A QUESTION FOR US AIRWAYS PASSENGERS - WHAT KIND OF FLIGHT CREW DO YOU WANT FLYING YOUR FLIGHT TODAY?

We know you're here because you're concerned about safety, and we appreciate the time you're taking to get the facts.

SAFETY FIRST. At the US Airline Pilots Association (USAPA), the union that represents US Airways pilots, that's our motto. Our pilots have decades of experience and are committed to making sure that every flight we fly arrives safely at its destination. That's our responsibility to you, our passengers - and it's one we take very, very seriously.

Unfortunately, our employer does not share our passion for safety. While US Airways management touts their safety record and certain programs they have in place, they have nonetheless created a culture of intimidation and pressure, where a Captain's authority takes a backseat to economic considerations and on-time performance. We know that being on-time is important to our passengers, but US Airways is pressuring its labor groups beyond reasonable limits and to the detriment of safety. We cannot support their desires for profits over safety, and we will not put the lives of our passengers at risk to satisfy the on-time performance goals that produce lucrative executive bonuses.

Consider what happened on June 16, 2011:

- One of our most experienced Captains - with over 30 years of experience, thousands of hours of flight time and a degree in Aviation Safety - was in the cockpit, about to embark on a 3,000 mile trans-Atlantic overnight flight.
- When pushing back from the gate, the auxiliary power unit (a backup source of electrical power) and the Hot Battery Bus (a critical source of primary electrical power) both failed. In other words, the plane had no electrical power and no radio communications.
  None
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- After opening a window to verbally call down to the ground crew (the Captain’s only
option), US Airways maintenance was able to restart the power unit, but offered no explanation
as to why it failed or any reasonable assurance that it wouldn't fail again.

- With her years of experience, the Captain knew this was a serious problem, and not one
she wanted to encounter again, in the middle of the night, somewhere over the Atlantic Ocean.

This Captain did exactly what she is paid to do: exercise good judgment by stopping the
operation and to address the issue with US Airways' maintenance staff. In the meantime, she
had an airplane with nearly 300 passengers who were not only anxious for information, but they
were getting increasingly hot. Diagnosing the electrical problems required shutting down the
aircraft's air conditioning and there were problems with a ground-based conditioning unit. While
dealing with the maintenance issue, the Captain and her crew also had to monitor the situation
in the cabin and make sure the temperature wasn't unsafe - for passengers of any age or health
condition - and balance those concerns against the goals of Customer Service agents who are
frequently resistant to deplaning the passengers because of the pressure to be on time.

Perhaps if mechanics had simply started work on the problem when the Captain reported it, the
situation would have worked itself out, but US Airways isn't running that way with our current
management. Instead, they embarked on a plan to intimidate the Captain and her crew to try to
get them to fly the airplane without fixing it. Not only did mechanics try to convince her to
disregard the problem, but her supervisor called her repeatedly and put tremendous pressure
on her, specifically asking if she was "refusing to fly." At US Airways, pilots who refuse direct
orders are putting their jobs at risk.

But this Captain stood her ground. She was right and she knew it, and she deserves
tremendous credit for placing her career at risk in the name of safety. So, what does US
Airways do with a Captain with such strong character and superior skills? In this case, she was
met by US Airways Corporate Security and escorted out of the airport!

Furthermore,
members of her crew were threatened with arrest should they try to interfere.
US Airways has since attempted to spin the reason for calling for security as a customer service
issue - they claim that her "continued presence was creating an environment that reflected
unfavorably on the Company." Translated, this Captain's presence represented the passengers'
only link to the truth about the aircraft's condition, and the Company likely didn't want them to
get wind of the fact that their plan was to find a crew who would fly the airplane without fixing
this known deficiency.

After escorting the Captain out of the airport, the replacement crew experienced the same
US Airways Pilots Are Committed To Safety First!

problem - not once, but TWICE - and the airplane was finally removed from service, requiring over seven hours of maintenance to repair a failed battery bus and replace a faulty electronic control board on the auxiliary power unit. When all was said and done, a total of six experienced pilots refused to fly the aircraft before it was repaired and it finally departed some 11 hours late with a third crew. But these questions remain: Do you want the pilots of your next flight to deal with this type of intimidation from airline management and customer service? Should they have to place their jobs at risk in pursuit of an airworthy aircraft?

This isn't the first time USAPA has been moved to make our safety concerns part of the public record. Three years ago this month we alerted the travelling public in USA Today to US Airways management's last big assault on our Captains' authority when they were issuing discipline to pilots who disagreed with how much fuel was needed on certain flights. (Click here to read our other communication to you from July 2008.) The very idea that accountants and managers would argue with our most experienced pilots about fuel loads was ludicrous. Many of our pilots have been flying professionally since long before our top managers attended their junior proms, and we weren't about to place our passengers in jeopardy over a few dollars saved. It's the difference between book knowledge and real world experience. Our pilots have real world experience - tons of it - and that's what saves the day when real trouble arises; we all remember the "Miracle on the Hudson".

Similarly, our recent confrontations with US Airways' management involve the difference between what looks good on paper and the reality of flying seven miles above the Atlantic or Pacific Oceans at night. Or over the Rocky Mountains. Or over the dark expanses on our way to Anchorage. Often times it's a question of what is legal versus what is safe. It's legal to fly with the absolute minimum fuel onboard, but our experienced Captains know it's not always safe. It's legal to fly with certain aircraft equipment inoperative, but it's not always safe. It was technically legal for US Airways to be the only major carrier to fly over the Amazon Jungle without satellite communications for essential ATC communications and position reporting, but the pilots insisted it wasn't safe. In fact, for most airlines, if the SatCom is inoperable the flight is cancelled. Finally, after pressure from the union's Safety Committee and outside entities, US Airways has stated they will install the equipment. Their excuse for not installing it in the first place? Management stated the revenue on the route in question didn't justify the expense of installing the communications equipment; again a clear money over safety decision.

