

THE FRONT OFFICE

OPINION PAGE



The Common Message of an Extraordinary Tale

When I first saw Captain-Retired Al Haynes' name on the agenda at STMA's 9th Annual Conference and Exhibition, I didn't quite understand his relevance as a featured speaker. You'll remember that Captain Haynes piloted United Airlines flight 232 that crashed in Iowa City. Most of you probably watched television in awe that day as dramatic footage of the fiery crash flashed across the screen. Haynes' story promised to be a fascinating and dramatic tale, but I couldn't understand how it would relate to the duties of a sports turf manager.

Statistically, the odds that Captain Haynes' DC-10 would experience total hydraulic failure in mid-flight were negligible. Theoretically, if one of the plane's hydraulic units failed, one of its two backups would be sufficient to handle the job. United Airlines was so confident in the safety of the double-backed system, they didn't even have a standard operating procedure for the unlikely possibility of total malfunction.

During the course of flight 232, all three units did fail, and more than 100 people died in the crash that followed. However, as a result of the team work of everyone involved in the disaster, 184 people survived. Ultimately, this proves to be the most statistically unexplainable fact of the entire event. United replicated flight 232's situation in simulations numerous times after the disaster. Each simulation resulted in a 100% fatality rate.

It's easy to consider Captain Haynes a hero for his part in these incredible events, but he refuses to present himself as such. Instead, he credits five main factors in averting total disaster: *luck, communication, preparation, execution and cooperation.*

The role *luck* played in flight 232's situation is undeniable. Weather, location, and time of day created conditions that were "favorable" enough to allow the event to unfold as it did. The fact that the plane remained flyable at all without its hydraulic systems "can be attributed to pure luck."

From start to finish, thorough *preparation* and effective *communication* further contributed to the unexpectedly high survival rate of flight 232. Before the flight ever left the ground, the United Airlines cabin and cockpit crews prepared to cope with emergency situations with regular and comprehensive safety training. The ground crews matched this preparation with disaster drills of their own. When the unthinkable occurred, Air Traffic Control coordinated communications with the cockpit and groundcrew, and the cabin crew kept passengers calm and rational.

Smooth *execution* rose out of excellent preparation. Everyone *cooperated* in an intense rescue effort that stretched into the night. Samaritans placed the well-being of others above their own interests, and many, many heroes were born.

The average sports turf manager may never have to deal with a crisis as devastating as the crash of flight 232, but the importance of Captain Haynes' message extends to anyone who works closely with the community. The five main factors Haynes listed to explain the high survival rate are universal. We can use them in our daily lives as well as our emergencies.

With effective communication, preparation, execution, cooperation, and a little bit of luck, we should all be able to handle anything that comes our way.

Steve Berens, Editor

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