

**ADDRESS TO CAR/SAM AIR TRAFFIC SERVICES QUALITY
ASSURANCE SEMINAR – LIMA, PERU OCT 15TH TO 18TH 2002**

QUALITY ASSURANCE

Imagine there is a bank that credits your account each morning with \$86,400. It carries over no balance from day to day, allows you to keep no cash balance, and every evening cancels whatever part of the amount you had failed to use during the day.

What would you do?

Draw out every cent, of course!

Well, everyone has such a bank. Its name is **TIME**. Every morning, it credits you with 86,400 seconds. Every night it writes off, as a loss, whatever of this amount you have failed to invest to good purpose. It carries over no balance. It allows no overdraft.

Each day it opens a new account for you.

Each night it burns the records of the day. If you fail to use the day's deposits, the loss is yours.

Ladies and gentlemen we must ensure that every second of these seminars are productive, we must make every effort to implement and maintaining Quality Assurance programs. For those of us who have not yet implemented such programs, ***there is no better time, than the present.***

The path to implementing such programs or even establishing a quality assurance Unit within your own ATS Organizations may not be turbulent - free, as we experienced in Jamaica, but believe me the rewards are excellent. In the end you will be firmly on the path in achieving the ultimate goal of establishing an incident free air traffic control service, or in the short term, you will experience a reduction in the number of ATS incidents, as we in Jamaica did.

The primary objective of quality assurance is to continuously work towards achieving an ATS incident free environment for all users of the air traffic control service.

When the Civil Aviation Authority of Jamaica started its quality assurance program, it was not smooth sailing, we experienced resistance and frustrations, but we persevered.

The first step was to select an ***experienced officer*** to head the QA- Unit. The officer chosen, myself had to undergo a re-certification process. I had been at the Training Institute for a number of years, teaching, so I had to return to operations and undergo on – the – job training for a time. I will tell you now that my fellow controllers did not make it easy for me, I had to convince them that, if I was to do any proficiency check on them, then I am capable of working traffic, just as good or even better.

After re – certification I embarked on a program of educating the controllers about quality assurance, this was done by memos, articles, seminars, talks and the promulgation of a quality assurance manual. The work on this manual

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is on – going and amended from time to time, but some sort of documentation had to be in place.

The CAR/SAM REGIONAL GUIDANCE MATERIAL ON AIR TRAFFIC SERVICES QUALITY ASSURANCE PROGRAMS, is an excellent source document and we use utilize.

The first phase of our program was the introduction of **personal controller logs** for all operational controllers. This log is the property of the **STATE**, it is inspected from time to time by QA, to see time spent in sectors.

The second phase was the successful introduction of mandatory proficiency checks for all operational controllers. At first there was resistance, but now, there is none, in fact controllers have come to me and said their proficiency check is due. Proficiency checks are not difficult, but can cause problems, if they are not accomplished professionally. Before we started this process, we published a document, **Rules and Procedures for Controller Proficiency Checks**, this document has now been incorporated in our Quality Assurance Manual as Appendix – A.

If safety in air navigation is to be ensured, then it is essential that air traffic controllers exercise their knowledge and skills to the highest standard at all times. One way of ensuring that the ATS system is maintained at an extremely high standard is to require controllers to participate in Proficiency/Refresher training regularly. But participation in training is not enough; a very vital part of training is evaluation in which checks/tests are done to determine whether the objective(s) were achieved, in this case to determine whether air traffic controllers are performing at the required standard. This is accomplished through a program of regular proficiency checking of controllers on the job, to see whether they are performing at the required standard. Proficiency checks focus on identifying and correcting deficiencies in controllers before they result in incidents and accidents.

Proficiency checks are conducted bi-annually or in exceptional and extenuating circumstances, by a schedule to be determined. A Quality Assurance Officer normally conducts it. This does not preclude a Unit Chief from requesting or conducting a special proficiency check as deemed necessary. A proficiency check roster is prepared and issued to all units. This is intended to ensure that all controllers and Unit Chiefs are screened on a regular basis, and operational air traffic controllers will be given advance notice of a proficiency check so that adequate preparation, mentally and functionally, can be made.

