

Spirit Magazine: Colleen's Corner

“Delivering Proactive Customer Service”

MARCH 2008

Time dictates every aspect of the airline industry. From the reservations process to the flight length, your wait at baggage claim, and your trip from the airport to your final destination, the clock is ticking. When things go awry, our internal clocks start to keep track. That's why we created the Proactive Customer Service Communications Team.

Our goal is to solve a problem when it happens, and we empower and encourage our Frontline Employees to take the necessary steps to resolve the situation. There are times, however, when an entire airplane full of Customers may encounter a particularly stressful or very inconvenient situation. That's when our Proactive Customer Service Communications Team springs into action. This group of just four Employees tracks the Customer “pulse” of our entire operation.

Way back at the beginning, the folks on my staff met daily with representatives from our operating departments to determine when we needed to send a letter of apology to every Customer on a flight. Our goal was (and remains!) to have that letter in the Customer's hand within 48 hours. But this was just an interim step until I could find an Employee with extensive airport experience and great writing skills to “own” this project.

My quest paid off when I found Fred Taylor. Along the way, Fred's one-man duties evolved into a Team of four. While the Team still writes to Customers on flights with unusual circumstances, it has streamlined the process and greatly expanded the criteria for sending these letters. This group is also part of our proactive Customer Service efforts in other equally challenging circumstances. For example, this Team—along with Customer Relations, Reservations, and all our operating departments—helped develop our reaccommodation plan for airports impacted by or under the threat of hurricanes, blizzards, or other disruptive acts of Mother Nature. This plan allows Customers to make alternative travel arrangements at no additional cost. When these kind of events strike, the Proactive Customer Service Communications Team provides information about how our Customers are affected to all departments involved, our codeshare partner ATA Airlines, and to Customers through advisories on southwest.com. Other more specialized proactive Customer communications also fall under this group's umbrella.

- Our Proactive Customer Service Communications Team meets—either in person or by phone—with representatives from all operating departments twice a day at 9 a.m. and 3:30 p.m. seven days a week. At these

- meetings, they review the current operating status of the airline and discuss the potential impact of upcoming forecasted weather.
- During the week, an additional, extended morning meeting includes a thorough recap of the preceding day's operation. In keeping with airline tradition of using acronyms, this Morning Overview Meeting is shortened to M.O.M. Who else gets to meet with Mom every business day?
 - Our Proactive Customer Service efforts generate extremely positive comments from our Customers and the media.

Fred's Team is truly bilingual in an airline kind of way—the foursome translates the specialized jargon of our operational side into plain English that you can understand. I am very proud of how this group has turned our vision into reality. But there's more to come; we're always working on improvement.

Welcome Aboard! Colleen Barrett President, Southwest Airlines