AEI Update for AMFA

March 30, 2017

The global push for less and less qualified personnel has put ever increasing pressure on aircraft maintenance technicians and engineers who certify for the final airworthiness of aircraft. Many cases have been filed with the regulatory authorities in the USA, Europe, and Australia, most notably the FAA investigations of Southwest Airlines and American Airlines in 2015, one in regards to oversight and the other maintenance fraud. Time pressure combined with inadequate qualifications and training will result in disaster; it's not a matter of coincidence, it's only a matter of time. So, if your manager tries to strong-arm you into signing, think long and hard about the consequences, and then hand them the pen and say, “you sign it.” If the answer is a blank stare, then respond, “I will sign it when I am satisfied that this aircraft is airworthy.”

The Tech log signature, return to service (RTS), certificate to release to service (CRS) or signing off all ensure that, to the best of the signatory's knowledge, all the maintenance carried out and the necessary documentation associated with the aircraft is in order and in accordance with company procedures and regulations, all together saying, this aircraft is ready to fly. Whenever management talks about watering this down, removing this part or streamlining procedures, it’s simply all about cutting costs and removing the certified engineer, mechanic, or technician from the landscape. Losing this final stage of crucial oversight is not just stupid, it is plain dangerous, and at Aircraft Engineers International (AEI) we fight that battle daily in every corner of the world.

How many times have we heard "new aircraft don't require maintenance," "this aircraft is a game changer," "this aircraft turns itself around?" If I had a dollar for every time I heard one of these or similar statements, I would no longer be working 12-hour night shifts. The truth is akin to reality, no matter the advancements in technology and materials, the guarantees given by manufacturers or the rhetoric of airline management, all aircraft breakdown and when they do they need us, the men and women who know what they're doing, have been trained accordingly, certified by the national regulator to uphold maintenance to a standard not to a price for ours is a grave responsibility.

Offshore outsourcing was once the scourge of all airline heavy maintenance operations personnel, and whilst it remains a constant threat nowadays, it has been taken over by onshore outsourcing - companies such as Lufthansa Technics, SR Technics, HAECO, ST Aerospace and the like have bypassed the fear factor of offshoring by creating MRO facilities within other countries. This allows the appearance of employing locals yet they do so often at reduced wages, no union representation, and lesser work conditions than the national operators, thus undermining the very systems that has been put in place over one hundred years to protect all aircraft workers. The exposure of poor maintenance standards and the use of unskilled labour in these facilities, by AEI and its affiliates, has enabled authorities to enforce regulation where once upon a time they operated without oversight.

As the worldwide entity that represents tens of thousands of aircraft professionals on all continents, ok maybe not Antarctica, at AEI we focus our efforts on all these matters and more striving to prevent this continual race to the bottom by an ever-increasing profit before safety industry. Our efforts to ensure ‘safe skies for all’ are matched by all our affiliates and that combined effort will ensure the travelling public fly safely. I know every time I sign a logbook I do so believing my family is on board and I believe we all do the same – we are the “Guardians of Air Safety,” and without us and our dedication to our profession, the world of air travel would be one of tragedy.
So, no matter how cynical, how dissatisfied, or how disillusioned we become with the powers to be who seek to control our world (regulators, airlines, or MROs), we all never want to see a burning hole in the ground, not on our watch.

AEI was pleased to hear that a quick resolution was attained in the Alaska Airlines contract negotiations, but equally frustrated and extremely disappointed with the behavior of Southwest Airlines management who have treated their hard-working mechanics so poorly. Coming up to five years without a current contract is utterly unacceptable. I personally know some of those who are on the AMFA negotiation team and aircraft maintenance technicians working for Southwest, and at AEI we throw our full support behind the AMFA push for respect, recognition, and remuneration.

Everyday all over the world AEI representatives in national unions are encouraging, advising, protecting, and most of all understanding what all of us are going through day to day – why, because we're one of you. To be a part of a world fraternity ensures the spread of knowledge, because as we know knowledge is power and when that gained knowledge is applied it becomes all-encompassing. I encourage you all to join our Facebook, twitter, and email network and share the knowledge of thousands of engineers, mechanics, and technicians the world over.

The AEI International Annual Congress 2017 will take place in Lisbon, Portugal in November, where engineers, mechanics, technicians, and other aviation professionals gather together to discuss, present, and debate current subjects and most importantly a way to solve the problems we all face. AEI AC 2017 will be an opportunity for all members, especially those who attend to charter the direction of AEI for 2018. We welcome any member of affiliate organizations to join for what is four days of important discussions and presentations amongst likeminded professionals from the world over.

In Solidarity,

Paul Cousins
AEI President
