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Professional Negotiators and White Knights

There are those who regularly tout the benefits of “professional negotiators” and they are *wise* to do so. Few if any Delta pilots would willingly turn over their negotiating authority to unelected, self-appointed “leaders” with no collective bargaining experience - no “table time” whatsoever - that have never represented a pilot group in negotiations of any sort. So we are naturally grateful that they perceive the need to mitigate this shortcoming by hiring “trained professional negotiators.” It is troubling, however, that they don’t offer examples of how this approach has worked out favorably for our peers at other airlines.

USAPA used similar promises to get on the property at US Airways. However, when it came time to negotiate a new contract, USAPA’s “professional negotiator” was an attorney with the very same law firm that supported its decertification drive. Six years after leaving ALPA, the pilots of USAPA still lack an amended agreement with their airline.

There is no silver-tongued, white knight in shining armor, trained professional negotiator to be found *anywhere* who can persuade airline managements to immediately yield to the demands of their clients. Through the entire history of our profession, contracts containing meaningful advances for our professional lives have only been achieved by strong pilot Negotiating Committees, backed by unified pilots, and supported by qualified professionals. When ALPA speaks of “professionals” we mean attorneys, economic and financial analysts, benefits specialists, and other subject matter experts with experience in airline negotiations. ALPA experts work hand-in-hand with elected pilot negotiators in drafting and speaking for proposals and making strategic judgments, under MEC direction and ultimately subject to MEC and/or membership approval, in accordance with each pilot group’s Policy Manual.

ALPA has more professional staff dedicated to labor negotiations than any other union in the world! These assets are divided amongst four different departments - Representation, Legal, Retirement and Insurance, and Economic & Financial Analysis. This is a unique and valuable array of resources, so respected in our industry that many independent pilot unions, including APA, IPA, and SWAPA, have requested assistance from one or all of these ALPA services at one time or another, and that is the most relevant endorsement possible for an inclusive national organization.

These ALPA professionals are already working with our experienced negotiating committee to prepare for C2015. The planning continues everyday and ALPA is doing all it can do to ensure we are prepared to take advantage of the major opportunity which will be available to us in the coming negotiations.

An educated, experienced and *elected* pilot Negotiating Committee, backed by a unified pilot group, and supported by qualified professionals is always better than relying on promises offered by legal mercenaries who are only interested in racking up billable hours.

As the Delta pilots enter into negotiations with a company turning record profits, we have a proven formula for success.