



DIRECTOR OF MAINTENANCE

The Business of Aircraft Maintenance



YOEL ARNONI

PRINCIPAL AV8 PMA LLC | AV8 MRO LLC





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BY RONNIE GARRETT

PHOTO: FAIR IMAGING INTERNATIONAL

YOEL ARNONI, PRINCIPAL OF AV8 PMA AND AV8 MRO, SAYS HE'S LOVED AVIATION SINCE HE WAS A YOUNG BOY HOPPING PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION TO SEE PLANES TAKE OFF AND LAND, AND TO SIT AMID THE HUSTLE AND BUSTLE OF THE TERMINAL AT LONDON HEATHROW AIRPORT.

It was his time spent in the United Kingdom's largest airport, and one of the busiest airports in the world — leading Europe in flight numbers, passengers and value of cargo — that grew Arnoni's passion for travel and aviation, an affinity he held tight until as a young man his father asked him what he planned to do with the rest of his life.

At the time, Arnoni lived in Houston. Here, he discovered the aviation world awaiting him at Houston Community College, where in the course catalog he found information about a technical training program in aviation maintenance.

"I thought, 'Wow, that's romantic. Airplanes taking off into the night and flying all over the world.' I told my dad, 'I'm going to be an aviation maintenance technician,'" he recalls. His father, who was an engineer, chuckled at the thought and informed him it wasn't romantic at all because he'd be on the ground.

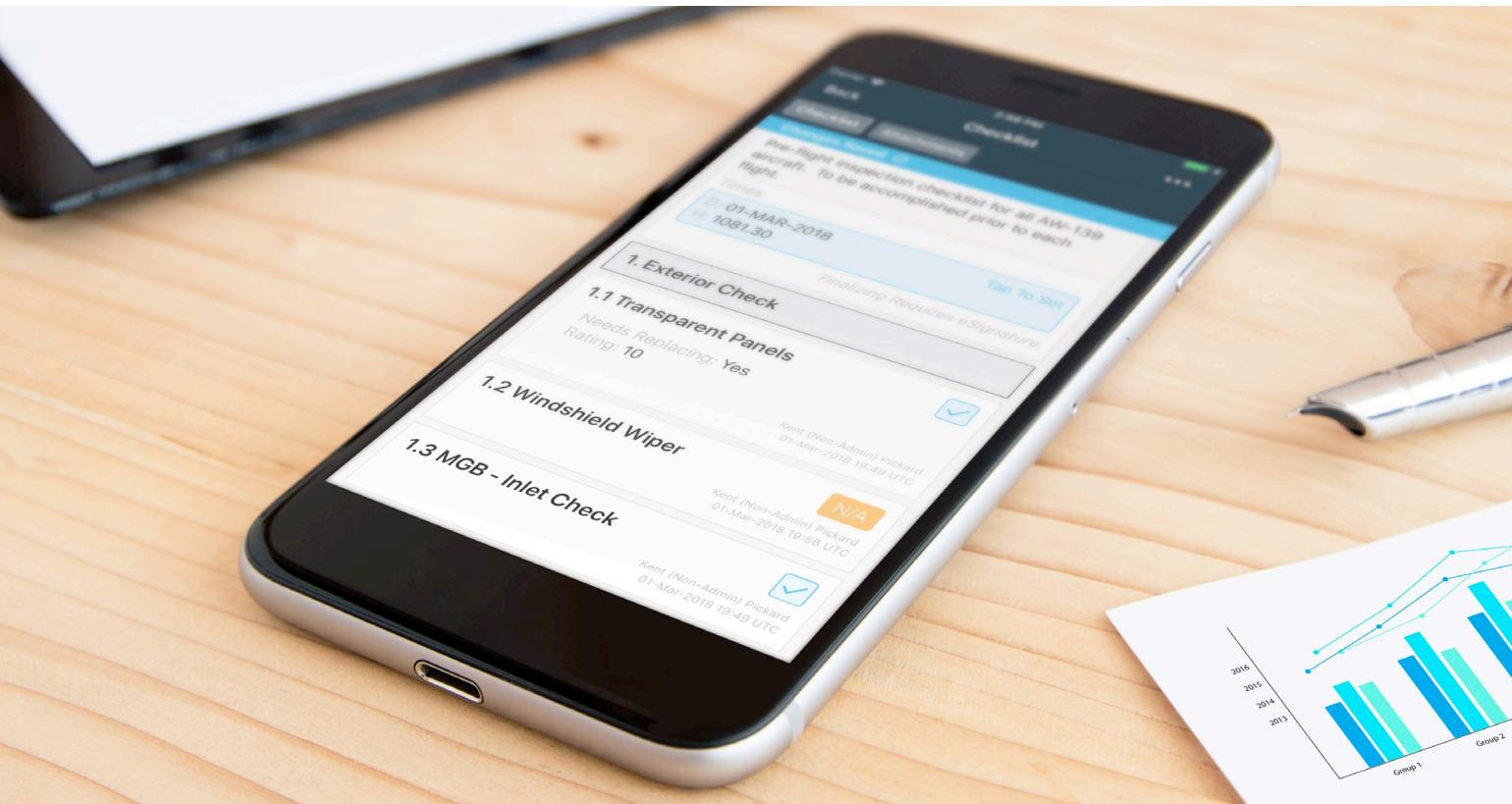
"But I said, 'No, dad, you don't understand. I get to be involved in aviation, and that is romantic,'" he recollects.

