



# EXPANDING Trust

We lately have printed several stories in which pilots or complete crews were so fatigued that, when they needed to make good decisions quickly, they could not come up to their typical level of performance. (See, for example, *ASW*, 9/08, p. 22.) The ensuing events ranged from fatal accidents to equipment-damaging overruns. To me, the alarming aspect of these events is further evidence of a widespread state of affairs that, largely by neglect, results in crews flying too exhausted to function correctly.

Sometimes, it is a matter of a particular pilot who, for a range of reasons, could not get the rest he or she knew was needed. Sometimes, it is a matter of scheduling practices that put crews in a position where a minor disruption at the end of a long duty day pushes them past the tipping point to exhaustion. Usually, exhausted crews rely on their professionalism to bring their day to a successful conclusion, all the system safeguards providing a sufficient margin. And, sometimes, the negatives overwhelm what's left of the safety defenses and the final result is not good.

In asking why these conditions persist, I clearly am pushing into territory littered with landmines left from decades

of labor-management wars. The institutional elements of this issue are too varied for this space, but in the case of scheduling rules, each group often feels abused by the other. An individual's fatigue is different and gets wrapped around management resistance to giving special treatment.

The particulars of this process are varied, but one element that permeates this discussion, with rare exceptions, is bedrock distrust between the two groups.

Until about 20 years ago, that distrust went across the board. But then an insidious little guerilla action started on the fringes, attacking advanced outposts of distrust as safety initiatives worked to develop new ways to identify and mitigate threats before they became accidents. The movement came in many forms, forms that in some cases were so revolutionary they required laws to be changed before they could become practice. There were many names, many programs, and they all depended on management convincing pilots that these were not just new sleazy ploys to be used as leverage in the constant battle between the two groups, and pilots convincing management that these programs were not just new ways

of avoiding responsibility. Neither was an easy sell. Yet, today we have a fairly elaborate safety reporting and signaling system dependent on a foundation of trust between the two groups — regulators, too, but that's outside of this discussion.

I am suggesting it is time to advance the trust offensive. The difficulty a crew or individual pilot faces in calling a time-out on account of being too tired to be safe is greater than it should be, especially since most regulators require pilots to stop flying when they are aware of their degraded abilities.

How is it that an airline or corporate flight department can operate with a just culture in all other operational elements, with trust flowing both ways, yet on the issue of scheduling, sick time and even fatigue we find the system locked into rigid structures dating from the industrial revolution? That's illogical and inappropriate in today's aviation system.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "J.A. Donoghue".

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