Surviving the bizav pilot and technician shortage

The well-documented skills shortage within the business aviation sector has led to a number of industry initiatives, not least the NBAA’s student outreach program, which it describes as a top priority.

Few are as passionate about attracting students and young people to the business aviation industry as Dan Wolfe, VP and General Manager of Aviation for Fortune 100 Nationwide Insurance. Recognized by the Living Legends of Aviation for his significant contribution to aviation, here he provides practical guidance on how to reverse the bizav ‘brain drain’.

How are we as an industry going to compete with the airlines in hiring and retaining qualified individuals? One option is to start with our youth. It is up to us to plant the seed among adolescents and young professionals entering the workforce. We must have continuous involvement within schools and colleges to present, mentor and offer as many “hands-on” experiences as possible.

It has been well over two years since the business aviation industry came to terms with the reality of the pilot and maintenance technician shortage. The ripple effect within our industry has taken a large toll, with major and regional airlines taking every qualified able-body they can find; and this trend will likely get worse before it gets better. According to Boeing’s 2018 Pilot and Technician Outlook, the next 20 years can expect a worldwide pilot demand of 790,000, and 754,000 maintenance technicians.

The airlines draw in top talent from bizav and military pools by offering a significant increase in long-term salary, sign-on bonuses and additional employee benefits. They’ve created fast-track entry programs for young flight school students, while growing markets in Asia and the Middle East are also contributing to the competition to recruit new talent.

Individuals are out there who don’t know about business aviation. We need to educate and find those who are energized and want to be part of this industry.

There are many ways to increase involvement, both locally and nationally. You can partner with local and regional groups for special events, attend career days at schools and universities and join mentoring and networking groups to be paired with younger peers. The Business Aviation Management Committee, in partnership with NBAA, recently released an energizing video Consider a Career in Business Aviation and presentation to be used for such advocacy. If you’re passionate about what you do that passion will be contagious.

Formal internships

Going beyond a presence in the schools, we need to bring students into our departments through formal internships. If you run a successful flight department but don’t have an internship program, what’s holding you back? NBAA’s website has a wealth of resources for businesses to use in the development of impactful internship programs. Nationwide has been running successful flight operations and maintenance internships for many years and each year brings a new skillset, talent and fresh perspective. The symbiotic transfer of knowledge and techniques is a benefit to both the student and flight department.

Getting the younger generations interested is a key priority. Along with ensuring that we are offering our people good compensation, benefits, and work-life balance. Engage with your HR leaders,

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There’s a common theme running through the content of this issue of ‘Contrails’. Whether it’s those who fly, service or maintain our aircraft or those no less important personnel who provide the landside passenger interface, the aviation industry is fully dependent on its employees to ensure the smooth running of day-to-day operations.

And while our ‘perfect’ audit from partner airline Allegiant was a rare and great tribute to those whose work formed the basis on which the audit was conducted, the customer service training workshops that we have been running for all BGR employees show that we take nothing for granted.

Well-trained, well-rewarded and motivated staff are the lifeblood of any industry. It was encouraging, therefore, of the work that the NABAA’s Business Aviation Management Committee is carrying out, especially at grassroots level, where the next generation of bizav pilots and technicians will come from.

The aviation industry remains a vibrant and exciting sector, with real career development opportunities for those who show the aptitude and energy that the job requires.

The agreement, one of nine similar arrangements between the United Kingdom and countries around the world, ensures a continuation of vital routes ahead of the UK’s exit from the European Union (EU). Commonly known as ‘Brexit’, the divorce from the EU is currently scheduled for Friday, 29 March 2019.

The ‘Open Skies’ arrangement replaces the existing EU aviation agreement with the US and will guarantee the continuation of vital transatlantic routes, ensuring people can continue to travel easily between the UK and US and maintaining choice and good value travel. It also protects the $64 billion trading relationship with the UK, in which air travel plays a vital role.

“The US and the UK have long enjoyed a ‘special relationship’, the term coined in 1946 by Sir Winston Churchill, and which has helped shape the modern world. There is no better example of this than in aviation, where transatlantic flights have helped to bring our countries even closer together, strengthening ties and boosting our economies. The bi-lateral ‘Open Skies’ agreement between the UK and the US bodes well for the airport, for the City of Bangor and for the wider Maine community.”

The announcement that the UK government has concluded a new ‘open skies’ air services agreement with the United States is great news, both for travelers and businesses alike,” says BGR Airport Director Tony Caruso.

The BGR website has undergone a total ‘makeover’, with a more contemporary appearance and a layout that is easier to navigate.

“Maintaining an up-to-date on-line presence is vital for Bangor International,” says Marketing and Business Development Manager Aimee Thibodeau. “Although we’re live with a new-look site, we will continue to tweak the content going forward.”
BIZAV SHORTAGE cont. from page 1

stress the importance of attracting and retaining talent to maintain your safe operation. It may be time for you to review and restructure your compensation and benefits packages. Do this before you lose a generation of pilots and technicians - don’t wait for a reactionary compensation restructure.

