



Sheryl Barden

President and CEO
Aviation Personnel International
(API), San Francisco

The daughter of Jan Barden, who founded the renowned business aviation-oriented placement, recruitment and advisory firm 50 years ago, Sheryl Barden graduated from Penn State University and then made her mark in the paper goods industry, advancing through a variety of executive positions. After earning an MBA at the University of San Francisco, she joined API in 2001 and was named president two years later. She assumed the CEO responsibilities in 2013. In 2017, she was appointed to the NBAA's board of directors and also serves as vice chair of its Associate Member Advisory Council.



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Questions for Sheryl Barden

1 You've reviewed countless business aviation resumes. What makes for a good one?

Barden: If you're looking for a piloting position, it should describe your experience in depth: hours, command time, ratings, aircraft flown, international versus domestic flying. But perhaps even more important is to detail what you've done to deliver the most value to your organization. How did you contribute? Rather than simply noting you were a safety pilot, note that you developed a safety manual or a FOQA [flight operations quality assurance] program with measurable results. Any time your actions saved the company money, or measurably increased safety or efficiency, they need to be highlighted. This is an opportunity to prove your value and that should not be wasted.

2 Considering that piloting is a technical career, is a bachelor's degree really a necessity anymore?

Barden: It's an important differentiator in any career field. It's almost become a standard for anyone in business. It shows your dedication to education and to personal development. Are people being hired without one? Yes. Some build their hours first, and then get a degree on line, which is fine. But having a degree is especially important for those hoping to get a leadership position in business aviation. Keep in mind that in business aviation you're working with and serving some highly educated people and they want those around them to come from a similar place.

3 The projections for growth in both airline travel and business aviation over the next decade and beyond are pretty heady. Do you think they'll prove out?

Barden: Aviation has always been a cyclical business and I have doubts that things will continue at this pace. Clouds of concern are building in our economy. Dick Van Gemert [former Xerox and KC Aviation executive] is an industry sage who I really look up to. He recently reminded me that history has shown us that aviation leads the downturn and lags in the recovery. I don't think that's changed. He cautioned people should have a Plan B and I think that's good advice.

4 And yet the combination of operational expansion and the forced retirement of a whole generation of airline pilots seems to have created a giant talent vacuum with all kinds of implications.

Barden: The pilot shortage is the No. 1 topic in every pilot lounge; it's the subject of the year! And some pilots are afraid they're maybe going to miss the bubble. Charter and smaller fractional companies are really struggling to get and keep talent. There are corporate pilots holding their companies, their principal or the family for whom they work hostage by demanding compensation adjustments every couple of months. Some ugly things are coming out now, and in some places — not all — it's a get-as-much-as-you-can game. And that saddens me since I don't think they're looking at the whole package. We have to find a place where we balance out and are compensated fairly and appropriately. I am not sure where that is.

5 Isn't trying to improve your circumstances a natural urge?

Barden: Yes, but I'm concerned that in this frenzy, some are losing their moral compass. And if the demands for compensation are too high, and pilot salaries approach those of their reporting executives, companies will look for other solutions. Keep in mind that the young CEOs don't want to own things and also don't place as high a value on face-to-face meetings. These "millennial values" will certainly have an effect on our world. Back in the Great Recession, pilots coined the phrase "will fly for food." That wasn't so long ago, and while it may be hard to believe today, somewhere down the road that may become a reality again. **BCA**