

## **Business Aviation Best Practices** : : A Quick Test for Yourself

*by Peter v. Agur, Jr.*

Operating a business aircraft according to best practices is an apple pie issue—who wouldn't want to follow what everyone agrees is best. Sounds good, but the problem is there is no set of universally accepted best practices. In fact, what one department considers best practices may be considered inadequate, or, alternatively overkill, for the next. Decide upon a standard that works for your department, and follow it.

The CEO of a major company recently said, "I want our flight services to operate to the standards of industry best practices." Like most top corporate executives, he knows what he is talking about because he has led programs to define and implement best practices within his own organization. Many top executives echo his expectations for his flight department's performance. After all, those are the standards they use for their core businesses—and they are often in the back of the airplanes.

At the same time, a number of business aviation organizations declare they are operating to best practices standards. Many of them are wrong—for a variety of reasons.

The first reason is the lack of a common and clear definition of those standards. The following are working definitions we use with our clients:

- **World Class or Best in Class Practices.** This is sometimes referred to as "Bleeding Edge." There is typically a high cost in time and effort to establish and maintain this extreme standard. In other words, it is not normally cost beneficial. This standard is pursued only when the customer demands it and is willing to pay for it.
- **Best Practices.** This is the set of practices designed and implemented to assure operational and organizational success. These practices typically include additional safety and service margins. They tend to be cost beneficial. These practices are dynamic because they are perpetually evolving with changes in customer expectations, as well as improvements in the general knowledge base.
- **Competent or Industry Standard Practices.** This set of practices meets the minimum standards set by the government (FARs 91, 135, etc.), original equipment manufacturers (OEMs), and vendors (FlightSafety International, Simuflite, etc.). These practices generally prevent operational or organizational failure. They tend not to have significant added margins for safety and service errors. And, they do not assure success.
- **Substandard Practices.** These practices or behaviors are most often transitional and not routine. They are usually situational. For example, your flight department will not immediately be fully competent when a new type of aircraft or team member is dropped into the mix. There is an elevated risk of operational or service failure that is not acceptable for sustained operations at this level.
- **Rampant Rhino or Negligent Practices.** These practices are in direct conflict with industry common practices. They are rarely observed and include behaviors



characterized by such comments as, "It is only a matter of time before that catches up with them." A few examples we have seen include 27-hour duty days without crew rest or relief, multiple landings with less than 20 minutes of fuel remaining, and passengers standing in the aisles during takeoff. At this level, safety and service failures are imminent.

Another reason for confusion about best practices is the lack of a clear method for developing and sharing them: Who develops, documents, and updates them? I can't. The National Business Aviation Association can't, either. It's up to you. Only you know your customers, your culture, your mission, and the best practices for assuring the outcomes you intend: appropriate levels of safety/security, service and efficiency.

A best practice for one operator may be overkill for you. What may be an industry standard practice may be exactly what you need to be doing, and no more. Anything more may be unnecessarily costing you and your company valuable resources. Therefore, it is up to you and your customers to define which best practices add enough value (margins of safety/security, perceived service benefits, and real efficiencies) to invest in and maintain.

Using the NBAA's Business Aviation Management Journal as a forum for identifying and sharing proven business aviation best practices makes a lot of sense. In an effort to get the ball rolling, we ask that you take the following test.

Start with 100 points. Deduct 1 point for each practice that applies to your operation and you follow it, but not rigorously.

Deduct 2 points for each practice you have addressed but not fully implemented.  
Deduct 3 points for each practice you don't do.

Your score will give you an idea of how close your operation is to best practices. When you have completed this test, we will ask you to make an important contribution to our industry.

#### Business Aviation Best Practices – An Incomplete Test

##### **Business, Administration, and Scheduling – 33 points**

1. The purpose and expectations for the flight department's performance are well expressed by top management. There are no mixed messages or inappropriate expectations or behaviors by key passengers.
2. The flight department reports to a senior, but not the top, executive. There is a point of appeal regarding critical decisions. The executive to whom the department reports does not face a "career opportunity" when he/she addresses tough issues with top management.
3. Your flight department is audited by an external agent at least once every two years.



4. There is a living operations manual. It contains sections dedicated to scheduling, maintenance, and flight operations. The manual is reviewed and updated continuously and is an active resource.
5. The flight department's emergency response plan has been developed, training has occurred, and a simulation or practice is held at least every two years.
6. The flight department staff has been trained in and practices critical organizational skills, such as teamwork, communications, problem solving, and conflict management.
7. There is an established cross-functional safety team (management, scheduling, maintenance, and flight). This team has the authority and resources (including time) to effectively act as safety champions.
8. Passenger manifests are confirmed, corrected, and transmitted (live or to a voice-mail box) so as to be accessible by home base prior to any aircraft movement for departure. Passenger manifests are always accurate (code names are acceptable).
9. There is a proactive real-time flight following process. Someone at flight operations/dispatch knows whenever a flight departs and arrives. If there is a delay in confirmation of a flight movement, there is a timely follow-up.
10. The flight department's phones are answered by a live body at all hours. This can be done through an answering service or corporate security during off-hours. Voice-mail and computer menu systems are not acceptable.
11. Your staffing levels are adequate to support managing the flight department's business, conducting operations, and allowing time off for vacations and training. This is done without heroic efforts or shortchanging key elements of the business.

