

BUSINESS AVIATION

Other Voices: It's Time We All Support Gender Parity

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By now, all facets of the aviation industry have been warned about the current—and forecasted to worsen—pilot shortage. Most of us are also aware of the seemingly unbudgeable, and abysmal, statistic of women in aviation. But, there has been little coverage on how the industry can resolve both problems with an overarching solution—gender parity.

Many people think that gender parity is comparing the ratio of women to men; it is more than that. A gender parity lens looks at this ratio while also delving deeper in order to understand what it is like for those women. For example, why do female pilots, on average, make [16 percent less than their male counterparts](#)? Why do many senior female first officers bypass captain upgrades at major airlines? Gender parity takes a data-driven, holistic approach to understand where our industry can do better.

Federal Aviation Administration data shows that there are 160,000 pilots in the United States holding the industry's highest license, the Airline Transport Pilot certificate. Roughly [7,000 of those pilots are women](#); not quite 5 percent. That means, conversely, more than 95 percent of them are men. For context, in a room of 20 pilots, there is one woman.

Boeing estimates that nearly [42 percent of airline pilots](#) will reach mandatory retirement age within the next 10 years. This mass wave of retirement, coupled with the increased demand on air travel, leaves the industry unsustainable in its current structure. Simply put, the status quo is no longer working.

In the 1970s, a wave of deadly accidents caused the industry to pivot. It was discovered that these accidents occurred mainly due to crew error, as opposed to mechanical failure. This birthed the concept of Crew Resource Management, which was introduced to help reduce human error. At first, staunch supporters of the status-quo fought this new, progressive, "touchy-feely" training. Decades later, Crew Resource Management training is now an integral part of all training, even single-pilot operations. It has been so successful that other industries, such as medicine and fire services, have adopted similar training techniques. With the pilot shortage looming, and the dismal 5 percent statistic stagnating, it's time for our industry to pivot yet again.

In 2017, the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) formed a Global Gender Summit ["aimed to motivate states and the global aviation industry to demonstrate leadership and commitment to gender equality in aviation..."](#) This is a great step, but we can make more immediate changes now. We can start in small ways that, collectively, will make a big impact. For example, unconscious-bias training should be a mandatory part of Human Factors and Crew Resource Management training. Airlines should find ways to create family-friendly schedules, such as offering more day-trip-only lines. Companies should encourage their employees to join and advocate for the minority. When the people in the majority (white, straight, men) advocate for those in the minority (women, persons of color, the LGBT community, etc.), change can happen more rapidly. Managers and department heads should embolden their employees to be mentors and activists for the organizations representing these minority groups. We need to stop calling gender parity a "passion-project." It is our professional responsibility.

If you have a job in the aviation industry, you are already a leader. You can be a mentor. There is a generation behind us deciding whether or not to join our industry. We owe it to ourselves, to them, and to aviation as a whole to improve our industry. Let us leave it better than how we found it. It is time for our industry to pivot; it is time we all become allies for gender parity.

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