



## The Advisory Alliance 60-Second Email™

### ***Do You Intimidate Your Co-Pilot?***

*July 18, 2013*



The recent tragedy of Asiana Airlines Flight 214 crash at San Francisco Airport has highlighted the significance of not only the role of the leader, but also those working with him or her. Moreover, it's underscored the criticality of the relationship of those working in the cockpit.

Deborah Hersman, chairwoman of the National Transportation Safety Board, recently noted that investigators were reviewing cockpit recordings to better understand "tone and demeanor" inside the cockpit and determine if junior pilots felt safe to monitor and challenge their superiors ([S.F. plane crash: Pilots' 'monitor and challenge'](#)).

A quick Google search reveals that this is not an isolated issue, but has a history. In 2011 the Times of India asked, "What makes the difference between life and death in the cockpit? Teamwork, besides technical competence, is the obvious answer. Just that sometimes the two don't come so beautifully together" ([Cockfights in the cockpit](#)). The article goes on to cite a 1988 737 Indian Airlines flight, in which the atmosphere in the cockpit was so frosty that when the pilot forgot to put the landing gear down, the co-pilot remained silent, and the plane landed on its belly.

A 1999 NASA-funded study by GA Tech found that "first officers who need to correct a captain's mistake often initially rely on indirect methods - such as



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'hints' in the form of problem statements - rather than explicitly stating what to do....The initial study revealed that, apparently because of their status, airline captains - both U.S. and European, male and female - give more than twice the number of commands that first officers give. Yet case studies of airline accidents show it is often first officers who are in the position of needing to correct a captain's mistake, the researchers said" ([Confronting the Boss Indirectly: Study of Cockpit Crews Finds Co-Pilots Use "Hints" to Correct Captains](#)).

And the issue of speaking up, doesn't apply just to the airline industry. Other industries are also mindful of the issue as well, including healthcare, legal, and military: [Joint Commission - Speak Up Program](#); [The Silent Treatment](#); [Silence Is Not Always Golden: When a Partner's Instructions Go Unchallenged and an Associate's Obligation to Speak Up](#); and [The Center for the Army Profession and Ethic \(CAPE\)](#).

What these industries have in common is a recognized and accepted hierarchy of rank and power. The culture certainly fosters notable efficiency when things go well. But if you need an early warning system to prevent things from going horribly south, in some cases the culture can be stifling, leading to missed opportunities for course corrections that would otherwise save jobs, careers, and even lives.

As a leader, it's critical to remember that you *are* the message. Who and how you are, sets the culture for your team, department, and/or organization (depending on your position and level in the hierarchy). It may feel great to be the number one, but make sure you've got a strong, direct, and vocal number two working alongside you. As a leader, you can't see, know, and be aware of everything. Make sure you have at least one person who will ensure you do when you don't.

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When have you experienced cultures of candor, and conversely, cultures of



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silence? What examples do you have of leaders' behavior preventing others from speaking up? Post your answers and comments on our [Ideas](#) page on our [updated website](#).

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As always, thanks for reading.

Best regards,

David Harper, Managing Principal



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