

“Winning Our Employees Back”

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“... the employees are witnessing that accountability is a one-way street. As pilots are disciplined harshly and covertly for minor infractions, has anyone in senior management ever taken responsibility for anything negative?”

The pilots received a letter addressed to all Customer Service, Maintenance, Flight, Inflight, and Operations personnel addressing the “winning our customers back” issue. We continue to be amazed at the leadership style of this corporation and to read what the authors profess it will take for this Company to be successful.

The letter reviews the recent history of our on-time performance and implies that “hard work” and a “focus” on our on-time performance will bring our customers back because that’s what made us on time in the past. This Company can close the passenger door an hour before departure, but until management gets some glimpse of how to motivate human beings, we will never win our customers back. They may fly us because they have little choice, but return on their own volition they will not.

The authors acknowledge that “as a team, we will win back our customers.” Teams, however, are not built through fear and intimidation. Unfortunately, these are the management techniques of choice at our Company. The examples are numerous and spread across all departments from the unjust termination of pilots, to the job threats of agents relative to on-time performance, and the numerous and repetitive grievance and scheduling abuses that take place daily for both pilots and flight attendants. This management group has made a culture choice. Management can talk all they want about teams, but the truth is that we employees do not care what they say; we care what they do. And what they do is to use fear and intimidation to motivate the people of a largely unsupervised workforce in a service-

intensive industry. What a recipe for success. Our customers are far from oblivious to this fact, the truth being borne out by our bottom line.

Don’t we love to emulate the successful when it’s convenient, though. During contract negotiations, as the pilots were repeatedly bashed in the press by our senior management’s public negotiations, we were happy to follow the cost structure lead of industry darling Southwest to the tune of MetroJet—a joke of a competitive response since the pilots were the only capitulators. Conveniently, however, emulating the true source of Southwest’s success has eluded this management. Kelleher knows how to motivate and his company is wildly successful.

Things have changed since the “hard work” and “focus” management’s letter asks for has resolved problems here. Even those who initially had faith in this management team have now witnessed too much, and a growing number are now among those thoroughly disgusted.

But management’s archaic tactics continue under the guise of the buzzword “accountability.” However, the employees are witnessing that accountability is a one-way street. As pilots are disciplined harshly and covertly for minor infractions, has anyone in senior management ever taken responsibility for anything negative? We know they are the first to pat themselves on the back with monetary overcompensation. Rather, they falsely blame employee negotiations for such things as the maintenance hangar fiasco, an event that has literally paralyzed this Company.



These techniques cost money. Every day, all day, every flight—the lack of motivated employees costs this Company money. We will not win our customers back as long as the motivational problem continues.

Rather than the fellow signatories of the “Winning Our Customers Back” letter advocating “hard work” and “focus” with respect to the on-time issue, we suggest management look in the mirror at their own performance. And then look out the window and see how many Southwest airplanes are on the ramp. How about some “hard work,” “focus,” and accountability

from management on the issue of non-performance in the employee motivation department? Not one pilot wants for coddling. Motivation is enhanced by respect for accomplishment, absent the qualifier that we employees all are too expensive.

When we are motivated to do so is when we will win our customers back. And the motivation will not happen through fear and intimidation.



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