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What Unity Means for You

By Captain Ed Havrilla

In nearly every instance of contract negotiations, labor leaders emphasize the importance of unity by the membership. While unity has a clinical definition that we can read below, the definition doesn't translate well into the actions that help it to develop:

Unity; noun, plural u•ni•ties.

1. The state of being one; oneness.
2. A whole or totality as combining all its parts into one.
3. The state or fact of being united or combined into one, as of the parts of a whole; unification.
4. Oneness of mind, feeling, etc., as among a number of persons; concord, harmony, or agreement.

I will try to give a few examples of what we can all do to build a better union for the Delta pilots.

Participate

Participation during non-work hours is a key demonstration of unity. Everyone knows it takes extra effort and time to attend an ALPA event near the airport or at a layover hotel. These LEC meetings and PUB events provide important information but they also provide a key part of negotiations; unified pilots attend union events. Complacent or contented pilots go play golf instead (and don't get what they deserve in negotiations). Every single member should make the effort to be at these events. Management is counting heads; our public presence is a measure of our union's solidarity, and is every bit as important as the content of the meetings and events. **Your motivation to get involved is a leading indicator of support for our organization and goals.**

Demonstrate

Wear a visible sign of support for ALPA and your negotiating team while at work. As you walk down the terminal, an ALPA lanyard, ALPA pin, or ALPA bag tag should define you to all that see you as a union supporter. Members of management are looking for these signs of support as a means to measure the unity and resolve of the pilots during negotiations. Furthermore, your fellow pilots are also looking for these signs. Team support builds confidence in a successful outcome. This is a simple request but a very important part of our historical methodology in labor negotiations. During summer uniform months, a lanyard is most visible from a distance so please consider this to be your first choice as an outward sign of support. In the winter, an ALPA lapel pin contrasts well with our black uniform. Bag tags help even while traveling as a non-rev.

Educate

The next step in building unity is by making ourselves an informed pilot group. In years past, we printed everything and stuffed your v-file or your mailbox; today, nearly everything is sent electronically. The difference is that in the old days this material was waiting for you to review over your four-day trip. This facilitated a lot of conversations in the cockpit, and the dissemination of the material was much more diverse. Regrettably today, a lot of material slides to the bottom of email boxes to be read later or not at all. When negotiations end, there can be too many pilots with incomplete knowledge or worse, misinformation about what transpired in the process. Snap judgments about contracts are what we try to avoid. An informed decision based on facts and the history of negotiations is the goal. Staying informed takes a near daily effort and having accurate information is part of the unity process. An important part of being informed is using that knowledge to provide input to your elected representatives. This is done with direct contact in person, on the phone, at a meeting, or via email. Expressing your thoughts completes the communication loop and helps to shape the direction of your union. Never rely on a posting to a public forum as a means of communications—take the direct approach with your concerns and get your questions answered.

Advocate

The final aspect of pilot unity to consider is your role as an individual when it comes to speaking with others, specifically members of management. Our base chief pilots are the eyes and ears of the Flight Ops team. What you say to them can and will be forwarded to senior levels. During negotiations, pilot sentiment is judged and helps management validate what is being said at the negotiating table by our elected negotiating team. Do not be the pilot who undercuts our current table position. Instead, if you are not completely up to speed on the information stream (see above), then provide your voice in general support of the ALPA team and our goals. Negotiations can be very dynamic. What just a few pilots say in the lounge can be construed as the voice of an entire base. Choose your words carefully.

Additionally, you may encounter members of management on the jumpseat, in the lounge or at a roadshow. Statements and questions in these situations matter as well. Be professional, be polite, but most of all, be *supportive* of our goals and our team. These are opportunities and each one of them helps to shape the final success of the contract.

"My union speaks for me" is a slogan we have used in the past. It does not indicate a conforming kool-aid drinker being led around as a bargaining chip. Instead, it does signify an active member fully participating in our internal processes, reaching consensus through democracy, and advancing our unified negotiating goals. That is our formula for success as a labor union.

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