

## World Class Service :: The Ultimate Difference

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“World Class Service” may be greatest difference between you and your competitors. But, “World Class Service” is a self-anointed label that is often misapplied... even in the ethereal arena of business aviation. Maybe this is because, “in the land of the blind, the one eyed man is king.” In other words, the most obvious alternative to business aviation, the airlines, continues to lower customers’ expectations... and the service performance hurdle. Your passengers are so elated to escape the chaos of commercial carriers that you can easily be lulled into believing their delight is your fault. Maybe your customers’ delight is your fault... and maybe it isn’t.

### Two Extreme Examples of World Class Service

“We can really nail World Class Customer Service because we can have complete control over everything the customer touches. This challenges us to come up with ways to meet and exceed our customers’ expectations,” states Lisa MacCartney, co-chair of the NBAA’s Shuttle Sub-Committee and the manager of a major mid-western company’s shuttle program.

Surprisingly, she takes what most passengers cherish, on-time performance and reliability, as givens. She says that, along with safety, these criteria are their base-lines for performance. Her department then focuses on service style and touch. “We don’t want the traveler to worry or be distracted from their business purpose. So, for us, service starts with the initial call or keystroke for the reservation. We are providing door-to-door hospitality. Therefore the entire realm of their experience is on our backs.”

“We deliberately give first-time travelers a special introduction to the process and experience. New travelers can access us through the company intranet or by phone. Then, our dispatchers identify them, engage them and host them through the experience, which includes door-to-door service. We have them park in our company secure parking area and provide ground transportation from the campus to the airport and from Teterboro to our New York City campus. As a result, the recent New York City subway scares have been a non-issue to our travelers,” Lisa continued.

Their touch processes are well thought through. “Crew familiarity with passengers’ names is important. It is one of the little things that enable us to differentiate ourselves from other options, like the airlines, fractional aircraft service providers, and jet card services.”

“In the end, we are a direct extension of our company’s branding efforts. This includes everything that is part of the trip experience; the food, aviation department clothing, etc. Our department’s members are briefed on the company’s initiatives, events and news. And crews share intelligence back to the aviation department to help us be



even more connected. In other words, we work hard at keeping the department immersed in the company's business," Lisa concluded.

Even though Lisa MacCartney's operation is a shuttle service, much of what she and her teams are doing can be applied to any high touch casual style aviation service organization. But what about a high style service environment?

The Drax Group's aviation department supports a very high net worth individual whose sense of style has its roots in upper class Europe. "We are in the 'Pleasing the Mrs. Business'", says George Adams, Director of Aviation. That sounds a bit open ended. It is meant to be. "It's about listening, interpreting and putting what she says, means and implies into delivering what she wants. We have become experts in what makes her happy and what does not." He refers to it as a highly invested relationship. It requires a lot intuition. But the department understands that as far as service goes, there are no limits – except legal and moral.

That kind of service has some interesting aspects to it. Who sets the service agenda, the crew or the passenger(s)? Many aviation organizations make the mistake of trying to establish the limits on service. But how can you meet or exceed their expectations if you guess what they want. Let your passengers (or your owner) tell you what they want. For instance, George has an agreement with The Mrs. He says, "I don't make any aesthetic decisions about the aircraft. She doesn't make any operational decisions. She has honored that agreement."

But could this elite style of service apply to your corporate aviation department? George believes it can and does, "There are a number of truly World Class Service aviation departments. There are as many, or more, who claim it and don't do it. The leaders of those aviation departments seem to treat their executive passengers as company employees rather than as high net worth individuals, which they typically are." Are you missing the mark by making assumptions about service?

### **What is World Service?**

Service has three key components: *scope*, *style* and *touch*.

*The scope* of your service is defined as the breadth of the time when you want your customer contact begins and ends. Many aviation departments describe their mission as to provide safe and efficient business aviation services. This is an operational focus that limits the roles and responsibilities of the aviation services team to an airport-to-airport scope. It is not World Class Service.

The scope of World Class Service is customer-centric. Like Lisa MacCartney's shuttle program, it is based on the customer experience. The scope of a passenger's trip begins with the reservation or scheduling process and ends with the payment of the last bill months after the trip. World Class business aviation services cover those events and everything in between.



*Service styles* have a range that can be described from High Class (i.e., champagne and caviar, Patton leather shoes, platinum-trim, etc.) to Casual (i.e., sodas and snacks, logo wear, brushed aluminum, etc.). Among World Class Service organizations *style* rarely changes quickly. Your customer defines the minimum *style* but you can rarely go wrong by taking it up at least one notch. For instance, The Kroger Company has evolved its corporate dress code to business casual. Even top management is normally tie-less. But Larry Clark, Kroger's Director of Aviation, has maintained a crew uniform policy that continues to include ties at all times. There are lots of reasons to take *style* up a notch, including professional appearance. But if you undershoot your passenger's expectations for *style* you are apt to make them uncomfortable or even reduce your image in their eyes. And they are likely to let you know you've missed the mark. Hit the mark and you've added value that cannot be matched.

