

chapter

1

Who Is Southwest Airlines?

You want an assigned what?

IF YOU ARE NOT FAMILIAR with Southwest Airlines, you'll need a little background to understand the bizarre revelations that will be divulged in the following chapters. Southwest is not your typical airline.

Like other airlines they have planes, you buy a ticket, wait in line, check-in your bag, wait in line, board, wait in line. Nevertheless, the similarities end with the typical airline's way of doing business and begin with the unique conduct of Southwest employees. Oh, yeah, First Class seating

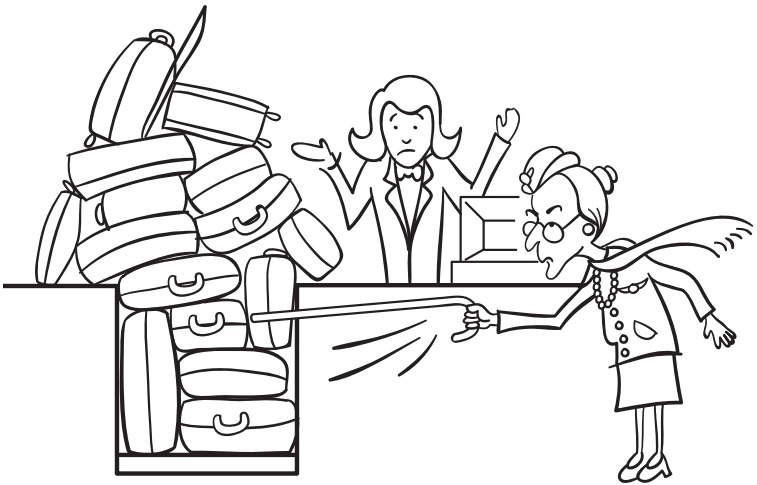
and in-flight meals—forget it! (See Chapter 2 on how to prepare for battle.)

They ask you to check-in at the gate an hour before your flight leaves. Once you reach the gate, you may have to wait in line if you weren't smart enough to check-in by means of the speedier methods Southwest offers. Passengers are not just checking in, they are essentially jockeying for position to get the best seat. Seats are "assigned" (ha, ha) on a first-come – first-seated basis. If you are first in line, you get a card with a big letter A. If you are last in line, you get a card with the letter C, which doesn't fill you with LUV, because you can bet a letter C seat wouldn't make your momma proud.

Like so many things in life, location is very important! Either you come early for front line position or you use some dirty, sneaky, conniving technique to advance to the front. (See Chapter 3 for Line Advancement techniques.)

Once you have been assigned a letter, you now wait for the usual, not sure when, boarding call (remember—seats are not assigned). As the plane pulls up to the gate, the game begins. The gate gal proudly announces to anxiously waiting passengers, "For your convenience Southwest offers "OPEN" seating." Yes, it's a wide open boarding free for all, but passenger antics create very little convenience for one another. OPEN is another one of those secret company code words employees learned in their LUV passenger training.

**Irma checks her bags,
takes the seat she wants**



Irma was always firm, but fair with people. Here she was told she may only check-in three bags. After thirty minutes of the "I Don't Think So Technique," she had no difficulty checking in all fifteen bags.

Employees enjoy this one, because they know it stands for “**O**nly the **P**ushy **E**nter **N**ow.”

Southwest pioneered the OPEN seating mad rush with the theory that, “We created a *level playing field*, so let them fight it out.” If you assign seats like everyone else, there’s little desire for passengers to perform. This way, the pressure for a good seat starts the day the ticket is bought. The theory supports the employee entertainment program, as passengers are in the competitive spirit before they ever get to the airport. By the time they get to the gate, they are pumped! Even the last person to make a reservation (and probably pays more) can battle fairly for a good seat. The system insures a lively group because everyone gets to play. The thrill of victory pulsates through passenger veins!

I won’t even dignify the pre-boarding process. I find the topic irritating, primarily because you can be in the “A group,” yet eighty, quite healthy looking pre-boards are lined up ahead of you. (Look somewhere in Chapter 4).

