

Podcast Transcription

Fly by Night: First Officer Brian Wald July 2020 Council 22 Secretary-Treasurer and Block 7 Representative

Captain Chris Lee My guest today is Council 22, Secretary-Treasurer and Block 7 Representative, First Officer Brian Wald. Thanks for coming, Brian.

First Officer Brian Wald Hey, good morning, Chris. Thanks for having me.

Captain Chris Lee Talk a little bit about your background before you came to FedEx.

First Officer Brian Wald I came to FedEx as a new hire in 2016, straight into the right seat of the MD11, had about a 7 month hiatus after a retirement from a 20 year career in the Air Force, where I flew C17s the whole time. So, McDonnell Douglas plane's, the only plane I've known. Most of my experience though, is Air Force related. Very little interaction with union employees. I had some union civilians in the Air Force and certainly I'd never been in a union myself until I came here on the property.

Captain Chris Lee So your union experience is primarily off the job in the military?

First Officer Brian Wald Absolutely. Civilian employees there were unionized. And most of your interfaces, I'd say as an officer in the military with other military officers, in my case enlisted loadmasters, very few civilians. So not a lot of touch points to see exactly what a union's about until you get here on the property and you're part of one.

Captain Chris Lee What was your motivation to step up and become a MEC representative?

First Officer Brian Wald To be honest with you, it sort of came out of a lack of information that I had. I had heard a story about a conflict between a couple people in the union, and I said, well, I don't know who that guy is and I don't know who that guy is and who's right and who's wrong. What really happened? And I found I couldn't answer any of these questions myself. I couldn't. I'd turn to talk to people and ask them and they're like, I don't know either. And so I decided at that point that I just didn't have enough information to be active in my future and my future success for the career path I'd chosen here at FedEx. So I figured I needed to take another step forward. And I did that straight into the mentoring program as it came new on property. And I've been doing that since then.

Captain Chris Lee What are your thoughts on getting involved in volunteering with the union?

First Officer Brian Wald I think you have to be involved. You can't see what's behind the door until you open the door. You don't really know what your capabilities are and to offer solutions until you've tried to examine the problems closely and offer those solutions. And there's a million different ways that you can volunteer at ALPA. There's a million different ways. The first and the broadest thing you can do is participate in the PDR system. If you're dissatisfied with something, you see something you don't like, tell somebody about it. That's active participation. That's what makes the union better. If you want to do more than that, if you were a new guy and if you felt like you were floundering in your first time here, participate in the mentor program, find somebody else to help to make their life easier. Who knows where that's going to lead. That's what led me to becoming a block

rep. If you have expertise somewhere else, if you just love aviation safety, get involved in aviation safety first, do it by your own safety reports and then find out if you can help if somebody's got some space for you to work for them. Doesn't have to be full time it can be part time. But do something, find a niche where you can succeed, find and fix problems for all of us to make this better. That's what's going to help us in the next collective bargaining agreement.

Captain Chris Lee Your term began in March of this year. How do you see your role as an MEC rep?

First Officer Brian Wald You know, at first I wasn't quite sure what I had gotten into. I think that's probably the case with any volunteer for any job anywhere. Though at this point, I'm fairly senior having been here only four and a half years, it sounds ironic to say that, but I'm fairly senior. I didn't feel like I had the experience of seniority with regards to the union interface. So I keep looking at myself and feeling like, hey, I'm the new guy still. I'm the new guy still, but I'm really not at this point. So I came into the union job with kind of eyes wide open. I wanted to make sure that I was listening first, not just to the MEC members in the room around me, but really to the group of pilots I represent in Block 7. And then digesting what they had to say, thinking about what I wanted to do with that information, then trying to push for policies that made sense for all of us to make our life better here, safer, a higher quality of life, well compensated just like we'd want.

Captain Chris Lee So there is a strategic element to what the MEC reps do?

First Officer Brian Wald I think there has to be. We can't be reactive. I think every one of us has probably seen a demonstration of what reactive looks like since this coronavirus took over, happened in February this year. I'm not saying that anybody could have foreseen the circumstances or that we could've had a comprehensive plan to handle this. But I am saying that we keep responding to information. We keep responding to information from voices in the field, from what the company is doing, from what governments are doing, and it's not a great or comfortable position to be in. So absolutely you have to take a step backwards. You have to look at this from the elevation that we're afforded, you know, and then try to make decisions that are lasting that makes sense and that gel with other components of what we really are trying to achieve in the union with regards to a collective bargaining agreement.

