

NO QUICK FIX FOR THE PILOT SHORTAGE

A major problem for smaller carriers for the past five years and widespread throughout aviation in Canada and worldwide, the pilot shortage is growing and won't be resolved by short-term solutions.

The air transport industry of Canada has come together to explore solutions and innovate in ways to attract and retain pilots. Unfortunately, there isn't a readily available solution to this problem because root causes are both systemic and economic.

Systemic because when the larger carriers need to attract a greater number of pilots, the problem is hardest felt at the next tier and then again at the one below that. Unfortunately, it is a juxtaposition of triangles, one with the apex, representing the number of carriers by tier from the bottom up, with the small carriers forming the base line. The other with the vertex pointing down representing the need for pilots by tier. While there are many more small carriers establishing the base of the first triangle, the number of pilots needed by the few larger carriers is represented by the inverted triangle.

Two things are needed to better manage this system. The first is to ensure that we attract more youth and women to aviation. The other is to better manage the transition from the smaller carriers to the larger ones in a way that will be less detrimental to the smaller carriers.

The problem is also economic because of many factors. The air transport industry is growing worldwide, thus generating a normal growth in the demand for pilots. This annual growth of roughly 5% is compounded by the fact that early cohorts of pilots are retiring in droves. That this problem is worldwide adds to the Canadian

situation. Foreign operators will target Canadian trained experienced pilots, thereby decreasing the available supply of pilots in Canada.

The demand for aviation services is very elastic as it reacts strongly to the state of the economy. The severe recession of 2008 discouraged young people from venturing into our industry as headlines spoke of layoffs and difficult times for many carriers. Unfortunately, it took a few years for people to once again begin considering a career in aviation. This lapse created a greater gap in the supply to meet the renewed demand which occurred a couple of years later.

The high cost of training is a serious financial deterrent which is not easily surmountable. Training is continuous and expensive for a carrier, which explains in large part the uncompetitive salaries offered to entrants as compared to other sectors of the economy.

Last year ATAC created a working group to address this critical issue. This initiative is not limited to ATAC members as only a comprehensive dialogue with all stakeholders will lead to viable long-term solutions. The working group is concentrating its efforts right now on the pilot shortage but also wishes to address other personnel shortages in aviation.

The mandate undertaken by the working group is considerable. Develop modern tools to entice the youth to consider an aviation career; appeal to women to become pilots; find financial help to train future pilots; and, build better bridges between the larger and smaller carriers to ensure a smoother transition of pilots. Accomplishing these tasks would go a long way to easing this problem. Unfortunately, attracting more people to aviation is a long-

term ordeal and will only yield results in terms of years, not months.

The federal and provincial governments also have to get involved beyond simply acknowledging the problem. First and foremost, governments must consider the growing shortage in this key industry in any new regulation tabled. Secondly, they must work with industry to find permanent solutions. Governments have the resources necessary to help develop the financial tools needed to attract people to aviation. Provincial governments must help us add aviation to the school curriculum and better inform the career counselors of the great opportunities offered by a career in aviation.

ATAC invites all interested parties to join in the efforts of the working group.

John McKenna
President and CEO
Air Transport Association of Canada

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