



TRAINING IN AVIATION – DO WE MISS SOMETHING?

News / Airlines



Most of us are more or less often passengers on different airlines, taking off and landing at various airports. The aviation professions are not too old, just over a century. The speed at which aviation has developed has been meteoric, and so have the professions. First, flight attendants began by stowing luggage and reassuring passengers they were afraid to fly. Just think of all the on-board and airport services we're used to seeing these days! Have you ever wondered what training airport employees and flight crews receive? How has these trainings evolved?

Training is a must for anyone who works in airline or airport ground handling. The safety of the aircraft, passengers, equipment, and employees is the TOP priority. Trainings are meant to meet the safety standards and regulations of airlines and airports. Appropriate training has an essential impact on productivity and quality of services, which is more than necessary to be different from concurrent.

Where does it start? Beginners start with initial training; later, regular recurrent training is required to maintain and update the skills. Training enhances company reputation and, of course, is needed

to pass audits. As the situation evolves and times change, how does this impact training? Think of the pandemic and all the procedures to be set up urgently to resume flying. How was training organized? How was it adapted? I can reach out to an expert with all my questions on training's evolution - SAFESky Managing Director Frederick Reitz:

T.O. Rick, we're facing different situations and time changes. Is there anything we're missing in training?

F.R. I would say training from what we're talking about. The problem is the airlines are so short-staffed, and the airports are short-staffed that we don't have enough people to do the job correctly. And that makes it challenging for the staff, it makes it tough for the customers, and it makes it difficult for the airport and the airlines. If we're going to start over and worry about all this security stuff, we need to start at the beginning, and it needs to start at the ticket counter. We need sufficient staff to observe and assist the customers and create a prescreening process. Like I'm sure you've experienced when you travel internationally, start at the ticket counter with the questions and continue that process.

T.O. In the early days, one of the flight attendants' duties was to reassure passengers that they would take the flight feeling comforted. Have we forgotten that?

F.R. We have because if you look at how times have changed, the planes have become bigger. Two hundred people on the planes, we're squeezing people in. Flight attendants have more work and fewer flight attendants on the aircraft. They go with the minimum, So, you've got four flight attendants handling 200 people. It's very hard for them to provide customized service. It's hard for them to help when needed. Now, now and then, you'll see where an inflight crew member does a fantastic job helping somebody who's having issues. And that's outstanding. But it should always be to help people who are afraid to fly or have challenges such as Physical issues or Mental issues.

T.O. I don't even know if passengers are aware that for crew members, the safety of the flight is the number one priority. Customer service comes only after the security of flight. Some passengers are coming on board like it's a five-star hotel and they are not thinking about the safety rules and regulations and are willing to have only five-star customer service. Even if it is a low-cost airline, should we remind passengers that safety comes first? I'm apprehensive about the mental health of crew members. They are overworking. What needs to be done if we talk about training in that matter?

F.R. I think that's wonderful what you said. One of the things we see, too, and I've experienced myself, is it is challenging for family members who have somebody who might have dementia or a mental issue. But sadly, they put the person on an airplane from point A to B, because of the cost of the tickets or they just don't travel with them. The person is on the plane and gets to the destination where there is nobody to greet them, or there's an issue on the plane and nobody there to help them. I think an educational video would be incredible onboard airplanes for customers to show them, say, hey, this is what we provide, and make them aware of the airline's challenges. We are here to give you service. I'm sure you've seen people ringing the bell. They want drinks and stuff before the takeoff. First -we have to get everybody seated safely. Let's ensure all the luggage is put away because we want to leave on time. Because everybody wants to get to their connecting flight or destination on time.

Crew members are working hard to get everybody to settle down, get their stuff out of their bags, and get the plane on the way. Then you have to deal with the confused people maybe don't quite understand what's going on, maybe can't sit comfortably in the seat they're in. Then they face

those challenges, and then the next challenge is you have families. You see, it is a big thing here in the United States. They want to sit together, but they bought the cheap discounted ticket, so the seats are all over. So now we're asking people if they'll move to accommodate the family members. I think if the media and people like yourself could create something entertaining yet enlightening for passengers and say, did you know that before the door closes, here are all the things the airline has to do to get you to your destination safely and on time?