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Proficiency checks are intended to determine a controller's ability to execute his/her duties under conditions, which are likely to exist at any time in any
ATS

unit. Consequently, although adverse conditions may exist at the time of the check, a controller will be expected to perform in keeping with their training in dealing with these circumstances and the checks will reflect this ability or lack thereof.

Proficiency checks are also intended to determine a controller's knowledge of new procedures, changes in regulations and familiarity with new equipment. Proficiency checks shall be scheduled for a time of day, which is fixed for all checks.

This time is a period in which the level of activity has been determined as moderate to heavy and will convincingly test the controller's ability to perform under increased stress. Activity may vary according to the time of year, however the period of day likely to experience the desired level is between 1600 UTC and 2000 UTC. Proficiency checks are scheduled within this window.

The Quality Assurance Officer on completion of a proficiency check, does not indicate in any way, shape or form, the results of the check to anyone
except

the person being checked, the Unit chief or the Manager Air Traffic Services. The findings of the proficiency check are entered on the Standard Proficiency Check form, a sample is contained in Appendix A of the QAM.

The period of a proficiency check is of a fixed duration sixty (60) minutes. Unless the Quality Assurance Officer desires a closer examination of the controller, or the level of traffic is determined to be insufficient to reflect a controller's performance capabilities adequately, the period of the check is adhered to.

Before commencing Proficiency Checks, we try to follow some simple rules.

ALLOW THE CONTROLLER TO SETTLE IN:

If he/she was previously working another sector, give adequate time for total familiarization with prevailing traffic situations.

TRY TO PUT CONTROLLER AT EASE:

Traffic permitting use an "ice-breaker" prior to commencement, to induce a relaxed, friendly yet professional atmosphere to conduct the evaluation process.

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DO NOT "CROWD" THE CONTROLLER:

Everyone needs his or her "personal space". Give adequate room for controller to manoeuvre. Remain at an adequate distance close enough for total and complete observation, without being an impediment.

DO NOT POINT OUT MISTAKES DURING THE PROFICIENCY CHECK:

The evaluation exercise is to test the controller's performance capabilities; not an opportunity for the Quality Assurance Officer to demonstrate how much he/she is knowledgeable. ***ONLY INTERVENE IF SAFETY WILL BE COMPROMISED.*** Guard vigorously against demonstrating either verbally or through body language, approval or disapproval, remain totally focused and impassive (POKER FACED).

DO NO ASSIST THE CONTROLLER:

Do not intervene by assisting controllers during the process either to promote expedition of air traffic or to clarify or forward messages to controller.

INDICATE COMPLETION OF THE EVALUATION EXERCISE:

This is done either by removing headset plug from socket or verbally.

The evaluation process is intended to be ***PAINLESS*** not ***PAINFULL***. It is desirable and possible for the ***SUPERLATIVE QUALITY ASSURANCE OFFICER*** to conduct the exercise with a highly possible degree of invisibility.

At

any rate if the process is conducted bearing in mind these guidelines, the process will be conducted professionally and free from distractions and interventions.

DURING THE CHECK

Perhaps the worst case scenario is that during the proficiency check, the controller becomes so tense, stressed and flustered, and is unable to complete the process or his/her performance deteriorates to a level that continuation could prove detrimental to the safety of an aircraft and its occupants.

Or during the check the controllers performance is found to be below the acceptable standard. In such cases, the evaluation exercise should be terminated forthwith and

- (a) The Quality Assurance Officer may provide temporary relief to that controller or
- (b) The ATS Shift supervisor is summoned to provide relief.
- (c) The Unit Chief is informed promptly
- (d) The Manager ATS is informed promptly

That controller will then be assigned a "non-control" position if he/she is able to continue for the duration of the shift.

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In any event such a performance will be deemed unsatisfactory and the results of the proficiency check will be entered on the Standard Proficiency Check form.

There are no provisions to "re-start" an evaluation exercise. In such an eventuality, the proficiency check will stand regardless.

Proficiency checks must never be based on the perceptual process.

Evaluators must, although difficult at times, guard vigorously against allowing one's feelings; one's "likes" and "dislikes", one's perception of fellow controllers to infiltrate the evaluation's arena.

