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Stephanie Pope Has The One Thing Boeing's CEO Says His Successor Needs

Marisa Garcia Senior Contributor *I offer an insider's view of the business of flight.*[Follow](#)

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Executive vice president of The Boeing Company and president and chief executive officer of Boeing ... [\[+\]](#) AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES

During a sometimes painful Senate Committee hearing this week, Boeing CEO Dave Calhoun faced the wrath of 737 MAX victim families and continued questioning over his \$33 million salary. Though he is, by far, not the highest-paid CEO in the U.S., the recent series of debacles at Boeing have made Calhoun an easy

target. His compensation and the question of leadership at Boeing are fair game for debate.

Despite some questioning that veered on badgering, Calhoun answered the Senators' probes into Boeing's safety record and what it might take to turn the company around.

Calhoun [resigned earlier this year](#) as part of a management shakeup amid a tidal wave of negative headlines, but he will remain in his role through the end of the year and will stay on the Boeing board after his departure.

The search is on for a successor who can take the [pressure that will likely linger](#) well beyond this year and effectively right [Boeing's wrongs](#).

While answering Senator Richard Blumenthal's question about changes required at the top level at Boeing for meaningful change, Calhoun shared the sole qualification the company seeks.

"We will try to select people who know a lot about airplanes. We are weird. We are in an industry where domain expertise matters a lot," Calhoun said. "And so we do prefer to choose from within, but we also do our best to match the skill sets with the opportunity. Right now, the immediate opportunity, and I think your committee has helped us point this out along with everything we've learned in the stand downs and the accidents, is: engagement, engagement, engagement, engagement. Trust with our workforce."

Calhoun said the company would select the next leader "based on that spec." Such a leader is already at Boeing, working along with Calhoun to turn the situation around: Stephanie Pope. To a careful listener, Calhoun's remarks at the hearing suggest a choice others in the industry have been expecting.

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Forbes' Jeremy Bogaisky was early in identifying [Stephanie Pope](#), who took over the role of CEO of Boeing Commercial Aircraft during the management shakeup, as a potential candidate to lead the company. Though there has been some skepticism over her lack of engineering credentials, there can be no doubt over her ability to engage workers. Pope has worked in every division of Boeing throughout her career and has been a positive influence.

As Bogaisky reported, former Boeing employees described Pope as “a formidable leader” and “a hard worker, a good listener who’s adroit at pumping employees for information and ideas, and skilled at building a consensus.”

Speaking with industry analyst Addison Schonland of AirInsight earlier this year following the Boeing shake-up, I asked him what he felt would be the “right stuff” for the next Boeing CEO and whether Stephanie Pope might have it. While, like others, Schonland saw Pope’s lack of engineering expertise as problematic, he said having a woman in charge of Boeing for the first time in its over 100-year history is potentially favorable in marking a step change. But it’s not just about the optics.

In considering my question, Schonland focused on the people of Boeing. “Imagine the employees, scared and bewildered. They surely can’t believe this is happening to their company. They surely

feel cornered,” he said. “The next CEO is going to have to dance on a needle. It is surely the toughest job in the world.”

If there is a tough job to be done, Pope has proven herself ready to do it. She is currently engaged in negotiating the long-delayed labor contract with [Boeing’s machinists union](#). That is an opportunity to forge closer ties to the workforce that keeps Boeing planes flying safely.

Pope’s engineering knowledge will be less critical if she can listen to engineers, technicians, mechanics and quality control specialists and help them effectively implement the required changes. As a former Boeing executive said to Forbes, “It’s never going to be one person who solves all the problems there... It will take a team and I think Stephanie’s leadership style is perfect for getting the team assembled and focused around that problem.”

While nothing is confirmed, part of the industry anticipates the appointment. Aviation Week reported on Friday that 30% of Boeing’s top aerospace and defense suppliers expect Stephanie Pope to be the next CEO.

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