Air Charter Safety Symposium Speaker Blog Post:
Preconceived Assumptions About Safety Leadership
by ACSF Symposium Speaker Rob Carraway

In a few weeks, I will be speaking at the 2013 Air Charter Safety Symposium. And hopefully, listening. Because, not being an industry expert but having observed organizations and industries for some time now, I must acknowledge that I have some preconceived assumptions about the topic of "developing a safety culture" (the topic on which I have been asked to speak) in your industry:

Assumption 1: Every corporate aviation department or fractional ownership company or any other player in this industry believes it has a safety culture. (I cannot imagine a player in this industry saying, "Yeah, safety is not that big a deal to us.") Of course, it may be true that many think, "I have a safety culture, but I know others in the industry do not" (much like many voters love their personal congressperson but hate Congress). At any rate, I suspect most, if being truthful, are skeptical that they could be more safety conscious than they already are.

Assumption 2: All formal programs, processes or regulations developed to improve "the safety culture" are highly superficial and can be easily undermined by the failure of individuals within the organization to accept the basic premise, namely that "we could be more safe than we already are". These activities and requirements are quickly seen as a waste of time, adding unnecessary administrative burden with no significant benefit.

Am I right? This is what I'll be listening for. Because if I am right, then that distinguishes you from virtually NO other industry or company I'm aware of that has been interested in trying to modify its culture. And unfortunately it means that far more often than not, organization-wide programs and processes or industry regulations, by themselves, lead to failure.

But I believe there is hope. And that hope lies not in company or industry-wide structures or processes, but at the level of the individual. Culture runs deep, and is often thought of as a collective good ("our" culture). But the true impact of culture is the effect it has between the ears of its individual constituents, how it shapes what

they think, say and most importantly, what they do.

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