

# PERSISTENT Efforts

We certainly live in interesting times. The move from boom to bust in our industry has been spectacular. Aviation took a serious hit as oil prices spiked over US\$140 a barrel, then, in just a few months, oil prices became yesterday's news. The next crisis was even worse, a shortage of cash and passengers. Only a few months ago, we had to consider how to manage safety during an overheated expansion. Now we have to consider how to help our industry stay safe as it restructures to survive the latest round of economic turbulence.

Now is the time to consider the safety threats and mitigations that can emerge during lean times. Clearly, cutbacks will occur throughout the industry, and it will be tempting to cut some corners in safety departments. One place that does not make sense to cut is safety management. For those of us who promote that science, it is time to sharpen our pencils and remind executives that an efficient operation and a safe operation are not two different things. Safety management allows us to identify problems when they are still small — and cheap. One of the early adopters of safety management was Air Transat. That airline realized a 72 percent reduction in abnormal operating costs because they became more aware of their operation. Safety management earns its place in an organization. Never let anyone forget that.

Another thing we can't put off, even during tough times, is end-to-end improvement of our training and selection systems. The easiest time to fix a system is when it is not clogged to capacity, and that time is now. As dark as things may seem today, it is important to remember that a

recovery is inevitable. There still will be a structural demand for air transportation as 2 billion people lift themselves into the middle class over the next 20 years. We have learned the hard way that our training and selection systems collapse like a house of cards when challenged by growth. I heard many tales of woe around the world when a few Middle East airlines picked up fewer than 1,000 pilots; I can't imagine what it will look like when we have to produce tens of thousands of pilots year after year. There is work to be done on these issues, and now is the time to do it.

My last point is the one that troubles me the most, because I am not sure what to do about it. Safety professionals know that fatigue is a big human performance issue, but we don't know the effects of *weariness*. I am talking about what happens to a workforce that is battered by one crisis after another. I worry that safety will be compromised when professionalism is overridden by a sense of resignation. We ask people to stay focused, but that may not be a reasonable request every day. I hope you, as managers, will do whatever you can to insulate the operational professionals from the anxiety and distractions of this economic environment. I believe we have to start thinking about the weariness factor before it affects our safety record and our bottom lines.



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