

Not long after I joined BA I remember operating a flight to North America. Where exactly I was going to I don't recall but I do remember the Captain I was with. Now this was in those pre internet 90's when a thud through your letter box meant the monthly bid pack had arrived, Balpa were battling to keep the cheese board loaded and emoji was one of our Narita ICC's!

Now on this particular flight in question my colleague was moaning and complaining most of the way about the inefficiency of the government and how the UK was going to the dogs. Despite the fact that in those days we carried about five different papers this particular chap read just one. (I'm not going to name and shame so let's call it the Daily Wail) After reading the Daily Wail he informed me that he was retiring in a few months time and because the UK was falling apart he would be emigrating. At this point I assumed he was off to the tax haven that was France but no, he announced that he was off to Uruguay! Yes, Uruguay! (And no, his partner wasn't from there) I subsequently heard a year or so later from another colleague that yes, he had retired and relocated to Montevideo.

I guess newspapers were the original influencers, certainly the Daily Wail used their influence to persuade this particular chap that the UK was about to go to implode and life would be better in the utopian land of Frey Bentos, but I shudder to think what he'd been like today with our social media overload. Today the internet has allowed these influencers to mutate and multiply exponentially, and with aviation such a fascinating arena for joe public we have more than our fair share of specialist aviation bloggers (god save the points, paddle your own canoe, the points guy etc etc) all overloading us with official looking information. Hey, this website specialises in aviation news, it must be true huh? But here's the nub. Virtually all of them are written by a single person essentially writing his own opinion.

The next main problem is human nature. We just love bad news, and rumours, especially bad ones. The saying a lie is half way round the world before the truth has even tied up its laces is, well, true! Take this example. You go on the internet to see what's happened and you see two headlines. The first says "an earthquake has occurred in Northern California, and some casualties are suspected" The second headline say "THOUSANDS DIE IN HORRIFIC EARTHQUAKE" Which headline will you click on? And then we click on the link, we start watching building collapse, people suffering, dying even and all this negativity effects how we feel. Ok, so that's an extreme example but if we come across a blogger with a headline "BA to lay off 50% of its pilots by December" we will inevitably click on it and read a depressing story which actually is just an opinion and has no basis. Bloggers though know they need hits and the headline "BA might have to consider laying off a few pilots next year" isn't going to do it for them.

Forums can be just as unhealthy. As soon as a bad news story appears someone posts it on a forum. Then the thread shoots off into 32 pages and of course you've got to work your way through all this to see what information you can find!

So, how's this affected you? Well you probably started the day in a good mood but now you're down, worried about possibly losing your job or the 15% pay cut which eventually became 120% by page 29 of the thread. You may well become irritable/angry/miserable with your friends and family, plus even a bit of self loathing because you ended up shouting at them or kicking the dog

Even just playing around on the internet can be counterproductive and time consuming. It's easily done, and we've all done it, fallen into that YouTube hole after picking up your

ipad to check your emails and ending up 45 minutes later watching Penguins do the funniest things!

Right now is extremely stressful. Pilots are generally good at handling pressure, it's in our DNA to just get on with it and sort it out. We as a group like to be busy. But finding the balance can be tricky. I've spoken to colleagues who have gradually added more and more into their lives without realising they're just trying to juggle too many balls and getting stressed. Now if we add into the mix job uncertainty, wage reductions, high mortgages, loans, school fees and so on we have worried pilots who's stress buckets are full. Now if we start ploughing through social media reading bad rumour after bad rumour it's no wonder some end up teetering on the brink of depression.

So what can we do about it? Well the obvious is simply abstention. Either don't go on or limit your time on forums, social media and the like. Secondly list your worries and stresses, now look at them. Which can you influence? Allocate time to tackle the ones you can influence. Can I influence being selected for redundancy? Unfortunately no. But I can influence my future after BA, by looking for alternative jobs, preparing my CV and so on.

Thirdly, allocate worry time. Sorry what? You want me now to worry? Well studies by top psychologists have shown that those who allocate a set period of time (no more than an hour) to worry about your lot and work out some possible solutions before saying, ok sod it, I'm off to play golf (other sports are available) generally feel better than those who drift through the day repeatedly coming back to, and worrying about their problems.

If this is resonating with you then we are at hand to help. Speedbirdpan essentially provides two independent and confidential services, one is signposting colleagues to services where they can receive help and the other is just to be a sympathetic ear for you to offload and talk about your problems and worries. As Busby said, it's good to talk! (Sorry if you're under 45, you'll have to look up who Busby was) Some people have good friends or family members that they can offload to and if that's you then great, use them, but for others we're here. We can't solve your issues but we can help you to find a solution. And no, no one is infallible. The author of this topic still has enough toilet roll to last him into next year!!