



A Culture, Not a Department

Aside from being a subtropical melting pot of many ethnic cultures, Tampa also serves as an incubator for another type of culture — that of customer service.

by JOHN PERSINOS
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In December, I visited Chromalloy at its ever-expanding facilities in Tampa, Florida. Chromalloy provides repairs, coatings and cast parts for aerospace turbine engines and other applications. This well-managed company, owned by the private equity firm Carlyle Group, exemplifies the “customer service culture”. A customer service culture is a set of values and methodologies that are communicated to all members of the organization, to guide their interactions with customers.

To be effective, this culture must be holistic and shared by everyone in the company, from the shop floor to the executive suite. The business imperative for fostering a customer service culture is easy to grasp: attracting new customers costs more than retaining existing ones.

The importance of customer service is explored by this issue’s cover story, “The Giants of MRO”. I examined the theme on my own, during my tour of Chromalloy’s spotless foundry in Tampa. The facility is a high-tech symphony of engineering, tooling and machining. As my hosts explained, customer service must be a pervasive culture, not simply an isolated department.

“We put ourselves in the shoes of our customers, who wake up every morning thinking about life cycle costs,” said Andrew Farrant, v.p., marketing/corporate communications, Chromalloy. “Everyone at all levels of the company is encouraged to think along the same lines. How can we make it the most cost-effective to coat, repair or build a part or component for an operator? We have engineers on site at major MRO facilities, as a way to stay close to customer needs. Our constant goal is to provide speed, innovation and turnaround times that are better than the OEMs.”

Tom Trotter, Chromalloy’s vice president and general manager, said that instilling respect for the customer is not a hierarchical, top-down process. “A customer service culture is important here,” he said. “We make customer service expectations very clear and specific and we communicate those expectations to everyone on the shop floor.”

Another company that’s grappling with customer service is the helicopter manufacturer, Eurocopter. Our European editor, Thierry Dubois, reports on Eurocopter’s new and innovative attempts to improve MRO turnaround times and responsiveness. Similarly, contributing editor Douglas Nelms addresses MRO and customer support for fixed-wing and rotorcraft avionics.

Read our “Point/Counterpoint” columns for different perspectives on the controversial topic of Parts Manufacturer Authority (PMA). In a separate Guest Opinion column, influential aviation lawyer Jason Dickstein opines on PMA. Jason serves as president of The Modification and Replacement Parts Association (MARPA), which represents the PMA parts industry. The importance of PMA has prompted our magazine to create a new conference, “The International PMA Summit”, scheduled for November 2011 in London. For details, go here: <http://www.avmain-mag.com/pma-summit>

In addition to conferences, we also produce web-based events. Our recent webinar, “The Convergence of MRO, UAVs and Avionics”, looked at how major avionics OEMs are funneling greater resources into the upkeep of the ultra-sophisticated electronics within unmanned aircraft. To read highlights of the webinar’s panel discussion, turn to page 47. This 60-minute webinar was recorded and archived; it remains available for registration on demand, at this URL: <http://www.avmain-mag.com/webinars>.

And finally, I’m proud to announce that the seasoned and widely respected aviation journalist Ramon Lopez has joined our editorial staff. He has written an article for this issue, on the incident when a Rolls-Royce Trent 900 engine blew apart on a Qantas Airbus A380. He also wrote the lead analysis story for our Intelligence news section, concerning a December court ruling on the Air France Concorde crash of 2000.

Ramon is the former editor-in-chief of the newsletter, Air Safety Week. As such, his insights into the Qantas mishap are of particular relevance. How engine maker Rolls-Royce rectifies the problem is bound to serve as a customer service “case study” of historic proportions.