Hire the Mission, Not the Résumé

Five waypoints to avoid a costly Director of Aviation hiring mistake.

Most Director of Aviation searches start with a person. Hours, type ratings, years in the left seat, prior management experience. That is the wrong starting point. It produces a candidate pool sorted by pedigree and a job description that could belong to any flight department in the country.

Start with the work instead. Define what the flight department must deliver for the company, then hire the leader who can lead an organization that delivers it. The résumé question gets easier once the mission question is answered.

1. Define the Big 5, then the missions that serve them

Saved time, speed and corporate agility are *the* product of every flight department. That operating leverage supercharges the Company's top strategic goals. Name the goals. Five is the optimal number. The "Big 5" draw from customer and sales activity, operational and quality site visits, safety and risk site visits, investor relations, crisis response, and M&A activity.

Then define the one to three concrete mission profiles the flight department must deliver in support of the Big 5. Not "domestic and international travel."

HYPOTHETICAL MISSION PROFILES

Three missions. Three different flight departments.

Each profile implies a different aircraft, crew qualification, and airport capability. Define your own before you write the job description.

MISSION AND CAPABILITY	ROUTING	PAX	PATTERN AND FREQUENCY	TRIPS PER YEAR
MISSION 01 Long-haul international	Palo Alto, CA → Tainan, Taiwan → Palo Alto, CA	8	Round trip in 4 days. Twice monthly.	24
MISSION 02 Regional executive	Charleston, SC → Indianapolis, IN → Nashville, TN → Charleston, SC	4	Same-day round trip. Four times monthly.	48
MISSION 03 Regional short field	Austin, TX → Tiptonville, TN → Belleville, KS → Austin, TX	6	Same-day round trip. Four times monthly.	48

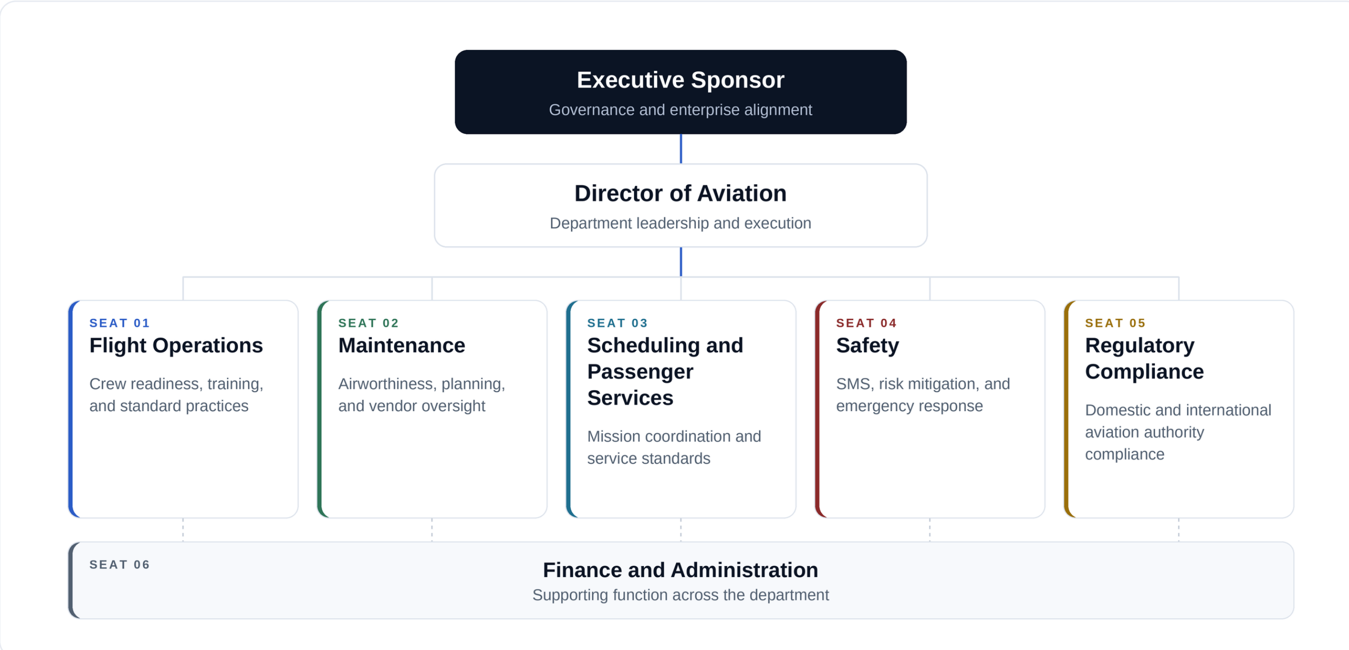
Those three mission profiles tell a serious candidate more about the job than pages of qualifications. They also tell you something: if no one can articulate the mission profiles, the problem is not the open position.

2. Commit to a functional Accountability Chart

An org chart shows who reports to whom. It does not show who owns a result.

High-performing flight departments organize around function, not title. The structure runs Function, then Seat, then Roles Performed, then the individual in the seat. What matters is that each Role has explicit visibility and rolls up to exactly one Seat. Frequently an individual will be responsible for more than one Seat.