Arnoni's passion for aviation became his reality as he flew through aircraft maintenance technician training and landed his airframe and powerplant (A&P) certificate in 1978.

Over the years, his career has experienced both glorious ascents and rocky landings, straight and level times and turbulent ones. It has transported him from the hangar shop floor and work as an A&P to a destination in aftermarket parts sales and manufacturing at the helm of his own business.

Today, this entrepreneur boasts 40 years of aviation experience. The majority has been in the corporate jet market, though Arnoni also spent several years in the commuter airlines and military markets. He has an extensive background in the aftermarket parts business as well as in maintenance and repair

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operations (MRO) and in aviation manufacturing.

Though he cut his teeth on the shop floor, he transformed himself along the way into an exceptional leader and innovator, thanks to an entrepreneurial spirit, the solid advice of many mentors

over the years, and a willingness to take risks. What follows is his journey from A&P to aviation entrepreneur.

BUSINESS IN HIS BLOOD

As a newly-minted aviation maintenance technician still wet

behind the ears, Arnoni landed on the shop floor at Atlantic Aviation in Houston. He didn't know it at the time, but this position would set the course of his career. The shop worked on Gulfstream, Hawker and Cessna aircraft, but the director of maintenance took one look at the Brit and said, "You go work on the Hawker team, maybe you can understand those limey manuals."

"In my first days in aviation, I was sentenced to work on [British-made] Hawkers, and that was it," Arnoni laughs.

As an A&P on the Hawker team, Arnoni became intimately familiar with the inner workings of these twin-engine jets, their repairs and their overhauls. This led to work for a variety of maintenance shops until 1984, when he was hired by Dick Cosgrove to sell parts for Cosgrove's aircraft parts business. He didn't know it at the time, but this was another game changer.

"Cosgrove hired aircraft mechanics as parts salesmen because they did a good job of dealing with technicians needing parts. I learned this business very quickly, and found it was a heck of a lot easier to sell a part than it was to install it," Arnoni says.

The job only lasted 18 months before Arnoni and Cosgrove parted ways, but parts sales and distributing remained his passion. When Arnoni found himself without a job and needing to make an income to support himself and his family, he turned to brokering parts as he looked for a job.

"I'd go around and visit with aircraft maintenance technicians, ask what they were looking for, then find the parts they needed," he says.

This was the beginning of February 1984, but by the fall of that year Arnoni found himself staring at his rudimentary business ledger. He noticed people owed him thousands of dollars. "I thought, 'You're not

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doing this while you look for a job, this is your job,” he says. “And, if it is my job, I realized I needed to start taking it more seriously. I had been in the parts business without even knowing it.”

He officially launched Arnoni Aviation Inc. in 1985, and specialized in parts sales for Hawker, Gulfstream and Falcon aircraft because that is “what I knew, what my aviation friends operated, and who I dealt with,” he says.

