



Why don't more aviation maintenance personnel belong to a professional organization?

Perhaps the cartoon explains it all, "I'm ONLY an AME or AMT if South of the 49th or, if over 50 years old, perhaps even still an A&P."

I have heard those very words more than once and I cringe. If we go back to the June 2015 issue of DOM or #7 of our DOM articles on our website, we see the characteristics of a typical aircraft maintainer as published by Giselle

Richardson, a psychologist who knew what she was talking about when in the late 70s she said that we have a tendency to be loners and not share our thoughts too often. In other words we are not joiners and that has to be **our greatest weakness** as a professional.

Lets start with a few statistics. However keep in mind the words of Franklin D. Roosevelt when he is reputed to have said: "There are lies, dam lies and statistics." As a politician he would know.

ATEC (Aviation Technician Education Council) reported that there are 286,000 AMTs registered with the FAA in the USA. Now they say that 27% of this number (77,220) are over 64 years old. Thus the odds are high that a good number are certifying angel wings. Thus I'll WAG (Wild Ass Guess) that 250,000 are active AMTs.

So how many belong to a professional organization such as **PAMA** (Professional Aviation Maintenance Association) According to John Gogola, their Chairman, there is 1200 which translates into **.48%**. John, who never hesitates to call it as he sees it says that the reason for this extremely low number is simply "*they are cheap bastards.*" In Canada there are 17,610 AMEs (2017) of which 601(or **3.41%**) belong to the five regional AME Associations that form CFAMEA (Canadian Federation of Aircraft Maintenance Engineers Association) **THOSE ARE VERY PATHETIC NUMBERS.** Another disturbing statistic is the number of us that are women. In the US only **2.3%** are women while Canada is almost the same at **2.5%**. They say that this is slowly getting better as the US is up from **1.7%** in the last 17 years.

So are the associations growing? No! Should they be? Hell Yes! So why aren't they? Refer back to Giselle's list of characteristics. I try not to repeat past issues but here is a good place to insert my mentor's speech; "Cinderella in the Flight Department." Sadly she is no longer with us but she didn't hesitate to call a spade a spade so take a careful read about what she said way back then.



Cinderella in the Flight Department

Some years ago, flight operations began to discover the value - indeed, the need for - training in the human element for their managers and staff. This activity has evolved from being a rarity to a regular feature in most flight departments and focuses mainly on flight crews and management. Although the seminars we offer are advertised as being useful for flight and ground crews alike, invariably,

in our sessions, pilots outnumber mechanics by about five to one. How come? Why is this type of training not made available to nearly the same degree in the maintenance departments? Aren't mechanics people too?

Don't maintenance directors, crew chiefs, supervisors need skills to communicate and to manage and to motivate? Don't mechanics too need to learn to deal with stress? Why aren't they getting the same attention the flight groups get?

The answers to these questions, I am afraid, come to roost squarely on the shoulders of those responsible for the maintenance departments.

THEY MOSTLY DON'T ASK FOR WHAT THEY NEED.

You may know that different professions are characterized by different predominant personality profiles. If you doubt it, the next time you go to the NBAA annual show, pause in the aisles and look about you: use your intuition and you will very quickly be able to pick out the pilots from the salesmen (well, not always!), the salesmen from the design engineers, and the mechanics from all the others.

*Why? What characterizes the mechanic? We have worked now for more than ten years in aviation departments, and in our experience, these traits at least are found to predominate in the maintenance area: commitment to excellence, willingness to put in effort and hours, integrity, distrust of words, dependability, the **tendency to be a loner, modesty (no desire to be in the spotlight), doesn't like to ask for help, tends to be self-sufficient and so to think things through on his own and not share his thought too frequently or thoroughly.** (We have not met many mechanics whose wife says, "I wish that man would shut up and let me get a word in edgewise".)*

*Most of these qualities are assets - **PROVIDING THEY ARE NOT CARRIED TOO FAR.** Let's look at self-sufficiency, plus the habit of doing your thinking without checking it out with others. It's my contention that both contribute to the one-down role that maintenance too often holds in the flight department. In other words, one of the reasons the maintenance group so frequently finds itself in the position of the second-class citizen in the flight department is because, in a way, it is asking for it.*

Speaking to an aviation group some time ago, I said, "When things go wrong, pilots bitch and mechanics sulk". You have all heard about the squeaky wheel. Those who suffer in silence are less likely to get attention.

The business of not asking has become a habit for some of you. Let me give you an example. Not very long ago, we were conducting Team Effectiveness programs in a large corporate flight department. The company is one that does not cut corners, and generally responds to reasonable requests from its manager. To our amazement, we found out that whenever pilots and mechanics went to ground school (even when they were there together!!), mechanics received a lower allowance for meals, etc., than did the pilots! We made loud and indignant noises about this to the Aviation Manager, only to learn that it was the Chief of Maintenance who established the cost-of-living allowances for his people when they were traveling. The Aviation Manager had no objection to increasing the allowances to match those of pilots; he was simply going along with the Chief of Maintenance's preference!

With that kind of behaviour, is it any wonder that Cinderella is pushing out cinders and garbage in the maintenance area while her pilot sisters go to the ball in their brocade gowns? This attitude invites others to see mechanics as less important than other members of the department. If you invite people to kick you, there is bound to be someone who will accommodate you.

This article is an invitation to mechanics, and especially to the managers in the maintenance area, to start rethinking how they perceive their role in the department, the contribution their people make to the company, and the ways they have at their disposal to make sure that they are duly recognized.

Space available prevents our detailing the myriad of instances where some clarity and assertiveness would serve the maintenance group well: salaries, working hours, technical training, and (given our bias) the fact that mechanics - like other human beings - can benefit from assistance as they find their way in life, just like the rest of us, whether or not they are currently in a period of professional or personal or family crisis. That is to say that employees in the maintenance area require systematic psychological maintenance like the rest of us, and will benefit from any kind of training that enables them to understand human behaviour better, to see how they unwittingly contribute to some of their problems, and - most important - to ensure that they find some ways to become comfortable with more appropriate behaviour.

The first step, of course, is for the management group of the maintenance area to upgrade their own people skills, to get to understand how they limit their ability to use their talents, their experience, their wisdom, and their compassion for the benefit of their people. They need to recognize that they have two roles to play in the organization; to contribute to the success of the flight department, but also to stand up for, to defend, to represent, to develop their own staff. The two are sometimes in apparent conflict. More important, the second role too often conflicts with the manager's personal style as described above. Too often, he opts for the first at the expense of the second.

The mechanic has his 50% of the deal too. Does he swallow his frustrations, give up too easily ("I mentioned it to him once five years ago, but he didn't do anything, so what's the use of bringing it up again?"), does he assume - like the wife who enjoys being a victim - that "if he really loved me, he'd know what I want", or does he state his point of view clearly, does he make his frustrations and satisfactions and preferences known? Does he give his boss the kind of feedback the boss needs to do his job properly and easily?

*Bear in mind that what I am recommending is not revolution but equity and responsibility. It's a psychological coming-of-age of the maintenance people in the aviation industry that I am pushing for. It's time to have a bonfire and get rid of what a friend of mine calls "**the humbleshit**" and give to this excellent group of **professionals** the position they deserve in the industry. IT'S LARGELY UP TO YOU!*

So let's cut the humbleshit and join a professional organization that will have as one of its priorities, to advance our profession to the level it deserves. For the small group who belong to their professional organization, you have my sincere admiration. For the way too large "what's in for me" group I say: "get your humbleshit together as you are holding the rest of our profession from achieving the recognition our profession deserves."