

# STRENGTH IN UNITY

## Airline Pilots Securing Their Future Through ALPA

### In Command: The ALPA Code of Ethics (Part 3)

"Skillful pilots gain their reputation from storms and tempests."

—Epicurus (341–270 B.C.)

Pilots of ships, the ancient Greek philosopher no doubt was referring to. But his words ring true for airline pilots today who are having to show their mettle in the midst of many storms and tempests.

ALPA pilots are being battered on all sides—wages, pensions, work rules, fatigue, foreign incursions into their flying—yet they are still maintaining sterling safety records and keeping their eyes forward, shoulders squared. Some pilots feel they're regarded these days as nothing more than glorified bus drivers—a natural reaction to their treatment by concession-hungry managements and a hostile, obstructionist administration. But there is little evidence that the general public has lost its respect for the uniformed men and women in the cockpit. One reason could be that so many of the Association's 62,000 pilots, consciously or unconsciously, live by the tenets of the ALPA Code of Ethics.

This is the third article in a three-part series on the Code of Ethics, passed unanimously 50 years ago after being presented to the Board of Directors at its 14th Annual Convention by the Board's Professional Standards Study Committee. The Code has been updated several times since that day, but the original resolution states the principles behind writing a code:

"WHEREAS one of the basic concepts of professionalism is group guidance of, and group responsibility for, the professional acts of the individual member of the profession; and

"WHEREAS it is desirable to have a standard by which each member of the profession may measure his actions and the actions of other members of the profession . . .

"THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED...that the Board of Directors enjoin all members of the Air Line Pilots Association to mold their professional acts to conform with the principles set forth in the Code of Ethics and Canons."

This article will address Section 5 (see sidebar), which examines the effect that a pilot's character and behavior have on the public perception of the profession, the industry, and the Association. As any politician making a small misstep in public has found out, or anyone who has put on a clean shirt and their best manners for a job interview instinctively knows, others' perceptions count

for a lot in getting what you want, or don't want.

Capt. Jay Santiago, Professional Standards chairman for the United MEC, says the prescription for curing bad press, or bad impressions, is a return to loyalty—to other pilots, and to the profession.

"Our value is driven down," he said in a phone interview, "when there is a lack of loyalty to each other. On all my flights, I tell my copilots that if any agent, mechanic, or flight attendant has a question about how we're doing business, always keep in mind that the answer you give will reflect on our profession."

Capt. Santiago has been an ALPA member for 36 years and worked in Professional Standards for 21 years. When it comes to company loyalty, he draws a distinction between behaving in reaction to a management's shenanigans and acting according to personal principles.

"Look at me," he said. "Early on, I got furloughed. Then when I came back, we went on strike in 1985. Then we got the ESOP, which took money from me, and that dissolved. Then supposedly came the high-paid last five years of my career, so I said to myself, well, I'll retire in a few years and forget about it. Then they took away my retirement."

"What do we owe to the management at our companies? We don't owe them much. But we do owe it to ourselves to always maintain our profession as pilots in the highest regard. I've been loyal to my company, and management hasn't been as loyal to me, but that's their problem. I have to live with my conscience."

"I tell pilots, when you negotiate a contract, you want to be able to say, 'Here's the quality of people I'm pre-

**Section 5 of the Code calls on pilots to be ambassadors of good will in a variety of ways.**

senting to you, they operate by a very high standard, they're the best.' If you want to earn what you think you're worth, you have to act that way."

The Code is a map for being "the best," he believes. Capt. Santiago lists the three foundational references for United pilots as the Flight Operations Manual, the FARs, and the ALPA Code of Ethics.

Section 5 of the Code calls on pilots to be ambassadors of good will in a variety of ways. Two arenas in which ALPA pilots are champions at filling that role are aviation safety advocacy, which relies on both technical skills and judgment, and serving the local community, which depends on generosity of spirit.

Capt. Terry McVenes (US Airways), ALPA's Executive Air Safety Chairman, says the Code "rings true as a state-

# ALPA's Code of Ethics—Section.5

**5. To an Air Line Pilot, the honor of his profession is dear, and he will remember that his own character and conduct reflect honor or dishonor upon the profession.**

- He will be a good citizen of his country, state, and community, taking an active part in their affairs, especially those dealing with the improvement of aviation facilities and the enhancement of air safety.
- He will conduct all his affairs in a manner that reflects credit on himself and his profession.
- He will remember that to his neighbors, friends, and acquaintances he represents both the profession and ALPA, and that his actions represent to them the conduct and character of all members of the profession and ALPA.
- He will realize that nothing more certainly fosters prejudices against and deprives the profession of its

high public esteem and confidence than do breaches in the use of alcohol.

