

UNNATURAL Acts

I've spoken recently about the importance of connections that must be formed among the regulator, the boardroom and the operation. These connections are being implemented as we put safety management systems in place around the world. That is a huge step forward, but more needs to be done. We need to build connections that let us solve safety problems across our professions, and that doesn't come naturally.

As a community, we have done a very good job of dealing with problems that focused on individual safety disciplines. In the last 20 years we have overhauled the entire concept of maintenance and airworthiness to deliver a fleet that is extraordinarily safe and reliable. We have applied human factors expertise to every inch of the cockpit to prevent and contain inevitable human errors. We have reduced the risk of controlled flight into terrain accidents through improved technology, training and procedures.

What remains are the problems that cross disciplines and communities. Here's one example of this sort of problem: runway safety. When I travel around the world, everybody I talk to is worried about runway incursions, runway excursions and runway confusion. This problem requires air traffic control, airports and airline operations to work together. Another example of a problem that crosses disciplines is midair collisions. Read the press reports about the Brazil crash if you want to see how difficult it can be to solve problems across air traffic control and flight operations.

Let's be honest. Working across professions in our business is not easy. At 18, I went to mechanic school with a brand-new commercial pilot certificate. I learned quickly about the divide that separates those two professions. At 25, I went to

air traffic control school with airline transport pilot and mechanic licenses and learned my prior experience was definitely not appreciated, but could be overlooked if I never mentioned it again! In my 30s, I started working with airport engineers and found out that after basically living at airports for more than 20 years, I had almost nothing in common with the people who ran them.

That is the challenge for us now. Accidents don't respect the cultural walls we have erected, so we are going to have to do some things that don't come naturally. We will have to build connections that bind together the safety systems that drive our disparate professions. At every level, we have to build mechanisms that allow for the exchange of data and the development of solutions that cross disciplines. This isn't a new idea; good safety managers have been doing this for years. But it can't be haphazard. It needs to be part of our new culture.

This will be a long-term leadership challenge. At FSE, we will be looking for ways to rise to that challenge. In the next few months, we will be kicking off a runway safety initiative that brings air traffic control, airports and flight operations together to solve problems. At every opportunity we will be looking for a chance to solve the cross-cutting problems, build those connections and create a culture where such unnatural acts become commonplace.



A large, white, handwritten signature of William R. Voss, written in a cursive style.

*William R. Voss
President and CEO
Flight Safety Foundation*