#### **Flight Operations - 33 points**

12. Your crew fatigue management guidelines for duty day and rest are at least as stringent as those established by the Flight Safety Foundation, and you adhere to them.
13. You have trained and fully implemented the Flight Safety Foundation's Controlled Flight into Terrain (CFIT) counter measures program, its equivalent, or better.
14. You have established and adhere to pre-established adverse weather procedures. At least once a year pilots receive training in specific practices and procedures for severe convective weather, wind shear avoidance and counter measures, and icing.
15. Weather minimums for departure and approach have been established and are adhered to. Heightened minimums are pre-established for high-risk operations. "Look-See" approaches are not permitted except under specific conditions and are trained for.
16. You have established and adhere to predefined aircraft performance restrictions for standard runway conditions (dry), contaminated conditions (wet, standing water, snow, slush, ice, etc.), and width restrictions.
17. Your department's checklist philosophy has been fully developed and is rigorously applied. Checklists have been modified from the OEM or training



- organization's model to fit your operation and cockpit flow. Vendor simulator training is done with your procedures.
18. Your crews train in a full-motion simulator regularly (at least every six months if you do not conduct additional line training, at least every nine months with additional line training). Your pilots train as crews, rather than separately, to enhance crew resource management training. You have worked with the vendor to establish a syllabus that meets your specific training needs.
  19. Your aircraft is never left unlocked while unattended on the ramp, either at home or away. You rigorously adhere to specific security processes that are designed to protect your passengers, crews, and aircraft.
  20. Each passenger receives a safety briefing prior to his or her first flight each day. You conduct passenger cabin safety training (i.e., FACTS, etc.) for your most frequent travelers at least every other year in each type of aircraft.
  21. On large-body aircraft (Falcon 2000, Challenger 60X, Gulfstream's large aircraft, etc.) you have a flight attendant on board for every passenger leg.
  22. All flight crewmembers have participated in high-altitude training within the past five years.

#### **Maintenance Operations - 33 points**

23. Each technician has received factory initial training and periodic recurrent training for each aircraft on which he or she works. Each technician attends at least one ancillary training program each year.
24. Ground handling staff are trained in aircraft movement and parking processes and are routinely observed. There is rigorous use of speed management, multiple wing/blade walkers, and barriers or cones to protect people and aircraft.
25. Aircraft refueling is always supervised and incorporates normal safety procedures. You periodically confirm your vendors' effective fuel farm and fuel contamination prevention and detection programs, at home and away.
26. Your technicians conduct a formal aircraft maintenance status briefing/debriefing with your flight crews before and after each trip. The aircraft's full maintenance status is easily determined by referring to maintenance forms carried onboard the aircraft.
27. The maintenance department has a tool accountability and calibration program that is rigorously adhered to.
28. Ladders and scaffolds are appropriate for the aircraft and the level of work performed by your technicians. Fall protection is rigorously used whenever a technician is working more than three feet off the ground.
29. Technicians routinely work in teams during elevated risk events and periods (i.e., heavy lifting, at night or weekends, etc.).
30. You adhere to a technician fatigue management program (maximum duty days and minimum rest periods) that is similar to that used for the flight crews.
31. When you send your aircraft out for a maintenance event (periodic inspections, refurbishment, overhauls, etc.) you have a technician, or a technical consultant, oversee the process onsite.



32. When you buy a new or prior owned aircraft, your technician or a technical consultant is a key member of the specification definition and selection/inspection team.
33. When you buy a new or prior owned aircraft that is to go through refurbishment and/or upgrades, your technician or a technical consultant is pre-trained and oversees the final phases of completion of the project.

There you have them, 33 best practices. How did you do? If you were brutally honest with yourself, you probably didn't do as well as expected. But that's not all bad. Consider this a starting point for taking your operations to the next level as you strive to achieve universal best practices.

Now, we have a request. Help us grow and share the best practices body of knowledge. What improvements to the practices described above do you recommend? What additional best practices do you recommend? There are a lot more best practices for each of your flight department's critical operational arenas: management/scheduling/administration, flight operations, and maintenance operations. Please share the ones you know and believe in.

With your input, we will compile a much more comprehensive listing of business aviation best practices to be published in the next Journal. Please e-mail your additions and comments to: Mark Twombly at [marktwombly@earthlink.net](mailto:marktwombly@earthlink.net).

Thank you for taking an important part in improving the safety, security, service and efficiency of our industry.

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