

# Discipline



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Lately, there has been a noticeable increase in discipline being meted out by your local Chief Pilot's office. What is most alarming to me is the *severity* of the punishment that is being handed down. In the past two months, *four* pilots have received 15-day suspensions. Fifteen days is a lot! For a Group II Captain, you are talking about an \$8,000 fine. This is not chump change.

Two of the cases boil down to "he said-she said" events. Distressingly, the Company has come down on the side of a gate agent in one instance and a passenger in another, rather than accept the word of a Captain with a long, unblemished service record with this corporation. That alone is incredible. Compound it with an overly severe penalty, and it all adds up to more work for your Grievance Committee.

It also appears that the Company is signaling an end to "progressive" discipline. For years, the Company had adhered to the basic tenets of progressive discipline, the theory behind which is to modify behavior. If the Company truly believed these four were wrong, could they not have achieved their goal (modifying behavior) with a letter of warning? Sure, they could have! If the event happens again, *then* you would whack the wallet.

Unless, of course, modifying employee behavior is not all you are after . . . .

No doubt the Company is sending a message here. I don't like to carry the Company's water, but I feel it necessary to inform you of these situations.

For now, I advise all of you to ensure that if you are involved in any incident of confrontation, make sure you have witnesses who will back you up. To have a passenger/gate agent's *uncorroborated* story result in a 15-day suspension of two good Captains is a travesty! The Company is *not on your side*—so conduct yourself accordingly.

## Arbitration

The *Last Trip Protection versus Vacation* arbitration went very well in July. We spent two days demonstrating a substantial past practice that is in our favor. The Company presented their case on September 5, and a decision should be known by the holidays.

Amazingly, this case simply boils down to a quality of life issue. Do you have to protect a trip on the 18<sup>th</sup> when vacation covers your originally awarded last trip in your line? The Company says "yes," which demonstrates their desire to have as much power over your lives as possible! This time period is hardly ever crucial to the Company, as most coverage problems occur at the end of a month. Would it kill the Company to let you roll on the A/I list, be out of here by the 12<sup>th</sup>, and enjoy a greater amount of contiguous time off? Of course not! Additionally, they *did* allow this practice until 1997. Why would they push something as trivial as this all the way to arbitration? And why would they change the way they did it in the first place?

Because they can. In the last 10 years, I have witnessed numerous examples of a sudden change in how the Company deals with pilots.

*“ . . . I advise all of you to ensure that if you are involved in any incident of confrontation, make sure you have witnesses who will back you up. ”*

*“Now, all of the flexibility is with the Company. You can’t fly into days off anymore (except one), but the Company can take every one away.”*

This change is not communicated to ALPA beforehand. Management’s strategy is to:

1. Take it (a plus for the Company),
2. If ALPA doesn’t complain, then they got it for free (a plus for the Company),
3. If ALPA does complain, then drag it out through the cumbersome grievance process. In the meantime, they enjoy the fruits of their theft (a plus for the Company),
4. Maybe ALPA will concede something to get it back. The Company usually does this by floating, “We’ll see this your way if you give us this piece” (a plus for the Company),
5. If it goes to arbitration, *maybe* the Company will win as arbitrators like to walk a fine line (a plus for the Company), or
6. Maybe ALPA wins (only an “equal” for ALPA—we got our peanut butter jar back!)

That was five “pluses” for them, and one “equal” for us. Where is the incentive to negotiate anything with us when stealing pays so well?

In this case, the Company wants as much control as possible. Throughout the years, we have seen the teeter-totter of flexibility shift dramatically toward the Company.

The Reserve System is an excellent example. Reserves used to have a lot of flexibility to fly

when they wanted to—and they *did* fly. Priority of Trip Assignment (POTA) was rare.

Now, all of the flexibility is with the Company. You can’t fly into days off anymore (except one), but the Company can *take every one away*. You get to pull Reserve as an “R” from your home outside of domicile? Ha! The Company can transition you to “S” *every day* of the month. They can, with the loopholes that they demanded for *rare* instances (so they said in negotiations), turn every Reserve into an in-domicile Short Call Reserve, with no seniority for quick call trips, who is unable to make any adjustments to his/her schedule.

And now nobody wants to fly. This system is the poster child for “be careful what you ask for because you just might get it.” They have *all* the flexibility—you have virtually none. The result has been the transformation of a highly motivated workforce into a group of people who now accept that “guarantee” is as good as it gets so why bother hustling?

It was better 15 years ago for everyone. It really was.

Finally, I don’t see them doing us any favors, so . . . .