Captain Chris Lee Being the representative for Block 7, one of our junior blocks, you represent a segment of our pilots who were hired after our last contract ratification in 2015. These pilots haven't been through a negotiation cycle yet with FedEx. Can you talk about that some?

First Officer Brian Wald Well, absolutely. So I haven't been on the property since the TA was ratified. Had a lot of interactions with guys going, you're in the union now, you need to fix this. You guys messed this up last time and I said, I wasn't here last time, and I don't think we messed it up. I came here because we have an incredible contract. So although we're junior in experience at FedEx and with FedEx ALPA, we are a huge segment of the population. And so I think there's a lot of opportunity with that. Many of us have come from the military. Many others have come from civilian backgrounds, have been involved in other airlines. They've been involved with other union work. So they might not have seen a contract negotiation at FedEx, but they might have seen a contract negotiation. And certainly they've seen what union representation does for them in their previous jobs.

Captain Chris Lee Well talk about what you feel the pilots' role will be as we go into contract 2021.

First Officer Brian Wald In our council 22, we just put out a communication about a week ago and we talked about this. The idea that any of the benefits that we've achieved in the last six months with coronavirus come from brilliant ideas that happen on Kirby Parkway it's just not, it's not quite correct. The eyes and ears that enable us to have the information we need to advocate for good policies that guarantee your safety, your security and your quality of life. That only happens with inputs from the crew force. So each of the 451 members of my block, each of them has a pair of eyes and a pair of ears. And thank goodness you know that they can send me information at any time or send the union via PDR information anytime to tell us something that they see that doesn't appear quite right. That doesn't appear quite compliant with the contract or that's just something that could be improved upon for the future.

Captain Chris Lee Why might a pilot contact you?

First Officer Brian Wald Sometimes it's what you call gripes and moans. But that's really not the preponderance of the comms that you get. People do respond when they're upset about something. People do respond when they've had a negative experience with something. And they really want that corrected, not just for their own personal well-being, but so other people don't have to go through the same troubles they've gone through. So much of the comms I get are hey, this is something I'm seeing in the field, the Taipei Executive Lounge, for example, these quarters are not really what we're accustomed to. They're not really allowing me safe rest. They're not really allowing me to be prepared for the flight I have to take. It's just not a jeopardy I want to be in. And I certainly don't want my fellow pilots to be in it. So that's much of the comms that you get, identification of problems by someone that don't really quite have all the tools to solve them. And I'm not saying that I do either, but I have a little bit more access to the union resources in terms of knowing people, faces, and names that can help to get these problems resolved for them.

Captain Chris Lee And that just amplifies the importance of the PDR system and how well it has worked for us.

First Officer Brian Wald Absolutely. I would say that I get more comms where I'm courtesy copied off of a block member's PDR than I do direct comms through email, text message, or phone calls all combined. I think that's a pretty good situation to be in because at the end of the day, where the rubber meets the road in solving problems here at ALPA are with our committees and we have some exceptional committees with very experienced volunteers that have been doing this for a long time. And they have a lot more background than a new rep like I have at my disposal. So using this PDR system to collect data and distribute answers to people, I think it's been very effective and I'm happy for it.

Captain Chris Lee Another way we get input from the pilots is through our surveys. We just completed a phone survey and in the fall we'll be coming out with our online survey where all pilots will have the opportunity to participate and their participation is extremely important. Can you talk to the pilots some about that?

First Officer Brian Wald I've been fortunate enough to be in the portion of the population that has been surveyed every time we've had a survey since I've been on property. I know that experience is probably pretty unique. Some people have been called once, twice or three times, but I cannot understate the value of open and honest participation in a survey

be it either the telephone or on the Internet. So you talked about the past surveys we've had and they've been telephonic up to this date. That's all I've actually seen. To me, they were professionally conducted. They were prompt. It was easy to do. I felt a little confined sometimes in the answers that I was able to give, because in some cases they're multiple choice, other cases it's free text when somebody else is typing and you want to get all your words out, but you also want to be efficient with the person there. So maybe your story's not quite told how you want to. The good news is that come this fall, the survey that we're expecting to do online will be accessible to everyone in the FedEx population. So no fractional fleet participation. No, I'm the lucky guy that got the call to put my voice out there. Every one of us will get to speak freely in the survey and the second thing that's unique is that you'll have time to do the survey. You're not on the spot. You're not hearing a question and trying to respond to it and come to find four hours later you're like oh man I wish I would've said this was my issue not that. You going to have time to digest the questions. Digest your answers. Refine your answers and put them in. And that's so important because this is going to give us the details that we need to refine I think the retirement planning process that we're going through, which is it seems like it's a controversial topic no matter which way it goes.

