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Anticipated Pilot Shortage

According to a Boeing Pilot Outlook, in the next 20 years, the major airline carriers will need to hire and train 637,000 new pilots to fly the world fleet of airplanes (Burke). International and domestic cargo and passenger carriers are expected to purchase more than 41,000 new airplanes from now until 2036 (Ostrower). The scarcity of pilots is the result of many things including: the unappealing length and cost of training, rating requirements, and the amount of money made (Ostrower).

The first flight was taken on December 17, 1903 (Bellis). Orville and Wilbur Wright made their first flight in a propeller driven biplane that took off using its own power, flew around at even speeds, and landed without any damage (Bellis). They studied birds to help get the airplane to work (Bellis). The brothers realized the birds flew in the wind by the lift of their wings in the air, which was caused by the curved surface of their wings (Bellis). The airplane Douglas DC-1, designed by a team led by Arthur E. Raymond, is said to be the first scientifically designed American airplane (Hallion). It has much superiority over the Boeing 247, its rival (Hallion). This airplane symbolizes the 1930’s Modernist aeronautics generation (Hallion).

As previously mentioned, the anticipated number of airliners to be purchased in the next 20 years is around 41,000 (Ostrower). Smaller, regional airports are already feeling the hurt of the shortage of pilots (Reed). The bigger airline companies are coming in and taking away all the regional air pilots, leaving the smaller companies no choice but to cancel flights due to the lack of pilots (Reed). Several smaller communities lost their air service or have reduced their number of flights drastically (Murphy). Because the pilots at these small locations are in such a need for pilots, they have raised the pay drastically from about $23,000 to $46,000 per year and will continue to rise until they can keep their pilots (Reed). Only 6% of pilots are women (Edemariam). Many people discourage women from becoming pilots because it is seen as primarily a man’s career (Edemariam). Just like the men, the biggest turnoff for women in the airline industry is the money involved in the training (Pawlowski).

The requirements to become an airline pilot are very extensive and can get very pricey (Freidrich). The cost of training in order to become a pilot can be quite high (Ostrower). It normally takes over $100,000, and to many people, that is a big turn-off to the profession (Freidrich). After the Colgan Air crash in Buffalo, New York, federal legislation was changed for the requirements of all entry-level first officer’s (Murphy). What used to be a 250-hour minimum flight time has now been raised to 1,500 hours (Murphy). Because of the raise in the minimum flight hours, many new pilots are forced into doing less than ideal jobs, such as banner towing, corpse-transportation, aerial pipeline inspecting, and other things (Murphy).

UPS captain, Peyton Cook, says, “The ‘glamour’ of being of being a pilot is gone. Most passenger airline companies who went bankrupt after 9/11 got rid of all pension plans for their employees. People do not want to work for a company for their whole lives, dedicate everything to them, and get nothing after they retire at 65.” After the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001, the airline industry felt major financial repercussions, which forced the airlines to change things in order to survive the economic downturn (Edemariam). In many situations following 9/11, the major passenger airline companies were threatening to declare bankruptcy if the unions did not give something up to help get out of their financial downfalls (Friedrich). According to Captain Cook, many companies including Delta, United, Southwest, and others got rid of the employees’ retirement benefits and are not planning on adding those back in. In 2007, the mandatory retirement age for all pilots went from 60 to 65 (Ripple). Cowen & Company predicts that over 42% of current U.S. airline pilots will retire within the next ten years (Ostrower). Peyton Cook explains, “Back in the day-after World War Two, a common thing for airlines to do was to fund their pilots’ training. They went in and recruited kids from high school to come get trained to be a pilot by them. I know United did that pretty often, but they have not done that in many years.” Because of the predictions of the shortfall of pilots, Boeing says they will begin an ab initio flight program that will be called The Boeing Pilot Development Program (Houston). This program will be able to take someone with no flight experience and have them flying a jet by the end (Houston). This program has been successful in other countries, but many do not know how it would do in the United States of America (Houston).

From 2000 to 2012, pilots’ median weekly earnings fell 9.5%, according to a Government Accountability Office analysis (Friedrich). Starting out, first-time pilots can be paid as little as $15,00 to $20,000 a year, and that is after they have paid the average $100,000 training fees to get certified (Friedrich). Many pilots’ schedules are hectic and unpredictable for years before they can make enough money so it is worth it (Murphy). The scheduling of a pilot’s work is highly based on seniority rather than merits, so it can take years before they have a lot of time off to spend with their families (Murphy).

“The upcoming shortage of pilots is a very serious issue that needs to be addressed,” says Captain Peyton Cook. It is affecting all aspects of the aviation industry, from big airline employees to smaller, regional airlines (Friedrich). Many smaller regional airlines are being swept out and some shut down because of bigger airlines’ desperateness for pilots (Burke). Some of the many reasons for the decrease in pilots is monetary issues, odd schedules, rare retirement benefits, along with many other things (Friedrich). As Peyton Cook states, “I think one of the many ways to help bring in more pilots would be if airlines funded their pilots’ flight training and certification from start to finish. It would certainly make the job more attractive.”

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