

May 11, 2014

Doug Parker - CEO American Airlines  
4333 Amon Carter Blvd  
Fort Worth, TX 76155

Dear Mr. Parker,

I see that you graduated from Albion in 1984. You must be a Michigander. Maybe you participated in Close Up...that's what this trip was all about. I trust that you will take very seriously the events that I have documented below.

My name is Bob Wood. I am a 56 year old teacher at Oakridge High School, in Muskegon. I travel often...domestic and international. On May 9, 2014 I was returning from Washington D.C. with ten high school students (on group travel booked in February) Flight #3820 from Reagan National to Detroit. The flight was scheduled to leave at 5:25 PM. We were at the US Airways check in a full hour and a half prior to departure.

What ensued was one of the most unprofessional and chaotic check in experiences I've ever been involved with. By the time the flight departed three of us had been left behind, one was in tears arriving in a shuttle bus moments before the plane doors closed, seven kids were on the plane without a chaperone, and parents back in Michigan were distraught over the possible outcome as it unfolded. All of this played out in real time on high school students' smart phones. None of it was necessary, had the US Air check desk done their job properly. I will document the experience below. I expect your offices to do a thorough investigation. And at least three of us...those left behind deserve a ticket refund. I would say the others deserve an explanation, as do all the parents involved.

As I said we arrived plenty early to make the departure. However, it was obvious from the onset that we were not a priority for check in desk personnel. We went through the line to the group sales counter where we stood unattended for probably ten minutes. Attendants looked our way, but continued to call for others in line to come forth. I've traveled in groups often. Normally at check in, if we have bags to check, attendants have preferred we do so as a group. I would assume that is why they have a sign that says "group check in" I've never, when traveling with a group of kids, been ignored so thoroughly, as we were on this occasion.

Once we were attended to, the process was painfully slow. Our attendant disappeared for awhile and it wasn't until I got involved and reminded the agents that we had a flight to catch that our tickets were finally printed and handed over. By now, we've been waiting about twenty minutes. Our tickets did not have seat assignments printed on the boarding pass. I thought that odd, but we still had time to make our flight. Seven of us, myself included, were not checking luggage. I had the six kids who were not checking luggage hustle over to the Boarding Gate. I stayed with the checkers.

An attendant named Harsha provided us the tickets and then pointed for us to go to the other end of the desks - some ten or fifteen slots down. Had he taken care of us then and there things would've worked fine. However, now the lines were beginning to get deep and the attendants went back to ignoring us. So we dragged our bags to the other end of the ticket counter and began the self-check in process for those with bags. I've done this often. The process was not working - the kids check in

procedure on the computer was continually bringing them back to the beginning screen. And they were doing it correctly. I asked for help...everybody was busy. I began to demand help, because time was running short.

It became obvious to me at this time that there was some dissension in the ranks of the attendants. One female attendant who was attempting to direct people from lines to the self check in was overwhelmed with questions. Agents at windows were engaged. There was nobody to help us fix the situation. And the clock ticked. Finally she asked if she could help. We told her that we were sent all the way down to this end by Harsha. She called down to him...he called back that he had taken care of us. Which made me angry - because he had not taken care of us at all. He had just pushed us off on the other end of the line to somebody else. I marched down to his window and demanded that he come down and fix this thing - because we were now in danger of missing the flight. He came down...and this probably 35 minutes into the process was the first time we had become a priority for anybody at the check in desks.

It was obvious to me and another attendant that the students were working the machines properly but that the system was glitched. So individual agents finally checked the kids bags separately. One of the four kids ran off to the Boarding gate. Meanwhile the female attendant who was directing lines, the first person to even look our way, turned my ticket over, showed me the www. contact for customer relations, and told me, "Report him to customer relations. He does this to us all the time." She was referring to Harsha.

As this was going on...and it was becoming evident that the group of minor students whom I was responsible to a School Board, a Superintendent, and ten sets of parents was going to be split on the flight, I asked "this is not working, why can't we just run our bags over to the Boarding gate and hand check them." That's happened before. In fact many of our bags were ultimately hand checked at the Boarding gate. The answer was emphatically NO...that's not procedure.

Meanwhile Shannon Depender and Shannin Albright were on the final steps of the bag check process. They ran their bags over to check in and dropped them. However we still had problems. Shannon Depender paid for her bag with a \$50 bill. Nobody had change. We stood and waited a full ten minutes while the attendant who took the \$50 disappeared into the back and I would assume looked for \$25 cash. It was obvious by the time he returned with \$25 that we were stuck in DC.