In countless areas of our professional lives, pilots are faced with the question of legality vs. safety. When we are partnered with solid leadership from a management team that thinks of safety above everything else, these decisions are made without intimidation or fear of reprisal. This certainly is NOT the case with the current management at US Airways, who is implementing a "shut up and fly" mentality we will not stand for.
It's been said that aviation is not inherently dangerous, but it is by all accounts terribly unforgiving. All USAPA pilots applaud the Captain in this latest debacle for insisting that her aircraft be safe. We applaud her for standing up to a company that pushes for on-time departures, no matter what the cost. We applaud her for averting a potential crisis over the Atlantic. Conversely, we find the Company's actions deplorable. They suspended her without explanation for three weeks. Rather than thanking her for exercising impeccable judgment and demonstrating superior knowledge of her aircraft's systems, they called her in for an investigative hearing and then returned her to line flying without any word whatsoever addressing why she was treated like a criminal at the airport that evening. On top of everything, they haven't even apologized.

What we are detailing here is a systematic problem here at US Airways. While this incident is a big topic this week, our files are filled with other, similar events - evidence of a serious cultural problem that Management is perpetuating.

Last year, after identifying the problem, our Safety Committee asked US Airways to partner with us in a Safety Culture Survey conducted by renowned expert Dr. Terry Von Thaden. (Click her to read Dr. Von Thaden's resume.) US Airways' management refused to participate. In fact, US Airways is the only airline in history to refuse participation in one of Dr. Von Thaden's surveys. They immediately politicized the survey by claiming it was a negotiating tactic on our part. That suggestion is both insulting and false. Pilots have more of a vested interest in safety than any other type of aviation employee; our pilots expect their union to be proactive, and conducting this survey - even as Management hid behind false claims of political intent - was overwhelmingly supported by our members. (This is but a small excerpt from Dr. Von Thaden's survey of the safety culture at US Airways: "It is not enough to state in corporate documents that you desire to provide a safe environment; then turn your back to work actions which intentionally violate both ethical and safe operations. US Airways has chosen a path that no longer provides pilots the protection of being within the "standard of care" recognized in the industry and could jeopardize their ability to operate safely."
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Management at US Airways appears to be hiding something. To wit, their legal department has prohibited managers at all levels from even discussing the results of the survey with us, perhaps because Dr. Von Thaden identified several serious deficiencies at our airline. Further, they have threatened our Safety Committee Chairman - an Airbus A330 International Captain with over 33
years at US Airways, over 18 year as a Check Airman, and nearly 18,000 hours of flight experience - with termination should he continue advocating for safe procedures on your behalf.

Experts will tell you: There's a big difference between a company's **safety record** and its **safety culture**. While US Airways safety record is unquestionably enviable, it is our pilots' experience and skill that produces it, as was the case in 2009 when two of our pilots landed a completely disabled Airbus on the Hudson River and all onboard survived. But professional pilots are risk managers by design, and we must always strive to prevent disaster rather than react to it. We look for possibilities of danger around every corner of the operation, and our experience tells us when to question an aircraft's airworthiness or the suitability of a set of weather conditions. We cannot exercise our best judgment when operating in a culture of intimidation and disrespect. This is why we are bringing you the facts about US Airways and how they treat their experienced aviators.

Leading up to our decision to again go public, 60 days ago we called for the immediate termination of the ranking official in charge of airline safety at US Airways - Vice President of Safety and Regulatory Compliance Paul Morell. Mr. Morell has been openly hostile toward us and our efforts on behalf of your safety, and his removal would undoubtedly enhance safety, but true to form our requests have been ignored by Management and the culture of intimidation continues.

Every pilot who flies for US Airways is committed to making sure that safety remains our top priority. While Management shamelessly takes credit for the safety record we provide to them, we are morally bound to bring the cultural problems this airline embodies to light. Because US Airways has steadfastly refused to work cooperatively with us and because the incidents are becoming more frequent and more serious in nature, we have decided our best alternative is to communicate openly and honestly with you, the travelling public. We know you have a choice in air travel. Management apparently thinks you'll be more impressed with an on-time departure than you'll be with a truly airworthy aircraft and a flight crew whose valuable experience is fully utilized to ensure your safe arrival.

Shame on US Airways management for putting profits before people.

So, what can you do?
For the flying public:

We urge the flying public to take several actions. First, let us know if you see any practices which cause you concern or events that have occurred that you believe are safety related. You can do that by clicking here.

Second, contact your elected officials and let them know how you feel about an airline that attempts to intimidate pilots into making questionable decisions. To find and contact your elected officials, simply go to http://www.usa.gov/Contact/Elected.shtml.

Third, contact the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) and let them know how you feel about airlines that put profits before safety. You can reach the FAA Aviation Safety Hotline here: http://www.faa.gov/contact/safety_hotline

Fourth, contact the Aviation Consumer Protection Division to express your concerns to them. They can be reached at: http://airconsumer.dot.gov/problems.htm

In the contacts above, here is some suggested wording you may consider:

I have read the safety concerns expressed by the US Airline Pilots Association regarding the disturbing negative safety culture at US Airways, and believe that this matter should be investigated in the interest of the safety of the traveling public.

Members of the media:

For more information, contact:
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