

Podcast Transcription

Fly by Night: Captain Mark Stafiej – Trip Services Committee

Captain Chris Lee My guest today is Captain Mark Stafiej, he's the Chairman of the Trip Services Committee. Hey, Mark, thanks for coming.

Captain Mark Stafiej It's good to be here Chris, thanks for having me.

Captain Chris Lee Talk to the pilots a little about your background before you came to FedEx.

Captain Mark Stafiej I spent 20 years in the Navy flying P3s. During that 20-year career, I spent time on a carrier, did certain staff jobs and had multiple flying tours, primarily doing anti-submarine warfare during the Cold War.

Captain Chris Lee What about what you've been doing at FedEx?

Captain Mark Stafiej I'm in year 22 right now. During my career here, I've been a Boeing 727 Second Officer. I have worked as a check airman, as a DC10 Second Officer, then about 14 years as an MD11 First Officer, then went up to Anchorage as a Captain for several years. And now, I'm a Captain on the 777, been in the left seat there for about five years.

Captain Chris Lee Talk about your union experience.

Captain Mark Stafiej Pretty much since I've been on the property, I've been involved in the union in one way or the other. I started off with the Critical Incident Response Program back in 2001. I was a committee member with that committee for approximately five years and I was very much involved in the 2002 Tallahassee accident. After that, I decided to kind of change roles. I was approached by the Hotel Committee Chairman at the time and he said, hey, would you like to do some hotel inspections? Well, one inspection led to the next, led to the next. So, in 2007 I joined the Hotel and Catering Committee, as it was called back then and I've been the Chairman now for about the last 10 years of the Trip Services Committee.

Captain Chris Lee What does the Trip Services Committee do?

Captain Mark Stafiej The name was changed several years ago in an effort to fully capture what the committee does. We don't just do hotels. We're also involved with the catering, domestic as well as international, and we're also involved with the ground transportation. So, between hotels, catering and ground transportation, the thought was to rename the committee to encompass what we do. And the title of Trip Services was what was used in order to capture exactly the scope of what the committee does.

Captain Chris Lee Your committee has received a lot of PDRs from the pilots. Is that a good way for pilots to reach out to you?

Captain Mark Stafiej PDR is one way. The other way is Insites. What we have learned through the PDR system is in a lot of cases the PDR has been an exact reflection or has been a copy of the Insite report that's been submitted. And so, I'd like the crew members to know that once you submit an Insite report regarding hotels, catering or ground transportation, that the Trip Services Committee, namely myself and my Vice Chairman,

receive a copy once it is closed out by crew travel services. So we do see that report. We do see what's going on. What I would request is that if you have not received a response to your Insite report, that you basically submit that PDR to us so that we can track it to make sure that whatever issue you are experiencing with a hotel is researched and resolved by the Company and then we can follow up with that.

Captain Chris Lee It's definitely important that pilots continue to send us PDRs so that we can track that data also to make sure that the two are marrying up as they should be.

Captain Mark Stafiej Agree.

Captain Chris Lee Talk about your hotel inspection program.

Captain Mark Stafiej This has been a program that's been in the works between the Company and the Association for over 20 years, and that is the major function of what our committee members do. With that point, the program is set up such that the Company vets hotels and they vet them based on a request for proposal, an RFP. Normally, the Company will present our committee with anywhere from one to three hotels to conduct an inspection. The committee member will jumpseat to that particular city, will spend 24 hours in that hotel and write a very extensive report. Based on that report the committee will make a recommendation to the Company. That recommendation to the Company is a non-binding recommendation, but we have had very, very good success in our partnership with Crew Travel Services during my tenure as Chairman of the committee that the hotels we have recommended the Company then has gone to contract with.

Captain Chris Lee Explain to the pilots how the hotel selection process actually works.

Captain Mark Stafiej The process is such that the Company will then talk to the hotel. They do all the negotiations with the particular hotel for amenities like food and beverage. We do have a contractual requirement for free internet. All that negotiation is done prior to the committee member conducting the inspection. Once the recommendation is made to the Company, the Company then will start the contract process with that particular hotel. Once the contract has been signed, then direct billing will take place so that the crew member does not have to use our corporate card to do that. In a lot of situations, the Company has not been able to travel to that respective city for a long period of time due to a myriad of reasons. And because of that, we have had numerous situations where crew members have submitted both a PDR as well as an Insite inquiring as to why there was not a direct bill. And that is due to the fact that the Company and the committee have not completed their respective inspections to start that contract process.

Captain Chris Lee So that's why pilots go to certain hotels for what seems to be a long time and still have to use their credit card and do an expense report?

Captain Mark Stafiej That's correct, Chris. The reality is, when an expense report is submitted, unless that crew member submits the folio for that hotel, even though they've used their corporate card, they will not be reimbursed for the expense of that hotel, even though it shows on their pairing, even though you use the Company card. So, to minimize that amount of time in a non-contract basis I think is a very important bonus for the crew members.

Captain Chris Lee As far as the quality of hotels that we use and the services that are offered. How's that going?

Captain Mark Stafiej I think that there's a lot of information going on between crew members that the hotels have degraded over the years. I've been on the property now for 22 years, but what I have seen, again, as my tenure as Chairman of the committee domestically, a lot of the hotels have gone from full-service hotels, which is a full-service restaurant, as well as room service at that hotel that has now kind of changed into what we call select-service hotels. And those are Hyatt places. Those are Courtyard Marriotts, where there is not a full-service restaurant on the property, nor is there room service. So domestically, we've seen a trend towards select-service hotels. On the international side, I think that we've done very, very well. The Company has always permitted our committee to inspect full-service hotels, which again is room service as well as one or more operating restaurants within that hotel property.

