

Can Boeing be trusted again? What steps can the biggest name in aviation take to repair its reputation?

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Every year, [billions of people](#) board planes that are built by one of two manufacturers—Boeing, an American manufacturer, and Airbus, a European corporation.

Air travel [has never been safer](#), data suggests. In the U.S., [only five people](#) have died on [commercial flights](#) since 2009, while the number of fatal commercial aviation accidents worldwide in 2023 [decreased to six—the fewest on record](#).

But it's been a very bad year for Boeing.

In January, an Alaska Airlines flight lost a door plug mid-flight. Later that month, loose parts were found on grounded 737 Max 9 planes. Inspections, audits and investigations followed—and so did tumbling consumer confidence.

Can Boeing be trusted again?

The most recent incidents have set the company back five years—when two fatal crashes of 737 MAX 8 planes killed 346 people.

"They're right back where they were—under the microscope—and with people wondering whether they can move things forward," says Peter Mancusi, a lawyer, crisis manager and assistant teaching professor at Northeastern University.

Crisis management is about helping companies facing public scrutiny manage their reputation. In the case of Boeing, Mancusi says, the company needs to first convince the Federal Aviation Administration—the U.S. federal government agency that regulates civil aviation—that it has fixed all the issues and made safety the top priority.

Repairing its public reputation can only happen after Boeing satisfies regulators, Mancusi says.

"You wouldn't want to say anything that would get challenged by the FAA," he says.

Boeing had long been considered the most trusted name in aviation. In the aftermath of World War II, the company was known for going the extra mile and spending extra money to keep passengers safe, says Simon Pitts, program director of Northeastern's Gordon Institute of Engineering Leadership and former senior executive at Ford Motor Co.

"That has all disappeared over the decades," Pitts says.

The recent incidents with Boeing planes, he says, reflect poor design, manufacturing and [quality control](#).

The company has put profits ahead of everything else, Pitts says.

"They are reaping the rewards of focusing on only one of the targets," he says. "And that's the financial target."

Boeing's shift away from "superb" engineering to satisfying shareholders happened in the late 1990s, Pitts says. That's when the company merged with McDonnell Douglas, an American aerospace manufacturing corporation and defense contractor that produced commercial and military aircrafts.

Boeing began to build more low-cost planes using the fewest number of workers.

Pitts says the FAA should share the blame in Boeing's downfall. After all, he says, the FAA allows too much self-certification, and

management flows freely between Boeing and the FAA.

"It really means that the FAA is blind to some of the things that are going on," Pitts says. "And that's both from a manufacturing perspective and also from a design and development and verification perspective."

The issue, however, is not transparency, Pitts says, but competency.

Pitts sees the recent removal of Boeing's CEO, chairman and head of commercial airplanes as a step in the right direction. CEO David Calhoun was not an engineer—a hiring mistake in Pitts's opinion. Boeing needs people in leadership who are either engineers or are engineering savvy, he says, and rely on this knowledge to make their decisions and lead the company.

"I've seen a number of companies almost cycle between having technical engineering leaders and finance-based leaders, and you can almost watch the performance of the companies improve and get worse again," he says.

The company's challenge now, he says, is to put the right people in charge with the resources to design and develop quality aircraft.

"I'm confident that given the right structure of the board, given the right leadership team, who then allocate the correct resources to the engineers, and manufacturing engineers, and the suppliers, they can in fact do a good job," Pitts says.

Boeing's new leadership team will also need to boost the morale of its employees, says Paula Caligiuri, distinguished professor of international business and strategy at Northeastern.

Senior executives should begin to provide regular updates about findings

and actions taken, she says.

"This includes meeting or exceeding regulatory requirements, exceeding industry standards for safety and quality, and making tangible improvements in the company's culture," Caligiuri says.

The company should establish an environment where speaking up about safety and quality concerns is not only welcomed but rewarded.

"Psychological bravery is the inner strength that fuels individuals to face fears and make tough decisions, anchored by a steadfast adherence to ethical principles," Caligiuri says.

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