*Service touch* describes the method of service delivery. It ranges from *high touch* (greet the passengers as they arrive, retrieve their bags from the car and place them onboard, take care of their cars for them, etc.) to *no touch*. The *style* of the *touch* must be in keeping with expectations, such as the greeting can be formal or casual. The level of *touch* is also defined by the passenger, on a situational basis. World Class Service providers are extremely agile in their delivery of *touch* because customers' needs vary dynamically from person to person and situation to situation.

*Service touch* endures throughout the entire experience. The fine dining industry has confirmed the diner's experience begins at first contact (*touch*) and ends with the last. That is why great restaurants refuse to have automated answering devices engaged during their business hours. Their clients expect a high *touch* experience and high *touch* is delivered by a warm human being, not a machine. That warm human voice is trained to get the patron's name right and to use it at least twice during the reservation process. This transmits a sense of both caring and care. The next *touch* opportunity is upon the diner's arrival. The best restaurants take over at the curb and control your experience until you pass that curb again on your way out. Many of us tend to see valets as an expensive intrusion. But someone seeking a high *style* high *touch* experience appreciates the comfort and ease a valet provides. Not only are you relieved of having to search for a remote parking space but you also have avoided the security risk that can exist in a dark and unpopulated area within a major city.

George Adams sums it up, "World Class Service is all about the personal aspects of caring for the passengers, their families and their guests."

### **Safety versus Service**

Years ago, when Jim Christiansen was interviewing with the Rockefellers for the role of president of their aviation business the subjects of safety and service came up. Jim seized the opportunity to manage expectations *and* passenger perceptions. Jim said he and his people would always put Safety above Service. Jim then emphasized his point by saying that the most important service he and his people could perform was, when it is absolutely necessary, to say, "No." They would say "No" whenever the assurance of safety infringed upon service preferences like departure times (during a



thunderstorm), airport selection (Aspen in foul weather at night), et cetera. Tragically, many people do not understand that message.

The following is a smattering of the choices aviation department leaders and their teams have made when they prostituted safety in favor for their versions of service. None of these events led to bent metal, but they easily could have:

- A two man cockpit crew deliberately endured a 27 hour duty day, without rest, in the name of “getting the job done”. The passenger was a very demanding chairman.
- The chief pilot and a junior first officer launched into icing conditions with one windshield panel heating unit inoperative. They had the good intention of getting the president and CEO of their company to his destination on schedule.
- The president of a charter company loaded his aircraft so far behind the aft CG that the autopilot couldn’t handle it. This was in response to the passengers declaring they had missed their airline flight and needed to be at a meeting first thing in the morning.

These kinds of crews errors are often made in the name of Service. They lead to an extremely important point about the challenges of misunderstanding the differences between Safety and Service. Dave Huntzinger, Ph.D., is Tag Aviation’s Director of Safety and Security. He has done some important research into safety failures. His analysis confirmed that 39% of the accidents during a recent period involved at least one intentional non-compliance with published procedures. He refers to these events as Procedural intentional Non-Compliance: PiNC (pronounced “pink”). Each of the examples cited above is a PiNC. Each of them significantly raised risks in the name of Service. It is my belief and concern that there are a huge number of PiNCs being committed each day because managers and crews are compromising Safety in an effort to deliver the wrong kinds of Service. The results of PiNCs can be devastating. For instance, service-sourced PiNCs may easily have been factors in the Houston Gulfstream runway undershoot accident, the Teterboro Challenger 600 off airport excursion, and the Aspen accident of a few years ago. The message is clear: Service-sourced PiNCs - Don’t you go there. Don’t let your people go there.

George Adams’ way of delivering the news of a service delay that is safety-based is low key and effective, “If I don’t want to go, you probably don’t want to go, either.”

So, if your passengers assume Safety is a given, then your remaining opportunity to make a difference in benefits is to enhance Service. Ah, and there in lies the rub. Service is not defined nor is it measured by you. Service is in the eye of the beholder; your passengers! The aviation organizations that get it are extraordinary. And they take extraordinary steps to make sure they get it right.



### **Actions to take - Getting Your People to Deliver World Class Service**

Becoming a World Class Service organization is not a result of luck or genetics. It comes from deliberate planning, preparation and performance – day in and day out.

It starts with a clear statement of what business you are in, like “We are in the ‘Pleasing the Mrs. Business’” or “...we are a direct extension of our company’s branding efforts.” Those statements of service intent make it much easier for your team’s members to understand the most effective approaches to service *scope*, *style* and *touch*.