Captain Chris Lee Do you think it's this way just because the Company is trying to save costs and gain efficiencies?

Captain Mark Stafiej Well, that also segues into how busy our committee has been over the last 12 to 15 months. The Company not only in my area, but through all areas, we look at now our simplified fuel policy, the Company is trying to save money, become more efficient, more lean in what they do and we're seeing that also on the hotel side. When a contract comes up for renewal, if that particular hotel is requesting a large room rate increase, crew travel services and the manager that works with that group is then in the process of reselecting or researching or vetting other hotels where the costs have been minimized. So, we have seen over the last year my committee has inspected 13 cities and we've inspected 31 hotels as part of this process. So, the Company is definitely trying to keep costs down as we're seeing that now with numerous changes of hotels and that's happening domestic and the international side.

Captain Chris Lee Let's talk some about ongoing issues. Many times, on the line the Company has the hotel providing ground transportation and there are times when they're also shuttling other customers and crews and we get stuck waiting in line for our turn. How's that going?

Captain Mark Stafiej Domestically, the Company is trying to save costs by using airport hotel shuttle services. That alleviates the need to have a dedicated ground transportation vendor, a limo service provider. The hotel is given a monthly schedule of our crews' arrival and departure times. The hotel shuttle, by contract is supposed to operate on our schedule. What's been happening, I can give an example with Denver, the hotel initially said they would be able to provide transportation per our schedule. They then had a change of heart, so to speak. And so now what we have essentially modified is the crew that lands in Denver that's going to the Woolley's Classic Suites airport hotel, they have a limo provided to go from the ramp to the hotel. In an effort to save costs, the Company decided to use the Woolley's Hotel shuttle from the hotel to the ramp. The hotel has only agreed to operate the shuttle on their times. So, that puts the crew member in a situation where they either have to go to the ramp early and therefore have a reduction in their crew rest or go with the schedule, which would possibly put them at the ramp later. But that is pretty much the exception. So, I'd like to let our Association members know that in the event the hotel shuttle is not operating per our schedule, which you see on your VIPs pairing please submit a PDR, an Insite report so that we can address that with the Company.

Captain Chris Lee What about situations where we have an airport hotel versus maybe a downtown hotel?

Captain Mark Stafiej As we do our recommendations to Crew Travel Services and as we look at the layover parameters for each particular city, we try to work with the Company to make sure that Section 5 is complied with. And with that Section 5, it states that layovers twelve hours and greater should have consideration for going downtown. The Company is working very much to comply with that. We try to modify and do the layover parameters based on crewmember feedback. The situation we have is crewmembers are being I guess optimized and so layovers are being minimized and we are fully aware of the fact that there are reduced restaurants around the hotels as part of our hotel inspection process to make sure when you are at an airport hotel that there are numerous healthy food options for the crew member to be able to walk to. So, if you have a layover of less than 12 hours, pretty much you will be at the airport. Anything over 12 hours again, the committee's working with the Company to ensure that is in a downtown layover.

Captain Chris Lee Have you seen any catering improvements based on crew member feedback from the PDRs we've been receiving?

Captain Mark Stafiej Most definitely. Crew Travel Services has two members that do the catering. The catering group is very, very, very responsive to Insite feedback. I could say specifically, the healthier food options over the last two or three years, the Company has gotten more salads or non-meat vegetarian options, and that's all been based on crew member feedback. So, when crew members say that it doesn't do any good to submit an Insite or PDR, I can say that based on the catering improvements that have occurred over the last two or three years the Company is responsive to that crew member feedback. Additionally, in areas such as Asia, where crew members have seen a degradation or lack of quality, the Company has been very, very responsive, being proactive to modify that catering in order to keep the quality going.

Captain Chris Lee Who do you have on your committee?

Captain Mark Stafiej The Trip Services Committee is comprised of approximately 25 members, including the Chairman, myself and the Vice Chairman. I'd like to give a shout out to First Officer Jared Hatfield. He's an Airbus first officer. He stepped up several months ago and replaced a longtime Vice Chairman, Captain Mike Percy, who has taken on additional responsibilities with the scheduling committee. And so our 23-24 members come across the board, all bid packs. There are members that are out in Hong Kong, Cologne, up in Anchorage. And so, it has been a little bit of a challenge to meet the goal of having a committee member within each domicile, within each bid pack due to bidding and things like that. So, the committee has stayed busy. And again, our major function as previously talked Chris is our hotel inspection program.

Captain Chris Lee Well, Mark, thanks so much for taking the time to do the podcast. Any final thoughts?

Captain Mark Stafiej Yeah. We have 25 members in the committee, but there are 5100 crew members. You are our eyes and can let the committee know what's going on. And how do we know what's going on out there in the field with catering, transportation, hotels is through the Insite and PDR system. Only through those reports can the committee as well as the MEC become aware of problem areas out there. And once we're aware of the problem, the committee, along with MEC support, will address those with the Company to

make sure that the quality of hotels, catering and ground transportation stays consistent in accordance with our CBA. Finally, one big goal for the committee as we get into contract 2021 is to have Section 5 improvements. That's our section that deals with all three of the areas of hotel, catering and ground transportation.

Captain Chris Lee Well, thanks again, Mark, and thanks for listening to the podcast. If you have any questions or topic ideas, please send us an email to fdxpodcast@alpa.org. And as always, be safe out there and we'll see you next time.