



CONNECTING AVIATION AND HEALTHCARE: PROJECT WINGMAN

With many aviation staff losing their jobs or on furlough, a question arises for many: "How can I continue to offer what I have to give?" One answer is to connect aviation with healthcare staff. **Nick Carpenter** reports on Project Wingman.

I was one of many people to lose my job during the lockdown in the face of the coronavirus pandemic. As a professional pilot, how could I best utilise my experience? The answer for me, and many other unemployed and furloughed colleagues, was Project Wingman.

Project Wingman is a charity that helps airline crew come together to support the wellbeing of UK National Health Service (NHS) staff. It provides a haven for both medical and non-medical staff away from patients, where they can relax with a drink, snack, and an empathetic ear during the COVID-19 outbreak.

The success at the hospital where I volunteer has been absolute with staff enjoying the diversion from their exhausting days. My colleagues have been amazing. Many of those laid off and desperately seeking new careers, have wholeheartedly thrown themselves into their new voluntary roles. Turning up every day in their spotless uniforms, buying snacks out of incomes that they do not have, baking delicious treats and looking after their guests with a smile, they have been an example of the best of our industry.

Many of them have spent weeks waiting to hear what their companies will do with them and this is where the interesting daily difference has

occurred. One well-known company told their staff from the outset that they would no longer be employed. Another waited until the eleventh hour and then fired many, keeping some in work but on much-reduced terms and conditions. The difference between the two workforces was marked. Those who have known their fate all along have continued contributing to Project Wingman. Those fired at the last-minute have all stopped attending.

After my first simulator session, I remember being told to "make a decision, any decision, you can always change it later". Making such decisions is difficult to do and managers, fearing the resentment that redundancy announcements cause, can be particularly poor at making them. Having seen the selfless commitment, pride in the uniform and good-natured strength of character of the staff that they have fired, I can understand why. The terrible indecision has had a harmful effect on many of our colleagues with all of us able to see the inequity of those selected for work and those discarded.

"My admiration for cabin crew and pilots has grown watching them give so much when some of them have only unemployment in their future."

It also raises two rather interesting questions. First, why has the NHS never provided a haven for their staff before? Some of these individuals work 16-hour days with only short breaks. They have little respite from the patients that they treat and nowhere to relax. This is not a lot to ask for even in a world where accountants are kings. Second, who is going to be lucky enough to add these wonderful characters to their workforce in the coming months and weeks? My admiration for cabin crew and pilots has grown watching them give so much when some of them have only unemployment in their near future. These people are a credit to the airline industry and the UK workforce. Duty is not dead; it perhaps just goes unrecognised. **S**

Further information:
www.projectwingman.co.uk



Nick Carpenter is a military trained and commercially experienced airline pilot currently seeking a new career. His interest in occupational safety has inspired him to study for both a Bachelor's and a Master's degrees in Psychology. nickc744@hotmail.com