

BACK TO WHERE We Began

I hate to keep beating the same drum, but there is one issue on which I will make an exception. We are still running out of people to run this business, and we still have not figured out how to ensure safety while dealing with a shortage of qualified personnel. I started talking about this back in 2006, and I need to bring it up every now and then to remind everyone that the economic downturn is transient and the personnel shortfall is structural. I know people in the United States looking for a job are going to call me crazy, but the fundamentals have not changed.

Boeing ran the numbers again, and in mid-September reminded us that the industry will need to produce more than 1 million pilots and maintenance personnel over the next 20 years. That breaks down to 466,650 pilots and 596,500 maintenance personnel. Almost 40 percent of that number will be needed to handle growth in the Asia Pacific Region. Growth in other developing economies will account for another 20 percent of the demand for new professionals.

The more mature aviation markets in North America and Europe will see relatively little growth but will have a lot of older people to replace as they retire. Together, those regions will have to come up with about 450,000 new technical people.

Those are about the same numbers we heard several years ago, unchanged because they were never driven by interest rates and stock markets — they were driven by demographics. There are still about 2 billion people expected to enter the middle class over the next 20 years, and they will want to fly places. The only thing that has changed is that those kids have finished a couple more years of school. In the established aviation markets, de-

mand for people was driven by retirement of the baby-boomers; I don't know about you, but I'm a few years older than when the recession began.

So, why do I think this is a safety problem? Because I keep seeing evidence that we don't have the systems and discipline required to face a sustained personnel shortage. During the last pilot shortage, the selection criteria went down and the training departments were over-taxed. As a result, a few years later, we are seeing accidents that should never happen. Just read a few of the recent headlines, or maybe review the accident report from Cameroon in August's *AeroSafety World* (ASW, 8/10, p.24). If you think the Western world is immune, read the accident report on the Colgan Air crash near Buffalo, New York (ASW, 3/10, p. 20). It is clear we lack the systems to prevent hiring the wrong people, and to remove them when they can't perform. China just came face to face with one of these systemic weaknesses: After the most recent accident, investigators discovered that more than 200 pilots had falsified their qualifications. Anybody with three different colored pens and a free afternoon can still fill out a logbook.

Organizations that are focused on the next quarter's results must somehow find the time and energy to deal with these long-term challenges. Aviation can't go into this next era with rules written in the 1950s and record keeping that goes back to the technology of the quill pen.



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