Look at the scope of your aviation department’s services through your customer’s eyes. Is the trip experienced managed well from door-to-door or are they on their own until they get to the aircraft? Many aviation departments have conducted process mapping processes in an effort to enhance their operational performance. Consider mapping out the entire trip experience from the customer’s perspective. You may be surprised how many opportunities you discover to expand your service’s *scope* and *touch*.

An excellent hands-on example of applying customer process mapping is when Phil Rickert, retired Director of Aviation Services for Hillenbrand Industries routinely asks crews to show him how they prepare the aircraft for their passengers. They normally take him into the cabin to see what they have done. It typically includes the basics of a tidy cabin, stowed and folded seat belts, etc.

Phil then takes them back outside of the aircraft to a point about fifteen feet from the boarding steps. He challenges them to take off their crew caps and assume the persona of a passenger. He asks them to look at everything from this point all the way into the cabin as though they are the passenger. The results are eye opening. The boarding steps and entryway are suddenly seen in a different light. The scuffs on the kick plates on the steps become obvious. The woodwork and carpeting in the entryway is at eye level and their condition assumes a new degree of importance. Sitting in the lead passenger’s seat, and each of the other seats in turn, provides a new set of angles from which to inspect the condition of the aircraft (especially the windows and other surfaces that collect fingerprints, pen marks, etc.). Phil’s point is that customer service is hugely impacted by the passengers’ perceptions of the condition of the aircraft and crew.

Beyond customer process mapping, you can become an avid student of customer service. It is easy to identify when customer service goes wrong. We are all subjected to poor service ever day. Take note of when you are irked and make certain you and your flight department are not guilty of similar transgressions. But the real opportunity to learn about customer service is to look for what is being done well and right. The sources of great lessons can be surprising!

I recently had my first rotor roter medical exam (colonoscopy). My initial hint that this was going to be an unusual experience was when I checked in. The lady behind the counter looked me in the eye, popped a smile and said, “Hi! How may I help you?”



Over the next hour or so every person I came in contact with during the examination deliberately made eye contact, smiled, introduced themselves and carefully explained their role and tasks in terms that were easy to follow and reassuring. The doctor and staff in that office had deliberately considered the patient's perspective. They had adopted methods and training to make the best service impact possible.

And when you and your team members identify service opportunities you need to implement them. George Adams makes it easy for his people to perform. "I empower the Cabin Attendant to bring the service level to what he wants, which meets or exceeds the passenger's expectations. I let the Cabin Attendant have whatever he needs for tools. Early on the flight deck crew challenged this arrangement. They were looking at it from their perspective. I shifted that perspective. I explained to them why we have a cabin in the aircraft."

George's comments were not demeaning. He explains, "Most pilots are not highly emotionally intuitive or they tend to detune it. It takes a lot of personal introspection to understand yourself and others better." And if you don't understand your passengers, how can you effectively serve them?

"The current generation of aviation department leaders (Boomers) grew up believing the Check Yeager Swagger was the model of behavior. That is a barrier to their relationships with other crewmembers and passengers. The upcoming group of leaders may have different models that may be more open," concluded George.

George's observations reflect an important social dynamic common among flight crews. Jerry Dibble, Ph.D., says, "Our data base says that people who graduate from pilot to manager tend to be very direct, sequential, activity oriented and linear in their approach to things. When they get out to the plane they carry that same attitude in how they deal with their people and customers. They often approach customer service from the perspective of 'How do I get them to do what I want.' It is more effective to get them to take a customer-oriented perspective. This requires them to get into the customers' shoes. That is a rare skill for most aviation managers."

Lisa's department does it through a structured process. "We have quarterly aviation department meetings with guest speakers from the core enterprise. They present on topics that help us remain connected. In addition, we use music in the waiting room and on the aircraft that is the same as we have in our stores. We put literature about store openings and other corporate news information on the aircraft (like marketing materials). We have become a distribution point for a lot of company information. We touch every level of the organization," she said.

Customer-oriented thinking works. A very good example is Matt. Matt is the recently appointed director of aviation for a major company that also supports its founding family, some of the wealthiest people in the world. For nearly twenty years he had been subordinate (in the truest sense of the term) to an aviation director who had tightly held the reins and the relationships. At first there was concern that Matt would be unable to succeed because he had never been given the chance to demonstrate



his abilities. But with close mentoring and plenty of empowerment, he has really shined. He has the dedication, imagination and patience it takes. With those attributes, he has infused something within his department you could call it CRM, Customer-oriented Resource Management. He has become the leader of a World Class Service business.

So, is your aviation department in the “safe destinations” business or is it in the “customer service” business? The difference in job security and satisfaction comes from knowing you are ranked among the best at what you do. Whether you define it as high style or casual, high touch or no touch, all that counts is that you deliver “World Class Service”. It is the ultimate difference.