

Introduction

When the template for the “disaster after the disaster” is out there, do you ever wonder why companies – and I mean big companies that should know better – keep following it? We know the results. Stock prices drop. There is loss of business. Regulatory fines are issued. Political repercussions abound. And that’s just a few of the consequences. Let’s blame the media! Let’s blame the unions! Everyone but us – where the blame really lies.

I became tired of seeing the disaster after the disaster due to a bad communication strategy or bad messages, so I wrote a book with the solutions – *Aviation Communication: Ensuring Success and Preventing Failure* – to take the lessons I have learned, and that have worked throughout the world, and bring them to everyone.

The cause of these communication disasters is the wrong strategy, a bad strategy, or better yet, no strategy. All too often the blame is laid at the door of the media, the unions, or some other group; an organization’s own strategy for communication and messages should be blamed instead. The problem is that communication is not a public relations or media issue but an issue that requires skills for every employee who deals with any audience, from the internal mundane workplace issue to the large-scale international crisis.

The strategy and messages in this book have worked for those who’ve used them in the past. Beginning on the foundation laid down in Chapter 1 and followed by the basic building blocks (techniques) in Chapter 2, readers will be provided with the same strategy that made the difference between success and failure in past communication challenges. The message will follow the strategy consistently throughout the book for reinforcement.

In my 30 years in this business and over 20 years of teaching aviation professionals at universities, I have never come across anyone who received this information during their initial aviation training. I certainly have never come across anyone on the commercial side of the industry who has ever been instructed on technical aviation issues and aviation is their product.

Investigators and regulators all over the world have used these messages and strategy. And if they have no problem with them, industry shouldn’t either. Sometimes industry forget they would not be selling tickets if the regulators had not given them the authority to do so.

Aviation Communication not only gives employees the strategy and techniques but tells them the messages for each subject and how to deliver them, from the technical to the commercial to what may seem like the mundane workplace event. Never before has a book been written for the aviation industry with these three purposes, and which can be used as an induction tool, a reference book, and a training manual. Many advisors tell industry what to do but not how to say it. Chapters 5 and 6 will finally give readers the exact words they need to take all that advice they have so often heard.

Let's take the media out of the equation for a moment. Employees need to communicate with various audiences on a daily basis, including customers, passengers, regulators, travel industry professionals, local community groups, and many others. They all need to have the messages and strategies that are contained in this book to deal effectively with these groups. After all, an organization is only going to do as well as the ability of these groups to deal with these audiences.

In the subsequent chapters there will be controversial questions with drafted responses, and a chapter with hypothetical press releases that will not make recent, familiar mistakes, showing the technique used from Chapter 2 and the philosophy behind it. The book will prove that a crash is an investigation first and not a media event. That is the key to getting it right.

In many of my classes, when I ask, "Who do you think in recent times has done a good job in communicating after a worst-case scenario?" The answer is invariably, "Tony Fernandes of AirAsia."¹ In the aftermath of the Indonesia AirAsia 8501 tragedy of December 2014, Tony Fernandes, the CEO of not one but nine airlines at that time, addressed the investigators of the world and told them exactly what he did in preparation for what no airline executive or airline employee around the world hopes will ever happen.² Readers of this book can learn the same formula that he used in Chapter 3, the 4-point formula. It is also the same thing Air France used in the aftermath of the Concorde tragedy.

Fortunately, the worst-case scenario is now a rare event in aviation. However, a crisis can be defined in many ways. It can be a workplace event, an environmental event, or something that may seem as mundane as a lost bag. However, to the person who lost the bag, it is a crisis. There needs to be communication for all these situations. This book is applicable daily and therefore addresses the reality that communication is not just about dealing with the media and families – and that is what makes this different from the ordinary PR book. This book is for everyday use. So why wait?

Communication is not an after-the-fact activity. You need to know what you are going to say *before* an event occurs. So many times, clients say, "How do I know what I'm going to say until something happens?" Why wait? After reading this book, they no longer have to wait until something happens. We've seen too many times that this strategy does not work.

Aviation Communication will take you through the techniques in Chapter 2, the strategy for the worst-case scenario in Chapter 3, to the messages for all subjects in Chapter 4, the controversial questions and answers in Chapter 5,

how to put it all together with templates in Chapter 6, and a lot more. You will want to read this now and keep it on your shelf as your go-to aviation communication advisor.

Notes

- 1 Teo Cheng Wee (2014) "AirAsia Flight QZ8501: Boss Tony Fernandes Draws Positive Feedback with Personal Touch," *The Straits Times*, December 31, <https://www.straitstimes.com/asia/se-asia/airasia-flight-qz8501>.
- 2 Tony Fernandes (2016) "A Family Affair: AirAsia Group in Light of Indonesia AirAsia Flight QZ8501," *Forum Magazine*, ISASI, Spring, p. 16.