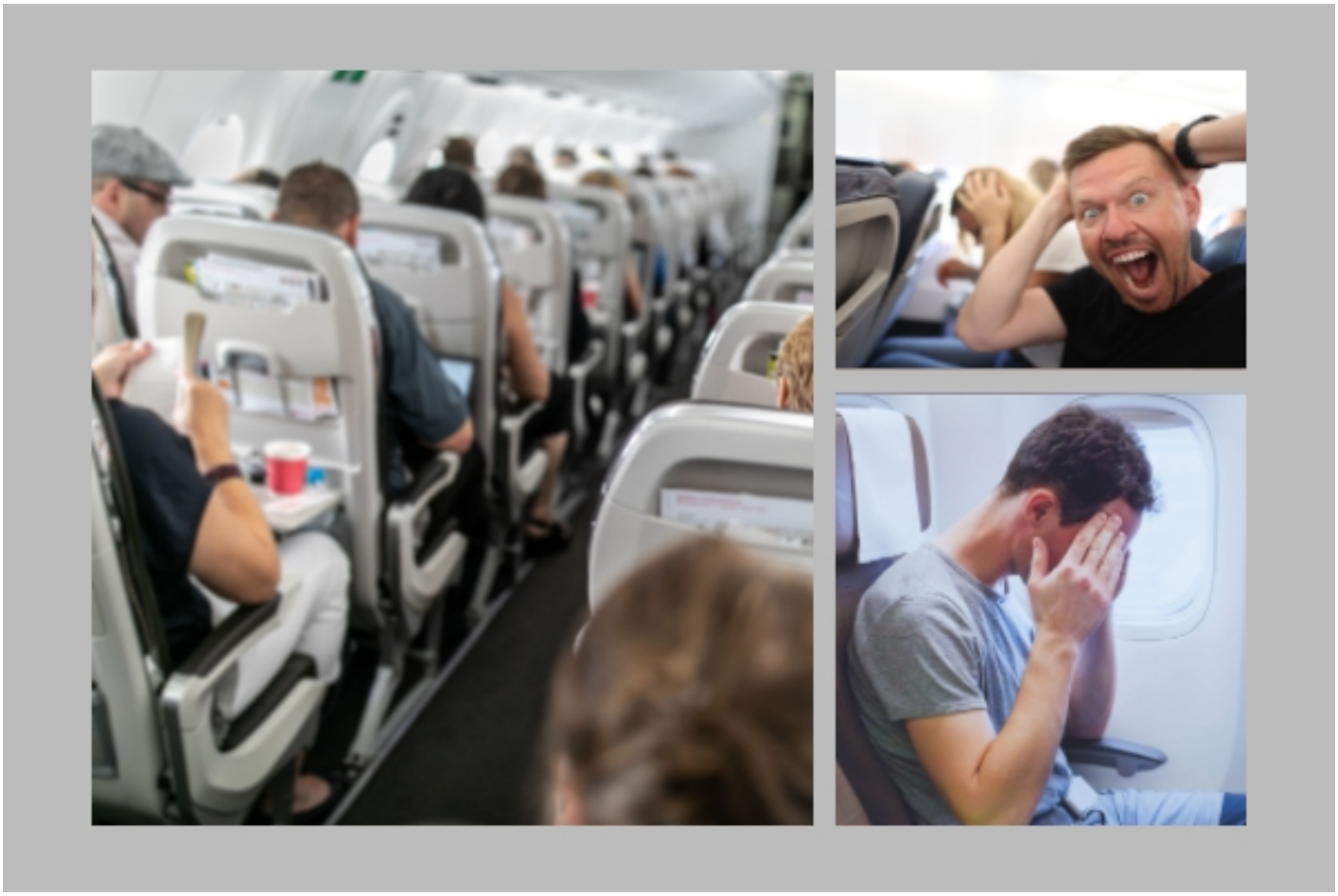
INCONVENIENT AIR TRAVEL - HOW CAN WE PREVENT UNRULY BEHAVIOR OF PASSENGERS

News / Airlines



Flight delays, flight diversions, and even emergency landings – all of that means inconvenience for travelers. In many cases the reason is far from weather conditions or issues with airline's punctuality. I am sure many of you witnessed that and know that the reason can be an alcohol. One more issue – drugs taken due health issues and by mistake or ignorance mixed with alcohol. All that creates unsafe environment for passengers, airport staff and airline crews. I decided to discuss on this situation, on reasons and potential solutions with Frederick Reitz, CEO and Founder of SAFEsky.

T.O. Rick, huge issue, I am sure everyone who travels by air at least once was confronted with this. My question may be naive, but what can we do to prevent these sometimes dramatic situations? Airport staff and cabin crew suffer enormously from this kind of passenger behavior.

F.R. So, we're going to make that our topic - how can we prevent. And medical issues. There was a guy, very sad, one man had a heart attack on an American Airlines flight and died. And the woman sued American Airlines because she said the gate agent should have saw that he was

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having a heart attack. I know your daughter is working at the airport, so imagine your daughter supposed to be a doctor now.