Ideally this is built and in place already. If not, make sure the new leader buys into the concept and commits to defining the Accountability Chart in the first 30 days.



3. Set the reporting cadence before day one

Agree on what executive leadership receives, how often, and in what form, before the start date rather than after the first missed expectation. The Executive Sponsor should get clear, concise reporting on four things: whether aviation is delivering the Big 5, safety, availability and reliability, people and capacity issues needing executive attention, and the decisions, risks, and opportunities ahead.

Cap it at ten KPIs. A monthly report with forty metrics is not reporting. It is evidence that no one has decided what matters.

4. Draw the decision line

The Director of Aviation needs room to lead. Executive leadership needs visibility on value delivered, safety, budget, and where the flight department needs help. Both are true. The friction comes from never drawing the line.

The Director of Aviation owns and reports on: missions supporting the Big 5, day-to-day operations, team leadership, safety, service delivery, vendor management, operational planning, budget planning, and budget tracking.

The Executive Sponsor owns: strategic company priorities, major capital commitments, significant fleet changes, shifts in the aviation model, and final budget approval.

Write it down. An accountability nobody wrote down defaults to whoever is least comfortable leaving it undone, and that is rarely the right person.

5. Define success, then sponsor the transition

First 90 days. Understand the operation and the mission requirements, build trust with the team, identify the immediate priorities, and establish a working communication rhythm.

First year. Deliver dependable service, develop the team, clarify priorities, and provide executive leadership evidence that the flight department is a strategic asset supporting the Company's top priorities.

The Executive Sponsor's part. Provide clear expectations, business context, and an actual mandate. Then make time for regular, focused conversation, not just the conversations that happen when something catches fire.

IF YOU ARE IN THE MIDDLE OF THIS RIGHT NOW

Zero Delta Aviation helps companies and family offices build high-performing flight departments, particularly at moments of leadership change and transition. If it would be useful, I would be glad to spend 20 minutes on your situation. No sales pitch. Just a working conversation about your flight department transition.

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ADDENDUM

Director of Aviation

A job description that results in a high-performance aviation leader.

Replace the bracketed fields with your specifics. Resist the urge to add length. Everything below is here because it changes who applies.

Position: Director of Aviation **Reports to:** [Title of Executive Sponsor]
Location: [Base / home airport] **Fleet:** [Aircraft type(s) and quantity]

THE MANDATE

[Company] is hiring a Director of Aviation to build and lead a flight department that delivers defined mission capabilities in direct support of the company's highest strategic priorities. This is a business unit leadership role. The successful candidate will run aviation as an accountable, measured, professionally managed function, not a standalone flying operation.

MISSION CAPABILITIES YOU WILL OWN

The flight department exists to advance five company priorities:

1. [Big 5 priority one]
2. [Big 5 priority two]
3. [Big 5 priority three]
4. [Big 5 priority four]
5. [Big 5 priority five]

You will build and lead a department capable of consistently delivering these mission profiles:

- [Mission profile: passengers, city pairs, trip duration, frequency]
- [Mission profile: passengers, city pairs, trip duration, frequency]
- [Mission profile: passengers, city pairs, trip duration, frequency]

STRUCTURE AND ACCOUNTABILITY

You will own and maintain a functional Accountability Chart covering flight operations, maintenance, scheduling and passenger services, safety, regulatory compliance, and finance and administration. Every function will have a defined outcome, defined decision authority, and one accountable owner, kept current as the department and fleet change.

EXECUTIVE REPORTING

You will deliver clear, concise monthly reporting to [Title of Executive Sponsor] covering no more than ten KPIs across four areas: mission capability performance against the priorities above, safety, availability and reliability, people and capacity issues requiring executive attention, and upcoming decisions, risks, and opportunities.

DECISION AUTHORITY

You own and report on: missions supporting the Big 5, day-to-day operations, team leadership, safety, service delivery, vendor management, operational planning, budget planning, and budget tracking.

The Executive Sponsor owns: strategic company priorities, major capital commitments, significant fleet changes, shifts in the aviation model, and final budget approval.

SUCCESS IN THE FIRST YEAR

By day 90: you understand the operation and its mission requirements, you have built trust with the team, you have identified immediate priorities, and a working communication rhythm with executive leadership is in place.

By month 12: service is dependable, the team is developing, priorities are clear, and executive leadership has confidence that the flight department is well led.

QUALIFICATIONS

- [ATP / Commercial] certificate and [total time / PIC time requirements]
- Demonstrated leadership of a Part 91 flight department or equivalent aviation organization
- Evidence of budget ownership, vendor management, and executive-level reporting
- A record of building structure, not just operating within it

This list is deliberately short. Candidates are selected on their ability to deliver the mission capabilities and management outcomes above. Certificates and hours are a threshold, not a ranking.

WHAT WE COMMIT TO

Clear expectations, honest business context, a real mandate, and a regular seat at the table with [Title of Executive Sponsor].

Applications: [contact / process]