



FLIGHT AIRLINE BUSINESS AWARD

TONY TYLER



BUSINESS

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Tony Tyler
Director general, IATA

When Tony Tyler hands the IATA reins over to Alexandre de Juniac on 1 September, he will have served the global airline association as chief executive and director general for five years. His immediate priority on joining was to quickly steady the IATA ship before setting course to make the association a more inclusive organisation and a better business partner.

“The thing I hope I’ve changed in IATA is that we’re seen as much better partners now and therefore more effective,” says Tyler. “When I joined, I think people respected IATA but they didn’t always enjoy working with IATA.”

Tyler became the sixth person to lead IATA when he took the helm at the end of the 2011 AGM in Singapore following a four-year spell running Cathay Pacific in Hong Kong.

And that gathering in Singapore was a fractious affair as certain airline chiefs made it clear they did not like the direction in which Tyler’s predecessor, the colourful but

autocratic Giovanni Bisignani, had steered IATA.

Amid scenes never before witnessed at an IATA AGM, there was virtually a mini revolt as several Gulf carrier chiefs seized the opportunity of the changing of the guard to vent their frustration at the way the association was being run. IATA essentially stood accused of lacking transparency and looking after only certain members’ interests.

Tyler, who admitted to being slightly taken aback by the Singapore mood, knew that he had to quickly steer the association on a more harmonious path or else its effectiveness, and perhaps its very existence, could be in serious doubt.

So the Oxford-educated Englishman set off on a charm offensive, quickly smoothing the feathers of his disgruntled members. No doubt his previous experience as a Swire Group “lifer” (Tyler joined Cathay’s parent company in 1977) helped him in his quest.

Alongside improving the association’s harmony and its accessibility, one of Tyler’s key achievements has been the rollout of the New Distribution Capability initiative, designed to give airlines more control over the distribution and sale of their products.

One of the biggest early challenges was overcoming the deep suspicion with which IATA was viewed by potential key partners in the GDS arena, given their acrimonious relationship during the Bisignani era.

Overcoming that hurdle no doubt contributed to NDC’s sluggish start, and Tyler admits he would have liked to have seen a little more progress. But despite that, he declares himself satisfied with how he’s leaving the project: “We’ve got a number of airlines already live, but the adoption of NDC was never going to be a big-bang event. It was always going to be incremental progress. As more applications are developed I think we’ll see more people adopt them in the coming years.”

But Tyler’s IATA legacy is very much about collaboration. “I think over the last five years we’ve done some good things, what we’ve done with NDC, on IOSA [safety oversight] and other aspects of safety such as tracking and conflict zones.”

After averaging 160 flights annually while in the IATA hot seat, Tyler is now looking forward to spending a little less time “up in the air” when he heads back to Hong Kong to enjoy his newfound freedom. “I’m not complaining, but five years of that is quite hard work – and I’m not getting any younger!”

Max Kingsley-Jones



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NDC: More distribution control

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