

## HISTORY 9

I mentioned earlier that Dave Garrett was the last great leader of Delta. People have a tendency to confuse management and leadership. Garrett was cut out of the same cloth as our founder, C. E. Woolman. One of my favorite stories about C. E. Woolman, and one that I think demonstrates his genius for leadership happened in Jackson. As the story goes, the ATL flight filled up, and the boss got off, and spent a couple of hours talking with the troops until the next flight. We were communicating by teletype in those days, and the news that the boss was “bumped” just like the rest of us was all over the airline within minutes. I can’t even imagine the value of that. A leader builds morale, and some managers destroy it. Woolman ran the company like it was still a small crop dusting outfit. It is said that he and Donald Douglas were prone to making airplane deals on a yellow legal pad. I am sure that was frustrating to the more modern managers under him who had to keep track of everything, but he knew how to inspire people.

Dave always had time to speak with the employees. I never saw him drive up to the gate in a widget car as some of our other CEO’s did. There were probably times when he was late for a flight, and he arrived by car, but I never saw it, and never heard about it. He always walked down the concourse, and said hello to gate agents, crew members, etc. When he boarded, he always turned left and spoke to the pilots, and answered their questions. I was deadheading in coach one day, and I saw one of our CEO’s board the flight from the ramp, take a first class seat on a full airplane, and not even speak to the pilots. He didn’t notice that I was on the flight. Some months later, we were meeting in his office about something else, and he asked me what he needed to do to “get along with the pilots”.

Dave Garrett knew what to do. He convinced people who worked for him that he liked and respected them, because he actually did. A company that succeeds or fails on the strength of its customer service depends on the morale of their employees. It seems so simple, but.....Was Dave perfect? Of course not, it’s easy to look backwards and find mistakes. One example was falling behind in IT. It almost seemed that we didn’t think computers were going to amount to much for a long time after our competition had made major investments in them, but Dave never forgot what his number one job was, and he did it splendidly. It’s too bad that he couldn’t have been cloned for the last twenty years.

Dave and I had a conversation in late 1967 at the NTSB hearing of the DC-8 training flight accident. He told me that expansion was going to be rapid during the next few years, and customer service was going to be extremely important.

He said he didn't want me to be a snitch, but he trusted my judgment, and if I saw things on the line that needed to be fixed, to call him rather than "writing it up". Dave felt that write ups were not always efficient because sometimes it would be a day or so. Or even several days before the written report found the right hands, and the trail would be cold.

I only called him twice in the next fifteen years, and the first time, he was not in his office. That was okay because Hollis Harris was a Senior Vice President by then, and he was an early riser.

The 727 was loaded with 148 passengers. It was an early morning ATL-LGA trip with breakfast scheduled in both cabins. A few minutes before departure time, the cabin advised me that we had not been catered. We then discovered that catering had forgotten us, and we were going to be delayed as long as forty five minutes waiting for them. Most of our passengers had briefcases, and a significant percentage were going for meetings, and returning the same day. I explained the situation to them, and asked them if they would prefer going on schedule with just coffee, juice, and rolls, or wait for the full breakfast. 148 hands went up in favor of departing on time. The only vote for taking the delay was ATL Stations. They insisted on waiting for catering.

It was about 0700, but Hollis answered the phone, he voted with the passengers, and since his vote was the one that counted, we departed on time. It was a turnaround, and we were back to ATL by early afternoon. We had the same gate agent, and he advised me that some senior stations people were very angry about being overridden. My response was that they should worry about their egos less, and our customers more.

In the early 80's, I was on a Tri Star PDX-SEA-ATL. We were playing computer catch up in the very early days of computer generated boarding cards. The SEA Gate Agent had more than a hundred customers lined up, and he was taking almost a full minute to generate each boarding card. I quickly calculated in my razor sharp mind that we were going to be more than one hour late if we didn't have a "Chinese fire drill" and just take the tickets, and let them occupy any vacant seat. I suggested it, and he told me that he would love to do that, but he didn't have the authority. Atlanta had instructed them to get the boarding cards out of the computer, no matter how much time it took. He said; "We are using AT&T line eight, and it is very slow, and AT&T has told us it can't be changed for several weeks. I can't do anything about it." I told him I knew someone who could. I went over to a wall phone and called Dave. He was in his office, and I explained the situation, and asked him if AT&T's Chairman was still on our board. Dave said he was, and to expect an on time departure. I think the station

manager, and another agent were in the gate house within three minutes, and the full flight departed on time.

