

**2019 National Air Traffic Controllers Association  
Communicating for Safety Conference  
Capt. Joe DePete, ALPA President**

**Keynote Speech  
Tuesday, September 17, 2019  
8:35 a.m. – 9:00 a.m. PDT**

*As prepared for delivery*

Thank you, Paul.

This is my first time attending this conference as ALPA's president. I like what I'm seeing. You have a strong member presence and tremendous enthusiasm and energy here!

Thank you to NATCA President Paul Rinaldi and Executive Vice President Trish Gilbert for all that you do for aviation safety and labor.

I'm honored to join you today. I would like to spend a few minutes talking about the lifesaving value of training—for both airline pilots and air traffic controllers.

Gene Cernan, a Navy A-4 pilot and the last man to walk on the moon, said, "Prepare for the unknown, unexpected, and inconceivable. Sharing experiences can help us to prepare. Personally, after 50 years of flying, I'm still learning every time I fly."

Airline pilots are constantly learning, training, drilling, and being coached. We are *truly* trained for life.

We learn *everywhere*. We treat every situation as an opportunity for knowledge transfer. While we gain valuable information in formal classrooms, we also regard the flight deck as a classroom. And we do more to understand how we can improve safety and efficiency through flight debriefs, crew room conversations, and online resources.

We also learn from *everyone*. We learn from the most experienced veterans, but also create opportunities to seek knowledge from brand-new aviators.

Pilots start with the mindset that *everyone* involved in airline operations is connected through the heart—our passion for aviation, safety, and our profession.

I believe that one of ALPA's greatest strengths is that we create a space where pilots and other aviation industry stakeholders with incredibly diverse backgrounds and experiences discover we're *all* connected. From there, we work and learn together.

As Gene Cernan's quote implies, we can't allow decades of previous experience to mean that we *stop* learning.

And through the wisdom of our years, we grow to understand that a willingness to learn *doesn't* detract from the hard work and sacrifices we've made to get where we are in our careers.

Trust me—like each of you, airline pilots *know* hard work and sacrifice. Just to become an airline pilot, we need an ATP or a Restricted-ATP certificate after earning private and commercial pilot certificates. This is in addition to an instrument rating, multiengine rating, and often a flight instructor rating.

Then, we build hours as a charter or corporate pilot or flight instructor. If you became a pilot in the military as I did, you gained academic training and flight experience under constant evaluation.

While becoming an airline pilot requires years of study and training, the experience only whets our appetite for more.

Once on the flight deck, we're trained and coached as a routine part of our jobs.

For those of us who have flown for decades, our accomplishment *doesn't* discourage us from learning new things. In fact, quite the opposite. Through our experience, we recognize the benefit of receiving and accepting constructive feedback.

Both pilots and controllers train to be proficient so that we can depend on our skills when we need to react to the unknown, unexpected, and inconceivable.

We know that mitigating risk is about more than proficiency—it's about preparedness. By learning from others who share our passion for aviation and safety, we train for life.

Let me tell you how:

We train for life through formal programs.

Throughout our history, ALPA has worked with regulators and airlines across the industry to develop and maintain dynamic and responsive training programs. The programs reflect emerging technology, while at the same time ensuring pilots maintain the strongest possible manual flying skills.

That's why feedback on our performance is so constant throughout our careers. In fact, we have a structure built around receiving feedback. That structure determines its nature and frequency through activities, such as recurrent training, and programs, such as Line Operations Safety Audits.

In addition, we learn from random flight deck checks given by the airline and the FAA. As a line check airman myself, I've seen some pilots who view them as punishment.

Let me tell you, the aviators who get the most out of the experience are those who adopt a mindset of openness and willingness to learn—they seize the moment to advance their performance.

We also train for life by learning from our industry's experience.

Following a series of aviation accidents, the FAA, airlines, and ALPA worked together to develop the Advanced Qualification Program, or AQP, as an alternative means of regulatory compliance for airline training.

Provided the AQP alternative is as safe or safer than the traditional requirement, the program allows a more creative response to training regulations. The FAA found that AQP encouraged voluntary participants to exceed the standards.

Airline pilots also learn through crew resource management, or CRM. A safety improvement that also emerged from aircraft accident investigations, CRM helps pilots enhance the cognitive and interpersonal skills needed to manage a flight.

