

# Cockpit crisis

Warning that flightdeck squeeze will 'get worse before it gets better'

**Pilar Wolfsteller**

**B**usiness aviation must market itself better as an exceptional career path deal with the current shortage of pilots and mechanics, according to Sheryl Barden (pictured), chief executive of business aviation recruitment firm Aviation Personnel International.

"I have been following the pilot shortage since 2013, and it's coming on like a freight train," Barden told *Flight Daily News*. "It's going to get worse before it gets better."

Barden, who has



taken part in panel discussions during the show, says that business aviation has traditionally hired from the military or regional airlines, but that stream of candidates has dried up in recent years.

With commercial airlines now offering cockpit crew pay increases of up to 40% due to new contracts, business aviation has to come up with some new ideas.

"Our industry has to figure out how to build a pipeline like the airlines build a pipeline, where, you come out of school, flight instruct, then go to a regional [airline], then you upgrade to the mainline carrier," Barden says. "We just

don't have that defined path in business aviation."

The airlines, meantime, are "solving the pilot shortage problem with money" and business aviation has felt the brunt of that supply-versus-demand equation.

Compensation is part of the puzzle, with company culture and predictable schedules the other.

"A day off is only a day off if you know you have it in advance."

She says that flight departments should consider hiring more low-time pilots - those with less than 1,500h of total flight experience - and building a mentorship programme to set them up for success.

"There is a major opportunity for many organisations that have a deep bench of strength, they've got people

who can be mentor pilots," she says.

Mentorship can be a tool not only for the flightdeck, but also for mechanics and maintenance professionals. The average age of workers in those skilled trades is past 50 years old, and the industry is desperate to attract young people with airframe and powerplant certificates. Often they choose employers where the job is easier and the conditions less harsh.

"What is the job of a business aviation maintenance professional? It's not working at United [Airlines], where you're the airplane brake guy, and that's all you do. In a flight department, you may have the airplane from tip to tail, and everything in between."

"It takes a special kind of person to do that," she adds.