

Agents, Old and New, Need Training

by JIM FOUTS
Reservations Manager — DCA

Nine years ago when we only had five flights out of Washington, a man came to the ticket counter and advised me that he would like a reservation on our next flight to CMH. I responded, "TWA has a flight leaving after ours and arriving much earlier." In short, I was apologizing for our service and the gentleman did not appreciate this. His reply, "If you don't mind I would like to take your flight. I'm fully aware of the fact that it stops eight times and that it is a DC-3, and TWA has a non-stop Martin. However, the many little extra services provided by your people, the friendly, courteous manner in which you handle the public, means a great deal to me." Certainly, this was a very pleasant surprise to me. I wonder if we would hear this today?

Future Success

I'm fully aware that most people will not go to this extent. However, I am certain that our future success, more than ever, depends upon repeat business. Unless we recapture much of the company spirit that has been lost through the years, and the so-called many small services that we provided, we will not get the repeat business. Consequently, our prosperity is at stake.

In the old days we had fewer people to supervise, and our job of customer service was much easier. We had sufficient time to train our employees. We were small, and because we were small, our customer service was excellent. Today, we are not so small, and our customer service is not so good. What are we going to do about it?

How many times during the course of a day over our system are we apologizing for inefficiency by saying, "I'm sorry, but the agent is new."? Everyone has to learn, true, but must our customers continually and consistently receive inferior service? Before an agent answers a phone or checks in a passenger, he needs a minimum of two weeks' classroom training. Agents are thrown on the ticket counter when they cannot even read the flight schedule. A revised sales manual is essential for use during this training period.

Initial Contact

In connection with our training for new sales agents, we speak much about our initial contact with the customer. With this initial contact we must give full consideration to the following factors. The new sales agent must realize that his voice must communicate an eagerness to serve. He must always convey to the customer that he is not only willing to handle his problem, but also he must show that he really wants to help him. For the reservation agent, it takes sincere enthusiasm in the voice. For the ticket agent, sincere expression.

It is not enough for us to provide comparable service to our competitors, ours must be better. It is not sufficient to be just adequate, it is imperative, in our competitive market, to be more than adequate. It is not enough to answer the phone, "PIEDMONT AIRLINES RESERVATIONS." Since this is our initial contact with the passenger, it should be, "PIEDMONT AIRLINES RESERVATIONS, MAY I HELP YOU?"

A ticket agent should be taught the proper way to greet the customer. It is not enough just to smile, take his ticket, mark it and hand it back to him. It is not enough for a hostess to smile, serve a cup of coffee, and pass out a few magazines. Common courtesy, a smile and

efficiency is not enough. We agree it is adequate, but to prosper in the future, don't you believe that we must give the customer better than "just adequate" service? As a local service carrier, too often we tend to accent the word local, but we must really emphasize SERVICE.

Retraining

It is not adequate to provide good training only for the new agents. Also, in our system the older agents need continual training for maximum efficiency. It is easier to train than to re-train! Unfortunately, many of our experienced agents did not have adequate sales training in the beginning. With closer supervision and continual training for all agents, in DCA we have devised a weekly evaluative sales quality check list. By monitoring each agent during the week he is given an appraisal on the main points of his job.

The quality of service we provide requires good supervision. Where do we find supervisors? Where do we find agents who are willing to take so much added responsibility for an extra \$15 or \$25 a month? In the past the question was, "Who will receive this promotion?" Presently the question is, "Who will take the promotion?" In DCA, the majority of our supervisors already have or are requesting to be returned to agent status. Our agents receive comparable salaries to our competitors. Certainly, it is time that we take a closer look at the salaries of supervisors.

Sales Guides

To provide faster and more efficient service, reservations and ticket counter personnel need sales guides. In reservations in DCA, we use a notebook which is in itself almost a full time job of reworking with each schedule change. However, with it our agents can take at least five more calls per hour.

The morale of our personnel must be the determining factor in the quality of the service given to our customers. In other words, to put forth that extra effort, to convey sincerity, to be company-minded and believe in what he is doing, it is imperative that the supervisor, the manager and the company give him their very best. With training we can combat the frustration that comes from lack of knowledge.

In conclusion I suggest we consider:

1. A centrally-located training center. With two weeks of intensive training the agents' productivity is immediate.
2. Better salaries for all supervisory personnel.
3. Closer supervision of hostesses.
4. Sales guides furnished from the general office for all stations.

Complacency, Forgetfulness: Irate Customers

by PAUL LOAR
District Sales Manager — CVG

I would like to confine my remarks to two subjects, both mentioned in general, in the meeting notice. They are both in the present state of the art, and within the direct control of this audience — and it wouldn't cost a cent to implement them.

You are all aware that the airline business is a routine business. Almost all of our passenger complaints occur when the routine is broken. Weather, etc. and mechanical delays are understandable, and generally endurable by our customers. But quite often we compound these problems by what I call, for lack of a better term, "sins of omission". Let me illustrate what I mean:

Flight delayed at ramp — passengers at gate — no announcement made.
Irate customers.