However, a 1990 trip to England charted a new course for Arnoni Aviation, which he operated for 21 years. “I realized I could buy Hawker parts cheaper in England than I could in the United States,” he says. “This was before the Internet and the world was small. The British would sell me these parts real cheap, and I’d fly them across the Atlantic, and they would double in price because they were imported.”

This realization prompted Arnoni to sell off his Gulfstream and Falcon inventory and focus solely on Hawkers. He eventually began buying entire airplanes to part out. He did well at this, apart from one small hurdle — he had a hard time getting things overhauled. In fact, many times he had to send overhaul work back to the factory in England to get it done, which took many months.

“The reason it took so long is the factory didn’t have the piece parts. They had to have them made,” he says.

What does a man like Arnoni do in this situation? He puts his own overhaul business into play.

“I decided I would start an overhaul shop in the U.S. and make the piece parts myself,” he says. “It was clear I was not only going to get into the overhaul business but also the replacement parts business.”

His new venture flourished, and by the early 2000s, Arnoni Aviation had parted out an estimated 30 airplanes. The company became the go-to place for Hawker parts along with overhauls, and Arnoni found he had achieved his goal of becoming the “Hawker parts guy.”

In 2006, he sold the company to BBA Aviation where it became part of its APPH Group, which was an English landing gear manufacturer and hydraulics supplier for Hawker. “They wanted to expand beyond the hydraulics on the Hawker and saw this acquisition as a means to do this,” he says.

From 2007–2009, Arnoni stayed on as CEO of APPH operations

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“I came to understand that I am not in the parts business at all, I’m in the problem-solving business. And I don’t stop until the guy’s problem has been resolved.” – Yoel Arnoni, Av8 PMA and Av8 MRO

in Wichita and Houston. Then he moved to a position in special projects for the legacy group at BBA Aviation from 2010-2011 before he left to start New POP, a company that developed and produced parts under a parts manufacturer approval (PMA) for out-of-production aircraft. New POP constructed parts out of improved materials and utilized production technologies that were unavailable when the aircraft were produced. And, in many cases, the firm also reverse engineered parts that were out of production.

DESIGNATED PROBLEM SOLVER

“My wife would tell you I’m a bullshitter, but I am an entrepreneur. I tend to think outside the box,” Arnoni laughs.

He quickly backtracks and says he’s not really an entrepreneur but is instead a guy who isn’t content to see someone’s problem and just let it sit.

He recalls a time when he needed a part and called a parts distributor to obtain it. The customer service professional on the phone typed the information into the computer and came back and said, ‘No, we don’t have the part.’ Arnoni then called the OEM and received the same response.

“They said no and that was the end of it,” he says. “But at the end of the day, an operator still needs the part. It doesn’t matter how many people say they don’t have it. It was then that I came to understand that I am not in the parts business at all, I’m in the problem-solving business. And I don’t stop until the guy’s problem has been resolved.”

While working at APPH, an OEM supplier for the Hawker, Arnoni had a revelation when dealing with one of the other OEMs, a firm that also made parts for the Hawker. He remembers the OEM’s president telling him that a company holding a PMA for its parts was selling them at half the price of the OEM.

“He asked me, ‘What can we do to sell more parts at the OEM price?’” he recalls. “I told him lower the price. People will pay a little more for an OEM part but not a lot more.”

The OEM president then explained he couldn’t significantly reduce the price because replacement parts were where the firm recouped the cost for the design and manufacture of the parts in the first place.

“He told me, ‘Every time Hawker builds a plane, we give them our products [for free], and the idea is that when the parts need overhauling, they will come to us and we will make our money back,’” Arnoni recalls.

Arnoni says this structure is common because aircraft manufacturers sell the planes at a lesser cost, but it does not help the component manufacturers which have spent millions designing a widget for the aircraft. Ten years later, when the parts need overhauling, these OEMs must charge a premium for piece parts. Operators are simply unwilling to pay those prices, which opens the door for companies holding PMAs to step in.

