

Training - Why bother?

Exercises - who needs them?

Training, exercises pay off

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Everyone knows about USAir flight 1549 from New York to Charlotte; it ended up in the Hudson River.

Everyone also knows about the flight's captain who - with his co-pilot - brought the plane safely down.

Everyone knows that, save for some bruises and hypothermia, all of the passengers and crew escaped serious injury.

Who deserves the credit? The flight crew.

Pilot: Chesley B. Sullenberger III

Co-Pilot: Jeffrey B. Skiles

Flight Attendants: Donna Dent, Doreen Welsh, and Sheila Dail
(http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/US_Airways_Flight_1549#cite_not-22)

"I know I speak for the entire crew when I tell you we were simply doing the jobs we were trained to do," USAirways Flight 1549 pilot Chesley B. Sullenberger III told a hometown crowd.
(<http://www.chicagotribune.com/topic/chi-090124-hudson-pilot-honored,0,1811094.story>)

Flight 1549's crew may have been better prepared than some, but all flight crews go through, if not continuous then frequent, training to prepare them for events they hope never will occur.

Sullenberger, according to the Wikipedia page (ibid.), is a former fighter pilot who has been a commercial pilot since leaving the Air Force in 1980. He is also a safety expert and a glider pilot.

Neighbors of FA Dent said the 150 passengers were lucky to have Dent's 20 years of experience on board. (<http://www.wxii12.com/news/18498470/detail.html>)

Key words

The key words uttered by Sullenberger are "we were simply doing the jobs we were trained to do."

Training and practicing what is learned.

It works for flight crews.

It can work for disaster event responders.

It must not be pushed aside for other things, and it must not be pushed aside because "we do it every day."

If other priorities constantly interfere with a training/exercise schedule, when an event occurs responders, and in Enterprise Risk Management/Business Continuity that means everyone, even people whose only assignment is to evacuate (or to shelter-in-place), will lack the confidence to do what may be necessary - even though it is not "strictly by the book," or the knowledge to do things in a crisis order.

The folks who beg out of an exercise because "we do this everyday" fail to understand that when anything more than a minor hiccup occurs, say a board fries, a printer fails, or a very senior and critical manager suddenly cannot be reached, need to know how to operate in "crisis mode."

Training exercises need to include Very Senior Managers as well as the custodian - truly a "key" employee.

Very Senior Managers, VSMS, must understand that they can make or break both the exercise and the response by their response.

Demands and shouting are counter productive; VSMS need to understand this and control both their own anxieties and those of lower-level managers.

From the ground up

Both Sullenberger and Robert Pearson, another commercial pilot you'll be introduced to later, were glider pilots.

Both Sullenberger and Pearson used this basic skill to get powerless planes safely to the ground.

What's the point?

Simple.

Responders need to be thoroughly grounded in their jobs; they need to know who to deal with situations at their lowest level.

Formal education does not necessarily equate to basic skills.

A person with a PhD in fluid mechanics may be at a total loss when the toilet overflows.

The electrical engineer may lack any clue as to how to use a volt meter.

I learned to fly in a 65 horsepower 2-seat Aronica Champion tail dragger, basically a glider with a small engine.

Among the many things you learn in a Champ - like it - is that the rascal will glide as long as it has sufficient air speed greater than "stall speed" and some air beneath it. I recall the Champ glide ratio that translated into an ability to glide 10 feet for every one foot of



things you and craft rascal will glide as long as it has (speed speed) and I vaguely had a 10:1 translated glide 10 feet altitude.

(See text beneath rule near bottom of article.)

Every aircraft has a glide ratio - the space shuttle is 1:1; no room for mistakes.

For all that, pilots learning to fly on small aircraft such as Champs (then) and Cessna 150s (now) learn - or should learn - about glide ratios and how to use them to their advantage. Pilots who go from ground school (equates to a bachelor's degree) to jets (masters) miss out on many of the fundamentals that both Sullenberger and Pearson learned piloting gliders.

The "other" job

Exercises identify people who are critical during the different response and recovery phases.

They also train people to do "other" jobs.

When I was a young and in the Flyin' Corps - in the class picture I was to the left of the Wrights - my primary job was "Medical Administration" - then coded as 906*0. My secondary skill was as a corpsman, 902*0. (The "*" was a 1, 2, 3, 7, or 9 and indicated the skill level.) I learned my secondary, "basic medical," skill before I learned the specialty, medical administration, skill. The Air Force, in its wisdom, figured since I went to basic medical training, I could function as a field corpsman in a pinch, and the pinch came on a regular training basis. My basic medical skills were "basic," but suitable for an emergency.

VSMs who, due to an event suddenly find themselves with little to do, can be put to work doing other things.

If nothing else, a smart VSM will accept a role as a gofer, as in go fer this and go fer that.

The cooperative VSM has the rank to get what the responder-with-a-task needs to get the task completed. The VSM may hold the credit card with a high enough limit to buy without bid a critical item (that perhaps should have been on hand already, but that's another matter for another time).

The VSM may be able to authorize overtime or travel or food for the troops.

But the VSM, as well as all the other people who may not be assigned a response function need to know they have a role to play.

But not now

There are people who, if they hang around, simply get in the way.

Training exercises identify these people.

These folks need to understand that while they are not needed during a specific response phase, they will be needed at another phases.

It is critical to their welfare and to the organization that this is abundantly clear.

The exercise needs to include assurance that the people not needed now know how to keep up to date with the response - who will contact whom and how. Strategically located bulletin boards (note the plural - to cover a broader geography and to assure that if one board is inaccessible, others can be reached), electronic media announcements, telephone calls, the buddy network.

While on the topic of furloughing staff, even for a brief period, management needs to take a look at the organization's policies and procedures. Are there P&Ps in place to cover compensation for furloughed personnel? The P&Ps, as with almost all P&Ps, need to be published well in advance of an event and all personnel need to know what to expect. Failing that, an organization could lose some very valuable employees because they are worried about how they will pay their bills or if their insurance still is in force.

No matter that "day job" a person has, there will be a response role.

It may not be one that is required from Day 1, but there will be something beyond the day job routine.

It may require using work-arounds.

It may require working from alternate locations.

Whatever it will take should be documented.

Whatever it will take needs to be practiced, if only to prove that when needed, it will work.

What's the purpose?

The purpose of training and exercises primarily is two-fold.

One: To identify deficiencies in The Plan.

It is this practitioner's opinion that any plan that is "100 percent" the first time out is not being exercised as it should be. No plan ever is 100% on the first exercise.

Two: To enhance responder confidence.

Disaster events rarely play out as expected.

Some one or some thing will be missing.

Responders need the confidence to take a risk within their abilities and knowledge.

Developing abilities and knowledge are the goals of training and exercises.

Some 25 years ago (July 23, 1983) another glider pilot, Robert Pearson managed to safely land an Air Canada 747 on a drag strip in Gimli Manitoba Canada after the jumbo jet ran out of fuel. Funny enough, Air Canada disciplined both Pearson and co-pilot Maurice Quintal (http://www.ctv.ca/servlet/ArticleNews/story/CTVNews/20080723/Gimli_Glider_080723?s_name=&no_ads=; and http://archives.cbc.ca/science_technology/aeronautics/clips/1155/).

According to a Wikipedia entry (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Glide_ratio), the Boeing 747 in the Gimli Glider incident achieved a glide ratio of only 12:1. A good discussion of this is on another Wikipedia page: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gimli_Glider