary reports of errors on their part that could, if otherwise discovered, result in discipline or FAA enforcement action. Under ASAP, the matter is addressed on a remedial basis, and all concerned learn from the experience and make the airline safer. This program has worked well for all parties, including the FAA."

Keith Hagy, director of ALPA's Engineering and Air Safety Department, says that even—especially—when investigating an airline accident, the honorable precepts of ALPA's Code of Ethics hold true.

"Our goal is not to mitigate blame if one of our members makes a mistake but to investigate why," he says. "ALPA safety investigators represent ALPA flightcrew members and all the others who fly the same type of airplane, into the same airport, in the same operating environment, to try to prevent a similar accident from happening again." —*Susan Burke, Publications Specialist*

ALPA's Code of Ethics—Sections 1 and 2

1. An Air Line Pilot will keep uppermost in his mind that the safety, comfort, and well-being of the passengers who entrust their lives to him are his first and greatest responsibility.

a. He will never permit external pressures or personal desires to influence his judgment, nor will he knowingly do anything that could jeopardize flight safety.

b. He will remember that an act of omission can be as hazardous as a deliberate act of commission, and he will not neglect any detail that contributes to the safety of his flight, or perform any operation in a negligent or careless manner.

c. Consistent with flight safety, he will at all times operate his aircraft in a manner that will contribute to the comfort, peace of mind and well-being of his passengers, instilling in them trust in him and the airline he represents.

d. Once he has discharged his primary responsibility for the safety and comfort of his passengers, he will remember that they depend upon him to do all possible to deliver them to their destination at the scheduled time.

e. If disaster should strike, he will take whatever action he deems necessary to protect the lives of his passengers and crew.

2. An Air Line Pilot will faithfully discharge the duty he owes the airline which employs him and

whose salary makes possible his way of life.

a. He will do all within his powers to operate his aircraft efficiently and on schedule in a manner that will not cause damage or unnecessary maintenance.

b. He will faithfully obey all lawful directives given by his supervisors, but will resist and, if necessary, refuse to obey any directives which, in his considered judgment, are not lawful or will adversely affect flight safety. He will remember that in the final analysis the responsibility for safe completion of the flight rests upon his shoulders.

c. He will not knowingly falsify any log or record, nor will he condone such action by other crew members.

d. He will remember that a full month's salary demands a full and fair month's work. On his days off he will not engage in any occupation or activity that will diminish his efficiency or bring discredit to his profession.

e. He will realize that he represents the airline to all who meet him, and will at all times keep his personal appearance and conduct above reproach.

f. He will give his airline the full loyalty which it is due. If he feels it necessary to reveal and correct conditions that are not conducive to safe operations and harmonious relations, he will direct his criticism to the proper authorities within ALPA.

g. He will hold his airline's business secrets in confidence, and will take care that they are not improperly revealed.