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Where are all the boys?

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Why aren't men more accepted as corporate crew? According to Scott Arnold, President and Founder of Sajat Solutions and member of the NBAA Flight Attendants Committee, it's a question of education.

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In an industry dogged by discrimination, entrenched views and fewer enforceable laws, Liz Moscrop asks “is it any wonder that one gender has to fight harder to be accepted and gain regular work in the business aviation sector?”

Even today, more than 100 years after man first took to powered flight, the ratio of male to female flight crew is disproportionate. It still hovers around the 10:90 mark, which is simply not fair. In an industry dogged by discrimination, entrenched views and fewer enforceable laws, is it any wonder that one gender has to fight harder to be accepted and gain regular work in the business aviation

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sector?

I know what you're thinking... male corporate flight attendants should be treated exactly the same way as their female counterparts. So why aren't men more accepted as corporate crew?

According to Scott Arnold, President and Founder of Sajat Solutions and member of the NBAA Flight Attendants Committee, with more than two decades of experience, it's a question of education. "Cabin crew are there first and foremost to provide safety for crewmembers and passengers," he says. "It's nice to have the soft skills: inflight service, etiquette and culinary training, but safety is paramount."

London Executive Aviation CEO Patrick Margetson-Rushmore, now part of the Lux group, says he does not have any male flight attendants as part of the permanent staff, but this is partly due to the fact there are far fewer applicants. "Some freelance agencies have certain clients who request men," he says. "The main thing is that the crew have to be discreet and the clients are comfortable."

Flirting with prejudice?

So, is this to do with the fact most clients are wealthy men whose preference is for an attractive young woman on board? Both Margetson-Rushmore and Arnold agree that there is an element of this, but not to the degree that I had suspected when I set out to write this piece. "We don't allow flirting - we insist that our crew are very professional," explains Margetson-Rushmore. "There are degrees of flirting and the recipient may not want that, and don't always know what it means in the context of being in the air. Drunk lads may misinterpret friendly banter."

Confronting my prejudice again, he also pointed out that the most of LEA's flight attendants are more mature. "Our oldest lady was 62 when she retired," he says. LEA had 25 applications from men last year, but all were unsuitable as they had no general aviation experience.

Like many corporate flight attendants, Arnold started life on the airlines before migrating to the private sector. He has



extensive training in culinary, fine dining, service and etiquette, as well as organizing and streamlining flight department procedures and managing crewmembers in a variety of flight operations. He is the past NBAA Flight Attendants Committee (FAC) chair and is now lead liaison of the FAC Advisory Council.

“Some clients do prefer females, and business aviation is male dominated, however most don’t care,” he says. “They want quality service and safety. Some men actually prefer guys. They can be guys themselves and strip down and change and be more relaxed on what they can talk about then they would if there was a woman on board.”

That being said, Arnold admits that he did once have a client who, although very pleased with his service, requested a female FA afterwards, adding that this is not a problem for him. “Clients are paying for the service they want, so it’s absolutely fine they have the choice,” he says. “It’s not a personal thing. There is no one size fits all.”

Safety first

Arnold says his main concern is for safety, and he spends a great deal of time trying to educate owners and passengers as to why this is so important. “In this industry there are no mandates about who has to be on board a private jet with fewer than 19 seats,” he explains. “The point is that attendants are there first and foremost for safety’s sake.”

The situation has been better with the advent of the International Standard for Business Aircraft Operations. Arnold continues, “In my experience many Part 91 operators are surpassing these safety requirements, and are really embracing and supporting safety. It’s mostly a few charter operators who are still old school.”

Narrowing the gap

The gender gap is reversed again when flight attendants are flight technicians and operators want to fly with a mechanic on board, a field with more men in the ranks. Arnold stresses that there is no opposition from pilots, who tend to be male. Indeed, there is almost exactly the same ratio of male/female pilots as there are flight attendants, except in

reverse. “We find pilots and crew really work together – it is team work and it’s important that everybody supports each other to make the trip successful,” he says.

One thing that is helping men become more widely accepted in the role is the insatiable industry thirst for good crew – especially in areas where private aviation is proliferating. There is a huge market in the northeast US, in and around New York, for example. In Europe the situation is slightly different in that in the UK flight attendants are required to have a full Cabin Crew Attestation before they can start work, which is similar to the FAA guidelines for crew.

“We want all cabin crew safety trained,” says Arnold. “So we provide safety training in our syllabus.” He points to the mindset of private passengers who can sometimes feel invincible while cocooned in luxurious surroundings and expecting that the pilots and crew are safety trained. “It is necessary to notify the client that the crew are not trained if the pilots should become incapacitated for any reason,” he adds.

Indeed, there is a notorious case where an owner had hired a flight attendant because he admired her looks, but she had no training and when the aircraft overshot the runway at Teterboro she was unable to open the door to let the passengers out. Nobody was hurt, but as Arnold points out, “it gave the industry a scare, and prompted stricter safety standards.”

With all this being said, Arnold feels positive about the future for men joining the industry. In fact, he has mentored several men through the process of learning to be flight attendants, and recommends they skill up, get safety trained and add culinary skills to their repertoire, noting this has helped them to find work. “Some flight departments are totally fair and just roster everybody equally.”

“I’ve been on flights with my current employer where both pilots are female and I’m the attendant,” he says. “Clients remark on it as it’s unusual, but always in a positive manner. It’s just a question of people getting used to seeing it.”