

Training our Leaders

What Does it Take To Be a Leader?

By ALPA Staff

“The education and the knowledge have been very, very helpful. I wish every member could see, what goes on, not just on a local level but on a national level, and all the resources: the members, the lawyers, the experts—what they really do for us is amazing. So I think having that knowledge is ultimately going to help me become a better union leader.”

—F/O Chris Suhs, Air Wisconsin F/O Rep

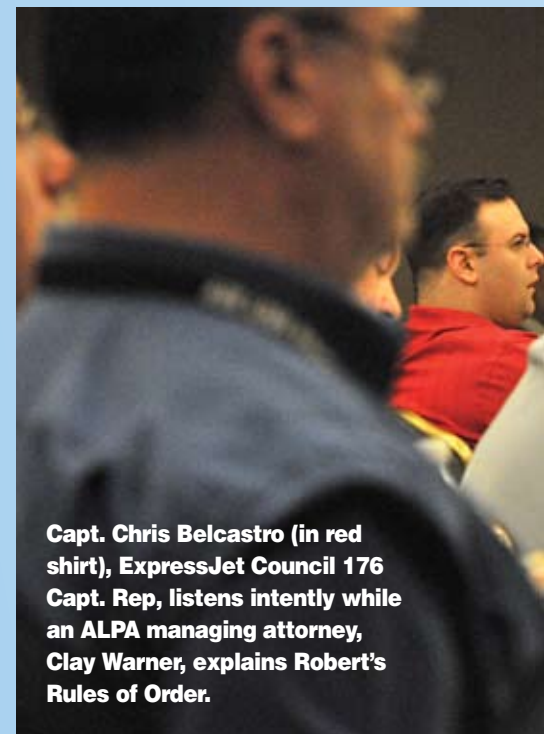
It takes courage, fortitude, and a high sense of duty to be an effective ALPA pilot leader. Sometimes that combination of characteristics is inherent. Sometimes ALPA's fearless pilot leaders need some assistance and support. It is no coincidence that after decades of training and cultivating strong leaders, ALPA has developed a method of instilling the traits of strong leaders in pilots who willingly raise their hands.

First Officer Suhs was just one of the

80 newly elected representatives from 23 ALPA pilot groups who attended ALPA's annual Leadership Training Conference in February. Eager to learn about their specific job responsibilities and tools available to them, these pilots engaged in days of discussions, listened to presentations, and interacted with each other and ALPA staff to immerse themselves in the ALPA culture.

“As a P2P member I had a basic idea of how ALPA works, but this week I've

learned so much more,” said Capt. Chris Belcastro (ExpressJet). “I want to be able to go back to my pilot group and say, ‘This is what ALPA's doing and this is why—keep the faith. Yes, we've been through tough times over the last couple of years, but keep the faith—as things turn around we're going to be



Capt. Chris Belcastro (in red shirt), ExpressJet Council 176 Capt. Rep, listens intently while an ALPA managing attorney, Clay Warner, explains Robert's Rules of Order.

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“Negotiations begin soon, and I want to contribute. I want to learn the resources ALPA has available, in part to make sure that we can negotiate the best contract we can get.”

—Capt. Brian MacDonnell, Air Canada Jazz Council 223 Secretary/Treasurer

here, we’re going to make it better, and we’re going to be a lot better off than we were a couple of years ago.”

This year, airline pilots representing Canada, cargo, passenger, regional and legacy carriers attended a reformatted Leadership Training Conference. As one of the Association-wide meetings that followed on the heels of ALPA Board of Directors meeting, it was fine-tuned with the union’s strategic plan tightly woven into the educational components of the four-day conference.

Reinforcing ALPA’s new direction, ALPA’s Strategic Planning Committee

met with the Leadership Conference Committee, led by Capt. David Farmer (Delta), to focus the agenda on the roles and responsibilities of the newly elected ALPA representatives.

ALPA’s president, Capt. John Prater, opened the Conference by explaining

or you’re part of the problem; I wanted to play some part in the solution, and ALPA is the best way to do it.”

F/O Ron Abel (United) and Capt. Tom Wychor (Mesaba), members of the Strategic Planning Committee, further explained the critical role the new reps play in the strategic plan’s success. “Your colleagues shaped the goals and priorities our union needs to carry out its mission,” Abel said to the attendees. “Now it’s your responsibility to monitor the progress and to personally participate in the strategic planning process.”