Captain Chris Lee The coronavirus has been a hot topic here on the property. Talk about that some and also how preparations are going for contract negotiations in 2021.

First Officer Brian Wald I would just say this about COVID, none of the benefits that we now see, the things that we enjoy and take for granted, sanitized airplanes, clean sleep rooms, masks, drivers wearing masks, diligence by the part of the rampers, none of that came free. All of it came because there are people here advocating for improved safety for our crew force. And I know there's disagreements about the efficacy of masks, how they do or don't work. The important part is, is that they're thought to work and we advocated for them and the company responded positively and gave us what we asked for. That's a great model, really, when you think about contract negotiations. We've identified a problem. We've articulated it. We've talked about it here on the property. We've discussed it with MEC reps. We've asked for a solution from the company and given the company a chance to respond. That's kind of how I see things going. And that's really how I have approached what I think are necessary components for contract negotiations. I've been here for four and a half years. Every time I've had a problem or something that I didn't like with a contract, I wrote it down. I try to think about it for myself for a little while, socialize it with friends of mine, peers, guys that I respect. I've refined my positions. Hey, this worked for me because...well this didn't work for me in the past, you know, think about it this way. And I've tried to change what I thought was important in terms of resolving problems and then to put that together in sort of a strategic package. How can we approach this all together? Most of the answers that we get come from people in the field who have observed something not working properly or not working as well as it could or not working to their benefit. And that happens. That's true of COVID and that's true of anything that you've experienced be it lie flat seat problems, be it insufficient hotel, be it the way your crew rest worked out in a fatigue call. You bring these to us and we try to refine a solution that's effective for the entire pilot group going forward.

Captain Chris Lee Well, thanks again, Brian, for taking the time to come in and do the podcast. Any final thoughts?

First Officer Brian Wald Well, I would say that ALPA only works for us if we participate in ALPA. Your good ideas are translated through the PDR system to your block reps or to your committees. And that information is then taken and passed on to the Negotiating

Committee who does God's work for you on a daily basis. It's passed on to you through the Communications Committee, through the production of this podcast, through some of the writing that you see in front of you. It's supported by a whole host of back office expertise between Railway Labor Act lawyers, between experienced staff officers here, between Grievance Committee, Safety Committee chair people who have industry interface, FedEx interface and who exchange ideas between their peers at other airlines. And they do this work day in and day out because they want to make ALPA better. It's important to understand that We Are ALPA, whether you wanted to be in a union or not. However, you came about your employment here at FedEx through compulsion, through happiness, through just wanting to participate in something bigger than you, we succeed because of the collective vision that's really refined by hundreds and hundreds of interactions with management, with friends, with peers, with rampers and all these interactions that we see and we work on. They give us an informed path forward sometimes to fill our personal needs, which for some is quality of life for others compensation for still others compensation after we retire and our working is done. For all of us, job security and safety and a great place to work. Most important, though, is that it takes all of us together to get this right. That's why I'm involved. That's why I got involved. I wasn't a participant before actively, and I didn't know what was happening around me. I couldn't sit by and listen to folks complain about this element or that element without actually trying to provide some type of solution. And I certainly don't have all the answers. But I know who the experts here are at ALPA that do have the answers. I know who I call on my Rolodex to help me resolve things. When people call me with a contract enforcement question, I don't answer it. I have experts that do that for us all, thank goodness because I get it wrong just like you do. You know, I learned through mistakes just like you do. I failed bidding before as well, just like you have. And I don't want to do it again. And I'd certainly like my mistakes to be learning points for somebody else. And I'm happy to benefit from the expertise that we have here.

Captain Chris Lee Well, thanks again, Brian, and thanks for listening. If you have any questions, go to fdx.alpa.org and utilize the PDR link. From there you can send me a PDR via the communications category. Thanks again for listening and as always, be safe out there and we'll see you next time.