

Re: Knock it Off Request

From:

Richard Rynearson

To:

\*\*\*\*\*

Date:

Thu, Jan 28, 2010 4:53 pm

Yeah man I'll be there if I can!

On Jan 28, 2010, at 6:49 PM, \*\*\*\*\* wrote:

No, they said the meeting was not in response to any particular request... which is bullshit, they were trying to save face after your email had made its rounds and shown the emperor to be nekkid.

The current WX is a convenient thing to blame our timeline problems on, but that is not the root cause of the issues, the increased training load coupled with shitty leadership that wants to see fucking magic happen and won't listen to reality (we lack the resources, AKA triple-turning and manning) are the root causes.

We'll see how it all ends out, and I'm very happy to be getting "out" by being a student again soon. My fini is on the 12th, see you there?

On Thu, Jan 28, 2010 at 6:41 PM, Richard Rynearson wrote:

Yeah man. I didn't make that meeting...wish I had!

What do you mean by them saying "this is not in response to any particular request"... you mean a request for more students?

On Jan 28, 2010, at 6:40 PM, \*\*\*\*\* wrote:

Dude, I got nothing but props for you on a well written rebuttal to the bullshit factor that has been rather high as of late. Way to call out the man!

I especially liked the leadership problems section and the discussion of Enron's "magic."

Hopefully you were as amused as I was at today's briefing, especially as all the timeline problems were being blamed on wx... and the fact that they stated "this is not in response to any particular request"... which was TOTAL bullshit.

Anyways, good on ya, thank you for being that guy and saving all our asses somewhat.

-----Original Message-----

From: Ryneanson, Richard L Maj USAF AETC 85 FTS/ADO

Sent: Tuesday, January 26, 2010 12:26 PM

To: Binder, John R LtCol USAF AETC 85 FTS/DO; Nesmith, Richard LtCol USAF AETC 85 FTS/CC

Cc: Wills, Craig Col USAF AETC 47 OG/CC

Subject: Knock it Off Request

Sir,

You stated in your email that a mishap is not worth the increased ops tempo. Given this information I would like to provide my assessment of the situation, as I understand it. As a loyal member of the Air Force and the 85th FTS, I believe it's my duty to pass information to my superiors even if that info may not be welcomed. I would like to provide my perspective concerning the increased ops tempo and six day fly weeks that have recently started. I know there is a great deal of information that I don't know and I realize leadership doesn't take action arbitrarily. Given the current climate, there is a chance leadership is not being provided high fidelity information and I hope this email provides some information that is useful. While I can't provide solutions with every perceived problem I identify, I hope my contribution will be seen like the call from the loadmaster who spots fuel leaking from the #2 engine. He might not know how to fix or solve the problem, but he provides a service in merely identifying it to those who can.

The short of my message is this, there is a belief shared by many that six-day fly weeks are going to become relatively standard for the next several months and perhaps longer. If true, and if squadron members still enjoy the briefed ability to call "knock it off," then I am calling knock it off. I believe this significant increase in ops tempo will increase risk greatly. If the ability to call a KIO has been removed from squadron members, then I would like to give my reasons for my position and provide information and recommendations to help mitigate the increased risk. Whatever decision is made, I, and every other pilot, am ready to implement whatever action leadership decides.

A 1999 Air Force Times article entitled, "Worked to Death - How Doing Too Much Cost 12 Crewmen Their Lives" took a look at a fatality at Nellis involving two

HH-60s that had a midair collision. According to the article, the overwhelming contributing factors that led to the disaster cited by the lead investigator, Col Denver Pletcher, included ""a high ops/pers tempo coupled with leadership problems, internal and external training deficiencies, broken squadron processes, low aircrew experience level, and midlevel supervisory breakdown." The Colonel wrote that the "squadron was on a path to disaster." The article explains that the squadron had been operating under that same ops temp for five years prior to this accident but that "By then, problems were chronic: Squadron processes broke down, morale was bad, the training burden was increasing and there seemed ever-less time to prepare for the next deployment or exercise."

I believe this safety report could easily describe the 85th FTS, and several of your instructors are already citing the squadron as being on the same path to disaster.

1. A high ops tempo. As you know, your instructor pilots are working roughly 12 hour days, five days a week, with a smattering of cross country weekends thrown in. Several in the squadron routinely work more than 12 hours in an effort to catch up with flight management duties. This current 5-day week ops tempo is seen as a grind and I have heard of at least one instructor who has nodded off while taxiing as a result of fatigue. This is the status quo ops tempo and not the greatly increased ops tempo of the six-day work week.

