

## VIEW FROM THE JUMPSEAT ~ Purser Commentary

### *The New BE Service: "Helter Skelter"*

**MAY 3, 2010**

I chose to reserve commentary on the new BE service until working it, myself, which occurred for the first time last week. As an observer with a passenger's perspective during the dry run, I vividly recall saying it seemed rather helter skelter. Having experienced it first hand, I can now report that is, indeed, the case.

We providers of the new BE service are running around like chickens with our heads cut off. That's back and forth to the galley countless times to deliver items that previously were readily available on one's beverage or meal cart. This new BE service is a HUGE step backwards. (Lest ye think I am just a PMNW FA complaining, I've heard these same remarks from seasoned PMDL FAs, as well.) We have actually gone back in time.

Even the PMNW dish-up service of years ago was better, in that items were separated by meat, starch and veggies. Now, with everything cooked together, portion controlled servings generate an institutional presentation. Add to that:

- ✓ We do not receive the proper utensils to do our job, causing hygienic concerns.
- ✓ The women's red sleeves fall into plates of food as it is prepared.
- ✓ We're left to use our fingers to plop the food, and that's *after* we've just brought in dirty items.
- ✓ I find myself reaching in front of those customers trying to eat their salad, because I must deliver their hot Japanese entree', rice and soup with a hot towel (how unappealing!), absent the much-needed casserole lifter.
- ✓ Pre-loading all of the second service casseroles on each tray is a health-hazard. Those meals sit in the carts with dried up dry ice from hours prior.
- ✓ The scrambled eggs are pre-plated for the second service, yet the cod fish is dish up. Where's the consistency?
- ✓ Galley space is at a premium, and we're all running into each other. Items that are needed up front are in the #2 galley. Items that should logically be boarded

together—such as napkins, swizzle sticks and lemons—are boarded separately in three different places.

It's as if someone said, "Let's see how miserable we can make the Flight Attendants' lives by creating as many unnecessary steps as possible."

On my eight-day trip, the wines were rarely correct, per the menu. Why even bother with a wine list if we can't get it right? Previously, at least we listed all the wines and could advise what we had when we served them. People want to see the wine bottles and look at the labels. This requires running back to the galley to get the wine caddy (for the initial beverage service) and then hurrying back with a wine glass, because the caddy is too cumbersome to carry along with a wine glass, and also pour on the same trip to the customer's seat. All of this used to be on a single beverage cart. Now they taste the wine, say it's too this or too that, and we must run back and do it all over again with a new glass. And how silly to give us just one Asahi and Sapporo beer per cart, forcing our customers to switch to another brand over their first choice!

It is a mistake to have the Purser manifesting meal orders and delivering menus when s/he should be at the boarding door. Agents are closing doors without the Purser's knowledge, because we are in the Upper Deck. Paperwork is overlooked. Unaccompanied Minors come onboard holding their own paperwork, because the Flight Attendant at the boarding door is not necessarily privy to all the changes that have come about since the integration. Pursers could nip these—and many other—items in the bud when we were at the door. Now, however, we are called away to take meal orders during this critical time.

This laundry list of disappointments could go on and on, but I shouldn't have to spend my day off explaining the obvious. This is a painful service. Heavy silver trays and coffee pots take their toll; carpal tunnel cases will be on the rise. Bending down to the bottom shelf of a three-tiered cart is hard on the knees. Three-tiered carts themselves are problematic, in that they are too low and cause back problems. This is not to mention how unappealing it is keeping items so close to the floor. While these are all issues previously brought to management's attention, they are resurfacing now, as if no one learned a thing from past mistakes.

It is difficult to be upbeat about this new service with the rest of the crew, when there are so many apparent design flaws. Despite several passenger compliments about my "gracious" service, they also commented it seemed we were all running around unnecessarily, compared to their previous trips. When you ask a customer if they enjoyed the new service, it is difficult for them to distinguish between a friendly crew delivering the service and the actual service product itself. I've been around long enough to know that airlines' survey questions are geared to generate a positive

customer response. That is a shame, because I know how much work has gone into the new service.

If we're not going to be provided with a 14th FA on the 747-400 (when the load calls for it), then don't try to sugar coat this service. It's bad enough with 14, let alone creating other problems in Economy, as a result. Once again, it comes down to staffing and giving us the tools with which to do our jobs properly. This, of course, on top of a poorly designed service delivery product.

Rather than desperately trying to perfect it, the best solution, in my opinion, would be to revert back to the tried-and-true cart service. There's a reason it has been the standard at nearly every airline for all these years: *because it worked!* This so-called better mousetrap has been tripped, and it's strangling our Flight Attendants struggling to deliver good service. I regret the need to be so brutally honest here, but the new BE service is a terrible disappointment!

~ Submitted by MEC Purser Committee Vice Chair Gary Helton