



Lift Contracting: The Future Of Commercial Aviation...Should We Choose To Allow It

What is the “end game” with all these bankruptcies, outsourcing, and new features of the FARs? Is it all just a bewildering coincidence, or is there something behind these efforts?

Airline management and the government realize that they have limited options for pilots unifying behind withholding their services (strikes). Without pilots, the aircraft do not move and enormous sums of money can be lost. But more important than money, it is CONTROL that the airlines covet above all other things. The best thing they can do in the present day is hide behind the tortured interpretations of the RLA and simply “wait-out” any pilot resolve to improve their situation. They also have limited use of the bankruptcy code to force concessions that pilots would never willingly give up at the bargaining table, however, this tactic has practical limits as to its frequency of use. It also comes at a price to management.

It isn't that they are concerned about the viability of their corporations; they want control. Profits are secondary to control, just as safety is secondary to profits.

It is maddening to an airline manager that a lowly pilot can use his authority as pilot-in-command to trump the wishes of management. It is further troublesome that pilots may eventually find release from the NMB and attain the upper hand in negotiations. Flight attendants can be replaced very easily, as can ground workers. Licensed mechanics are tougher to replace, but can be outsourced to third parties.

Pilots are almost impossible to replace and can only be outsourced by having another operating certificate generate the lift the airline sells.

That's where they are going. It is the only place they can go, unless they want to confront pilots on terms agreeable to pilots.

The United and Delta contracts in the early part of last decade served as a huge warning to airline management. Left to its own resolution, unperturbed by interpretations of the RLA that were never envisioned by its authors, the pilots will eventually get their hands on the levers that control the pace of negotiations, and secure contract language suitable to the responsibilities airline pilots bear. This is at odds with what management wants, since the language does not always translate to money, but control over aspects of the operation.

It is control they covet.

The managerial teams convinced a generation of highly gullible union leadership that they were only interested in increasing market share by standing-up smaller "airlines within airlines," or "feeder airlines." These new airlines would invade fortress hubs and bring passengers into their own hubs, expanding market share, and providing growth.

Well, after 20 years, how is that working for the mainline pilots? Not well.

Rather than expanding flying opportunities for the "mainline," the new "feeder" operation took over the peripheries of the mainline and

subsequently much of the shorter-haul market once served very well, and profitably, by the mainline. Passengers hate the arrangement, as they are stuffed onto small jets, separated from their carry-on luggage, and are flown around by pilots short on experience but long on ambition.

These new feeder operations are now large enough that they can be effectively used to whipsaw the mainline, as well as each other. Most of them were forced to compete with each other for the “lift” the mainline was contracting out to the lowest bidder. These new market realities provided powerful incentives for management to hire the cheapest pilots, cheapest maintenance, and provide the bare-bones training for the inexperienced pilots they hire. The inexperienced pilots, desperate to escape the “regional airline,” accept pilot pushing, horrible working conditions and low pay because they know they are working at an internship. **This is what caused the Colgan Air / Continental Connection 3407 crash in 2009 - NOT FATIGUE!** Meanwhile, highly experienced pilots at the mainline are either furloughed, or fearful they will have to accept lower standards or be further outsourced.

What does the public gain in such an arrangement? Colgan Air 3407 is a good starting point, since that is the EXACT model the airlines are seeking to implement over the entire operation. They do not care about your safety. They covet control and are willing to endanger the flying public, and bankrupt the air transportation system to get it.

By having an avenue to bypass the wishes of its pilot union, the airline has vastly increased the control they have over the operation. Control is a zero-sum game, and since management is in ascendancy, the pilot group is in decline. If increasing the amount of eligible lift contractors provides more control, they will certainly do so.

The misinformed among us will say this is an area collective bargaining must address, and in a fully-functioning industry, they would be correct. The collective bargaining process is broken, allowing airlines to stall at the bargaining table, and then when the mainline pilots dig in on their list of “non-negotiables,” the airline pops a Chapter 11 bankruptcy filing which allows them to take the crown jewels of the pilots at an 1113 filing.

Why do you think pilots have given up scope protections over the past decade? They gave them up at the point of a gun.

Once the mainline pilots are broken, after scope protections are gone, the race to the bottom will hit its next phase. New contract feeders will bid for the available flying, and the bidding process will force the pilots at those new airlines to undercut those of the rival. Eventually, the “profession” will be nothing more than a revolving door of poorly trained, fatigued, operators that have no prospects in any genuine middle-class occupation. Picture bus drivers with \$100,000 of school debt.

The only military pilots that will fly commercial air will be those who were kicked out of the military and have no other options. What was once the objective of the best military aviators will now be the repository for those too problematic for uniformed service.