He cites an example of an OEM charging \$700 for a knob used to turn a dial on an aircraft’s instrument panel. In this case, pilots were overtightening them and they would crack, and the operators were going

through 50 knobs per year. Arnoni quickly realized that a company holding a PMA for that part could charge less than half the OEM price and still make money.

In 2013, Arnoni, along with partners Russell Eckhart and Mike Washburn, launched Av8 MRO LLC to overhaul Hawker 125 series landing gear and TKS panels. In 2017, it added Av8 PMA (a wholly-owned division of Av8 MRO) to help repair stations and parts distributors gain PMA approval, as well as manufacture and distribute PMA parts. The company employs an in-house engineering staff as well as a designated engineering representative (DER) to get parts FAA and/or EASA certified. The firm also has manufacturing experts to get the parts made. Av8 PMA manufactures and supplies parts for exclusive use and or distribution of their customers.

“When a guy says, ‘I can’t fly my airplane because I need this part,’ it has become my problem,” says Arnoni. “To me that is simple. That is basic. But what I’ve come to find out is that’s not what most people do. But the idea that something can’t be done or hasn’t been done isn’t a stopping point, it’s a starting point.”

Arnoni says that though it might be corny to say, this philosophy stems from his mother and father, who both worked while he was growing up. If he wanted dinner, and his folks were both at work, he says he had to “bloody well cook it.”

He adds, “That’s just the way it was. If I wanted something, I learned I had to go do it, not wait for someone else to do it for me.”

Arnoni was just 28 years old when he started his first business. He says at the time people commented on how young he was, how brave he was and so forth, but Arnoni says it wasn't brave at all. "I didn't have a job and there weren't a lot of jobs in Houston at the time, so I found a way to feed my family. I went out and brokered parts and found business somewhere. There are a lot of people who sit at home and say they can't find a job. I didn't find a job either, I made a job. That's discipline."

MENTORS MAKE A DIFFERENCE

A person doesn't make his or her way in business solely on his or her own regard — he or she generally gets a leg or two up along the way from mentors who guide and push their business in the right direction. Arnoni is no exception and his list starts with his own father, who taught him how to be a good manager and leader.

His father was an engineer and project manager, and the No. 1 piece of advice he gave him was that there are very few bad people and bad employees in the world. "He told me, 'If you're having problems with an employee, it is your

fault. You need to understand that it's your fault, and figure out how to remedy the situation,'" he says.

He says this advice has served him well and is a philosophy he promotes to his managers. "Why is an employee not doing what I wanted him to do? It is probably because I didn't properly explain what I wanted him to do. Why is an employee not working fast enough? Perhaps I didn't tell him what the priority and the timeline was," he says. "I have taught this to every manager who works for me. They'll come to me and say this employee is not doing their job, and I'll ask the manager what they are doing wrong. They don't like that, but at the end of the conversation, they usually figure it out."

Doug Bowen, who at the time that they first crossed paths was the director of maintenance for a firm that would eventually become ENRON (one of the largest flight departments in the country), is another mentor who changed Arnoni's flight path. At the time that Arnoni met him, most maintenance leadership came to work in a blue shirt with their name on it, a pair of jeans and a pair of sneakers. Arnoni did the same. Bowen did not. He came to work in a suit every day.

Arnoni routinely visited Bowen to sell him parts. "I remember he looked at me one day, and he said, 'You run your own business, right?' Then he asked me, 'You want people to respect you for running your own business?' I, of course, said yes. He then said, 'Quit wearing those tennis shoes and jeans and start acting and dressing like you run your own business.' I told my wife about this conversation and she never let me leave the house again unless I was properly turned out."

Over the years, Bowen gave him a lot of practical (yet sage) advice on being a businessman. "Doug taught me how to be in the parts business," he says.

Bowen has never lost touch with Arnoni since retiring. In an interesting twist of fate, he works three to four days a week at Av8 along with John Porter, who was once the DOM for CSX. "I like having two older guys around the shop because they help keep me grounded," Arnoni states. "They are an anchor to the past and a driver to achieve more in the future."

Arnoni's journey has taken him far across the industry, netting him friends and mentors and business ventures along the way, but one thing hasn't changed course over the years — his love of aviation. "It's in my blood," he says. ■



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