T.O. What can we do for airport staff? They are doing a fantastic job, but sometimes they don't have enough training.

F.R. Recurrent training is necessary because it keeps things in front of the employees. They learn the basics. Here's how to check in somebody, here's how to take the tickets. But there are so many people with so many different challenges that you have to face them and still smile, and you have to be open to listening. We're getting so busy. We don't give them recurrent training. We don't give them adequate breaks. The employees need to be rested. They need to get away from the ticket counter.

I was blessed when I started with a major airline in Dallas. And this was all the pre-cell phone days, pre-kiosks asked, and the ticket line never stopped. And one day, it was my lunch break, and I told the guy training me, and he said: "Go to lunch." I said: "But the line won't quit." He answered: "when you come back from lunch, the line is still going to be here." You have to take care of yourself too. You have to rest and be fresh to face the continuous challenges. We need to support the staff! Management cannot be so busy with the operation that they don't see that employees are stressed or tired.

Late flights. The airline that I worked for was pretty good at providing relief. If you were at the gate for an hour or 2 hours and the flight was late, relieve them, let them go, and take a break. Please don't make them stay there and wait till the flight leaves. And then the recurrent training, we have to do that. We have to share with them tips on how to provide better customer service. What's the latest security threat? You guys over in Europe had the bomb threats, so definitely something with bomb threats and the importance of paying attention to your surroundings, looking for unattended items, looking for suspicious people. That training should have come out within a week of the increase in bomb threat calls.

T.O. How often would you say the airport staff should be briefed or trained?

F.R. security training is always continuous. It just continues because it's ever-evolving—the security threats. I think the station itself should have at least quarterly security training. But you mentioned briefings, at minimum, a weekly briefing. Most airlines will do a daily briefing if they do good, a shift briefing. And what's essential about the shift briefing is to discuss any security issues that happened the day before. So, the rumors are addressed immediately. You're aware if any people are coming back, let's say if the plane diverted because of a bomb threat, and now that day, the next day, you're going to be getting all the passengers. You want to know that some may be concerned about the flight that day. You don't want to joke about anything with them. It's good to know what happened the day before. I always gave daily briefings with a recap of the incidents from the day before, incidents of importance. But a minimum, a weekly briefing, so everybody's on top of everything. And it's not old news.

Airport guys. Airports need to communicate with the airlines right away, too. When something happens, you have to. I just met about three weeks ago with the city of Atlanta Airport. It was fascinating because one of the things we talked about was the annual airport drill. I said the drill always focused on the law enforcement or fire department response. But they left the airports and

airlines out of the program. We need to have everybody participate. If the airport has a security issue, they need the airlines to be aware of it and tell them what they will do about it. There was the young lady that was stabbing people in Atlanta airport. The airport should immediately have some kind of program for the airlines to say, what will you do if this happens? We need everybody to help. The airport will not have an immediate response as the incident unfolds. We need airline employees to get away for their safety and to help other customers and start realizing we need to direct the people away from here for their safety.

T.O. My last question for today – do you think we need to create a training ecosystem? It is good to have a plan for each aviation sector– airports, airlines, regulators. What is even better is to have a common goal.

F.R. I think that's a genius idea. Most airports have a monthly meeting with all the airlines. But you're right. By then, something could be three or four weeks old. If they had a training portal to share training, that would be great. Be good PR for the airport. They have the training portal and share it with everybody. The challenge with the airlines is they have so little time that they can schedule people to be down to do the training. And then typically what happens is the airline employees are so busy, they're sitting there watching these training videos, and all they want to do is get done.

T.O. We all want more time for families and friends, but it is much too important to have aviation ecosystem training on the same level.

F.R. I think you hit the nail on the head because there are so many more companies handling ground handling and contractors and security contractors. You're right; everybody's focused on a different goal. I think the challenge for subsequent years should be more standardized communication and talking about the issues that directly affect airports worldwide and then have everybody on the same page.

26 NOVEMBER 2023

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