TRANSED 2012 – SENSITIVITY TRAINING – THE KEY TO ENHANCING THE COMMERCIAL AIRCRAFT TRAVEL EXPERIENCE

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Purpose of the Study

The purpose is to demonstrate the importance of sensitivity training to enhance the experience of the elderly or persons with disabilities when travelling on commercial airlines.

Methodology

Rather than discuss the matter in conceptual terms this paper is based on factual and demonstrable training practices that are making a difference to travellers with disabilities today. Note – at WestJet, we call our ‘passengers’ ‘guests’ so you will see both terms used throughout the paper.

Some points discussed include:

- Leading edge sensitivity training – giving employees the best tools to respond to the needs of guests with disabilities through incorporating input from focus groups and employees and non-employees with special needs for the development of effective sensitivity training material.
- Building a comprehensive sensitivity training program that covers our World Class Guest Experience philosophy to general awareness, terminology & etiquette, body mechanics and proper lifting techniques including sections on the variety of disabilities and their unique attributes.
- Ensuring employees are well trained and educated and ensuring guests who are disabled are as aware of the policies and procedures as possible before flying generates a host of mutually beneficial outcomes including:
  - accommodation of the guest’s unique needs;
  - meeting the guest’s expectations;
  - reducing the possibility of injuries to the employee or the guest;
  - reducing boarding and disembarking delays;
  - making the employee’s work easier and more rewarding;
  - satisfying regulatory requirements, and;
  - providing a world class guest experience.
- Examples where training and procedures have been developed to enhance the experience of the guest traveling by air include:
  - registration at the check-in counter;
  - proceeding to the boarding area;
  - boarding and deplaning;
  - stowing and retrieving baggage;
  - moving to and from an aircraft washroom; and;
  - proceeding to the general public area or to a representative of another air carrier.
- Best Practices Analysis – what are our industry partners doing that works, makes sense, or is simply the right thing to do.
Expected Results

The expected result is to compel the audience to truly understand the importance of what an effective sensitivity training program can do to take good intentions and transform them into a consistently robust, pleasant, efficient, respectful and meaningful experience for persons with disabilities travelling via commercial airlines.

Through this dialogue I hope to come up with even more innovative and inspiring conversations about sensitivity training to achieve continuous improvement.

Conclusion

Through open and candid dialogue with guests with disabilities and a genuine desire to enhance the travel experience for guests with disabilities, combined with an effective sensitivity training program delivered through all levels of the organization, WestJet believes the travel experience for the elderly and for guests with disabilities can be significantly enhanced.

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