

# The Roller Coaster Effect... Pilots Ride Out Unstable Times

By Linda Jacobson, STSA Technical Writer

Fact: The pilots of American Airlines have borne a great deal of the restructuring burden at AMR Corporation. By accepting 23%+ pay cuts, reduction of vacation time, sick time usage and numerous other changes affecting quality of life, feelings of anger, resentment and distrust are high in the pilot group. The recent 9% pay snap-back represents part of an upswing from this low point. These ups and downs you experience as an airline pilot flying in deregulated times is termed "corporate instability" by industrial psychologists. Corporate instability inevitably manifests itself in employees as stress. The question becomes: How much stress, or corporate instability, can a pilot handle before flight safety is impacted?

Numerous studies have been undertaken to answer this question most notably among human factors experts and those involved in accident investigation. These experts agree that airline employee corporate instability follows a predictable cycle. Therefore, any stage of the cycle can be experienced in healthy — or unhealthy — ways.

According to the Flight Safety Foundation, a number of factors combine leaving the airline employee confused or frustrated. These feelings seesaw in the employee alternately producing feelings of loyalty, hope and commitment followed by feelings of anxiety, anger and fear. When a worker endures threats to employment or job loss, a grieving process is triggered and is similar to the sadness related to divorce, chronic

illness or death of a loved one. Common physical symptoms that accompany career instability are:

- Ulcers
- Change in appetite
- Alcoholism
- Headaches

Relationships may also suffer resulting in family disruptions, alienation of family members, separation or divorce, or lessening of communication within a marriage. **Any of these symptoms may emerge at any time during any one of the stages of work-related stress. To help counter these adverse signs, a pilot can:**

1. Schedule a physical examination to rule out other causes.
2. Maintain good nutrition.
3. Exercise.
4. Get adequate R & R.

Even if you are not currently affected, be

aware that due to the cyclical nature of the airline industry, work stress can occur, diminish, and then reoccur. Understanding the five stages of dealing with airline-related stress can help you to identify where you are at the present time.

Stage I is termed Denial. The worker's first reaction is to deny the event(s), creating a buffer from shocking or unexpected news. This reaction generally allows the pilot time to assimilate and manage the facts of the situation gradually.

Stage II manifests in Anger. The pilot may question why the situation is happening at his or her airline and/or to him or her. Generally, the pilot may feel powerless against the source of his or her anger. Because the source of anger is removed, the pilot may take out feelings of anger on those close to him or her.

STAGE OF PILOT CORPORATE INSTABILITY CYCLE	HARMFUL EFFECTS
<b>Stage I Denial</b>	The pilot exhibits extreme procrastination. The pilot assigns responsibility/blame to the Company or others over an extended period of time. The pilot continually changes the subject or gets angry at any mention of work problems over an extended period of time. The pilot may diminish or ignore the seriousness to flight safety issues.
<b>Stage II Anger</b>	The pilot feels distanced or disconnected from family, spouse, and children. The pilot may experience severe headaches, more frequent illness, or insomnia. The pilot may engage in self-destructive behaviors such as drinking, drugs, smoking, overeating, or recklessness. The pilot may overreact to situations viewed previously as trivial. The pilot may exhibit aggressive or explosive behavior.
<b>Stage III Bargaining</b>	The pilot does not separate business logic from emotional logic. The pilot is threatened by compromise and associates compromise with total surrender.
<b>Stage IV Depression</b>	The pilot's feelings of sadness or loss interfere with the ability to enjoy life, work, and love. The low mood persists for a length of time and is chronic. The pilot may experience weight loss, tiredness, irritability, low energy levels over an extended period of time. These symptoms interfere with normal functioning.
<b>Stage V Acceptance</b>	Roller coaster emotions do not subside. Intense feelings reoccur again and again without resolution.



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Bargaining is the next phase in the stress cycle. The pilot begins to hope that bargaining will save the day. Survival bargaining, done in a perception of imminent disaster, may initiate feelings tied to loss of self-esteem or apathy. The completion of this phase of the cycle leads to a point where the pilot can no longer deny the changes or losses that are occurring within the airline. Eventually, feelings of anger segue into feelings of sadness, loss, and dismay.