Now, having an A card doesn’t mean you get on first. It means you get to board with the first group of 40 or so people. Following the boarding announcement, cardholders sprint to the gate to secure front positions. The “boarding” (moo, moo) continues with the B, then finally the C group, until all the cattle have been herded on board.



Caution It is important to know that it is possible to be in the A group and be the forty-fifth passenger to board or be in the B group and be the forty-sixth to board. (See Chapter 4 for Herd Advancement techniques.)

Okay, finally you are lined up in the jetway, waiting to board, hoping to get a good seat. But wait! What about the all the carry-on junk you are taking to Grandma's house? What if there is not overhead bin space left? Oh, man, it's always something! (See Chapter 5 for Overhead Techniques For Swine.)

Bags are stowed, now to find a seat. If you were in the A group, you may choose from a selection of fine seating. If you hit the C group, you probably get your choice of middle and restroom area seats. In any case, the game doesn't end merely because you got the seat you want.

Being in the A or B group, you may have choice "seating" (what, me move?), but will someone be sitting next to you? As people parade down the aisle, they scope out their final resting place. You must protect your area! You don't want anyone sitting next to you. If the plane is one person short of full – that open seat belongs next to you! You can create your own First Class section. (See Chapter 6 for techniques in Seat and Row Management.)

You should have the seat, space and comfort you deserve. But what happens when the flight is full and you have no place to rest your arms? How uncivilized! You are entitled to the entire armrest, both of them! (See Chapter 7 for the rules of Elbow Etiquette.)

Southwest Airlines is nuts! It's all about the Peanut. The nut that made Southwest famous. The true power of the peanut is revealed. (See Chapter 8 to learn Mind Control).

Like every other airline, when all have been seated, the plane eventually takes off. But on Southwest, there are no meals, unless you consider peanuts and orange fish-shaped things fine dining. The soda is free, but a cold stiff one costs you. For the price of a ticket, you deserve all the free drinks, peanuts and fishies you want. (See Chapter 9 for Flight Attendant Manipulation techniques to get all the free stuff you want.)

In summary, here is the passenger war game! Move up in the check-in line, get on board early to get the seat you deserve. Keep the seats next to you unoccupied so you can stretch out and enjoy the flight. Then sit back and have a cold one on Southwest.

Having enjoyed a first-class flight is not to imply that you have successfully beat the system. Not only do you have to get the seat and service you want, but you must also exit the plane on

your terms, as well. (See Chapter 10 to move the slugs along their merry way.)

You will not be the only passenger that has learned these unique travel skills. There is some top-notch talent out there, so you'll need to discipline yourself, work hard and practice diligently. This flight manual is the result of watching and learning from the best performers in the business. (See Chapter 11 to enjoy the exploits of your fellow passengers.)

Finally, once you have gained boarding expertise, you will want the recognition you have rightfully earned. Your status as a boarding specialist needs to be documented. Flash your card and watch passengers and employees alike back off and give you room to operate. (See Chapter 12 to get your designation.)

Remember, there are those who will work against you. If you use the techniques properly, passengers cannot gain an advantage over you; employees will not laugh at you. "Battle the Cattle" and win the game!



Note If you end up in the C group, maybe you did not practice your techniques. Or, as you can see from the quote below, they want all passengers to be C's, because the company's first concern is employee entertainment.



Listen up,

"You want an assigned seat? Commit murder in Texas! Myself, I get the seat I want, where I want and when I want! Don't just stand there bellyachin. Sit down and shut up! Americans love the freedom of choice. Go ahead and choose, but don't tread on me! This is the only airline that doesn't whine at me about sittin in a seat some dummy picked for me. I ain't in first grade. Nobody "assigns" me a seat!

Lots' a Luck,

Irma

"WE CALL OUR PASSENGERS CUSTOMERS WITH A CAPITAL C, BUT WE ALSO SAY THAT OUR EMPLOYEES ARE OUR FIRST CUSTOMER."

—SOUTIONS MAGAZINE, WINTER 2002

QUOTE BY COLLEEN BARRETT, PRESIDENT SOUTHWEST AIRLINES