



Release to service: Flying and the pandemic

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ASK FOR MAYDAY



Like it or not, 2020 will go down in aviation history as one of the most memorable years in our careers. In the space of only a few months, aviation went from being on an incredible trajectory of growth to stumbling to one of its lowest points ever. However, as aviation always seems to do after a crisis, we are slowly starting to trend back upwards and in the not too distant future we'll find ourselves back at the controls.

It's been a long period of downtime for many of us and after we've gotten over the disappointment of our uniforms being a few sizes too small after the lockdown, we can start looking at what we need to get done in order to get back safely into an aircraft. We are going to have to look at a few factors to ensure that we are entirely mentally and legally prepared for re-entry to our normal working life.

MINDSET:

Possibly the most challenging part is going to be our mindset going back to work, for a lot of us we've had months of uncertainty and cut salaries and we've felt largely let down and disappointed with our companies. No airline in South Africa paid full salaries over this time period and a few paid nothing at all. We do need, however, to accept that whether we agree with the way our respective companies acted or not, they were at the end of the day acting in the best interests of survivability.

In the interests of our own wellbeing and safety, we need to try our best to leave any negative feelings behind and to focus on creating a positive, safe and productive work environment for ourselves and everyone around us. Every single person from top management down to the aircraft cleaners have been adversely affected by Covid-19, and as flight deck crew we need to try our best to be compassionate to everyone around us and be patient.

When in doubt, always consider what is legal and what is safe. If you feel that you are not in the right mindset or that you might hinder the safety of the operation please speak up, go to your management if necessary. There are resources available to crew who need assistance, you can contact Mayday-SA or your company employee assistance program, something as simple as a chat with someone you trust can make a difference.

MEDICAL:

We need to be sure of our medical status before we return to flight, these have been tough times and many of us may have had issues with anxiety, sleep disorder, depression or other factors which may have required the help of prescription medication. If you've been put on any new medication you need to make certain they are compatible with returning to flight as per the regulations.

Covid-19 has been widespread and many of us have contracted the illness with varying numbers of symptoms, thus there is a South African CAA requirement to return a negative test result as well as have your medical examiner supply a report to them before you are cleared for flight duty.

REGENCY:

If you flying in an airline environment, they will hopefully be aware of the recency requirements and ensure that they are fulfilled; however as flight crew, and for the GA pilots, we ultimately need to make sure we fulfill the requirements laid out in the regulations, this is obviously important from a safety aspect as well as to ensure we are fully covered by insurance.

NEW PROCEDURES:

There are new procedures in place that we will need to comply with because of Covid-19, by now most of us are used to signing in everywhere and having our temperature taken 500 times a day. There will also be requirements for crew to operate in PPE which might be uncomfortable and possibly have an effect on communication in the flight deck environment. It's important to be patient and ensure that, despite wearing masks, we are patient and maintain clear and effective communication.

TRAINING:

Crew will have to go through various amounts of training, something which we already dread. However, the training is something we've all gone through and passed before, so we aren't doing anything new to us. We need to approach training the same way we always have with a positive and open mindset.

We do need to be open and honest though, if we have personal issues or anything happening that may affect our performance rather go and speak to your management or the instructor beforehand. All the instructors and management pilots have also battled through this pandemic and should be sympathetic, but there has to be a required standard that is met in order for them to pass you. Don't allow yourself to be in a situation where a personal issue affects the outcome of your training.

SAFETY AND OPENNESS:

As has already been said, we need to ensure that we are safe and that at the end of the day we get home safely to our families. While it has been difficult for a lot of us financially over this period, we still need to make sure that when we climb into an aircraft, we do so with the ability to ensure a safe outcome for the flight.

Please, be open with yourself and if need be, speak to someone. There are many resources available to all of us that can help to improve our general wellbeing. The hardest part is making the initial contact and being strong enough to admit that there is an issue. A simple conversation with a friend might be all that is needed. However, there are other resources, such as Mayday-SA, with trained volunteers to help you through the transition back into the cockpit.

Resources Available:

<http://www.mayday-sa.org.za/>

<https://www.aviation4sa.co.za/>

<http://caa.mylexisnexis.co.za/>

<http://www.caa.co.za/Aviation%20Medicine%20General%20Information/%E2%80%A2Guidelines%20on%20Aviation%20Personnel%20With%20a%20Confirmed%20COVID-19%20Positive%20Diagnosis.pdf>

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