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The Realities of Canada's Competitive Airline Industry

Fellow Professional Pilot,

Renew Your Membership

The recent cessation of operations by Canada Jetlines marks yet another chapter in the turbulent history of new airlines attempting to break into the Canadian market. It appears efforts are being made to repatriate crews and we wish them a speedy return home and gainful employment at other operators with minimum delay.

Some good news is that several other Canadian airlines have offered help for Jetlines crews and their families to be brought home free of charge.

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Meanwhile, those familiar with the industry knew it was highly unlikely that the latest entries into the ULCC and targeted leisure markets in Canada would persist without at least some of the new entrants remaining untouched. Canada Jetlines joins Lynx Air, Swoop, and Sunwing, leaving Flair Airlines as the remaining discount operator in the segment. As professionals, flight crew are caught up in the crossfire of investor & market realities despite performing their job functions impeccably. Nevertheless, it behooves the careful pilot to be cognizant of some industry realities in Canada, so that, should the worst happen, one is prepared and perhaps forearmed with a plan or two to minimize disruptions in their professional progression.

The high costs associated with operating an airline in Canada are a significant factor contributing to the struggles of new entrants. High fuel costs, airport fees, navigation fees, and the slow regulatory environment are only some of the hurdles to new entrants which particularly affect those eyeing the leisure and more cost-sensitive demographics. Canada’s geography and the distribution of its population centers cannot at this time support the level of capacity and business models seen in the USA, Europe and elsewhere. Throw in the vagaries of weather, the economy, and world events, against the backdrop of the capital-intensive nature of growing an airline to a commercially-viable size, and it is no wonder that new entrants folding or being absorbed a few years later is the rule rather than the exception.

One salient consequence of the present-day status quo is that pilot longevity is not recognized from operator to operator. Most pilot groups are unionized, and remuneration & quality of life is on a seniority/equipment scale. While the College of Pilots does not envision an industry-wide seniority list, professional recognition for the career path is a foundational vision of this organization. Achieving it would pave an additional path towards generating some benefits for all professional pilots, without wading into the complexities and politics of seniority. Dealing with financial institutions, government loans and skills training programs, pilot supply markets & hiring can be established and streamlined, so that while pilot longevity may not be recognized following an event such as an operator shutting down, pilot experience is, and is given more value than it is presently.

Together we soar!

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