

1 Introduction to cabin crew

Background

The world of flight attendants has changed significantly since the beginning of commercial air travel. The first airliners were actually mail planes with a few extra spaces for passengers. The only crew were the pilots. Eventually, some early airlines added 'cabin boys' to their flights. These crew members, who were usually young men, were mainly on board to load luggage, reassure nervous passengers, and help people get around the plane. Imperial Airways of the United Kingdom had 'cabin boys' or 'stewards' in the 1920s. In the USA, Stout Airways was the first to employ stewards in 1926. Western Airlines (1928) and Pan American World Airways (1929) were the first US carriers to employ stewards to serve food. The first female flight attendant was 25-year-old registered nurse, Ellen Church, hired by Boeing in 1930.

Until relatively recently, airline stewardesses were subject to strict regulations. They were not allowed to be married and most airlines had certain constraints on their height, weight, and proportions. Their clothing was similarly restrictive: at many airlines, stewardesses wore form-fitting uniforms and were required to wear white gloves and high heels throughout the flight. While it was a perfectly respectable occupation for young women, early stewardesses were generally underpaid, had minimal benefits, and were in a subservient role to pilots.

During the 1960s, '70s, and '80s, flight-attendant unions, as well as representatives from the equal rights movement, brought about sweeping changes in the airline industry that addressed these problems. Since the 1970s, the policy of the major airlines has been to hire both men and women as flight attendants and to have minimal restrictions on size and weight. Flight attendants now share many of the same benefits as pilots, and airlines recognize them as a crucial component of the air-travel industry.

Flight attendants on board a flight collectively form a *cabin crew*, as distinguished from pilots and engineers in the cockpit, who form the *flight crew*. The role of a flight attendant ultimately derives from that of similar positions on passenger ships or passenger trains, but it has more direct involvement with passengers because of the confined quarters and often shorter travel times on aircraft. Additionally, the job of a flight attendant revolves around safety to a much greater extent than those of similar staff on other forms of transport.

There have been many changes in training over the years, in response to certain incidents. One of the most significant was the introduction of Crew Resource Management (CRM). The training is based on work at NASA in 1979, which found that the main cause of many aviation accidents is human error. In several tragic incidents it was found that the aircraft were mechanically sound; the pilots and their crews technically competent. However, the systems and procedures in place simply did not catch fatal mistakes in time. In short, the systems were flawed. CRM focuses on interpersonal communication, leadership, and decision making in the cockpit. CRM training encompasses a wide range of knowledge, skills, and attitudes including communication, situational awareness, problem solving, decision making, and teamwork to improve air safety.

The actions of flight attendants in emergencies have long been credited with saving lives. In the United States, the National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) and other aviation authorities view flight attendants as essential for passenger safety. Studies have concluded that assertive cabin crew are essential for the rapid evacuation of aircraft.

An incident worth noting with regard to changes in training occurred in 1978 when a United Airlines 173 flight experienced a problem with its landing gear light. The NTSB found that the crash was caused by the captain's failure to accept input from junior crew members and a lack of assertiveness by the flight engineer. As a consequence of the Tenerife disaster (where two jets collided on a runway in 1977), there were sweeping changes made to international airline regulations and to aircraft. Aviation authorities around the world introduced requirements for standard phrases and a greater emphasis on English as a common working language.

Other notable incidents which have brought about changes in training include the British Airtours flight 28M runway disaster of 1985, an Air Ontario F28 crash in 1989, the Kegworth air disaster in the same year, the Gulf Air crash of 2000, and the Flash Airlines crash of 2004.

Jargon Buster

Job titles

The titles used vary from airline to airline and the amount of crew on board depends on the size of the aircraft.

Chief purser

The Chief purser (CP), In-flight service manager (ISM), Cabin service manager/director (CSM/CSD), Senior cabin crew member (SCCM) – the title associated with this crew member differs from airline to airline. These crew members are mainly found on larger aircraft types and are in charge of running the cabin – in other words they ensure the service delivery over the whole aircraft. They have no serving duties and are responsible for resolving any problems as and when they occur. They decide who works in which position and will make any changes accordingly. They report when the cabin is secure for take-off and landing, deliver on-board announcements, and report any broken or missing emergency equipment to the pilots after the pre-flight check. They generally operate the doors during routine flights, hold the manifest, and account for all money and required paperwork for each flight.

Purser

On some flights the Purser is the person who is actually in charge of any particular cabin area (first class, business class, etc.). The purser has been described as the 'Head Flight Attendant' and usually takes care of the premium cabin, ensures paperwork is complete, operates the in-flight entertainment equipment, and does other administrative tasks. The purser will, on board larger aircraft with multiple flight attendants, assist the Chief purser and have similar roles and responsibilities. Pursers are typically flight attendants who have been with an airline for several years prior to further training to become a purser, and normally earn a higher salary than flight attendants, because of the added responsibility.

On some airlines, under (or instead of) the purser, there may be other levels of cabin crew, such as Assistant purser (AP) and Senior flight attendant (SFA)/Senior crew member (SCM). Some airlines have two grades of general flight crew. Grade Ones work in First Class and the lower grades in the other cabins.

aft This describes the direction of movement within an aircraft: towards the tail. It may also describe the back/tail location or a region within an aircraft cabin, e.g. *aft lavatory*.

starboard This refers to the right hand side of the aircraft.

port This refers to the left hand side of the aircraft.

manifest A document listing the passengers or cargo on an aircraft. It also lists first class passengers, passengers with special needs or dietary requirements, and gate connections.

Common abbreviations

IFE in-flight entertainment

L/H long-haul

SM or SPML special meal

PFUG pre-flight upgrade

CCOM Cabin Crew Operations Manual

ICCA International Cabin Crew Association

Activity Assistant

- 11** These are some personal qualities in no particular order that students may want to consider with reference to their own traits and abilities.

Personality

ability to work as a team

good personal organization

good planning skills

desire to treat everyone equally

ability to work under pressure

being alert, noticing things

flexibility

patience

professionalism

quick reactions

Physical qualities

good co-ordination

excellent health

stamina

height

physical strength

clarity of speech

good vision and hearing

personal hygiene

a good memory