Learning a new role

Newly elected ALPA representatives learned how they fit into the ALPA

“I want to learn more about Robert’s Rules of Order.”

—Capt. Jamie Ferguson, United Council 11 Secretary/Treasurer



CHRIS WEAVER

how the strategic plan set the future course of their union and how it ensures that all ALPA members have an opportunity to know, understand, and play a role in bettering their union for the next generation of pilots.

“Simply put, you are responsible for the future of this union and our profession,” Prater said. “ALPA’s success depends on the conviction you hold as a union representative. In the end, a union is what you make out of it.”

Many Conference attendees shared Prater’s sentiment. When asked why they ran for a leadership position, reps responded that they wanted to make a difference. F/O Jay Dougherty, vice-chairman of CommutAir Council 152, sums it up: “My whole approach is that you’re either part of the solution

structure, and how to leverage the strength and experience of 52,000-plus pilots from 35 different airlines.

Capt. William “Bill” Couette, ALPA’s vice-president–administration/secretary, provided a “30,000-foot flyover of the Association” explaining how the union conducts its business. Couette’s presentation illustrated the work of BOD Delegate Committee 1, which examined the Association’s current structure. Couette explained the make-up and responsibilities of ALPA’s governing bodies and the documents—ALPA’s Constitution and By-Laws, Administrative Manual, and individual master executive policy manuals—that provide guidance and framework. Changes proposed by Delegate Committee 1 include holding



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joint local council meetings for ALPA pilots based in the same city to draw larger participation and encourage pilots to think beyond airline borders.

“Couette’s presentation was great on how ALPA actually works and runs,” said Capt. Mark Nagel, the Mesaba pilots’ Master Executive Council chairman. “As the MEC chairman I run the MEC meetings, but it’s amazing what facts I didn’t have before today. The Robert’s Rules presentation was very informative and interactive. In 12 years of my ALPA volunteer work, I’ve been to a lot of these conferences, but at this one there are things I never knew, and I’m just learning for the first time.”

Capt. Mark Moore (Delta), a member



“I believe in ALPA and want to support my pilots. I want the big-picture perspective—what goes on behind the scenes. I’m here to learn the policies and procedures to effectively do my job.”—Capt. Amy

Kotzer, Pinnacle Council 129 Secretary/Treasurer

cornerstone area, sharing information across pilot group lines, providing assistance from ALPA national committees in the collective bargaining, retirement and insurance, and flight-time/duty-time areas, and “mainstreaming”

involved would need to research what the majority wanted, choose a bargaining team that would foster confidence, and communicate effectively and frequently the negotiating plan. The easiest aspect of all of this might be the actual negotiations.

York also talked about the characteristics of the current bargaining cycle and how it differs from the bankruptcy and restructuring period that followed 9/11. Even with the current economic downturn, ALPA pilot groups have returned to strong pattern bargaining approaches and—as the recent Delta/Northwest and Alaska contracts show—are making substantial improvements to pilot collective bargaining agreements.

“I want the Conference to equip me with the tools I need to adequately represent the folks in Hong Kong. I’m here to learn the mechanics of getting stuff done.”—Capt. Michael Plowman, FedEx Council 14, Status Block Rep

of the Leadership Conference Committee, briefed the attendees on the traits of being an effective leader. He stressed the importance of honesty, integrity, and transparency. The committee felt strongly that adding a leadership component back into the agenda would better prepare these pilots for their new roles.

Bargaining favorable contract patterns

The current post-bankruptcy era bargaining cycle provides opportunities to bargain favorable contract patterns in the cornerstone areas of pay, benefits, work rules, and job security. In the Board of Director’s strategic plan, ALPA leaders confirmed and emphasized the importance of establishing targets in each

negotiation of healthcare and retirement benefit issues.

ALPA’s strategic plan also highlights the importance of MEC strategic planning to ensure that each pilot group’s bargaining and contract enforcement goals and work are consistent, well organized, and supported by pilot members.

As an example of how a task is carried forward as consensus and leadership positions are developed within the MEC, Bruce York, director of ALPA’s Representation Department, said, “You would have to think about it as if you were buying a car for your entire neighborhood with everyone getting to vote on the type of car, color, gas mileage, etc.” York noted that if this approach was used, those



PFE Steve Farnworth, PFE rep at First Air, makes a point during a question-and-answer period.