Salesman calls on travel agent — agent asks for posters, and PX tariff — salesman doesn't write it down.
Irate customer.

Flight one hour late — passenger on way to plane asks agent to send message to deplaning station and notify wife — agent says will do — he forgets.
Irate customer.

All stations message from INT lost and found — check on lost bag — agent pulls TT message, says I'll do it when I'm not so busy — forgets — bag in operations rooms for two days.
Irate customer.

These "sins of omission" not only create ill will with our customers, they also cost our company money.

The second subject is even more basic. In spite of all the problems mentioned, the fact remains, business has been good, and from all indications it looks as though it will remain good in the foreseeable future. Add a group of managers that are three years older than when we last met, and we have the ingredients for a common corporate ailment — complacency.

Again, let me illustrate — an old prospector is on his way into town from a long trip in the hills, he's dirty, bearded, and worn out, but he's finally hit it, has a big bag of high grade ore on his back. On the way in, he meets a young fellow on a jackass. The old man yells, "I've struck it rich. I've struck it rich." The young fellow says, "How did you do it — I've been out here all week, and haven't seen a thing." The old man replies: "If you're going to make it in this game, you have to get off your ass and go to work."



Losing More - Finding Less

by T. L. MARTIN
Staff Assistant — Sales

The question put to us is how to provide the best product to the most number of people at the most economical cost?

In many respects we are doing this as evidenced by our growth and progress over the last 19 years.

As all of you know, when we accept a passenger, we are entering into a contract with that passenger to carry him and his luggage from point A to point B. Fortunately, we don't lose too many passengers but we are mishandling a large number of bags. I don't know how many of you have ever lost your bag while traveling but put yourself in the passenger's shoes — caught away from home without a clean shirt, a change of clothing, your business papers.

Rough Situation

Think about that for a minute. That's a rough situation. There are very few things you can do to a passenger that will make him madder than lose his bag.

When we have lost a passenger's luggage we have a choice regarding the course of action to take.

We and our people in the field can make a real honest effort to produce the bag at the minimum inconvenience to the passenger, or increase his ill-will toward Piedmont by taking an indifferent attitude.

For example, if a passenger travels from DCA to ROA and arrives in Roanoke without his bag, then this is not only an ROA problem — it's DCA's, too. Washington may have failed to board the bag, it might be at CHO or LYH because maybe it was pulled short of destination. It could be at Tri-Cities because it overrode ROA. The bag might be at any station.

Everybody's Problem

The point is this—ROA's problem is everybody's problem and every effort of cooperation should be exerted by each individual supervisor and staff to keep the passenger and his bag together at all times.

In every category of lost and found we have had a tremendous increase in, not only the number of mishandled bags, but also in the cost. In some cases, we have been able to bounce these claims to other carriers, because we could prove that they did not transfer the bags to us or for some other reason. The transfer information is the single largest criteria for determining who picks up the cost.

Part of the contributing influence towards this increase was the six week strike last July and August when all of us were pushed to the hilt with more passengers, extra sections, shortage of trained personnel,

and in general, lack of time to do a proper job.

But discounting the strike, mishandled bags and costs have been constantly increasing at a greater percentage rate than the number of passengers we have been carrying.

MSB Decrease

In reviewing the claims that have been sent to Winston-Salem, I'm glad there has been a definite decrease in the number of claims involving MSB passengers. Some bags are not being sent to INT, and I am paying out claims. For example, recently we paid a man \$68 for his that was lost last February 28th. This bag was received at INT last Monday after floating around on the system or being held for almost two months by one of our stations. If any bag you have isn't claimed after 48 hours, send it directly to Winston-Salem.

Lately, Central Lost and Found has been trying to get the stations to include the necessary information with reference to the transfer of the bag from the other carrier. While the bag claim is still under local control, please determine whether or not the bag was received from the other airline and attach this information to the PA T 240 form. Any station that receives such a request should, as soon as practical, check for the information and reply immediately to the station looking for the bag. If the bag was not received, start searching for the bag with the other airline. Attach all teletype messages to the lost bag report before sending it to Central Lost and Found.

Solutions

The following is a list of the major complaints and suggestions to help us reduce the number of claims and costs:

- (1.) After receiving a message regarding a bag, search your station and answer the message.
- (2.) After each flight, remove all unclaimed bags to prevent their being lost or stolen. Take these bags to the ticket counter or some other safe place and let the passenger claim his bag there. While it does inconvenience the passenger a little, it's far better than losing it.

As all of you are aware, several persons have been caught stealing bags from our self claim areas in recent months. For example, a skycap in DCA was caught with seven (7) bags in his apartment. Two (2) of these bags belonged to Piedmont. Last fall over forty (40) bags were found in a motel room. This happened right here in Atlanta. From what little was left of the bags and from other information received, it was determined that

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