

Inside Southwest Airlines (SWA) , August '06

For this SLLC session, we were invited to see the inner workings of Southwest Airlines, a company that works hard to keep KidSpirit alive in all aspects of their work together. In preparation for this morning, SWA gave us each a copy of LuvLines, a company newsletter demonstrating many creative ways to teach the complexity of this business, to recognize *People at all levels working hard to keep SW in the winning column, and continue to build a spirit of community.

Jeff Lamb opened our day by telling us that he came to SWA with high expectations and then discovered life inside Southwest to be even better than he dared to imagine. He then showed a heartwarming video on Customer Service, modeling the three core values of SWA:

A Warrior's Spirit Leading with a Servant's Heart And a Fun-Loving Attitude!

We saw this on our tour through their headquarters, with unique expressions of fun in every workspace, new murals in the halls to commemorate special aspects of SW culture, and memorabilia framed and hung proudly through every hallway.

We learned how hard they work to create a family atmosphere in a company of 32,000 very special People. There are pet photos, couples who married after meeting at SWA, old uniforms, awards, honors, uniforms made of peanut packages...so much creative and funny stuff you couldn't possibly take it all in. Our take-away was that People here are encouraged to bring their whole self to work and enjoy participating on a really committed, fun and winning team.

We were taken to the Marketing Department to learn how they bring fun and KidSpirit into their commercials and branding. This helped underscore why it is good business to earn mind space with Clients through fun themes such as "Wanna get away?" or "It must be football season!" We then were brought into a Marketing Team learning experience called "The Family Feud Game Show." Teaching business facts and strategies through a fun activity is a far better way to make learning memorable, something SWA does really well. We learned about a neuropeptide, oxytocin, that is generated from peak emotional experiences and has been associated with high levels of commitment and loyalty. This research provides a scientific insight into the tremendous loyalty People have to SWA. Clearly, SWA is a master at coming up with a multitude of fun ways to show appreciation and make People feel a part of the entire business.

After our tours we devoted the rest of the morning to remembering the importance of nurturing our own spirits. It's easy to stay so focused on making sure those around us are well served that our own needs may get overlooked, particularly by us. A leader's capacity to remain childlike and generate contagious fun is an important part of modeling servant leadership. Our friend, Herb Kelleher, Chairman of SWA is a great example of this.

We had some fun exploring the importance of play, fun and KidSpirit in our life and work, learning why we get talked out of the many creative ways we had fun as kids and how we can rediscover that in our lives and work now. People brought some wonderful toys from childhood, shared some great memories and then generated some energizing possibilities for reenergizing our lives and work with a renewed sense of playfulness.

We were encouraged to spend some time going back to childhood dreams and memories and finding creative ways to make some of those dreams come true. Too many busy adults have delayed joy for so long that it has lost a place in our lives. ***You Don't Have To Go Home From Work Exhausted!*** was given out as a resource to help us create lots of refreshing Joy Breaks in our lives.

We thank Cheryl Hughey, Jeff Lamb, John Viard, Keila Selders, Karen Hafertepe, Tiffany Harvey, Travis Peterson and Toni Baughman and all the other great People inside SWA for making our visit so successful. We left inspired to bring more fun into our own lives so that we can be enthusiastic servant leaders within our organizations, families and community.

Robert K. Greenleaf said, "Nothing much happens without a dream. For something great to happen it takes a great dream." When we dare to claim a dream from childhood and bring it alive now, we will be amazed at the new energy, creativity and enthusiasm it generates for every aspect of life.

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*Note: SWA always capitalizes People, Employees, and Customers as a symbol of respect.