This stage, Depression, may lead to feelings of confusion, disorganization, or tiredness in a pilot. Low-grade depression or depressed mood is most

often associated with work stress in airline pilots and is today considered to be a chronic symptom in pilots because of the highly stressful and unstable working conditions within the industry. Psychologists agree that this is the most difficult type of depression to address, because the pilot tends to assimilate it into daily life gradually. Thus, the damage associated with it is also gradual.

The final stage of work stress is Acceptance. This phase is a time for understanding, gathering resolve, or taking possible action. It does not necessarily herald happiness but a lessening of the emotional roller coaster a pilot experiences

with the ups and downs of working in the airline industry.

The APA Aeromedical Committee has many resources available to assist a pilot who may be experiencing harmful effects from these stages. If you have any questions, please contact a committee member by calling 1.800.323.1470, ext. 3043. Some resources are also listed on the Aeromedical Committee Web page on APA's Web site.

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## Duty Free Periods

### *How many Duty Free Periods (DFPs) does a pilot get each month ?*

Regularly Scheduled pilots (commonly known as Lineholders) get 10 DFPS each month, 5 separate periods of 48 hours each. These are denoted by an asterisk (\*) on the bidsheets. Additional days off are denoted as "DO" on the bidsheet. (15 D.1.)

Domestic Reserve pilots get 10 Non-Moveable DFPS plus 1 Moveable DFP in 30-day "Contractual" months and 11 Non-Moveable DFPS plus 1 Moveable DFP in 31-day "Contractual" months. (15 D.2.b.)

International Reserve pilots get 10 Non-Moveable DFPS plus 1 Moveable DFP in 30-day "Contractual" months and 10 Non-Moveable DFPS plus 2 Moveable DFPS in 31-day "Contractual" months. Moveables can be scheduled as a free-standing 48.

### *What are the rules for how the DFPS are scheduled ?*

DFPS for Lineholders do not have to be scheduled on a calendar day basis. They must, however, be scheduled in one of the following combinations: (15 D 1.a-e)

- Five 48-hour periods
- Three 48-hour periods and one 96-hour period
- Four 48-hour periods and two 24-hour periods
- Two 48-hour periods and two 72-hour periods
- Three 48-hour periods, one 72-hour period, and one 24-hour period
- One 48-hour period and two 96-hour periods

Each of these individual DFPS must be separated by at least 24 hours.

DFPS for Reserves must be scheduled for calendar days (midnight to midnight) and can be broken up into no more than 5 separate groups. One of these groups must be designated as a "Golden" DFP, and must be at least a 72-hour period. (15 D.2.b.{5-6})

The Moveable DFP must be scheduled at the start of, or at the end of, a group of Non-Moveable DFPS. It cannot be scheduled in the middle of Non-Moveable DFPS, and it cannot be scheduled by itself (15 D.2.b {2-4})

### *How can a pilot change the originally scheduled DFPS?*

No DFP can be changed retroactively, either by the pilot or the Company. (15 D.3)

A Lineholder can request a change to any DFP prior to the start of that DFP. This is most commonly done by contacting crew Schedule. The DFP can be moved to earlier or later in the month, or it can be split/combined into any of the combinations described above. (15 D 1.g)

A Lineholder may voluntarily drop one 48-hour DFP, prior to the start of that DFP (15 D.1.h). Pilots can contact Crew Schedule, or may use the HIWAV Personal Mode entry:

HIWAV / (Date DFP begins) ex. HIWAV / 15JUN

Note: ONCE DROPPED, A DFP CANNOT BE RESTORED.

A Reserve Pilot may move any DFP, with the Company's concurrence. (15 D.2.i)

A Reserve Pilot's Golden DFP can only be moved with the Pilot's consent. (15 D.2.d)

A Reserve Pilot can trade DFPS with another Reserve Pilot under certain conditions. (15 D.2.j)

A Reserve Pilot may, with the Company's concurrence, volunteer for duty on DFPS, for premium pay.(18 G.2.b)