

Professional Standards Review...Confidentiality vs. Anonymity

ALPA is unique among unions in that it is comprised almost solely of pilot volunteers who do the bulk of the work and are elected to govern the organization. Paid staff supports the elected officers and various ALPA committees.

The ALPA committees are in place to provide services to the pilots as a condition of their membership in the union. Unlike the representational and collective bargaining aspects of ALPA membership, the service committees are housed in the administrative end of the ALPA structure. Peer volunteers provide services to the pilots in the interest of maintaining healthy, productive career paths. Often these committees handle issues of a personal and sensitive nature and work with the pilots quietly behind the scenes. Only when pilots face matters before the company such as discipline or violations of the PWA (by the company against the pilot) do the pilots obtain representation by their elected local council representatives. The administrative committee volunteers do not have any authority to represent pilots and are always obligated by a duty to fair representation to all pilots in good standing in ALPA. We do not pick and choose whom we counsel and never pit one pilot against another.

In the world of ALPA volunteer work within the committee structure it is incumbent upon the committee leadership to regularly provide continuing dialogue with the volunteers in order to keep up with the latest trends and provide refresher training and review of the fundamentals of committee protocols. It is equally important to provide continuing education to the pilot group as to the workings of the ALPA committees.

The ALPA committee structure is comprised of two large organizations: The Air Safety, Security, and Jumpseat group and the Pilot Assistance Organization. As to the former, these committees and their respective sub-committees are comprised of pilot volunteers who are highly educated and possess various skills and widely varying backgrounds. ALPA's Air Safety and Engineering office, security experts, and ALPA's legal department support them. The Pilot Assistance Committee is an umbrella organization consisting of the Aero-Medical, Critical Incidence Response (CIRP), HIMS (alcohol and chemical dependency), Professional Standards, and Canadian Pilot Assistance.

While the Safety, Security, and Jumpseat committees deal mostly with technical matters, they are highly valuable to provide a check and balance for the air carriers, FAA, and congress in order to ensure the U.S. has the safest, secure air transportation network in the world while allowing thousands of pilots to freely travel unencumbered on the flight deck jumpseats between homes and domiciles. The commitment to safety is consistent with ALPA's motto "Schedule with Safety".

Pilot Assistance deals with the human side of the airline piloting profession. Airline pilots are expected to come to work healthy, rested, and motivated. The sub-

committees are comprised of trained peer volunteers who handle highly sensitive problems of an ethical or professional nature. They do this under strict confidentiality in order to protect the privacy of the individuals. This is the cornerstone of their work. Without disciplined confidentiality, credibility would be comprised and the phones would stop ringing.

It has come to the attention of the Professional Standards Committee that there seems to be a rising tide of misinformation and misunderstanding as to the relationship between confidentiality and anonymity. While Professional Standards will always conduct business in a confidential manner, it will not conduct business anonymously. It is not in keeping with the Professional Standards approach to bring forward to an individual concerns shared by another individual and not reveal the name of the concerned party.

As previously mentioned, issues of a sensitive or personal nature or issues involving conflict between two or more individuals, for obvious reasons, require a high degree of confidentiality and respect for the privacy of any conversations between those directly involved while attempting to reach a reasonable solution to the conflict. However, it is sometimes necessary for more than one Professional Standards volunteer to be privy to a situation. This is absolutely not a violation of confidentiality and is sometimes helpful in successfully resolving a conflict.

Professional Standards employs a myriad of ways to effectively communicate with pilots. Information shared between volunteers stays strictly within the confines of Professional Standards and privacy is maintained. In practical terms, confidentiality simply means that only those that have a direct need to know may have knowledge of the matter. Cases are not freely talked about in the crew room or on the shuttle bus. Even the MEC officers are not privy to names and conversations unless the matter before Professional Standards involves potential company discipline. In that case, the Professional Standards Committee steps aside and the pilots are provided representation from their elected council officers often with the help of ALPA labor attorneys.

In order to understand why confidentiality and anonymity are diametrically opposed, it is necessary to fully appreciate the policy and protocol of Professional Standards. The role of Professional Standards volunteers is to insert themselves into the conflict to help the conflicted parties reach a mutually agreed upon solution to end the conflict. The goal is to get the two parties to agree to fly together safely and professionally. The pilots have an obligation to honor the ALPA code of ethics and conduct themselves professionally while upholding the ideals of what it is to be a professional airline pilot.

The Professional Standards committee is a reactive as opposed to an active committee. The volunteers don't go looking for work. The committee acts as a forum for our pilots to come to as a service to them strictly on a volunteer basis. Many times pilots use Professional Standards as a sounding board for a reality check

or a place to simply vent where they can bounce something off an interested peer who is acting as a neutral, non-judgmental third party. Often, the willingness and patience of the volunteer to spend time with the caller while being a good listener and not attempting to be a “fixer” yields positive results and the caller ends the call feeling much better and is very appreciative of the volunteer’s time. These conversations remain private.

While the committee volunteers can be very good listeners, they can not necessarily “fix” someone’s problem or resolve a conflict with another person without both parties stepping up and becoming part of the solution. The common mistake by pilots is to come to Professional Standards and attempt to drop a conflict into their lap, expect them to take it to the other party, explain the concern, find a solution, and not state who brought it forward. That approach is a set up for accusation. The Professional Standards concept does not allow for this because it demands that both parties are engaged in the process.

Often, there is a fear of retribution. This is a needless concern that is simply not acceptable and will be dealt with harshly. Usually, the seeds of retribution are sown in the fact that the communication loop is not closed and both parties are not talking to each other. The subject of the complaint is not in the loop and feels blindsided and perceives that he was “turned in to Professional Standards.” That is why it is incumbent upon the Professional Standards volunteer to fully explain the rules of the game from the get go and to see to it that all parties take an active role in helping resolve the issues. Nobody can ever get “turned in” to Professional Standards. In the case of a conflict between two individuals, if all parties are not willing to be identified, then Professional Standards may not be the proper forum and the party seeking assistance may need to seek satisfaction elsewhere.

The Professional Standards approach to conflict resolution and behavior modification is sound and proven over many years. The committee has a long track record of success and is instrumental in helping pilots maintain a healthy career track. It respects privacy and will conduct business in a confidential manner and, at the same time, encourage all parties to be fully engaged in the process to reach positive outcomes. The Professional Standards Committee will promise confidentiality, but will not grant anonymity.

Captain John Rosenberg

Delta Air Lines

ALPA International Professional Standards Group Chairman

