

PILOT RECRUITMENT: DIALOGUE AND SHARED OUTLOOK NEEDED

Second and third tier carriers expect their pilots to inevitably move on when the larger carriers invite them to join their ranks. It is an accepted fact that the smaller carriers are a training ground for pilots and a feeder to the first-tier carriers.

Few pilots elect to stay with the air taxi or regional carriers, usually for the lifestyle that these jobs offer, closer to family or attachment to a region, but the majority of them jump at the opportunity when approached by the larger carriers. In many cases these pilots are willing to accept a drop in salary for the opportunity to fly the heavier planes. Ridiculously short notices from pilots not wanting to forgo a take-it or leave-it opportunity have led in the past decade to the implementation of training bonds among many smaller carriers as a way to protect the training investment they have made in these pilots. Unfortunately, a number of resulting disputes had to be settled in the courts.

High pilot turnover is something that the smaller carriers learn to cope with. The problem arises when they lose too many of their experienced pilots unexpectedly and over a very short period. There are many accounts of 703 and 704 carriers having to park planes because they just don't have a sufficient number of experienced pilots checked out for captains' positions. These carriers have to scramble to accelerate pilot training to fill the vacancies.

The larger carriers hardly ever talk about a pilot shortage because they still have a pool of experienced flight instructors and smaller carrier captains to recruit from. That outlook is changing as we see the large number of pilots that the world air transport industry is expected to need within 10 years. Massive wave of retirements among the baby boomers are expected in the legacy carriers within two

to three years. Consequently, the demand for pilots will increase significantly and supply chain problems will seriously affect all operators, large and small.

This pressure could lead to staffing problems for the carriers and this could then also lead to other concerns as a result of accelerated training and promotions before pilots feel ready to move to the left seat or to a new carrier.

Although the supply of qualified pilots will remain a challenge for years to come as our industry continues to grow at a steady pace, a greater dialogue between the larger carriers and those supplying the pilots would greatly help alleviate the stress put on smaller carriers.

Of course, no one can predict the exact number of pilots required in the next three to five years for any given 705 carrier, but Human Resources should have a very good idea of what the needs of each company are going to be and plan accordingly. To share this information with the supplier carriers would only help better coordinate recruitment efforts for everyone concerned.

Many ATAC Members have voiced serious concern over the lack of advance notice for the recruitment schedule of the larger airlines. ATAC would like to see a better dialogue between carriers, a dialogue that would quantify the expected needs over the next few years and the recruitment planning schedule. This would help prevent hiring waves that literally wash out the smaller carriers of many of their captains in a very short and unexpected timeframe.

An exchange of information, a sharing of concerns, and agreeing to work together to meet today's and tomorrow's market needs would be a remarkable start and it would promote safe, reliable, efficient and affordable air transport in Canada.

John McKenna
President and CEO

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MAG LOGISTICS - TORONTO, ON



OCTANT AVIATION - LONGUEUIL, QC



ORNGE - MISSISSAUGA, ON



SUMMIT AIR - YELLOWKNIFE, NT



TYLAIR AVIATION - KAMLOOPS, BC