

## Phoenix Servant Leadership Learning Community session (PSLLC) Southwest Airlines - May, 2016

For our inaugural Phoenix Servant Leadership Learning Community session (PSLLC) Southwest Airlines leaders Tammie Flynn, Sharla Avila and John Viard provided an exceptional workshop, *It's Not the Love of Power: It's the Power of Luv*. Here are some key points from the session:

**1. Servant leadership is love in action. Employees at Southwest learn early about putting caring into action and that “you will never lose your job for doing the right thing.”** As an illustration, we watched a training video created for employees that had employees and customers sharing compelling stories of acting based on Southwest’s values: Warrior spirit, Servant’s heart, Fun-LUVing attitude. This showed how employees go outside the normal bounds of service in creative ways. Often this is done without getting permission – when one’s servant’s heart says it the right thing to do. One example was a customer who had joined the military and was leaving his young family to go overseas into a war zone. A flight attendant spotted the family and had two extra minutes time before they needed to prepare to depart. She took that time to let this young fellow’s children come on board to say goodbye one last time. Everyone on the plane cheered. This young man said, “I knew in that moment that if I could experience this from strangers on an airplane, I would be okay, I would be taken care of wherever I went.” By showing how employees could do something positive, sometimes even life-changing, viewers could find inspiration and encouragement to take actions too. There were repeated examples of employees who went the extra mile. Sometimes it was something very small like taking an extra 2 minutes to make a difference.



## **2. Maintain a strong culture by knowing your values and mission and encouraging people to live their values**

There were so many examples of how the values and mission of Southwest Airlines are being brought to life in their unique culture. For example, Southwest is in the Customer Service business, they just happen to fly airplanes. They connect people to what is important in their lives. They care so much about employees they have a mission statement for employees that goes along with the company mission. *“Above all” employees will be provided the same concern, respect and caring attitude within they organization that they are expect to share externally with every Southwest customer.*

**Treat your employees as your customers.**

**Our Purpose**  
Connect People to what's important in their lives through friendly, reliable, and low-cost air travel.

**Our Vision**  
To become the world's most loved, most flown, and most profitable airline.

**Our Values**  
**Live the Southwest Way**  
Warrior Spirit  
Servant's Heart  
Fun-LUVing Attitude  
**Work the Southwest Way**  
Safety and Reliability  
Friendly Customer Service  
Low Costs

**Our Mission**  
The mission of Southwest Airlines is dedication to the highest quality of Customer Service delivered with a sense of warmth, friendliness, individual pride, and Company Spirit.

**To our Employees**  
We are committed to provide our Employees a stable work environment with equal opportunity for learning and personal growth. Creativity and innovation are encouraged for improving the effectiveness of Southwest Airlines. Above all, Employees will be provided the same concern, respect, and caring attitude within the organization that they are expected to share externally with every Southwest Customer.

**3. Learning on the Fly** – Training and coaching initiatives focus on key competencies for employees based on one's role and work. One competency, "learning on the fly," was something that distinguished Southwest when 9/11 hit. Some elements for learning on the fly include developing a high level of team trust, taking time to brainstorm and learn together quickly, and finding a "third right answer." When 9/11 hit, other airlines took the "first right answer" and within 7 days almost every airline had employee layoffs. Southwest stayed with the challenge; pulled the team together, stayed creative, and found a way to invest in people and to stay financially solvent. The "third right answer" involved many things but one was that the CEO didn't take a paycheck for 6 months to help through this difficult time. When employees experienced the generosity from leadership, there was an outpouring of generosity from all employees who were offering to give extra hours or finding other ways to be helpful. Thus during 9/11 many airlines went under but Southwest stayed strong. This serves them to be able to give and help in many situations where there is devastation (such as after Hurricane Katrina). This can be an illustration of the way they practice the Golden Rule at Southwest. **Take care of the employees and the numbers will take care of themselves.**

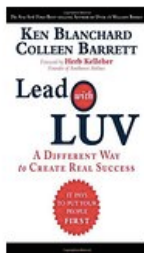
A question that was raised was, with your great servant-leadership culture, do you ever have difficult times? Two replies included: (1) We have difficult times but our focus on a fun-LUVing spirit helps us through and may make it less apparent when there are difficulties. (2) And there was an illustration of a difficult time, which happened just the day before (and some members had been up all night). There had been a technical issue with computer services that prevented the computer screening of luggage through the TSA. Bags were piling up at Sky Harbor Airport. Steve Wells told the story of how

the local Southwest team practiced “learning on the fly,” and found ways to get the bags to their destinations. Drawing on high trust in external networks they reached out to the City of Phoenix who brought additional workers over to help. Some leaders stayed to get food to everyone. There were many illustrations of servant leadership in action to inspire us.

#### 4. Some other key words of wisdom, best practices, and takeaways:

- \*There should always be two-way accountability- managers to employees and employees to managers.
- \*One year and five year career goals invite employees to grow their careers. This keeps performance improvement alive throughout the year, and helps employees stay motivated and excited, and able to achieve goals and dreams.
- \*Build teams with diversity (including diverse strengths among individuals on the team), and bring good diversity practices into recruitment.
- \*First embody the concept of servant leadership on an individual level and that spreads eventually, trickling out to the team, organization and community over time.

**5. Gifts** - True to the generous spirit of our hosts, we left with an extra gift – we all received a copy of Coleen Barrett’s wonderful book, *Lead with Luv: A Different Way to Create Real Success*.



Throughout the session we worked in small groups with these questions for dialogue: *“How do you demonstrate love in action (or service in action) in your daily work? What values guide behavior in your workplace? How do you encourage people to live up to values? And, how do you use SL in internal and external networks?”*

What a great spirit of learning together among every servant leader who joined. What an extraordinary presentation from Tammie, Sharla and John, and launch to our SLLC. What wonderful stories and questions from so many of our members. Thank you for all you contributed!



PSLLC 2016 - OUR GROUP IN SESSION #1 AT SOUTHWEST AIRLINES

BACK ROW: SCOTT, STEVE T, MATI, EDDIE, JULIE, MOULSON, STEVE W, GAIL, SHERRY, JUSTIN, DAVID, JOHN  
FRONT ROW: DEBORAH, ISHRATHI, RHONDA, ROBIN, SHARLA, DANIELLE, REBECCA, FIORELLA, KARI, LAURA, TAMMIE