Rox called me that afternoon. He was laughing, and he said a VP had come into his office that afternoon and asked him; "What is a Gene Hall?" Frank said; "He is one of our captains, and one of my close friends. What's he done now?" The VP said; "Dave called me to his office and chewed on me for about twenty minutes over a problem in Seattle that Gene Hall called him about, and after I had been back to my office for a few minutes, he showed up there, and chewed on me for another ten minutes." Frank was laughing, and the offended VP told him that it wasn't funny.

Frank told me that he was calling to caution me. He said; "Dave believes you, and if you call him with problems, make sure you are right before you call because he will take action, and you have one VP who is very unhappy with you already.

A week later, I stopped in Seattle on the way back to Portland, and the station manager and both agents were standing in the jetway as we pulled into the gate. They wanted to thank me for the new AT&T line that replaced line 8 a few hours after we had departed the week before. They said they were going to take me out to dinner at a restaurant of my choice the next time I had a Seattle layover. Right..... they knew we didn't have any 1011 Seattle layovers. I still haven't collected on that dinner.

After Gene Blondeau was killed in January 69, Chicago was not much fun, and I was able to hold a DC-9 bid in Atlanta. Joan was pregnant again, and due in May. I was very close to the bottom on the 9, and was flying a roach coach turn around ATL-DTW. Our trip departed ATL around 2000 and arrived back to ATL about 0500.

Most of the General Office buildings had not been constructed. We had a couple of buildings, the old hangar, and Southern Aero, one of the FBO's (private airplanes) had an operation toward the south end of the street. There was a parking lot next to Southern Aero, and we parked our cars there, and walked across the ramp to operations. My airport car was a very nice, low mileage Chevrolet Impala. It was about two years old, and was well equipped with radio, heater, white side wall tires, seat covers, and had a full gas tank the night that I ran into Pat McGirl in ops as I was going out to DTW, and he and his crew were arriving for a layover. I didn't have any intention of becoming Pat's accomplice in the theft of an auto, but that is what I did. Since they were signing in about the time we would be arriving the next morning, I suggested he take my car so they

could drive to a decent restaurant for dinner. The timing was good, and they arrived about the same time that we did the next morning. Pat gave me the keys, and told me that he had done a couple of minor repairs by reattaching two loose wires on the dash. He said he was able to get the radio working, and he had put some gas in because it was on empty. I told him the tank was almost full, and he said the gauge must have been wrong. He gave me directions to the parking place which was not very close to where he had picked the car up.

I was puzzled, but I shrugged it off, and walked across the ramp. I couldn't find my car. I finally gave up, and used a phone at Southern Aero to call Pat. He gave me detailed directions to the parking place, and I finally realized that he had stolen about a ten year old Chevy. My car was untouched in its original parking space. The stolen car was nowhere near the space that it had been stolen from. We always wondered about the owner. Did he report it stolen? How would McGirl have talked his way out of going to jail if the police had stopped him, and would I have been a felon also? The possibilities are endless.

Operations in the old ATL Terminal was a long skinny room with a bank of telephones along the outside wall. At push times, dozens of crew members would be milling around, using the phones, catching up on the latest gossip, starting or spreading rumors, etc. I was on the phone, and Charlie Peck was a couple of phones away, deep in conversation. Bald Charlie was sporting a magnificent, new toupee. Of course, I was too much of a gentleman to act like I noticed anything different about him, but several pilots had "congratulated" him on his new look, and he was probably feeling slightly self conscious when his worst nightmare, in the person of Dean Halverson happened along. As Dean walked pass Charlie, just barely slowing down, he reached up and lifted the toupee off Charlie's head and in a voice loud enough to be heard in half the building, he said; "Nice toup Charlie", as he dropped the toupee back on Charlie's head. It landed sideways, and almost covered his eyes. Poor guy, his face was blood red, and he was trying to straighten the thing with one hand, while holding the phone with the other. I am not certain, but pretty sure that was the first and last time I ever saw Charlie with hair on his head.

