

Accountability

As we provide workshops around the country, I have many opportunities to discuss maintenance errors and their prevention. Unfortunately, too often I find that some technicians still feel that it is up to their employer to make sure that maintenance errors do not occur. These technicians cite such factors as unrealistic time lines, lack of proper resources, hangar lighting, lack of spares, and the list goes on and on. They believe that the company which employs them is responsible for creating an environment which creates or enables the errors to occur.

Within some aviation companies these situations may be true, especially because of perceived intense economic competition. Even in intensely competitive business environments, history has shown that operating an aviation department which is focused daily on safety, is an essential attribute to business survivability. Those companies that operate by seeing how much more they can squeeze out of the maintenance budget for example, and fail to instill a proper attitude towards safety, create an environment for their own demise. They become targets for take over, merger, consolidation, and bankruptcy candidates. And, if a catastrophic accident occurs which is traced back to a lack of proper safety initiatives, there might not be much left of the business by the time the courts, including the court of public opinion, are through.

Every one of us, as professional maintenance technicians, must accept individual responsibility for our own actions, work product, professional growth, continuous training, and self-improvement. At the end of the day, we as technicians are responsible for our own actions.

As professionals in our industry, as in any other industry, we have to be accountable for our own actions. Doctors are accountable. Engineers and architects are accountable. As the maintainers of complex aircraft, every day a large number of people depend on what we do to be completed correctly, every time. We must be aware of those factors that can adversely effect our judgment at critical moments in our day to day routine. We must be aware of how our own attitude, self esteem, our ability to communicate, complacency, pressure, stress, distractions and lack of knowledge effect our judgment. Knowing this, we can better understand what counter measures we need to implement in our work routine to make sure we are not creating maintenance errors and that we reduce the possibility of such errors occurring in the future. By doing these things, we have accepted responsibility for our actions, taken significant steps to reduce or eliminate human errors, and assumed individual professional accountability for our actions. I will discuss some specific human factors which are essential in creating a safer work environment, but which are based on individuals.

Attitude is extremely important. What is our attitude towards our job, position, company, shift, peers and management? How many of us come to work with a chip on our shoulder? An individual who comes to work with a high self-esteem is able to work well with others because of his self-image. Regardless of what happens during the day, he knows that he has tried the best he can to make decisions, look for the good in others' actions, and take criticism constructively. And, a positive attitude is contagious in a good way. This is a basic starting point—come to work

with a positive attitude and high self esteem. If you find that you just cannot muster a positive attitude and feel good about yourself, then perhaps you should consider some changes in your life that will help to create this positive attitude.

What can we do to make sure we have a positive attitude and a high self-esteem? Establishing goals and direction in our lives is a very good starting point. If we go through life aimlessly, how will we know when we have reached a threshold in our life? Reaching these thresholds and goals is what keeps our self-esteem up and which directly influences our attitude.

Where are you in your relationship with your family, with your peers, managers, flight department? If you are not happy, what will it take to make you happy? What do we have to change in our personal lives to give us a positive attitude. Consider reading books, listening to tapes, attending seminars, watching videos, or talking to someone about setting some challenging goals with check points along the way to ensure we are on track. Have we identified what results we are looking for? Most important is to set our long- and short-range goals in writing so we can read them frequently, even several times a day. If we make these types of efforts, they might rub off on others. You may positively affect their attitude. This change in attitude, which affects behavior, can be contagious. Be the first one to start.

What communication skills do we possess? Do we take the time to listen to others? Do we make the effort to say what we want to say in a concise and rational way? How well do we, as the maintainers, communicate with the flight department? Do we let them know what was done to the aircraft and what feedback we need to confirm that the aircraft is operating properly? Do you let the flight crew know that you are just as interested in the serviceability of the aircraft as they are? As a professional technician, let the flight crew know that if there is a defect on the aircraft that you would like to discuss it with them on the company radio before the aircraft lands, or as soon as they land, so that if there are any further questions you may have, they can be answered before they shut down the aircraft. Is this type of relationship and this type of communication up to management to create, or is it up to you? We may communicate well among each other on shift but how well do we communicate to other people in our company who may make decisions on our behalf. If you are having problems with relationships and communicating, I strongly recommend again reading "How to Win Friends and Influence People" by Dale Carnegie.

We have to let flight crews and management know how important their ability to effectively communicate to us and with us effects our judgment. Are they aware of how important it is for us to have all of the details to make rational decisions. I hope that there will be a day that I do not constantly hear about the flight crews who do not communicate effectively with maintenance. Teamwork and synergy in the workplace rely on good positive communications. A good starting point to establish this is by creating a common goal or mission statement within an aviation department. Once the mission statement is achieved what is everyone's role in obtaining the goal?

Complacency, pressure, stress, and distractions can negatively affect our judgment. We have to make sure that these human factors do not take root in our personal behavior. A relatively easy concept, which does not cost any money and does not require a management directive or policy is for each of us to take pride in our signature. Our signature is a written testimony of our

individual accountability. How many people do we know in this industry who will sign something just for the sake of signing for it? If we read and visualized everything that we did on the check sheet before we signed for the task, there would be a marked decrease in errors. Do not sign a check sheet without first reviewing in your mind everything that you did on the check sheet. Make this a permanent habit and you will have implemented a very strong counter measure to human errors.

If we work in a small flight department, it would be a large benefit to the technician after he worked on the aircraft for 12 hours fixing a defect, for the technician to review with the flight crew what was done to the aircraft. This would not only be another check of the work completed but it makes the pilot aware of what was done to the aircraft he is going to fly. This would also reduce the possibility of something being left uncompleted if the technician had to visualize in his own mind what he did while he was explaining his actions to the pilot. Just imagine this teamwork, synergy, and common goals in action.

As professionals in this industry we are accountable to ourselves to stay knowledgeable in our field. We should do a self audit to determine areas that we need to improve and study - whether it be in technical, regulatory or even communication skills, and then determine an action plan.

Consider reading trade magazines, manufacturer's communiqués, maintenance manuals, manufacturer's conference notes, regulations, advisory circulars, becoming members in our professional associations and chapters. Listen to tapes on personal skills such as listening, communicating, self-esteem, personal relationships and setting goals. Mix professional technical material with self-improvement and self help topics. Remember that "the day we figure we know it all is the day we should start learning" and "no matter how sharp that axe is we should be able to make it sharper."

As we can see, when it comes to preventing aviation errors, our role as technicians within the flight department is critical. As technicians, we are just as responsible for making the effort to instigate synergy and improved accountability, as anyone else. Management's role is to listen and take action. And, we need to understand the distinct differences in the personalities of pilots and maintenance technicians. Here is an example to illustrate these differences. If a pilot has a concern with an aircraft or company policy he will raise his concern several times until something is done. If a maintenance technician has an issue, he will usually raise his concern once. If there is no response or action taken to that concern, then the technician feels that management does not care.

With human factors awareness training, everyone in the whole flight department is given the tools to make the organization an improved work environment. You are given the framework to organize a flight department to work in synergy, but it is up to professionals in the organization to use the tools and make it work. The training will influence the individual's behaviour and attitudes to achieve improved individual skills to manage human factors issues and teamwork. Personnel who complete this training have a better understanding of their role, what they as individual professionals can do to reduce maintenance errors, how they are personally responsible for taking control of their actions, being responsible for their work, and how they are accountable for not only their own actions, but for their individual and professional growth.