

NASA alumnus reflects on shuttle disaster

Jerome Lederer directed safety after Apollo fire

By Greg Klerkx
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In the wake of the explosion of the space shuttle Challenger Jan. 28, the process of finding answers to the tragedy is as slow and painful as the recovery of the shuttle's shattered remains. But according to Jerome Lederer of Leisure World, the ultimate answer to the problem lies not only with Challenger but at the heart of the American space program.

"When accidents happen, there are usually two things involved," said Lederer, director of the Office of Manned Flight Safety for NASA from 1967 to 1972. "One thing involved is a surface cause, a technological problem. Then there is a root cause, something psychological or economic that underlies everything.

"I don't know any more about the actual problem (with Challenger) than I read in the newspapers. But I think that the basic problem behind their troubles is the need for motivation."

Motivation is a familiar subject to Lederer, who was appointed as director of the safety program at NASA shortly after a fire in one of the Apollo rockets claimed the lives of three American astronauts. Lederer took the position as a "retirement job" after spending 20 years as director of the Flight Safety Foundation, an organization that pioneered advances in aviation safety.

After his appointment at NASA, Lederer developed and implemented a motivation program for NASA employees. He said the program was designed to get NASA employees and their families personally involved with the success of the space program.

The ultimate goal of the program was to increase employee efficiency and to make NASA employees more responsible for their work.

"Complacency is the worst problem in aviation," said Lederer. "It's like driving a car. If you do it over and over again and nothing happens, you tend to disregard the danger. With the motivation program, we tried to get workers and their families spiritually involved with the success or failure of the space program. This is done by showing the worker's family how important he is, how he is helping the prestige of the United States."

One of the key aspects of Lederer's motivation program involved bringing the space program to NASA families. Vans loaded with the latest space technology traveled to NASA communities as part of an effort to educate NASA families about the space program. Exceptional NASA employees also received special recognition, including all-expense—paid trips to Cape Canaveral to watch space launches.

Lederer said that he wasn't sure if the motivation program he developed was still in operation at NASA, but added that whatever program is presently being used

should be upgraded to meet the increasing demands, both public and private, on America's space program. He said that strict launch and

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Jerome Lederer