Proficiency checks should focus on hard facts, the disastrous consequences of poor judgment, the distress caused by ill-timed decisions and actions, with its resultant monumental fall-out, and the harsh realities that ensue when dangerous practices are encouraged. The proficiency checklist contained in Appendix – A, of our QAM, the selectivity of rated items, is a strong indication of the superlative importance placed on the process.

In order to remain focused and impassive to the process, Assurance Officers must not allow certain pitfalls to influence the outcome of the performance check. Some of these are:

1. ***SELECTIVE PERCEPTION:***

Any characteristic that makes a person, object or event stand out will increase the probability it will be perceived.

This is so because it is impossible for us to assimilate everything we see, only certain stimuli can be taken in. In other words we see what we want to see.

We must guard against using past experiences such as "previous loss of rating" or "ATS Incidents". The process must be based on the "Here and Now".

2. ***HALO EFFECT:***

When we draw an impression about a controller based on a single characteristic such as intelligence sociability or appearance, a "halo-effect" is in operation. This has no basis in controller proficiency checks.

3. ***CONTRAST EFFECT:***

This occurs when a person's evaluation is influenced by comparison with other persons recently encountered, who rank higher or lower on the exercise.

4. ***PROJECTION:***

It is easy to evaluate others if we assure they are similar to us. If we evaluate controllers based on our expectations, then we are involved in projection.

5. ***STEREO-TYPING:***

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When we evaluate based on groupings, we are using the short cut known as stereotyping. The possibility for manifestation is very real as performance varies from shift to shift and certainly from unit to unit.

The third phase of the quality assurance program focused on ATS Unit Evaluations. These evaluations are done twice per year and concentrate on four areas;

1. to determine the deficiency, conformity or non-conformity of rules and procedures in the air traffic services, as performed by the ATS Units;
2. to determine the effectiveness of the quality assurance program, its ability or lack thereof in meeting specified objectives;
3. to provide unit managers with an opportunity to improve the product provided to users of the services;
4. to meet national and international requirements.

After the initial resistance, once controllers were convinced that, these quality assurance programs were intended as means to improve the system, not an opportunity to "get rid of some of them", the other quality assurance initiatives were easy to implement. We have gone on to implement a number of programs such as;

- 1 a national incident reporting system. Called **SPAIR**, the special protocol for all incident reporting.
- 2 Unit Specific Manuals, replacing Local Order Manuals(which was essentially a compilation of memos)
- 3 Position relief checklists
- 4 Voice recording reviews
- 5 Pilot/controller forums with at least one major carrier monthly
- 6 Familiarization/training flights, three flights yearly
- 7 A recognition program to acknowledge quality performance by controllers
- 8 Establishment of a post of, preliminary incident investigation officer
- 9 Establishment of incident investigation panel.

As we all know the continued success of any program will require constant enforcement, QA Officers may in the process become unpopular, but we must persevere. We must perform our duties professionally and fairly, be fair, be very, very, fair, in the end you will gain the respect of your colleagues.

The entire Jamaican Quality Assurance Program is maintained through a system of robust monitoring activities, controller proficiency checks, ATS unit evaluations, inspections and visits. I must add also, that every initiative is

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documented. **Documentation** is a very important element of the Quality Assurance Program.

Our experience in Jamaica has led to the role of Quality Assurance being extended to other areas within the Air Navigation Services. This is so because, these areas can have a profoundly negative impact on the performance capabilities of Air Traffic Controllers and by extension the Air Traffic Services. Although not yet fully documented, we are currently reviewing the Air Navigation Support System **WHICH HAS RESPONSIBILITY** for ensuring reliability of critical navigational aids such as AUTO TRAC 11, RADAR, ILS, VOR/DME, NDB and RADIO FREQUENCIES with a view to extend the umbrella of Quality Assurance to cover these areas. We recognize that failure of these equipment can have a serious impact on the quality of service offered. Therefore QA has been extended to cover this area. The role of Quality Assurance in this regard is dynamic, changing and expanding.

Ladies and gentlemen, as I said earlier, the road to establishing these programs were not easy, but the rewards have been many.
Thank you.

Desmond Davis
Chief Quality Assurance Officer
CAA – JAMAICA.