

THE MESINGER REPORT

The Flight Crew, A Most Valuable Asset

by Jay Mesinger

I recently reviewed pilot salary surveys produced by two respected industry publications. As you might imagine, flight crew salaries are moving higher due to the added utilization of aircraft in a robust economy as well as the increased demand due to fractional use. But this is evidence of more than just a simple supply and demand equation. There is more to the story than meets the eye by simply noting the change in salaries over the last several years.

I learned to fly when I was in high school, and then during college, I received my flight instructor rating. In those days, people were standing in line to learn to fly. But within a few years, the VA benefits that funded much of the advanced training ended. So did the lines! Over the next several years, the cost of flying lessons skyrocketed. The military increased the commitment required to get into flight school, and the number of pilots being trained dropped accordingly. We are suffering from these changes today. One of the greatest threats to growth in aviation is the low number of well-trained professionals in the cockpit. We are simply running out of good pilots.

As an aircraft broker, the shortage of qualified turbine aircraft pilots greatly affects my ability to sell planes.



The entire industry is searching for solutions. Manufacturers, NBAA and many of the aviation associations are supporting learn-to-fly programs intended to increase the number of pilots for tomorrow's marketplace.

What's the bottom line? Supply will continue to be stretched, and salaries will continue to edge up, while attracting and retaining flight crews will become an even more challenging task. I always tell

my clients that if they have a great pilot already on staff, they should work hard to be good partners in the relationship.

If you are currently looking for additional talent, outline a short- and long-term vision of the flight department. Remember, salary is not the only consideration in today's pilots' market. The opportunity to work with a quality company and considerate individuals who understand the costs and complexities of flight operations will cause a pilot to feel more secure and more willing to invest in a long-term relationship.

Benefits, equity opportunities and various intangibles can make long-term employment a reality for your best pilots. It will take listening to their professional and personal needs and responding accordingly.



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