

MEDIA RELEASE

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Qantas Dispute Shows the Importance of Win-Win Strategies

The recent shut down of Australia's iconic airline, where passengers were left stranded without warning, caused astonished reactions around the world at how industrial relations negotiations could go so wrong so quickly.

Business Coach and Mentor, Antony D Inman observed that the actions of Qantas CEO Alan Joyce will be a talking point for business schools and lecturers for many years to come and that Perth businesses could learn a great deal from this global story.

'It was like a classic chess match where Mr Joyce's strategy effectively forced the Australian Government to step in and expedite a solution' said Mr Inman.

The dispute was actually about a variety of grievances, involving wages and work conditions between the Airline and three different unions: the Australian and International Pilots Association (AIPA), the Transport Workers Union (TWU) and the Australian Licensed Aircraft Engineers Association (ALAEA).

In fairness to the pilots, their claim was not about pay, but about ensuring that only Qantas pilots would be allowed to fly Qantas planes, and the extent of their industrial action had been to not wear their caps and to make carefully and diplomatically worded announcements to passengers about the need to support Qantas pilots in light of their excellent safety record.

'These were hardly the actions of militants!' said Mr Inman.

Qantas are still statistically the safest airline in the world in terms of accidents or noteworthy incidents.

The other two unions, however had been 'nibbling away at the toes of the airline giant' by causing random work hold-ups that had caused costly delays in services.

Qantas CEO Alan Joyce was worried though, that the Unions' plans to continue being disruptive for months to come would effectively lead to the eventual demise of the company.

His response, however was a move that was described by the President of the Pilot's Union (AIPA), Barry Jackson, as 'holding the country to ransom'.

It was a move of which a world chess champion would have been proud. Alan Joyce sprung the decision to close down operations without warning, on an unsuspecting world.

This decision was announced a mere one day after the company's shareholders had emphatically endorsed his authority at their A.G.M. with a significant and controversial pay rise. It also coincided with an event that itself traditionally 'stops the nation' – the world famous Melbourne Cup horse race.

If that wasn't enough, Perth was also playing host to the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM), opened by visiting royalty, Her Majesty the Queen.

'Imagine the embarrassment to the Prime Minister, Julia Gillard, if she wasn't seen to act immediately to resolve a dispute that would inconvenience and possibly strand some of the world's top dignitaries', said Business Coach Mr Inman.

Many business commentators are saying that the decision to ground all Qantas aircraft and leave passengers floundering, was a huge risk that could significantly damage the reputation of the Airline and its brand, possibly irreparably.

Mr Inman explained that he and his partner were on a long weekend jaunt in Melbourne when the newsflash hit the world headlines and they were left uncertain as to whether they would be able to return home as planned.

'We were delighted when the tribunal at Fair Work Australia used their powers to force all parties to cease the dispute, get the planes back in the air and return to sensible negotiations' he continued.

Tony Inman concluded that although this was an extreme and what you might call 'landmark' case, all businesses should realise the need to ensure that the needs of both company management and staff are always as aligned as possible.

'In the wake of the Global Financial Crisis, where many small and medium sized businesses have found the going tough, we need to ensure that our staff are kept informed about external pressures and the strategies by which the management plan to address those threats. We also need to be ethical and transparent in our consideration of the staff's needs, while explaining clearly the impact on commercial viability of meeting their desired wages and conditions.'

'That way, if we can find a win-win outcome, we can all keep our company flag flying' said Mr Inman.

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Tony Inman has 32 years of management experience, mostly in retail, tourism, transport and coaching, of which over 15 have been spent running his own businesses here in Perth.

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Interviews are available on request.

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