

# Spotlight On Core Objectives: Customer Satisfaction



Buenos Aires: 12:40 p.m.

I'm Rono Dutta, president of United. All of us on the leadership team – as well as all of us at United – are working to make our four objectives a reality. My focus is customer satisfaction. That means leading United's team of more than 100,000 United people around the world in improving customer service.

Our goal is to make our customers feel good about their experience with United. We have their loyalty, thanks to our superior route structure and our Mileage Plus® program. We get credit for providing a comfortable, enjoyable ride and relatively hassle-free service. But feedback from customers indicates that the genuine warmth, friendliness and honesty of our people are not coming through in many of our customer interactions.

Some companies are "head-driven," and they emphasize processes and numbers. I think of United as being "heart-driven," because our people are a very caring group. We have to open the shutters and let the rest of the world see this. That's how we'll win over our customers.

We're focusing on characteristics that customers value, specifically candor and responsibility, and warm and attentive service. Changing our behaviors in these two areas is our greatest opportunity to bring Our United Commitment<sup>SM</sup> to life.

Our people want to do the right thing. They strive to be candid about problems and accept responsibility. But sometimes they are hampered by systems that don't fully support their efforts. We're fixing that by investing in new technology that will give everyone in a customer-contact position whatever is needed to keep our customers properly informed.

Probably the most difficult, the most challenging, and the most critical area of focus is providing warm and attentive service. Today, when we ask our customers what they would like to see more of, they say, "Well, you're professional and very well trained, but you don't seem to be very concerned about my needs. Show me you care. Don't treat me with indifference." Customers want us to demonstrate our understanding that travel is not always a pleasant experience. They basically want a caring attitude. We need to tap into the reservoir of caring that is at the core of United's culture.

Our front-line supervisors on the ground and in the air are key to this transformation. We're making sure they understand exactly what kind of service our customers want. We're giving them extensive training so they can be effective coaches with everyone who touches our customers in some way – our customer service representatives, our flight attendants, even our pilots. It comes down to the basics: making eye contact, using the customer's name, greeting her with a smile.

Right now, air travel for most people is too stressful, too complicated and takes too long. One reason is that our industry has some serious structural problems to address, such as the inadequacy of the air traffic control system. While this problem is certainly not limited to the United States, the U.S. system is where we have had the most difficulty. We're pushing the federal government to encourage improvements.

Another reason is that airport and operational processes and procedures have not changed much in the past 15 years. To address this, we've created a special group within United to review processes and reengineer them in a way that creates a seamless experience on the ground.

But these are long-term initiatives. In the short term, we know that the people of United – with all their personal warmth and dedication to this airline and each other – have the power to make every flying experience a great one for our customers. I'm committed to unleashing that power.

Rono J. Dutta  
*President*





Keep our customers  
coming back with  
superior customer  
service.



The people of United are constantly asking their customers and each other how they can enhance the entire travel experience – from creating a more comfortable environment in flight to ensuring that a customer's luggage is there at the end of the journey.

When United's most frequent travelers requested additional work space and legroom on board, a team of service and product representatives from throughout the company responded with an exciting new product, Economy Plus<sup>SM</sup>. Economy Plus adds four to five inches of legroom in the first six to 11 rows of the economy cabin in our U.S. domestic narrowbody fleet, and it sets an industry benchmark for customer comfort. "The response has been great," says Kathy Reilly, the Economy Plus project manager. "Our business customers are telling us that the additional space is just what they need to be able to work productively and in comfort during the flight. They also appreciate the fact that they're being rewarded for their loyalty to United."



New product development is only part of the customer satisfaction story. United is also investing in its people, both to arm them with skills and to support them with resources that are critical elements in providing exceptional service. The Qualified Purser Program, designed in collaboration with the Association of Flight Attendants, is just one example. This innovative training program builds leadership, conflict resolution and team-building skills. More than 2,200 of our flight attendants have successfully completed the course and earned the designation of Qualified Purser – making them better equipped to resolve onboard problems on the spot.

"As pursers, we try to come through for our customers, even in the toughest situations, with compassion and, when it's appropriate, a sense of humor," says Qualified Purser Cynthia Kurowski. "We work with our fellow flight attendants to create a positive atmosphere on board so that more people leave the plane happy."

But the goal to provide the customer with a hassle-free flying experience won't be achieved only in the skies. United's people recognize that delivering on the basics, like baggage handling, is crucial to customer satisfaction.

In San Francisco, employees have tackled baggage-handling performance head-on, and the results are striking. In 1999 alone, they reduced the number of mishandled bags by nearly 35 percent. Here's how: A team of representatives from every employee group examined the handling process from start to finish, better defined each group's role in the process, installed state-of-the-art BullsEye baggage scanners and adopted a uniform improvement objective.

According to Bill Roy, general manager-Customer Service in San Francisco, "It's all about focus – getting every member of the team, from the lobby to the ramp, to focus on keeping customers and bags together." Now, on those occasions when a bag is misdirected, customer service representatives can accurately and swiftly pinpoint the location of the bag and share that information, as well as the solution, with the customer.

"No one is happy when bags are delayed," says Roy, "but it's far less likely to happen now, and when it does, we can keep the customer informed. We've set another stretch goal for this year, and we're determined to make sure that every customer departs on time – and with his or her bag."