- He will not publish articles, give interviews, or permit his name to be used in any manner likely to bring discredit to another pilot, the airline industry, the profession, or ALPA.
- He will continue to keep abreast of aviation developments so that his skill and judgment, which heavily depend on such knowledge, may be of the highest order.

**HAVING ENDEAVORED to his utmost to faithfully fulfill the obligations of the ALPA Code of Ethics and Canons for the Guidance of Air Line Pilots, a pilot may consider himself worthy to be called...an AIRLINE PILOT. 🌐**

ment of the credibility and integrity we hold so dear in the work we do as safety advocates with the FAA and the NTSB.” The ALPA *Administrative Manual*’s statement on the Association’s aviation safety philosophy (Sec. 80.S.2.a) lists a raft of qualities that guarantee credibility and integrity—ethics, professionalism, competence, tenacity, persuasiveness, principled compromise, accountability—and that parallel the ideals behind the Code.

Each year, at the Air Safety Forum, ALPA presents an Air Safety Award to a pilot who has made a contribution to aviation safety, most of which have had a lasting effect outside the pilot community. “They become ambassadors to the airlines, the pilot group, the public, and the whole Association,” Capt. McVenes says. “The honorees are living examples of the Code of Ethics in action. They would not be effective in what they do without it. Though we expect this kind of behavior from all our pilots, the honorees’ efforts take it to a higher level.”

As for community service, FedEx Council 79 pilots in Anchorage are an outstanding example of pilots banding together to improve lives of people beyond the pilot group.

When FedEx pilots joined ALPA, Capt. Tom Buskirk became an unofficial “community relations” contact for the Council and initiated their first project, Pilots for Kids, which continues today under the leadership of First Officer Tom Peichel and his wife, Fiona. Each Christmas, about a dozen pilots in uniform and Santa (F/O Peichel) visit children in three hospitals, bringing them gifts purchased with contributions from Council 79 pilots.

Fiona Peichel said in a phone interview, “About three days before the visit, we check on the genders and ages of the patients, and then we power shop. And we always buy extras, for new kids coming in and for siblings who might be in the room when we arrive. Also, we bring gift bags for the parents. The hospital workers, the parents, and the kids are just overwhelmed. They love the ‘cool pilots,’

and the Styrofoam airplanes we gave them this year.

“It’s great to see pilots who are a little hesitant come on the visits anyway. They end up being the most involved and getting so much out of it.”

Capt. Buskirk soon moved into leading a FedEx 79 effort for Habitat for Humanity. In 1995, the pilots raised \$28,000 and helped to build the first “sponsored” Habitat home in Alaska. “We built another one in 2000 with other ALPA groups—United, Northwest, and Alaska, plus air traffic controllers—which former President Jimmy Carter came to visit,” he said by phone during a layover in Hong Kong. “Shortly thereafter, we began our tradition of sponsoring the Alaska Special Olympics State Alpine Ski Event with money and volunteers.”

The 2006 ski event took place in March, coordinated by Capt. Catherine Dwinnell for the eighth year, and assisted by pilots who provided the PA system, served as announcer, and helped as ski buddies for the athletes—making sure they did their practice runs and got to the start on time, as well as providing encouragement at their events.

“FedEx pilots sponsor this event alone, the only Alaska Special Olympics sponsors who do that,” Capt. Dwinnell said. “Each year we need to raise a minimum of \$2,500, and we always exceed that. This year it was a record \$4,700.”

Capt. Buskirk said these activities, and many others, enhance FedEx pilots’ image in Anchorage, but that’s not why they volunteer. “The bottom line for the individual pilot or group of pilots is that this is an essential ingredient for a full and complete life,” he said. “I think these guys donating their precious summer days in Anchorage to build a house and contributing \$500 or \$1,000 to help pay for it are doing it because it provides nourishment for the soul.”

The Code of Ethics was written by pilots who knew the character that pilots should have. And in many cases, pilots naturally fulfill the prophetic principles the Code lays down for them.—*Susan Burke, Publications Specialist*