T.O. You are right. I hear these stories often from her and her colleagues. Example – check-in, handling agent clearly sees that the passengers is not good to fly. First in a very nice and polite way that they are trying to find a solution, maybe change for a later flight or other day. Often the passenger goes even to threaten airport agents to file a complaint and get them fired. How do you find the balance between being responsible identifying potentially risky passengers and keeping things smooth?

F.R. I think agents have to do exactly what they are trained to do. If the agent sees that the passenger is not good to fly, he will take actions. If they're not aware of it, then we need other people to make the agent aware that there could be an issue. And the airline must support the staff by giving them the proper training. We've been talking about that last week for example during the conference in London. Think about what happened some years ago. There was no training given when the mask rule was implemented. An e-mail was just sent out telling flight attendants that everybody must wear a mask. And airport agents were told, everybody must wear a mask. You need to teach them how to address the customers, how to properly tell them, and what are you going to do when they don't comply?

T.O. Is it mandatory for airport passenger handling agents to have such training?

F.R. Yes. It is regulated only for specific job duties in the Us, they are called ground security coordinators. They're the ones that are called to help with security issues. The most important thing is how you say things.

The other day I was boarding the flight for London. And there was a lady in front of me, who didn't speak good English. The agent said - can you consolidate your bags? She started to explainthis is my purse, my carry on… The agent answered – so, that's a no, step over there! That was terrible. She was just explaining what she had. All she had to do was put the purse inside her littlecarry-on bag. But the agent just right away said, no, that's a no.Step over there. So, they wanted to check her suitcase because she had a purse and a little backpack and a bag. The key is you have to know how to talk to people. You have to avoid talking in a threatening and demanding way.

T.O. Where can you get such training?

F.R. You can hire SAFEsky, we will be happy to come and train you!

T.O. Believe me I will write this down!

F.R. This is what we do! We teach people! The problem, airlines do not want to invest in training, it means extra money. It is a problem everywhere.

T.O. Is there a specific EU or USA regulation saying that passenger handling agents should have that kind of training for example once each 6 months?

F.R. Honestly, I don't know. Some agents have been working for decades and their level of services let's say still is on the level of some years if not decades back. Poor habits of the knowledge of communication, hiw to properly addressing people. We recently saw this in New-York at the customs line. The staff directing the lines were very rude and abrupt and not professional.And that's really on the obligation of the employer, be it an airline,an airport or whatever, that they have to give people. There's no regulation, but why wouldn't you want to give

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good service? That's going to be the difference between your airport and somebody else. Your airline and another airline.

T.O. Another question I have for you - is it true that the effect of alcohol doubles once in altitude? Reasons can be different: pre-flight alcohol consumption, accessibility of alcohol or just lack of awareness. The problem is whatever the reason, the consequences can be significant: Crew safety, passenger safety, disruption to flight operations…

F.R. Let's say it affects people differently. Just because the cabin is pressurized at 10,000ft. If somebody's not used to 10,000ft, it could affect them a lot. Somebody that's under the influence of alcohol or drugs could feel it differently than somebody else who's healthier in better shape. There was an incident that I will share with you for reference, where a kid went crazy on a flight in Europe, 21-year-old, and he was drunk and he violent and crew had to restrain him. When the police got on board, they found out that he had gotten a text mid-flight from his girlfriend that she broke up with him. It's not just the alcohol. What happened was also an emotional issue. Think about people that lose a loved one and get on a plane and they're going to the funeral, they're drinking because they're depressed. We need to look at the entirety of the situation, what's causing them to drink or medicate themselves. But that's also lack of education on mixing alcohol and drugs.

T.O. We are back to square one. We must educate, to explain again and again. I've recently seen a lot of frequent flyers who are acting like "I Know everything". In fact, sometimes they are making so silly, stupid mistakes thinking that they know pretty much everything. Maybe we need to come together, with airlines, associations of airline, airports, to proceed with massive campaigns? "We love you flying with us, but here are some basic things to remember". Passenger behavior campaigns – learn how to become a good flyer.

F.R. Let's do best airline passenger guidelines. How to be the best and the most welcome passenger for airlines. I hate to reward bad behavior. But maybe we should reward good behavior. If you help crew members, it is up to airline to identify the passenger who did help.

Maybe people will remember that being nice or paying attention to what happens can pay off. Example: I was on a flight; I always sit in the aisle for security reasons. And a mother brought her daughter up and said OKAY, there's your seat. Which was between me and somebody else. And she goes I'll be in row 22. And I said, oh, no, you sit here, you sit by your daughter. When I landed, the flight attendants had turned my name in, and I got 5000 extra miles for customer service.

T.O. Let's come all together: airlines, regulatory authorities, airports, different aviation industry actors. Let's proceed with pre-flight awareness campaigns! Simple fact of identifying causes, understanding consequences, and working on preventive measures, we can significantly improve safety and security of air travel. Let's work all together passenger's education and more pleasant flying experience for all!

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