While it is often the case that we are unable to compete head-to-head with airline salaries, we need to consider the bigger picture. It’s no secret that bizav employees are a different breed. We ask our employees to do so much more than commercial pilots or technicians. They perform cross-functional work, use diverse skillsets to contribute to workplace improvements and efficiencies, lead department-wide initiatives, and partake in leadership and professional development trainings. Working in business aviation allows the individual to learn and grow in ways the airlines just can’t offer or support.

There’s a quality of job fulfillment for the bizav pilot/technician that is unattainable in the airlines. This is a huge draw for young professionals looking at future career goals. Sure, some folks are in it solely for the money, but in my 40 years’ experience with business aviation and the airlines I know that if you chase the dollar, you’ll be running forever. We want passionate people working in our industry, enjoying their jobs and excited about their career paths. We need to connect and communicate with our upcoming workforce. If we don’t get out there and energize the potential future generations of business aviation we’ll never get ahead.

Customer service is the byword

In the aviation industry, in which increasing automation is the norm, the importance of the interaction between one human being and another may sometimes be overlooked.

This sentiment formed the basis of a series of customer service workshops for BGR employees – from those behind the ticket counter, to baggage handlers, fuelers and managers alike.

“At BGR, our customers truly are the most important part of our business and we take pride in the level of customer satisfaction and personal touches that we provide,” says Airport Director Tony Caruso. “The customer service training program stressed all aspects of the customer experience, from the importance of a friendly greeting to more specific points to help employees go the extra mile whenever possible and never leave a passenger with unanswered questions.”

Perfect, says Allegiant

Airport Director Tony Caruso was “thrilled” to learn that BGR was rated “perfect” in its most recent audit by Allegiant Air, the leading low-cost airline that operates non-stop flights between Bangor and Sanford/Orlando and Tampa/St. Petersburg airports.

Conducted annually, the audit provides a comprehensive assessment of the airport’s performance, from ticketing and baggage handling to all other aspects of Allegiant’s processes and protocols. Covering both arrivals and departures, a flawless appraisal is quite rare, says Caruso.

“According to Allegiant, in nine years of conducting audits, this was the first to achieve a perfect rating.

“While we set ourselves high standards and are continually monitoring our own performance, it means so much more when one of our airline partners acknowledges what we do.

Celebrating 20 years of care

LifeFlight of Maine, which provides airborne transportation for critically ill patients who need emergency medical care, recently celebrated 20 years of service at its Bangor International Airport base.

Pilots, mechanics, nurses, paramedics and patients joined representatives of parent organizations Central Maine Healthcare and Northern Light Health (formerly Eastern Maine Healthcare), and aviation operator SevenBar Aviation, in a dedication ceremony and open house that allowed members of the public to meet the crews and enjoy a close-up view of the helicopters and fixed-wing aircraft that make up the LifeFlight fleet.

Over the last 20 years, the non-profit organization has touched the lives of more than 25,000 patients and their families, according to a LifeFlight news release.
A tall tale

Of all the New England roadside giants, none enjoys more fame than the 31-feet tall statue of lumberjack Paul Bunyan that stands in front of the Cross Insurance Center in Bangor, Maine.

Although many towns have adopted the mythical leviathan as their own – and Bunyan statues may be found throughout the US – Bangor’s claim as the country’s lumber capital and the place where Bunyan was born is perhaps the oldest and most legitimate. There is even an oversized ‘birth certificate’ that hangs in City Hall, proclaiming his birth date as February 12, 1834, the day Bangor incorporated.

Towering over Main Street since 1959, when it was commissioned as part of the Queen City’s 125th anniversary celebrations, the 3,700-pound statue is constructed of fiberglass, metal and wood and stands on a 6ft-high stone base. Designed by local artist J. Normand Martin and financed by New York based builders, it was built to be hurricane-proof and can withstand winds up to 110mph.

The statue stands as a monument to the City’s heritage, depicting Bunyan in a classic lumberjack pose, with a double-bit axe in one hand and a peavey, a lumberman’s lever with pivoting hooked arm and metal spike at one end, in the other. Over the years ‘Tall Paul’ has been adorned with a bandana when legendary country singer Willie Nelson performed in town and a Shriners’ fez when society members convened in Bangor.

Although Paul Bunyan’s legend is a staple of American folklore, the Bangor Bunyan owes at least part of its fame to local author Stephen King, who brought the statue to life in a cameo role in his 1986 horror novel, It, which featured the City’s fictional counterpart, Derry. In the book (also made into a TV mini-series) in which seven pre-teens fight a child-killing clown, the statue comes to life when it is inhabited by an evil spirit.

A time capsule, to be opened on the City’s 250th anniversary on February 12, 2084, was buried in the statue’s base.