

Podcast Transcription

Fly by Night: Captain Mark Jefferson - Professional Standards

Captain Chris Lee My guest today is Captain Mark Jefferson. Mark is the Chairman of the Professional Standards Committee. Thanks for coming. Mark.

Captain Mark Jefferson Thank you for having me.

Captain Chris Lee Tell everybody a little bit about your background before FedEx and what you've been doing since you've been at FedEx

Captain Mark Jefferson Before FedEx, I started flying when I was 17. I went off to college, Georgia Tech, studied aerospace engineering, Go Jackets. And then I graduated, went to work for Beechcraft, which was a wholly owned subsidiary of Raytheon. I was there nine and a half years. The day after I left Beechcraft, I came to FedEx. That was November '95. At FedEx, I was hired into the back seat of the DC10, right seat of the DC10, moved to the left seat of the 727 and then the left seat of the 757, left seat of the 767, and in the 757 I moved into training, LCA/PCA.

Captain Chris Lee Talk about your union experience.

Captain Mark Jefferson My entire experience volunteering in the union has been in Pro Stan. I was on the committee for about four years, moved over to Chair in 2014.

Captain Chris Lee Who else is on your committee?

Captain Mark Jefferson The Vice Chair is Juan Leoncio. There are nineteen total people on the committee. We spread them across all the domiciles, all the seats and we try to keep it diverse. So we have civilian, military, male, female, Captain, First Officer, so all throughout.

Captain Chris Lee Explain what the Professional Standards Committee does for the pilots.

Captain Mark Jefferson Professional Standard's primary responsibility is to enhance the margin of safety in daily flight operations. We do this by promoting and maintaining the highest levels of professionalism and conflict resolution. That's what we're most known for, is conflict resolution. The most common misconception about Professional Standards is that people believe that it's a function of management. This is not a function of management. It's an ALPA function. We are not agents of management. While we do share the same goals, which is to return everyone to a normal working relationship, we do not share the same tools. Management has their tools. We are pilots working to resolve issues for pilots, strictly.

Captain Chris Lee And is that a conflict between pilots, Captain and First Officer, or just any conflict?

Captain Mark Jefferson That's actually between pilot to pilot, pilot and any inside workgroup, inside FedEx workgroup, any outside workgroup, or any time a pilot comes into a conflict with another party during the course of work.

Captain Chris Lee Talk a little bit about the Letter of Agreement that Professional Standards has.

Captain Mark Jefferson The [Letter of Agreement \(LOA\)](#) for Professional Standards at FedEx, regardless of how you feel about this contract, it is very well written. It is uniformly held out at national conventions as the way a LOA should be written. You can find that on the website at fdx.alpa.org, there you can find the [LOA](#), the [ALPA Code of Ethics](#), and how to [contact the Professional Standards Committee](#).

Captain Chris Lee Are there different ways that a pilot can end up talking to Professional Standards?

Captain Mark Jefferson There are several ways. The most common is a pilot has called Professional Standards for an issue with another pilot. Management will refer a pilot to Professional Standards and on occasion, we will have another carrier, another ALPA carrier, and in fact it's happened with non-ALPA carriers that have an equivalent of Professional Standards, they will call us over an incident involving one of our pilots. That's generally how the pilots come to us.

Captain Chris Lee And if pilots have a conflict in the cockpit, we want them reaching out to us, not necessarily management, correct?

Captain Mark Jefferson Absolutely, absolutely. You want to call us first. There's a resolution process for dealing with disputes. Management subscribes to it as well. You want to deal with it at the lowest level. That's person to person. If that's not able, then call Pro Stan. We are third-party intermediaries. We're neutral. We maintain confidentiality. That's a requirement and we're there to return things to a normal work condition without elevating it to the next level, which would be management.

Captain Chris Lee When you get a case, maybe one referred to you from management, what do you actually have to provide back to management?

Captain Mark Jefferson There's only one thing, and that's an excellent question. The [LOA](#) points this out. Actually, reading the [LOA](#) is very insightful. Number one, it tells you why we exist. We all agree that this is a safety issue. Number two, it tells you how management will interface with Pro Stan when they have an issue they want us to deal with and how we are to respond to management when something has been resolved. The only thing we're allowed to tell management is, it was resolved or it was not resolved. And historically, that is the only thing they ask for. They know what the rules are. They know how it works. They ask us to go work on a problem. We work on it. We say this has been resolved. Now we do give more details in defense of a pilot. Quite frankly, it happens very often that a pilot is accused of something from an outside workgroup or somewhere else that they didn't do or it didn't occur the way it appeared. And in the defense of the pilot, we'll say this is what actually happened and this is how we resolved that issue.

Captain Mark Jefferson You briefly hit on this, but can you expand some on the confidential nature of what you do?

