

HOW MUCH EMOTIONAL BAGGAGE CAN YOUR AIRCRAFT HOLD?



I recently had the pleasure of spending time with the manager of a major flight department. His department was in the process of replacing one of their two aircraft with a different plane for a growing mission.

He also told me that a positive underlying result of the transition would essentially be that the flight department would get a new empty emotional baggage compartment with a different aircraft. This flight department had taken delivery of the aircraft that they were selling when it was new from the factory. Throughout the "birthing" process, they had numerous difficulties and down time. After what were now years of successful operations with that aircraft they had had a dispatch reliability of 99.5%.

Unfortunately, however, they couldn't seem to forget the early days of the aircraft's life when its dispatch reliability was 85%. Although the early problems had long since been fixed both the department personnel and management feared the rare "missed or delayed trip" and this fear affected the whole department.

As a result, the flight department manager shied away from promoting the use of the aircraft throughout the company. Mind you, this fear existed regardless of the fact that the aircraft has a dispatch reliability of 99.5%. When the aircraft sells and the purchasing flight department has 99.5% dispatch reliability, they will most likely boast of the plane's success instead of shying away from promoting its use. Nothing about the aircraft will have changed, but the memories of its problems in its early years won't weigh down the new flight department. Simultaneously, the flight department who has been hampered by this heavy emotional baggage will

get a new opportunity with an empty baggage compartment with their replacement aircraft. Hopefully, this will allow them to move forward and promote the use of the company's aviation assets unlike before. It is important to note, however, that transitioning aircraft is not the only way to clean out your emotional baggage compartment and it often times isn't a solution at all.

Last month I wrote about "getting back to the basics." The basics referred to in the article were about staying in the forefront of your industry in troubling times when others are scaling back. For a flight department, this meant promoting the use of your aviation assets to keep your company in front of clients, customers, investors and alliances. It is through this kind of "boat-rocking," or defying status quo and promoting increased utilization in down times that your department might thrive instead of facing a boardroom edict to shut down.

Rocking this boat can be a terrifying thing to do and that fear can fill a department's emotional baggage compartment too. When status quo is comfortable and your emotional baggage compartment is full with fear of speaking up and promoting use, many flight departments stay quiet.

Unfortunately, it is when you stay quiet and you don't promote use that the company board and the executives might overlook the value of the flight department. Therefore, the emotional baggage might end up being just the cause the department does face that edict to shut down. There are many reasons an emotional baggage compartment can fill up and weigh down a flight department. I also understand that finding ways to empty out that baggage can be both difficult and scary. Someone might ask why they should confront this baggage and work to empty it. The answer to the question is because the result of not doing it might be that dreaded edict from the company boardroom. As a

matter of fact, last year my company was brought into a multi-aircraft, multi-location flight department to help identify opportunities for efficiencies cost-reduction and reduced dead-head legs. After working hand in hand with the department for about a month, we jointly identified many opportunities that would accomplish those goals. Now, months later and without any action taken by flight department management to incorporate many of the opportunities we identified, we have been informed that it has been mandated the flight department be closed.

The emotional baggage compartment within that flight department was full of history relating to specific airplanes, corporate decisions, merged flight department ideologies and more. Unfortunately, I believe it was in large part due to this emotional baggage that the simple opportunities we identified together were not implemented resulting in the department being shut down. As I have said above, I know that cleaning out the emotional baggage a flight department might have is challenging, and to put that baggage behind you can be scary, but confronting the challenge might be the only way to keep a department alive and thriving in this difficult time. For instance, staying out in the forefront of your company's industry can help it survive tough times and come out on the other side a winner. Keeping your flight department in the forefront of your company's mind-share can also help it succeed.

Therefore, go take a current weight and balance calculation and see if you need to offload some emotional baggage. Continue to check this often, take the risks associated with emptying your emotional baggage and promote the positive virtues of your assets!

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