



Challenges and Resilience Article

Challenges. Life is full of them.

One thing we all share is that we experience our own individual challenges every day. Some challenges are small for one person and large for another; some challenges are equally difficult for us all. For example, many people find getting out of bed no problem, while for other people it can be one of the most difficult events of the day.

The COVID-19 pandemic has undoubtedly created a significant increase in the daily challenges faced by us all, including those who were, are or aspire to be employed in the commercial aviation sector.

Challenges facing those previously employed in aviation

Firstly, let's take a look at those who were previously employed in the aviation sector.

Since the pandemic began, thousands of fantastic Aviation Professionals have sadly lost their jobs – and with them a lifestyle, a community, and a wage. As an additional challenge, the pandemic meant that after being made redundant new jobs were in short supply. The financial and emotional strain caused by redundancy has made life exceedingly difficult for many of these people. Moreover, the loss of regular contact with the aviation family is a readjustment that most of us hoped never to go through; working in the aviation industry has a way of working its way into your heart and it never seems to leave. Although the views from the aircraft are spectacular, the truly unforgettable moments come from the colleagues who have become some of your best friends. The jokes made in the galley or the pranks played on a turnaround are just some of the experiences that many people will be missing out on for several years ahead, if not longer. To me, this is one of the biggest challenges to overcome.

Challenges facing those still employed in aviation

Secondly, let's take a look at those who have remained employed within the aviation sector.

Within this group, there appears to be an obvious split between those who are technically employed but who are not flying, and those who are still able to operate flights during the pandemic.

Those who are not flying currently have had to adjust to a world where they are unable to do the job they are paid for. Six months before the pandemic, I remember talking to a colleague who said to me 'Getting paid and doing nothing is the dream.' How those thoughts have changed. Speaking to the same individual recently, five months since their last flight, they said to me 'You have no idea how much I would give to be in an aircraft, cruising at Flight Level 370, taking customers to their beautiful destinations.' Reflecting after living what they had thought of as the dream just a year earlier, they realised just how significant the job was for them.

For those who are still flying, a common story appears to read something like the following:

'I have never worked so hard in my aviation career before. I am constantly on the edge of fatigue and I cannot keep up with the amount of flying I am being asked to do.'

To those struggling to fill empty hours, this might seem like a nice problem to have - however, those who are flying are battling mental fatigue and physical exhaustion daily. Anyone who has experienced those sensations will be able to relate to just how hard overcoming those challenges can be.

Challenges facing aspiring aviation professionals



Finally, let's look at those who aspire to be employed in the aviation industry.

'Investing in your future' is a phrase that is thrown around a lot in schools and colleges across the world, but there are few industries where the investment is quite so heavy. For pilots, the prolonged, intense effort required for the duration of their training can lead to significant fatigue and mental stress. Similarly, the financial strain of that training can be truly significant, with many taking out a huge bank loan or putting a significant amount of their savings into their future. But knowing they're heading towards a future role in the airlines straight after graduating, each pilot finds a way to get through.

In the aftermath of the pandemic, thousands of cadet pilot graduates are having to come to terms with the fact that their dream career is now much further in the future than they had hoped for. That drive to complete their training has dwindled knowing that the aviation market doesn't have a role for them, and the challenge of driving for the training 'finish line' has lost its reward.

Those who have already graduated are now having to consider temporary career changes and find ways to keep their ratings current after their plans to enter the airline world immediately after graduating have sadly collapsed.

How can aviation professionals face these challenges?

After exploring the challenges that each group of aviation professionals has faced since the beginning of the COVID-19 Pandemic, it may seem that one group is facing a greater or lesser challenge than another. However, the point of this article is to highlight that challenges are personal, and affect each person very differently. Just because we can compare one person's situation to another's does not mean that we can accurately judge how challenging their individual circumstances are.

Someone's ability to cope with any challenge can be affected by the number of other difficulties they are facing and by the level of support they already have in place. In short, when you judge a person's situation, it's important to be mindful that they could be facing additional challenges which are not obvious from the outside.

The importance of resilience



Speaking personally, 2020 taught me a lot about myself. I have learnt that even when things are going well, how well prepared you are to face the unexpected is critical to your actual responses to challenges. In all, I summarise my attitude into a single sentence: 'My challenges do not define who I am, my reaction to each challenge does.'

Think about it from a pilot point of view; no one expects an engine failure at V1 to actually occur. However, we talk about our hypothetical actions and prepare for such an event in case that day comes. If it were to occur, the engine failure would say nothing about me, but my ability to respond to it would.

When we talk about how we can respond to difficult situations positively, one word comes to mind: resilience.

Since the pandemic began, resilience has become a buzz word for life in general. However, the Aviation 'family' have had to adopt the concept to an extraordinary level.

'Resilience' refers to 'the capacity to recover quickly from difficulties or tough situations.'

There are two important elements to this concept; reaction and recovery. Resilience includes how we react to difficulty, and how we recover from it.

Resilience is an important quality for success, and it isn't something you either have or you don't - it's something that can be improved. Using the engine failure example above, it's clear that preparing your actions for difficult situations is a defined process we can use to increase the reaction element of resilience.

The second part, our ability to recover quickly, is vital. Mental wellbeing, physical health, social relationships and professional confidence all contribute to our individual resilience. Each aspect can be addressed in vastly different ways - but they are also very closely linked, and with the right resources, every member of the aviation family can work towards improving their resilience.

Only time will tell just how resilient the aviation industry is as a whole - however, there is hope for the future, and a hope that recovery can begin soon.

Challenges are inevitable, but with resilience, we can face anything.