I was standing at that same phone bank one night when a very fast thinking captain walked in with his copilot. The copilot was tearing the wrapper off a Snickers Bar. He asked the captain if he wanted a bite of the candy. He was obviously not sincere, because when the captain said he did, the copilot licked the candy bar, and then handed it to the captain. The captain accepted it, turned it over and licked it on the other side, and returned it to the copilot. They were both laughing pretty hard when they threw that one in the trash, and put another quarter in the candy machine.

In the late sixties and seventies, the Miller, Rox, Cooper, and Hall traveling poker and golf quartet was very active. A lot of other pilots would move in and out of the poker games, particularly at the annual golf tournament. I can quickly think of Murray Stafford, Snake Smith, Don Mairose, Malcolm Simpson, and Dave Reno turning cards with us.

A couple of months before our second daughter was born, I had played golf with Rox, Cooper, and Ashby Taylor at East lake on a Saturday. Ashby was a lifelong friend of Franks from Augusta. He was the sales manager for the Caterpillar dealer in Atlanta, and very nearly a scratch golfer. His son, John later became a Delta financial executive. We were at Frank's house for a cookout that evening, and Ashby and I picked up a baseball and a couple of gloves that Frank, Jr. had left on the patio, and started tossing the ball. Frank, Jr. was fourteen years old, and he and one of his buddies showed up with a basketball. They had a basketball goal in back with a small paved area. The boys challenged us to a two on two basketball game, and since we were already fortified with an adult beverage or three, we readily accepted.

I was wearing a genuine imitation silk sport shirt along with imitation Palm Beach slacks, and genuine imitation Gucci loafers (no socks), and I intended to not work up a sweat. Unfortunately, there had been a little rain shower that afternoon, and there was a wet spot on the court. I was already perspiring slightly when Ashby threw a pass behind me as I broke toward the basket. I reached back for the ball, my feet slipped out from under me, and I ended in the wet, muddy grass, flat on my back. Rox was not worried about my condition, but being a lawyer, he was very concerned about liability as he stood over me, asked if I was okay. I said; "Frank, I am fine, but I just calculated that I will be forty seven years old when our new baby is Frank Junior's age, and I will not be up to this, I hope Joan has another girl, and not a boy.

It was a couple of months later on another Saturday in May 69, and the quartet had a 1000 tee time at East Lake. I was scheduled to pick up Cooper and Rox at Frank's house at 0830, and meet Miller at the golf course. I had a complication because Joan's blood pressure was elevated, and her doctor had decided to admit her to the hospital until the birth. We had her in a room at Emory early that morning, and her doctor told us he wanted to keep her there because her blood pressure had been a problem during her first pregnancy. He went on to say that he hoped that I didn't plan on waiting for the baby, because it wasn't "going to happen today". Joan told him that I was supposed to play golf, and they both insisted that I play. I had every intention of calling the golf off, but they convinced me.

By that time it was too late to pick Frank and Joe up, so I called Frank's house. Frank Jr. answered the phone and said; "Dad's in the backyard, hitting golf balls into a net, but Mr. Cooper is in here." Joe came on the phone, and I told him I was running late, because I had to stop at Emory Hospital, and would meet them at the golf course. Joe asked me if someone was sick, and suddenly, without any warning whatsoever my evil streak showed up. I said; "No Joe, I just dropped Joan off to have a baby." There was definitely a moment of silence before he suggested that I might consider not playing that day. I explained that Joan was two weeks early, and if she was on schedule I would wait, but since she wasn't the golf game took precedence. Before I left the hospital, the nurse told me not to count on the baby not showing up that day, and call after nine holes.

The three of them were waiting for me at the entrance of the pro shop. They were all shaking their heads in disbelief. Frank said; "Hall, I knew you were no good, but I didn't have any idea that you were this no good." My golf was awful, I couldn't wait to get to the turn, and call the hospital. The nurse told me not to hurry, but Joan was in labor, and the baby would be born that day. I hustled back to the hospital, and my daughter Tracey and I arrived in the delivery room at the same time. I overplayed my hand that time, because it went around the cocktail party circuit that Gene Hall dropped his wife off at the hospital to have a baby, and he continued to the golf course. There were wives who never forgave me, but Joan was not one of them.

Some more Quartet stories next time.