Added Conference Insights

AFL-CIO Secretary-Treasurer Richard Trumka gave a powerful presentation to the Conference attendees about the relationship between strong trade unionism and a healthy middle class. He said, "Our economy is the product of a generation who believed that markets are fundamentally good and government is fundamentally bad." He noted that the fallacy of this thinking has finally caught up with us.

Trumka reminded ALPA leaders that although they are not responsible for the world economic meltdown, as representatives of the international labor movement they can play a major role in rebuilding America's middle class. With a pro-labor Congress and new presidential administration, Trumka said there is hope for better times ahead. While



the congressional economic stimulus plan may not pay direct benefits to airlines, the impact of thousands of Americans returning to work can't help but benefit the airline industry. [↗](#)

calls a day from pilots seeking medical advice. Office staff are also in routine contact with the FAA about policy matters and individual cases that require resolution.

Fiscal forecasting

At the BOD meeting in Las Vegas last fall, ALPA pilots discussed at length the value of the Association's resources. From its highly experienced and dedicated core of member volunteers and elected officers to the world-class professionals who make up ALPA's staff, Board members agreed that it's essential to maintain efficiency while still retaining the skills and expertise needed to ensure ALPA's role as the voice of airline pilots.

General Manager Jalmer Johnson outlined the Association's current staffing levels and the decisions made to streamline the operation. Capt. Randy Helling, vice-president-finance/treasurer, explained ALPA's budget and assured new reps that the Association is well positioned for the future but will require continued prudent financial

Playing it safe

ALPA's new leaders got a glimpse of the Union's vast safety structure, which not only provides support to pilots who need assistance, but also spearheads significant efforts to enhance safety via government regulators and in Congress and Parliament. More than 300 ALPA pilot volunteers, together with the union's Engineering and Air Safety Department, are constantly finding new ways to improve the safest mode of transportation.

Using ALPA's strategic plan as a vehicle, union leaders in BOD Delegate Committee 3 set the Union's strategic priorities regarding safety and security.

Chris Baum, manager of the Engineering and Operations section of ALPA's Engineering and Air Safety Department, reviewed those priorities and stressed the importance of setting up a stable local safety structure. He talked about the accident/incident investigation function of ALPA's air safety structure. "We maintain our credibility by separating safety issues from industrial and

collective bargaining issues," he said.

Managing Attorney Jim Johnson trained these new ALPA leaders about the different legal and representational issues they and their members could confront if involved in accidents and



"I'm attending the Leadership Training Conference to learn what I need to do to properly represent my pilots and to make sure that I'm an effective LEC leader."—F/O Jorge Cuevas, PSA Council 9 F/O Rep

incidents, especially outside the U.S. and Canada.

The new council officers also learned about the ALPA Aeromedical Office's primary function of providing clinical services to individual ALPA members. Dr. Quay Snyder, an ALPA associate aeromedical advisor, said that the office responds to 200 to 250

resource management and oversight. "Losses have caused sizable declines in ALPA's dues revenue," added Helling. "We have to exercise extreme care in managing our members' money."

Talking the talk

An important attribute of any ALPA leader is the ability to communicate

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with his or her pilots. ALPA equips its pilot leaders with the tools to accomplish that important goal, as elected union leaders are in a natural position to influence their members' actions.

"The goal of the BOD's strategic plan is to build unity within the pilot ranks by reconnecting ALPA with its members," said Marie Schwartz, director of ALPA's Communications Department. Sharing the message starts with ALPA's pilot leaders—what they communicate to their members regarding ALPA's strategic plan sets the tone for what the Association can accomplish.

Schwartz explained the multitude of resources available to pilot groups through the Department, from internal and external communications programs, to strategic planning, to strike preparedness support, and event



John Darrow, Delta Council 55 F/O rep, takes notes on his computer during Capt. Prater's opening presentation.

Recognizing the rules of engagement

Jonathan Cohen, ALPA chief counsel and director of ALPA's Legal Department,

important part in their merger.

BOD Delegate Committee 6 members tackled these issues back in October, and pilots will hear updates from two ALPA national committees—the Career Security Protocol Committee and the Merger Policy Review Committee—on these issues at the Executive Board this May.

In an annual nuts-and-bolts segment, York and other attorneys from the Representation Department presented "Planes, Pains, and Autographs," a series of breakout sessions aimed at teaching pilot representatives how to help members who are called to the chief pilot's office for potential discipline action and how to think about the process of contract enforcement.