2. Leadership problems. This may be evidenced by the relatively recent increase in alcohol related incidents that have taken much of the Wing Commander's time lately. I believe it's also evidenced by a perception that leadership has responded with an iron fist that hands out punishment with a sledgehammer rather than a scalpel in many instances, a perception I believe has had a severe morale degrading effect. The most important leadership problem I believe exists is a punitive environment for dissent or bearing bad news or for simply having unpopular opinions. While my own personal experiences with the chain of command show punishment will be delivered without an infraction, others' experiences create the perception of unjust punishment. In other cases, punishment is provided in response to mission-centric loyal dissent. Careers are ruined for providing mission inspired professional opinions to our leadership and this is widely known to be the case in our ops group. Command leadership from top to bottom in AETC role models a disinterest in the reality of mission related problems and the message is understood to be "I don't care...just do it." It is widely understood by multiple instructors that loyal dissent is simply not tolerated in our wing. This climate, in my opinion, may serve to stifle accurate information from flowing to decision makers and may potentially derail safety processes. The thermometers may be broken and leadership may not be getting an accurate reading. For example, instructors are seen as the last defense against unsafe

flying operations and are told

"there is nothing we do in training that is so important we can't do it tomorrow." This message isn't supported by leadership actions, however, and the six-day week belies this correct training perspective. Instructors are told they have the ability to call safety can ops cancel a sortie. It may be illuminating to track how many instructors have taken this option despite a grueling five-day week.

3. Broken squadron processes. I believe there is a widespread perception that the squadron and flights are unable to accomplish everything required without cutting corners. One example is the failure of the squadron to accomplish PT (a requirement that has recently been removed from regulations in testament to an inability to comply service wide). From my perspective, other issues are presented including time to complete routine syllabus events, computer based training events, etc. I believe corner cutting is standard to make due and I think this perception is shared by most of your instructors.

4. Low aircrew experience level. This is a hallmark of our training environment in which many pilots are low time FAIPs and the students, of course, bring less than limited experience. It's a continual factor in what we do and an ORM risk that sets us apart from the operational Air Force.

The cited article discusses an increasing training burden. My understanding is the root of the problem in the 85th is exactly that; a significant increase in the number of students to be trained without an increase in instructor manning and given daylight flying hour limitations. Further, my understanding is higher headquarters does not want the 85th to wash out or wash back students in response to this increased burden.

The article also discusses poor morale. I believe our squadron suffers from poor morale as well, particularly given the leadership climate, although instructors do a good job of dealing with it given a weekend to unwind. A weekend is a light at the end of the tunnel and pilots use it to reset. If this time is taken (cutting off time by 50%), I believe it will exact a psychological toll that exacerbates existing challenges much further than "simply one more day of work." A six day work week is merely one crew duty day from working continuously and will, in my opinion, lead to an outsized decrease in morale and leadership challenges. A six day week exacts a real toll as people, even now, don't fully use that time to rest but to complete other Air Force related tasks such as PME and master's work in addition to the tasks that every individual in America must do...paying taxes, rent, housing repairs, etc. This is to say nothing of family obligations and raising children. I have talked to instructors who have pulled out of masters programs due to the ops tempo and know of one who predicts he will fail a course as a result of six day

weeks. I believe the increased ops tempo, like sleep deficit, will have a compounding effect as individuals are not able to accomplish tasks in both their personal and professional lives.

Of course, we are a military unit in a time of war. There may be times when we have to give all of our time to the mission. MWS instructors such as myself come from units that have done precisely that and have, in many cases, come to AETC seeking rest from heavy combat operations tempo, realizing they will go back to that same tempo when they leave Laughlin.

I strongly recommend leadership discontinue any plans to leverage the weekends of its instructors and students. If, however, leadership continues this plan I make the following suggestions in an attempt to mitigate risk. First, leadership needs to communicate clearly the importance of the task that is justifying the increased risk through the higher ops tempo. If there is a valid justification, this will not only increase morale and win support for the decision but will serve to bolster the idea of operational risk management. Unless this clear justification is provided, the message may be received that risk does not require a clearly worthwhile reward and may have unintended negative consequences. While communicating to pilots the reason for the increase in ops tempo will not remove the increased risk, it will help mitigate it. Second, leadership should communicate an end in sight so people can buckle down and get it done. Third, leadership should spread the pain so that six day weeks are not encountered back to back and do not allow a night week to be a six day week which increases the risk even further and enhances the feelings of fatigue. This will allow airmen time to better take care of time sensitive tasks (like PME and master's work). Last, leadership should emphasize that the ability to knock off a sortie for safety is not only acceptable, but expected to happen with increased frequency.

As to solutions on how to accomplish the increased training requirements without increasing the instructor force, the solution is simple. Commanders need to successfully meet their obligations to provide the resources to their people in order to accomplish the mission. Simply put, magic is not an Air Force core competency and there is no magical solution. The often heard "10 pounds in a 5 pound bag" is a denial of reality. This denial isn't healthy for an organization. It reminds me of an account where Jeff Skilling, president of Enron, was presented with information showing that Enron was employing magical solutions that would exact a price in reality. Skilling told the employee that he never wanted to see the slide again. The employee said "it's the facts" and Skilling said, "It may be the facts, but I don't want you to think about it like that!" Enron failed because it refused to accept reality. The fact is, as I see it, we can only accomplish so much

safely until commanders provide the necessary resources.

In summary, for the sake of safety I am calling Knock it Off on the six day week plan. If that ability has been removed, I have provided my recommendations to mitigate the significant increase of risk of flying six day weeks.

Respectfully,

Maj Rick "Ryno" Rynearson  
85th Instructor Pilot