Thanks to advancements in CRM, we have a “pilot flying” and “pilot monitoring” on the flight deck. In emergencies, air traffic controllers actually become part of our crew.

Information transmission takes place in a positive, proactive way and helps create a shared mental model focused on safety.

As Paul Rinaldi noted in a recent NATCA blog remembering United Airlines Capt. Al Haynes, “Every day is a training day.” Many of us recall how in 1989 Haynes demonstrated exceptional CRM while piloting United Flight 232 during an engine failure. He saved many lives.

CRM applies to the two or more pilots who must be present on the flight deck to ensure safety. But it also applies to interactions with pilots on other aircraft as well as with air traffic controllers.

In another example, in its investigation of the Colgan Flight 3407 crash near Buffalo, N.Y., the National Transportation Safety Board noted the pilots’ lack of flight experience.

When, at the direction of Congress, the FAA reviewed the Colgan accident and 30 others, it found that shortcomings in airline pilot qualification and training had played a role in all of them.

The regulations that resulted improved the training pilots receive for, among other things, flying in adverse weather and icing, recognizing and recovering from upsets and stalls, and mentoring other crewmembers.

The rules also updated pilot certificate and type-rating requirements.

ALPA strongly supports these lifesaving training improvements.

#### Airline pilots train for life though data.

The *Harvard Business Review* describes “learning agility” as the capacity for rapid and continuous learning from experience. It explains that agile learners make connections across experiences. They value and derive satisfaction from the process of learning itself.

I believe that air traffic controllers and pilots embody these traits in the satisfaction we draw from learning and applying what we’ve learned.

As a result, we contribute to a philosophy of learning across the aviation industry. For example, our industry is moving beyond a forensic “tombstone” approach to safety in which improvements occur only as a result of accidents.

Today, we embrace a more risk-predictive model. Data collection helps us learn about connections across experiences to predict risk and prevent tragedies.

One of our industry's strongest safety tools in this endeavor is voluntary, nonpunitive safety reporting programs.

ALPA is deeply invested in these programs that allow pilots, controllers, mechanics, and other aviation professionals who are on the front lines of daily operations to report safety hazards they observe without fear of disciplinary action.

The Commercial Aviation Safety Team and Aviation Safety Information Analysis and Sharing program both use information gathered through such voluntary efforts. Using the Aviation Safety Action Program, the Air Traffic Safety Action Program, and other sources, we now identify and *predict* safety risks. We make a proactive effort to mitigate them through training and other actions *before* accidents can occur.

In addition, ALPA pilots train for life by learning from our peers.

One way that airline pilots learn from our colleagues is through PIREPS. As everyone in this room knows, pilots voluntarily submit information to help other pilots learn about the operating conditions we're experiencing.

Once we radio in the PIREP, each of you helps us get information about weather hazards or other flight conditions to our colleagues.

The safety value of PIREPS is not only relevant to flights at a specific location, it also helps us improve safety more broadly. These reports are sometimes our only source for the meteorological data and flight conditions that we discover.

At its 2016 forum on the subject, the National Transportation Safety Board encouraged pilots to "pay it forward" through PIREPS—and we do!

Airline pilots learn from our peers in other ways as well. On every flight, flightdeck and cabin crewmembers monitor and evaluate each other while on duty.

In addition, ALPA's globally respected Professional Standards program helps us work together to resolve professional or ethical challenges. Issues such as personality conflicts and differences in flying styles are quickly and effectively addressed among peers.

Pilots and air traffic controllers have worked together to build NATCA's professional standards bench.

Pilots also mentor each other—especially our newest aviators. ALPA has professional development and mentoring programs at 11 university campuses across the United States. We also conduct mentoring work at more than a dozen other universities in the United States and Canada.

We train for life by finding new and better ways to learn.

Through human factors and training, we not only learn about training, we learn about ourselves.

ALPA works through our Air Safety Organization, led by our first vice president and national safety coordinator Capt. Bob Fox, and through the International Federation of Air Line Pilots' Associations, or IFALPA, to ensure that human factors are at the forefront of how we train.

