

ALPA's Team Approach to Negotiations

The best way to put more pay in your paycheck, get better work rules and improved quality of life, grow your pension, and get stronger scope language in your contract is to turn to ALPA—the best pilot negotiating support team ever assembled. Learn more...

Local pilot leaders chart the course of negotiations and make the decisions, but those pilots call on teams of ALPA experts and advisors to guide them through the negotiations process. That team includes:

- 42 professional negotiators in ALPA's Representation Dept.
- 13 financial analysts in ALPA's Economic & Financial Analysis Dept.
- 13 attorneys in ALPA's Legal Department, and others in general counsel's law firm,
- 17 benefit specialists in ALPA's Retirement & Insurance Dept., including 3 benefit attorneys, 2 pension investment advisors, and 1 pension actuary, and
- 18 communications specialists from ALPA's Communications Dept.

Let's face it, negotiating a collective bargaining agreement for pilots under the Railway Labor Act (RLA) can present some unique challenges. With ALPA, you and your pilot group can respond to these challenges using a time-tested team approach to negotiations.

Years of experience, an in-depth understanding of the complexities of the RLA, and commitment to best practices have molded the ALPA team approach into an extremely effective process for achieving a pilot group's contract goals.

In the team approach, pilot volunteers, elected officers, committees, and ALPA staff fulfill specific roles and responsibilities in negotiations. The team strategy capitalizes on each player's particular expertise, knowledge, and experience, which enables the pilot group to deliver a powerful, unified, and effective effort.

Pilots Form the Foundation

Negotiations begin and end with the pilots. They elect their key decision-making leaders—the Master Executive Council (or MEC)—and the Negotiating Committee members are selected from the pilots' ranks. As the pilot group's representatives are chosen, and as priorities are identified and negotiating strategies are developed, every pilot has an individual responsibility to participate in the activities of the union and to express his or her views and concerns.

Feedback from individual line pilots is critical, especially as the negotiating process begins. Through extensive statistical polling and surveys, the MEC learns

the issues, concerns, and views that are of primary importance to the pilot group. Using this comprehensive pilot input, the MEC develops a set of goals and priorities to guide the work of the Negotiating Committee.

Once the pilot group and management reach a tentative agreement at the bargaining table, the agreement still needs approval by the MEC and, if the pilot group so chooses, direct membership ratification. The membership ratification process is much more effective if pilots stay informed about the issues throughout the bargaining process.

The Role of the MEC, Negotiating Committee, and Specialty Committees

The pilot group's elected officers—the MEC—represent the pilot group on the team. Once the goals and priorities are established, the Negotiating Committee works to achieve these goals. As with other ALPA committees, Negotiating Committee members come from the pilot ranks and are chosen by the MEC.

Because of the complexity of a typical pilot contract, the work of the MEC and Negotiating Committee is supplemented by numerous specialty committees made up of pilot volunteers selected by the MEC. Most pilot groups have active Retirement and Insurance, Scheduling, Grievance, Hotel, and Professional Standards Committees.

While these committees are active year-round, during contract negotiations they play the vital role of analyzing and developing negotiating options and recommendations in their area of expertise so that both the Negotiating Committee and the MEC can fulfill their responsibilities to the pilot group in the most informed and effective way.

The MEC is also charged with building unity of purpose and support among the pilot group. The Communications Committee is responsible for creating and implementing a communications plan that educates the pilots and their families about collective bargaining and the goals for negotiations, updates them on progress, and encourages them to engage in the process.

The Strategic Planning Committee (SPC) is designed to help prepare pilots and their families build leverage throughout negotiations but particularly help them prepare for the end stages of negotiations and any contingencies that may arise (including strike preparedness) during that period. The SPC also works to enlist help from other pilot groups, and secure guidance and funds from national resources to prepare for endgame negotiations and to sustain an effective strike, if necessary.

Backed by ALPA and Its Professional Staff

ALPA and its professional staff round out the team. They provide experience and technical expertise to assist the pilot group throughout negotiations, contract ratification, and implementation of a collective bargaining agreement.

Each pilot group is assigned a contract administrator/attorney (CA) who is an experienced airline industry negotiator. The CA works with the MEC and Negotiating Committee as they develop goals and priorities, helps write contract proposals, and is at the table with the Committee during negotiations. The CA also works with the pilot group to enforce the contract and ensure that management fulfills its obligations to the pilots as outlined in the contract.

The pilot group is also assigned an economic and financial analyst to assess the airline's ability to meet the pilots' needs and further to develop complex cost models as part of valuing the cost to the company of changes to pilot and company contract proposals.

In addition, an employee benefits specialist works with the pilot group to help navigate the complex world of retirement and insurance. Benefits specialists help develop programs tailored to the circumstances and needs unique to each pilot group.

The pilot group is assigned a communications specialist who, in coordination with the MEC and Negotiating Committee, helps to develop and implement a strategic communications plan—or that keeps the pilots informed in a timely way and ensures that pilots can provide input and feedback during negotiations.

The ALPA team approach delivers a unified and powerful voice for its pilots—a voice that articulates the interests and concerns of the members and is backed by the experience and expertise of the combined resources of the pilots' union—ALPA.

TESTIMONIALS

"It's very, very important to understand that as you're considering this representation question, it isn't just writing a check and paying dues and having some unknown, faceless, nameless person do the heavy lifting for you. . . . This is an all-team effort, and everybody has to be pulling on the oar and nobody gets to hire somebody to walk the picket line or take the risk for them."

—Capt. Dave Webb

ALP Article: Don't Look Now, but There's a Team Behind You