

# A NEW BEGINNING, FOR ALL THE RIGHT REASONS BACK TO BASICS



Recently, my son Josh and I were invited to the offices of a large public company. We had the opportunity to meet with all of the senior management and participate in the discussion of starting a first time flight department. It was clear that our

role in the meeting was to help them understand the challenges and steps to achieving this goal. The most important part was for Josh and I to listen to them discuss their corporate culture. During that segment of our meeting I was reminded of the absolute value of 'Getting Back to the Basics'.

As I listened to the senior management team discuss the growth of the company, a company built on solid principles and foundations, I remembered something an advertising salesman said to me over 20 years ago. When times are tough, the leaders do not pull back. They continue to show their presence and spend advertising dollars when they are least available. The leaders remain on top by understanding the value of staying in the forefront of their prospects, clients and industry when times are tough. They are ready to display their name and their philosophy when competitors are scrambling to just stay afloat.

As I listened to this group of first time buyers describe their corporate culture, I remembered the importance of staying in front of the client's mind and of getting actual face time with them. It is during these tough times that we all, as aircraft professionals, pilots, flight department managers and owners, must use the aviation asset as a tool to help pull the entire company out in front. The company we met with is going to invest in this tool to make more frequent visits to their retail locations throughout the United States. They are planning to visit vendors more often, and use their aircraft to scout new locations. In short, this large public company is planning to

stay out in front during more difficult times. If you have a tool like an aircraft, use it. Find ways to increase face time, and build new relationships. Be the leader in your field. Promote its use.

In my role as an aircraft sales professional, I encounter discussions from owners that center around selling the aviation asset. Due to the weak environment we are in, the conversation often turns to some discussion of negotiation with a lender or lessor. Short falls are commonplace. This opportunistic answer is admittedly not the right answer for all. If it just made a difference to one or two departments it will have been worth mentioning.

As a flight department manager, this could be that time to forge new bonds between your department and the internal management. Find ways to promote the tool that is already in place with pilots trained and full flight operations in place. Be a cheerleader of sorts. Find ways to promote use.

The first obvious response from corporate hearing about potential greater use may be, "we are cutting back costs and the aviation department must be cut back or temporarily grounded". It may have to suffer somewhat as across the board controls are reviewed and implemented, however, a less severe cut may be avoided if the aviation tools can be used to build and support the very business that's suggesting the cuts. This powerful tool can be a savior during these very difficult times. Promote the aviation asset by getting out in front of your clients, prospects, and even competition.

**"I CHALLENGE EACH OF YOU IN THIS INDUSTRY TO BE A PART OF THIS NEW VIGOR; ADDING A LITTLE SOMETHING DAILY TO THE REVITALIZATION OF OUR INDUSTRY"**

Remember, the opportunities to increase use, and build and strengthen the company are not new; they frequently get forgotten as internal financial challenges increase. Anyone can just reduce payroll or change structure. But having the flight department take a proactive measure towards supporting the bigger picture as well as finding ways to independently cut down their own costs enhances the philosophy of the company to stay out in front. This challenge should entail real depth in the review of each and every cost. Find ways to keep the department ready to perform its duties without compromise to the delivery of its intended use. Find the ways that are less obvious (in cutting costs) like creating new vendor relationships with lower costs associated with fuel, and outside services. Remember, the vendors would rather keep you flying as well. A complete shut-down will be much more devastating than some reduction in profit for your vendors.

This new year will not be free from challenges and new obstacles, but it can be rich with opportunities for a renewed strength and vigor for our industry. This will not start with production of aircraft, but from a renewed eye towards use. It can start small with a positive conversation about aviation in an FBO lobby and build to working both internally and externally with your flight departments to develop strong, positive relationships and support networks for keeping up with the newest and most valuable cost cutting, or safety building patterns.

I challenge each of you in this industry to be a part of this new vigor; adding a little something daily to the revitalization of our industry. It can start as a small rumble or an article, like this one, dedicated to use and growth. It can then grow into a real ground swell if we all embrace the mantra. Back to Basics: Back to what may be tough but always works. The Basics.

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