Captain Mark Jefferson There are very specific guidelines for us on conducting a Professional Standards case. This is all confidentiality. It's designed to protect all parties concerned. When you come to us, you agree that it begins and ends with us, just the parties involved and the Pro Stan Rep. It's compartmentalized to the point where we don't

share between Pro Stan Reps what we're doing. This is all to protect everybody and their reputation. The important thing when dealing with Professional Standards is to understand that it's a two-way street. We have a requirement for confidentiality, but most important, we don't choose sides. We're intermediaries and our goal is to return people to a normal working condition. I can't leave without giving you some advice on how to handle a conflict. You're going to handle a conflict either with a significant other, a family member, buying a car, in the store, or at work. The first and single most important thing. You will never, ever de-escalate something by telling someone to calm down. In the history of saying calm down, saying calm down has never calmed anyone down. You've actually poured gas on the fire. So don't do that. Just, you calm down. You can moderate the conversation by staying calm, right. That doesn't mean that people will calm down with you just because you did, but you can at least keep from pouring gas on the fire. We are trained at active listening and active listening specifically means that you hear what that person is saying and that is all you're processing. If you're thinking about responding to something, you're not actively listening. If you are responding to something, if you're talking over them, if you're drifting off, you're not listening. If someone is truly upset, I may disagree with why, but they're upset. First, I put myself in their shoes, and then I think, okay, now I try to work back toward a calmer place. The next thing is apologizing, particularly if you're the cause. You have to apologize. If you're just like walk away, that is going to escalate to either us, which would be safe or management, which I cannot tell you what will happen. No one can, depending on how they view that circumstance. So it benefits us all to stay out of trouble. But when we do find it, use the tools to affect a safe exit. Stay calm, don't tell people, hey, you know, I'm a FedEx pilot and . . . this is the beginning of a problem. And three, do not at all suggest that the person who's upset with you is just wrong. They may be. You're just making them mad and it goes downhill from there. So take a breath, disengage, give us a call. We'll handle it for you.

Captain Chris Lee What does Pro Stan not do?

Captain Mark Jefferson The first important thing is that we are not a police force. We do not seek problems. People come to us. Policing is notoriously corrosive and we're pilots helping pilots. We're not trying to corrode the environment. So we don't go looking for those problems. And specifically, we are not the uniform police. None of us do that. What we also don't do is FAA enforcement actions, grievance issues, we'll refer you to Grievance for those, substance abuse, we have a very effective HIMS program, medical issues, we'll refer you to Aeromedical as well, legal issues, again we don't deal with, proficiency, there's a Training Committee, we will refer you to them. The important thing to remember here is that if you don't know, call us. We'll tell you who the appropriate group to help you is. It may not be us. And we do get a lot of those calls. That's perfectly fine. The big thing is to call us first before you seek help out with management or just bad advice from someone else.

Captain Chris Lee The crew force is and has been under a tremendous amount of stress during the past year. How has this translated to your workload?

Captain Mark Jefferson It's increased the workload in very specific areas. The stress that pilots are under is extreme in my career. The single largest factor right now is political and then the key for pilots is to remember that you're obligated to follow the laws of the land, FAA guidance, FedEx guidance and any other regulatory authority under which you're operating. Your opinion, positive or negative, can do nothing good but get you in trouble and that has increased our workload considerably. One of the ones that is very consistent is fatigue. Unfortunately, we call it fatigue, even though it would more accurately be

exhaustion. From a Pro Stan point of view, we see this when we have one or more parties telling the exact same story, but they're very upset with each other, even though they agree on the facts. Once we talk to them and ask them, you're not disagreeing with this person, why are you upset? That's when we'll suggest it's exhaustion. We don't control those schedules. Pilots have to look out for themselves. Unfortunately, fatigue is a lot like alcohol or dehydration. When you discover you're thirsty, you've been dehydrated. When you're saying you're tired, you've been fatigued. And the problem is that you're now unpredictable, even to yourself. There are things that plenty of people have said, I don't know why I did that, me included. We're there to correct that, help you through that, tell you to get some rest and move on with no damage to your career.

Captain Chris Lee If a pilot finds themselves in a situation where they feel like they need Professional Standards, how do they contact you?

Captain Mark Jefferson There are multiple ways you can get to us. The first way, just go to fdx.alpa.org > [Committees](#) > [Professional Standards](#) and you'll see the contact phone number. The next way you could contact us is the [DART](#). It honors our no documentation policy. So just input your phone number and we will call you as soon as we can. The last way, you can always call the ALPA office, even in the pandemic. If you leave a message, say, I need to speak with Pro Stan, they will give us a call and we will call you back.

Captain Chris Lee Any final thoughts?

Captain Mark Jefferson There are some important things with Pro Stan that I hear that I want to share with everybody. Number one, it is a union function. This is the most important thing I can tell you. As a union function, this is designed to help pilots. It's pilots helping pilots. People often get confused and say, look, Professional Standards, I want somebody's job. I want somebody punished, I want something done. That's not what we do. That's not what any union does. The important thing with Pro Stan is if you're having a problem, realize the only strength that you have in organized labor is solidarity and participation. So before you break that up, give us a call. Our efforts are to protect us all. Regardless, you're wearing our uniform, it's important for all of us to stick together. And that is how our voices are heard and that's how we're represented. Remember, if you're out there and trouble seems to find you, which it often does, we're just minding our own business and trouble seems to find us, de-escalate the thing to the best of your ability. Remain calm. Don't identify yourself with who you work for. Nothing good will come of that. Just separate yourself and give us a call. We'll get you the help you need as soon as we can. That is what I would advise everybody about Professional Standards.

Captain Chris Lee Well, thanks again Mark for coming, and thanks for listening. If you have any questions, please go to fdx.alpa.org and utilize the [DART link](#). And as always, be safe out there and we'll see you next time.