With pilot compensation so misaligned with the dedication required and responsibility undertaken, the next-generation pilot will be better off driving a taxi or a limousine, leaving only the dregs of the industry operating the aircraft. As Captain Sullenberger once said,

I think that there will always be people who will want to do this [commercial aviation]. It just may not be the same people who are doing it now.

I guess we will add “commercial airline pilot” to the list of jobs “Americans won’t do.”

Management will lobby Congress to **change the law** allowing foreign operators to bid on domestic US flying. At first, it will be the Canadians, British, and Australians, but soon afterward, it will be the Egyptians, Mexicans, Chinese, Indians, Brazilians, or any other carrier that will find the rock-bottom pilot to fly. The lowest bidder will still be flying you from Newark to Buffalo, but it will be by pilots that will make us fondly remember the “expertise” we had with Colgan Air. The new “seamless” travel experience will be from the airplane to the taxicab.

The fields of the piloting profession will be salted.

The short-sighted will say that a national seniority list would prevent this from happening, but they are sorely mistaken. Seniority does not matter in an environment where one day you are senior and the next day, you are out of work. You would still need to be hired by the winner of the contract, which won't happen. The airline will just bypass you and hire the next youngster with more ambition than common sense. Seniority does you no good unless you are employed. Any pilot group that was "senior" and believed they could improve their working conditions would simply be replaced by another hungry group.

Absolute control. This is management's dream scenario, and they are less than a decade away from achieving it.

Too bad our union leadership of the late 80s and early-mid 90s thought the RJ wasn't a threat. Many of the union leaders knew they would be over the finish line by the time the threat materialized, so they sold-out the future of our profession for "peace in their time." The camel no longer has his nose under the tent; the camel has made himself at home and is about to move into the master suite.

Our union leadership still doesn't understand that while seeking to beggar thy neighbor to capture market share, we are all destroying our profession.

The only way this happens is if we continue to grant concessions on scope. Living to "fight another day," or "we will get them next time," or any other such failed tactics will continue to yield failed results. This must be the line that management is not allowed to cross, lest they keep coming for more.

There will always be pilots in their mid-late 50s that don't want to "rock the boat." There will always be promises that this will be the last concession, so as to stay competitive. There will always be a "path of least resistance." The siren song of "peace in our time" has destroyed more peace than just about any other concept.

Appeasement invites aggression - always has, always will. Ask an American Airlines pilot how much "peace" \$8,000,000,000 worth of tribute purchased for them in 2003. Ask a United-"tulip" pilot how much "peace" they purchased in 1994 with their B-Fund, and an entire year's pay. How

many millions did Glenn get when “peace in our time” ended?

Where do we stand as a national pilot group? Will we support efforts to end this destructive cycle, or will we opt not to? The weak among us will say that those on top will not support unity, because they are on top. Those on the bottom won't support unity because they are fearful of starting over. Those in the middle don't want to risk going down, and can see the top from their present position.

Excuses...excuses...the vocabulary of “**TYPE 3**” pilots¹.

We propose “solutions...solutions.” We propose that this “lift brokering” model never be allowed to progress beyond its present form, and be pushed back to extinction. We have proposed legislation that would accomplish these goals, and allow what we do for a living to, once again, become a profession of dignity, respect, and honor. We can't do that without unity.

If you want to be replaced by an over-indebted, inexperienced, malleable functionary, keep your eyes on only that which immediately benefits you. If you wish to be an integral part of a generation that stands up to the forces arrayed against us, and rebuild the profession, as those who went long before us did, support national unity. Support OPERATION ORANGE.

They are coming for your career. Whether or not you are at Southwest or Delta, American or US Airways, your airline managers need your consent and your selfishness to achieve their purposes. Your pilot association doesn't understand that you have options and that your future is not set; they are just unprepared to fight. **They have been providing hospice care for a dying profession.** It's time to convince them to support a cure for what ails us.

It is the law that ails us.

Change the law; restore your profession. This is a decision you must make, whether you like it or not. By making “the other guy” pay the full measure of sacrifice, you are only guaranteeing you will also make that sacrifice.

¹ See *Basic Strategy*, pg 2, www.operationorange.org/basicstrategy.pdf

Support OPERATION ORANGE's efforts to **change the laws**. This is a FIRST AMENDMENT right we all enjoy, and no court or Railway Labor Act provision can take that away from us.

If anyone has a better idea, we would like to hear it. Don't bring us problems; bring us solutions.

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THIS IS OUR TIME.

For more information, please visit OPERATIONORANGE.org.