Four of us ran together to the security check, where we got our final surprise. One of the three girls' boarding passes had been marked for the fast security check in. The others, mine included were marked for the slow security check. She made it; we didn't it.

And the flight took off without Shannon, Shannin, and I.

Now we were left with finding a fix. However, flights were all booked for the night. At US Air Express we spoke with the first individual of the day who was professional and calm and helpful. I truly appreciate the attitude and effort of Rahel T Haile. She booked us on a morning flight to Detroit. And while this was all nice, we still had a huge problem. I had eight kids with no chaperone on a plane headed to Detroit. Parents were calling, some were on the road to Detroit, some were home worrying, one was in tears. And the students on the plane were out of cell coverage.

This chaos continued at the US Air Express management office downstairs. We did not get much help for awhile. We needed a hotel for the night. They could not release a voucher for the minors. Shannon Depender's mother was rightfully irate on the phone about that and asked to speak to the attendant. The attendant refused to speak to her. So Shannon had to serve as a go-between. That was awkward. Meanwhile, parents who had found out about what was happening started ringing me...wondering what was going on. I asked that Air Express attendant to provide escort in Detroit, for my students to their parents in baggage claim. I was told, "We will ask, but we cannot promise it." Which didn't make any sense at all to me, since the problem was entirely of US Air's making and that parents were fully concerned. At one point I was asked, "If you were so worried about the students taking the flight without a chaperone, why didn't you just tell them not to board." To which I responded, "and then what,? we'd have ten minors that would not have a hotel room for the night." The beginning of this process was looking as disorganized as what happened at the original check in until Corey Brown joined us.

Corey was professional, calm, and effective. After about a forty minutes - he was able to find us a late flight to Detroit. We would arrive in Detroit about midnight, which would get us into Muskegon by 3:30 AM. After a long discussion he provided myself and Shannon and Shannin each a \$200 voucher. The two girls called their mothers and asked what they should do. For each, the mothers requested a refund. The girls are minors and they will not fly on alone...particularly after this experience. Corey explained that he wasn't at liberty to do so, but encouraged us to write to Customer Relations. Also, after he found out about the nature of the check in, he set out to do his own investigation, and told me that the flight had been overbooked by ten to sixteen seats. He said, "That just does not happen. Something was wrong."

And so we took our vouchers, I called worried parents and explained the situation. Thankfully when the plane landed in Detroit, an adult who was sitting with one of my students, he identified himself to me on his cell as a Federal government employee, promised to escort the kids. I found out later he also offered to buy them food if they were hungry. Things worked out in the end...thanks to he, and to Corey, and to Rahel.

But this process was a MESS. Parents were scared. Students were confused; some people were crying. We were all ignored, pass around, and mishandled by US Airways agents.

At the end of the experience these things need to be remembered...

- \* You don't break up a group of ten minors traveling together without just cause.
- \* You don't ignore a group of ten minors who have stood in line and are waiting at the group check in for fifteen minutes.
- \* You don't issues boarding passes with no seat numbers.
- \* You don't overbook a flight by sixteen seats.
- \* You don't (Harsha) dump the ten minors off to the other side of check in.
- \* You don't (Harsha) claim you've helped them when you dumped them off to the other side of the check in.

- \* You don't take cash for bags if you don't have cash for change.
- \* You don't take ten minutes to find \$25 cash when the traveler is late.
- \* You don't "after you know they are late," send one through fast check and three through slow check in, thus breaking the group travel into three parts.
- \* You don't refuse to talk to a worried mother.
- \* You don't suggest as an answer that a chaperone hold eight minors off of a flight, when you know that you can't issue a single hotel voucher for two minors who have already missed the flight.
- \* You don't 'not ensure' an escort at the other end, when all of problems that have occurred are because of your company's lack of efficiency

**\* You don't live by any other mantra than "the customer is always right."**

I have have few requests.

I want to hear how this full investigation, that Corey talked about, comes out. I would also like Shannin Albright (A7BI3F) and Shannon Depender (A7BLVN) and myself to receive cash instead of travel vouchers. We will gladly return our vouchers. I would also like a letter of explanation for the events of May 9, that I can provide to my School Board, my Superintendent, and my parents, for the chaos that ensued.

Finally, please make sure that Corey Brown and Rahel T. Haile are noted for their professional service in this endeavor.

Thank you for your assistance in this matter. I expect to hear back from you soon.

Sincerely,

Bob Wood - [bobwoodmsu@gmail.com](mailto:bobwoodmsu@gmail.com) / 616-402-8668  
 Oakridge High School  
 5493 East Hall Road  
 Muskegon, MI 49442

cc...

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 US Airways Customer Service