CONQUERING

Story by Matt Johnson
Images by Ryan Mason
Depending on whom you ask there are many definitions for the word “hazard”. One definition states that “a hazard is a present condition or circumstance that could lead or contribute to an unplanned or undesired event such as an accident”.

Compare that with the definition for “risk” – “a situation involving exposure to danger”. Of course these are the “textbook” answers and as we all know life and especially aviation doesn’t operate in a vacuum. What is often overlooked and misunderstood is that many aviation risks are born of hazardous conditions (and attitudes) that are the direct result of a cultural acceptance that has promulgated over a period of time.

Operational mindsets including the “mission” type mentality often involve the “that’s the way we do it” or “that’s how we’ve always done it” or even “we have got to get this done” type of organizational inadequacy. Bad habits such as this and the lack of organizational leadership has given birth to many unidentified and unnecessary risks that have led to numerous fatal accidents.

For many organizations operating under this “mentality” they have only known “wrong” and have no idea of what “right” looks like. What may look “right” for a particular organization can be very subjective. What is “wrong” in an organization can often be a morbid reminder of what not to do again.

**Why does it occur?**

As the old saying goes, ignorance is bliss. The reality is that many organizations operating under the previously mentioned mindset only know “right” after an accident or incident has occurred and everything has been brought to the forefront, normally through an investigative body or in the form of an “outside audit”.

You know the organizations that say “we haven’t had an
accident in 20 plus years, we obviously are doing things right.”

In many instances it is only by the Grace of God that the “holes didn’t line-up” for those organizations with this negligent mindset.

with the identification and subsequent conquering of organizational hazards. As alluded earlier, “you don’t know what you don’t know”.

The way to educate yourself about the hazards within your organization involves work, time and a serious commitment. Additionally, you have to seek out those that “do know”, the ones employing industry best practices, etc.

Fortunately, much of the work is already out there and readily available. In the air medical industry Flight Risk Assessment Tools (FRAT) are not only utilized but mandated by regulation however I am amazed to see non air-medical organizations that know nothing of their existence. Or if they have heard of them they feel “we are too small of a unit to use something like that”. Sadly, I’ve heard that exact statement on more than one occasion over the years.

No unit is too small to collectively weight the risks involved for a particular flight or shift. Not doing so is negligent and plain stupid. There is much to be learned (and adopted) from other sectors of the aviation industry. In a perfect world and with a “workable” budget, a good place to start is with an outside analysis of the organization.

How to fix it

I would never suggest that all risks can be eliminated; however, I do however feel that many of the risks we face in our industry can be mitigated
This will give the organization an idea of what hazards are present and more importantly, how to mitigate those hazards and operations risks.

While most have absolutely no desire to have an outsider look at your organization in great detail, the function of an external audit is to ensure that an organization’s internal controls, processes, guidelines and policies are not only adequate and effective but that they are in compliance. This level of compliance involves governmental requirements (Federal Aviation Regulations), industry standards and organizational/departmental policies.
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Much of a proper audit will identify the hazards and subsequent risks that are “blind” to the organization. For nearly all facets of our industry, organizations can find “best-practices” that other organizations have already implemented for improving their own risk management practices. While you may not agree with all of the recommended industry practices, many of them do have a great deal of merit and warrant serious consideration.

**Is It Doable?**

Is it possible to conquer all hazards? Not likely, but not making an effort to find out “what you don’t know” about your organization could be the first ingredient in a recipe for disaster. Industry best-practices are out there, seek them.

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