

VIEW FROM THE JUMPSEAT

WE WOULD NEVER HAVE RATIFIED *THIS!!!*

✈ By Sean Oltersdorf, DTW

Our historic election carries different meaning for everyone. For me, it is about restoring our profession. It is about securing a legally binding contract—an agreement that reflects our upgraded responsibilities as safety and service professionals at a major global carrier.

During my 14 years as a Northwest/Delta Flight Attendant, I've seen four CEO's, countless inflight managers, 9/11, SARS, bankruptcy, and now a mega-merger. I've experienced industry-leading pay and benefits during the good times, and concessions negotiated during the bad. My decision to vote YES for representation was easy. I imagined the Delta "policy manual" as our first post-bankruptcy Tentative Agreement. Knowing our history, our solidarity, and confidence in our value, I believe my colleagues would reject that TA hands down, if the situation were differently framed.

Delta's flood of glossy campaign mailers only cherry picks current pay and benefits. It compares our bankruptcy Contract with a "policy manual" that can and does change without notice. Token pay increases for our PMDL colleagues are being touted as "raises" that don't even touch what was taken, without negotiation, even prior to bankruptcy's cuts. They tell us we're all the industry's best, but don't consider us worth more than "standard." I've seen nothing that explores other possibilities. After a long stretch of career losses, it seems "standard" has been dressed up and marketed as an "enhancement" – a package most of us would have rejected just a few years back. Earlier in my career, however, I might not have understood why.

When Northwest Airlines hired me in 1997, I never imagined my new airline family was working under

concessionary terms they referred to as "The Red Book." After six long weeks of training, \$15.98 per hour didn't seem so bad to me – even as a recent college graduate. Besides, who cared about making lots of money, right? We would see the world for a few years and move on to the next thing. As the familiar story goes, the job becomes part of who we are, and years later we discover it was a career, all along—albeit, a profession continually reshaped by our fast-paced aviation industry.

My \$15.98 quickly felt more like \$8 an hour, as I became acclimated to the rigorous demands of flying. When I heard about contract negotiations, I was hopeful we'd see some more money. Other contractual gains would be icing on the cake, but as a relatively junior new hire, I defined improvements with dollar signs. I was focused on short term benefit, and not much beyond the next paycheck. Growing up in a union household—my father, a life-long UAW member—I thought I understood the power of "solidarity." Turns out, I was about to learn an important lesson about collective bargaining.

In 1999, Northwest Flight Attendants and the company reached a Tentative Agreement with improvements to much of our contract. For me, the "Lavender Book" (or TA1) would mean an immediate 24% pay increase, and what appeared to be decent work rules. I heard rumblings about an inferior Retirement Section, but that whole concept felt abstract to me. Despite the raises and other improvements, the NWA Flight Attendant membership felt we deserved better—especially after years of sacrifice to save the company from



collapse. The lavender book was overwhelmingly rejected by 69%, sending negotiators back to the table.

When we reached TA2 roughly eight months later, it included pension improvements, stronger work rules and health insurance benefits for domestic partners. "The Yellow Book" was easily ratified by 68% of our group, and went into effect June 1, 2000. By staying unified with an eye on the future, we secured a mutually beneficial agreement that is widely considered one of our best contracts to date.

FAST FORWARD A DECADE OR SO ...

Choosing representation in our current election was easy for me, imagining the Delta "policy manual" as a Tentative Agreement up for vote. Hourly rates in this non-binding document appear slightly higher than our bankruptcy Contract, but are still on par with the lavender TA we rejected over ten years ago! In fact, at my seniority, the PMDL policy manual would pay me nearly two dollars *less* per hour than that rejected 1999 TA! Can you imagine the uproar had our Union negotiated the policy manual back in 1999, called it TA1, and sent it to ballot? We'd have voted it down in a heartbeat!

BUT WAIT, THERE'S MORE ...

What if they added a side letter that said by agreeing to the conditions in this hypothetical policy manual TA, we would forfeit all opportunity to negotiate future raises, work rules or benefits? That even if we liked any particular rule or guideline, it was all subject to change on a dime? That nothing was firm, the only guarantee being that leadership would eventually change? What if it said we had to sit outside, while others discussed Open Skies, joint ventures, alliances, merger possibilities and strategies for economic downturns?

Captain Lee Moak, Chairman of the DAL ALPA MEC, recently wrote that Delta's January 2011 pilot raises will add "an increase of roughly \$75 million in value for

the Delta pilots. It also marks somewhat of a milestone in that the New Year pay rates will be above those that were in place when Delta filed for bankruptcy protection in 2005." Just a couple years after approving an industry-leading contract of their own, our pilots already have their eyes on 2012, when their current agreement becomes amendable. Moak goes on to say, "[W]e will be negotiating a contract with a healthy, profitable company, a situation that has not existed in over ten years and a situation which some on our seniority list have never experienced."

Given this kind of optimism, why would flight attendants even consider work rules and pay that aren't even close to those we rejected in the nineties? Given our generous contributions to our company's success and in the context so noted, I believe Northwest Flight Attendants would have rejected this "offer." And likely by a 100% margin.

Rejected 1999 "Lavender Book" (or TA1) Payrates

	<u>DOS</u>	<u>DOS + 12</u>	<u>DOS + 24</u>	<u>DOS + 36</u>	<u>DOS + 48</u>
1st Year	\$19.24	\$19.63	\$20.22	\$20.72	\$21.34
2nd Year	20.73	21.15	21.78	22.33	22.99
3rd Year	22.18	22.63	23.31	23.89	24.60
4th Year	23.61	24.09	24.81	25.43	26.19
5th Year	25.53	26.04	26.82	27.49	28.31
6th Year	29.50	30.09	31.00	31.77	32.72
7th Year	32.33	32.98	33.97	34.82	35.86
8th Year	35.86	36.58	37.68	38.62	39.78
9th Year	36.23	36.96	38.06	39.02	40.19
10th Year	38.50	39.27	40.45	41.46	42.70
11th Year	39.36	40.14	41.35	42.38	43.65
12th Year	40.35	41.15	42.39	43.45	44.75
13th Year	41.56	42.39	43.66	44.75	46.09
14th Year	42.76	43.62	44.93	46.05	47.43
15th Year	43.40	44.27	45.60	46.74	48.14

PMDL 2010 Policy Manual Payrates

Length of Service	Hourly Flight Pay	Length of Service	Hourly Flight Pay
		After 6 Years	34.65
0-1 Year	20.67	After 7 Years	35.77
After 1 Year	21.49	After 8 Years	36.76
After 2 Years	22.96	After 9 Years	38.12
After 3 Years	24.84	After 10 Years	39.18
After 4 Years	27.37	After 11 Years	41.04
After 5 Years	29.43	After 12 Years	45.75