

**GLOBAL AIRLINES: FLYING IN
FORMATION FOR GROWTH**

DATE : JULY 2015

Like country indicators all carefully and respectfully in sequence along rows and rows of perfectly spaced seating at a calling together of heads of delegations at a United Nations council meeting, national carrier names are all lined up awaiting the arrival of their respective VIP representatives. Alongside carrier name plates, microphones are at the ready for those moments when quote-worthy interventions occur from the floor.

Looking across the grand room, the feeling of global reach and responsibility is omnipresent. The 71st Annual General Meeting of the International Air Transport Association, IATA, is readying for official opening.

With just-in-time precision, the room fills with over one thousand leaders from across IATA's 260 members. A sea of suits flows in. A feeling of heightened attention spreads as recognisable faces appear, some with an air of almost industry celebrity: Sir Tim Clark, Willie Walsh, Carsten Spohr, Ivan Chu, James Hogan, Akbar Al Baker, Richard Anderson and Alan Joyce to name but a few.

Then walks in the man responsible for navigating the organisation into the future, IATA's Director General & CEO, Tony Tyler. With his usual presence of grace and gravitas, he looks out at IATA's membership with what appears to be a blend of both authority and affection, as if to convey that these are his people, this is the industry of his life's work and love.

As the AGM is called to order, protocols are observed, and the keynote address is delivered by the US Secretary of Transport urging the industry to "*Keep going, keep growing*", a bonding can be felt across the collection of executives present. Then the moment arrived for IATA's commander in chief to deliver the '*State of the Industry*' address – one of the year's most important encapsulations of industry performance, priorities and purpose.

Within seconds of Tyler's taking to the podium, the spirit of the message is clear: aviation has become the lifeline of global connectivity of opportunity, possibility, unity and understanding.

THE BEATING HEART OF GLOBALISATION

The numbers reveal a remarkable story of global impact. As expressed by Tyler:

"We have worked together to build the global standards and systems that underpin a worldwide network of some 51,000 routes. And this year 3.5 billion passengers and nearly 55 million tonnes of cargo will travel safely by air. And that's only the beginning of the story. Airlines create jobs. We directly employ 2.5 million people. A further 56 million work in the value chain. And there are countless more jobs in businesses that rely on airlines to deliver some \$6 trillion of goods to global markets."

Not part of Tyler's address, though well known by the industry, the Air Transport Action Group (ATAG) translated the industry's annual impact into events occurring ever 60 seconds. The results?:

- Over 5800 passengers boarding aircraft
- Over 50 aircraft taking off worldwide
- US\$ 4.1 trillion worth of economic activity being supported

- US\$ 12.1 million worth of world trade being carried

With a doubt, aviation is the beating heart of globalization. Tyler reinforces this truism as his words fill the room.

And then his tone changes slightly, moving from a technical voice to a more personal one, as he states to those listening to his address in pin-drop silence,:

“Airlines create intangible benefits. How many deals are sealed in meetings that involved air travel? How many great ideas took root on a journey of discovery? How important are ties to family and friends maintained over great distances? And how can you measure the value of the freedom to expand horizons that air travel makes possible?”

Across the grand hall, the faces of leaders from across the globe reflect back agreement with these sentiments. While differing in nationalities, cultures, ages, career paths and ideologies, these thousand plus individuals are all united by a collective appreciation for just what it takes to be a leader in this industry - technically, financially, and even emotionally. An innate respect exists across this aviation community.

Especially when challenges are faced.

UNITED IN THE SKIES

The past 12 months have been particularly gripping for the aviation sector. While oil prices have offered some financial relief, still hearts and minds weighed heavy as unprecedented tragedies have occurred a number of airlines across the globe. Airline codes have become common language around not just aviation boardroom tables but general public dinner tables. Beyond fiction, incidents have left the industry reeling in the quest to comprehend how, just how, such events could have occurred through acts of weather, acts of man, acts of God.

Still, these shadows have been transformed into a relentless quest on the part of IATA to ensure that above all, protection of passengers occurs at the fundamental levels of safety and security. As beautifully expressed by Tyler,:

“Every loss is a tragedy. I know that you join me in remembering all who have perished in aviation tragedies and their families and friends. The greatest tribute that we can pay to them is to make flying ever safer. That is precisely what we are doing.”

As the rest of IATA’s leader’s address unfolded, and the AGM per se, technical discussions took over as issues around safety, security, the environment, evolving traveller demands, emerging challenges to the management of growth, the role of the industry in combatting crime (shared by CITES), and other areas of aviation effectiveness and efficient, and of course, operational performance reporting, dominated the agenda.

Still, through all of the reportbacks, addresses, panel discussions and debates, the sense of solidarity across the IATA community only grew. Even when more sensitive issues came to the fore, open skies in certain markets being the one with the most undercurrents and unedited thought bubbles, still the shared sense of purpose and commitment was clear.

Reason being, in addition to this collection of great leaders possessing exceptional technical acumen, they share a love for the skies. As much as aviation discussions today tend to focus on



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the hardware – new aircraft design, step-change innovations to reduce environmental impact – deep within the minds and hearts of aviation leaders is a love for flight, a spirit for discovery. And a courage to go beyond borders of today’s definition of possibility - the very same traits possessed by aviation’s pioneers, whose spirit continues to encourage people to look up and go further.

Most important, the courage and commitment held by each of these leaders is what makes this community truly special. It is what holds their absolute focus on just one seat on the world’s enormous number of airplanes: that single passenger with hope in his/her heart, idea in their mind and boarding pass in their hand.

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