Putting politics in perspective

For years, ALPA leaders have laid the groundwork to solidify the union's position as the voice for pilots with the AFL-CIO, the National Mediation Board, the FAA, the NTSB, the U.S. Department of Transportation, Congress, Parliament, Transport Canada, and the Transportation Safety Board of Canada.

That move, which goes back to Dave

"The conference is an introduction to ALPA's many resources, but it's also a chance to bring everyone together in a single location so they can network."—*Capt. Robert Driscoll, Alaska Council 63 Capt. Rep*

preparations. She also emphasized the importance of maintaining continuous communications and added, "leaders can significantly minimize rumors among their pilots and create a productive and harmonious working relationship within their MEC by using effective communication techniques."

Capt. Brad Mahoney (FedEx) discussed with the new pilot leaders the importance of knowing how ALPA functions, and the role of the local council representative in the MEC structure.

explained the legal duty of fair representation when representing pilots and the parameters set by the Railway Labor Act for self-help—areas that every pilot leader needs to know. Cohen noted that violations of the RLA's obligations can jeopardize a union's ability to exercise legal self-help.

The session also included open discussions about career security and merger issues, including a presentation by Capts. Lee Moak and Jim Van Sickle, members of the newly merged Delta MEC, who told new ALPA leaders how strategic planning played an

“I want to try to gain as much information from everybody else’s past experiences, because we don’t have any experience to build on. We’re building from scratch. That’s one of ALPA’s big advantages—the tremendous resources we get. And that’s really what justifies it for me—I see ALPA as a tool, a way for us to secure our future in a manner that’s better than how we could do it on our own.”—F/O Jay Dougherty, CommutAir F/O Rep

Behncke, ALPA’s first president, and his friend and ally New York City mayor Fiorello La Guardia, puts ALPA in the best position to help create comprehensive policy that addresses the pilot agenda.

BOD Delegate Committee 7 reaffirmed this as a priority for ALPA, and more often than not, ALPA is the only pilots’ union that participates in policy initiatives.

Brendan Kenny, director of ALPA’s Government Affairs Department, briefed conference attendees about current lobbying priorities, including the status of FAA reauthorization; H.R.831, which looks at airline alli-

ances from an antitrust perspective; international pressures to change airline ownership and control policy as a means of dealing with the industry’s current financial challenges; bankruptcy

and pension reform; and the need for improved air cargo security.

Senior Government Affairs Specialist Kelly Hardy emphasized the importance and strength of pilots’ participation in ALPA-PAC. “Every year thousands of ALPA members demonstrate their commitment to ALPA-PAC and its goals with their generous voluntary donations,” Hardy said. Nearly 6,000 pilots gave to ALPA-PAC last year, raising more than \$1 million.

Bringing it all together

ALPA’s pilots can propel the profession forward by implementing strategic planning initiatives and building pilot unity among the union’s ranks. The Membership and Organizing structure refines that process, but the pride of being an airline pilot and an ALPA member starts with these ALPA leaders.


Cpts. Couette, Wychor (who also serves on ALPA’s Organizing Task Force), and John Sluys (Alaska), Group

B4 EVP and chairman of ALPA’s National Membership Committee, discussed the findings of BOD Delegate Committee 8, which examined the Association’s membership and internal and external organizing efforts.

Using data gleaned from surveys conducted with dozens of ALPA pilot groups, the final speaker of the conference, Phil Comstock of the Wilson Center for Public Research, described member characteristics and trends to help council officers better understand the needs and interests of their

constituents. Delivered in an interactive format, Comstock showed how this generation’s solidarity will propel the entire airline piloting profession forward.

He praised the incoming ALPA leaders’ skills, noting that Generation X and Y pilots make excellent negotiators—growing up with baby-boomer parents, this group constantly questions and tests authority, and often bands together to get the results they want, all outstanding qualities for any union leader.

These qualities will come in handy working toward ALPA’s No. 1 organizing goal: bringing all airline pilots in the U.S. and Canada into the ALPA fold. Accomplishing this feat will strengthen the union’s overall position—at the negotiating table, in the nations’ capitals, and in the global economy—and would fully illustrate the power of every airline pilot working together toward a common goal. 

“Phil Comstock was just fantastic. That was awesome—definitely a great way to wind things up. He sent us away on a really high note.”

—Capt. Tracey Hyndman, CanJet Council 235 Capt. Rep



Antoine Lemaire, UAL Council 34 capt. rep, asks a question during the town meeting.