In areas from threat and error management to flight deck communication, ALPA is teaming with our industry partners to look at the way current and future aviation workers' life experiences affect the way they learn. We're asking questions like "How does growing up using iPhones influence how an individual learns in training?"

As has been the case since our union's earliest days, ALPA is deeply involved in using technology and automation as tools to enhance safety. At the same time, we're keenly aware that pilots' manual flying skills *must* remain extremely strong. On the flight deck, pilots start with our technical proficiency. We then use crew input to make decisions based on techniques learned through training.

While technology and automation have important roles, *no* technology adapts like a well-trained pilot or air traffic controller.

As professionals, our training and proficiency allow us to adapt quickly in unplanned and sometimes extraordinary circumstances. We know from the NATCA Archie League Medal of Safety Awards and ALPA's Superior Airmanship Awards that the result saves lives.

As a member of the AFL-CIO Commission on the Future of Work and Unions, I'm honored to partner with your president, Paul Rinaldi, who has done important work as the transport sector commission chairman. Working under Paul's steady leadership, I've spearheaded ALPA's effort to view these issues through a much broader lens of the dignity of work.

We are cognizant—and remind influencers at every level of government and industry—of the essential role that collective labor agreements play in creating a proactive safety culture.

Finally, we train for life for the future of aviation safety.

David Peterson, director of Google's Center of Expertise, Leadership Development, and Executive Coaching, is quoted in the *Harvard Business Review* saying, "Staying within your comfort zone is a good way to prepare for today, but it's a terrible way to prepare for tomorrow."

To sustain our success in aviation safety in the face of future demand, lives literally depend on pilots and controllers training to use new technology and learn new capabilities.

In addition to supporting more passengers and freight in the future, the United States also needs to continue to safely integrate commercial space operations, UAS, and other new entrants into our national airspace.

To do all this, we cannot allow ourselves to be limited to what we know *now*—we must embrace *new* thinking.

As we develop new policies and procedures to integrate these operations, we know from Six Sigma and the legendary Gordon Graham that training to decrease variations in our procedures will help us reduce errors and increase efficiency.

NATCA—and each of you—are our partners in this process of training for life. Few of our passengers or cargo shippers recognize the level of qualification, intense training, and constant evaluation that we commit to as pilots and air traffic controllers.

But pilots and air traffic controllers understand this commitment. We stand together—in our passion for unionism and our passion for safety.

During the last government shutdown, I was proud to stand with President Rinaldi at NATCA's "Stop the Shutdown" rally.

Together, we alerted the nation to the needless risk the shutdown posed to the safety, security, and efficiency of our national airspace system. It was an honor to meet so many controllers in person at Washington National and Dulles as ALPA members expressed our support while you were asked to do your jobs without pay—an ask that was unconscionable in my view. As dedicated professionals, you and other aviation workers continued to provide your lifesaving services during the shutdown.

It was just one example of the extraordinary commitment of NATCA, along with each of you, to safely guide the more than 44,000 flights that transit the U.S. national airspace every day. It's this commitment—your commitment—that sets air traffic controllers apart, and it's the same pledge that makes air travel the safest mode of transportation.

You can expect that same dedication from me and from ALPA in the future. We intend to stand shoulder to shoulder with you, with one voice, to say "NO!" to future government shutdowns.

In May 1969, Cernan was the lunar module pilot of Apollo 10, which descended within a few nautical miles of the moon's surface. The mission demonstrated that the Apollo command, service, and lunar modules would perform as expected.

In a 2007, Cernan told a NASA publication, "I keep telling Neil Armstrong that we painted that white line in the sky all the way to the Moon . . . so he wouldn't get lost, and all he had to do was land. Made it sort of easy for him."

On behalf of every one of the more than 63,000 members of the Air Line Pilots Association, thank you for being the shepherds of the sky who paint a white line to guide us safely to our destinations.

Thank you for being our brothers and sisters in labor.

And thank you for never, *ever* being satisfied with what you know, for always learning more—in classrooms, radar rooms, and tower cabs.

Air traffic controllers simply *never* let up in your pursuit of knowledge. And neither do airline pilots. Together, we do whatever it takes to keep our passengers, crews, cargo, and communities safe.

I appreciate your having me here today and for being our partners in training for life.