

Alternate Modes

By Bob Osgoodby

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When choosing a company to do business with, we all agree that customer service is high on our list of priorities. The following relates some types of practices a business should definitely avoid.

Recently, we flew from Newark to West Palm Beach on business, and stayed a few extra days to visit with our daughter. Since this was the first time we flew since 9/11, we didn't know what to expect, so we allowed plenty of time before the flight.

We were pleasantly surprised that we could check in, and get our boarding pass at curbside. We then headed directly to security to be screened prior to boarding. Apparently my wife Sue's purse failed the X-ray check, as they put it through several times. While short of a body cavity search, they did put her through an extensive check. Taking her purse then to a different machine, they wiped it with a cloth, and then tested the cloth. They didn't make her open the purse, which I found strange, and offered no explanation of what they were doing, or why.

While I recognize that the security guards are not direct employees of the individual airlines, they should insist that these people are at least courteous. Those with a bad attitude make flying even more onerous.

We finally got through security, and had some time to wait before the flight, so we decided to get some lunch. We ordered, and while they gave us a fork, they didn't give us a knife to cut the meat. I inquired and was told that no knives were allowed in the airport or on a plane. OK, I thought but wondered how I could injure someone with one of those small plastic knives with a rounded tip - the fork would be far more dangerous.

We finally got on the plane and they served what they liberally called a snack". It was about the size of a golf ball, and had the consistency (and in my opinion the taste) of dried mud. Unable to cut it, because of the perceived danger a small plastic knife would pose, we had to pry it apart with our fingers. One taste however, and we were glad we had something to eat at the airport.

We also ordered a drink, and much to my surprise, the stirrer was about 7 inches long, made out of stiff plastic with a point as sharp as an ice pick. What a weapon!

I seriously doubt if I could kill or even threaten someone with the prohibited small plastic knife. It would probably take a half an hour or so to kill someone, and they would have to cooperate. If someone tried to threaten me with one, I might die of laughter.

You could however easily kill someone with the drink stirrer they provided, with a jab in the eye, an ear, or the throat. This was simply stupid. Why didn't they provide a small plastic straw instead?

Many people are apprehensive about flying under any circumstances, and many became even more so immediately following 9/11. A first time flyer leaving from Newark will have their heart in their throat. Due to noise abatement restrictions, the plane must make some severe turns to follow a waterway on takeoff.

Before 9/11 on a another flight, a considerate pilot warned us about the takeoff pattern, and told us just before he made the turns what was going to happen - not now - it seems that the skies are no longer "friendly".

Now with the airlines struggling to survive, you would think their service would be top notch to entice people to fly with them - Naw - in my judgement, same old, same old crummy service.

Hey guys, "wake up and smell the coffee". These people on the plane are your customers. I guess the airlines are trying to cut costs, and probably the "bailout" by the Feds was justified, but if you want them to come back, you better start treating them like customers.

Add the inconvenience of having to arrive at the airport hours before your departure time, minimum wage security guards who don't instill a lot of confidence, and the issuance of a weapon with your drink, I think, like the well known sports announcer, I'll consider alternate modes of transportation.

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