

Chicago Daily Law Bulletin.

Serving the city's law profession since 1854

May 10, 2018

Air travel helps build character, as any frequent flyer will tell you

By Adam J. Glazer

Adam J. Glazer is a partner at Schoenberg Finkel Newman & Rosenberg, LLC, and an adjunct professor at the Northwestern Pritzker School of Law. His practice focuses on business litigation, and he is available at adam.glazer@sfnr.com.

Airplane travel is nature's way of making you look like your passport photo. — Al Gore

Like rain on a day off or coffee spilling on your shirt on the way into a client meeting, air travel delays seem inevitable.

When caused by weather conditions or mechanical issues, delays are shrugged off. The aircraft throttle is sticking? I'll happily wait for the maintenance tech to pull up alongside the 737 in his golf cart with a little WD-40.

It's when skies are clear, no instrument malfunctions and the new departure time texted by the airline shows 20 minutes later than the already delayed ETD displayed at the gate that frustration mounts.

The earnest gate agent broadcasts to her captive audience that this time, the inbound aircraft really is expected to arrive in 25 minutes, but most passengers lost faith in her three announcements ago.

Thoroughly relieved to finally board after a 2½-hour wait, I almost fail to realize that no details behind the irksome delay were ever offered, including from the flight crew. Instead, please step out of the aisle so other passengers can find their seats, fasten your seat belt low and tight across your lap and hang on to your coats until the end of the boarding process to save room in the overhead for carry-on bags, or "rollerboards" in airlinespeak.

This last directive is one to which virtually no passenger adheres. Not only are the overhead compartments stuffed to capacity by the end of the boarding process, but those of us seated by the window with our seat belts secured low and tight are in no position to access the overhead and find room for our winter coats if we wait for the boarding process to be completed.

With the burly and unfriendly middle-seat passenger spilling not only over the armrest but into a considerable portion of my seat, I settle in as the cabin lights dim for takeoff. Accelerative forces in the pressurized air, combined with spending most of the preceding 2½ hours at the "Aeronautical Alcohol" tavern, enable me to lapse into a deep sleep. Or so I had hoped.

“FROM THE COCKPIT, THIS IS CAPTAIN LOUD!” booms Capt. Loud, before delivering an irrelevant and somewhat esoteric — but rousing — monologue about the winds that will apparently be coming from the southwest when we land four hours from now and how we’re approaching our cruising altitude of 33,000 feet.

Or will we land three hours from now and cruise at 34,000 feet? My head is still spinning when I actually hear Capt. Loud conclude his piercing remarks by inviting me to “sit back, relax and enjoy the flight.”

Deprived now of both sleep and the armrest, I start to contemplate the refreshment cart’s arrival. The monopolistic 34,000 foot prices won’t discourage me today; I’m on an expense account. Let’s break out the “seasonally fresh” wraps or savory snack boxes.

Oh, how you disappoint, flight attendant Jose, when you offer only some Belgian biscuit/cookie/biscotti concoction on this flight. Why didn’t I pick up a sandwich before boarding, you ask, considering the flight was delayed some 2½ hours? Because they were serving vodka tonics at Aeronautical Alcohol, Jose, not tuna melts.

Attempting to make up for the absence of snack boxes, the flight crew lowers a video screen with complimentary content. To listen in, however, requires headphones, and alas, mine are unreachable, tucked away in one of the pockets of my “rollerboard,” now buried beneath winter coats of both disobedient window passengers and adherent aisle-sitters.

Instead, I simply stare in disbelief at the screen as a major airline subjects its passengers to 108 minutes of “Ferdinand,” an animated film about a peaceful bull consigned to a bull-training camp.

Not only does this kids’ movie fail to quiet the kid behind me gleefully running through his alphabet, but it actually features quarterback Peyton Manning voicing the role of the fighting bull Guapo. I applaud my own foresight for rendering my headphones inaccessible.

To escape this unlikely cartoon bull movie, I again attempt to drift off, belly full of confusing, sugary Belgian treats and the armrest unexpectedly available when the stocky and disagreeable middle seater makes a run at the first-class lav. This nap attempt too is foiled mere minutes later, when the flight attendant who calls herself Cindy takes to the intercom to share how “excited” she is about a new credit card opportunity.

Cindy’s genuinely contrived excitement over the piles of miles bestowed once a passenger charges the equivalent of three months’ pay over the next two months comprises solid salesmanship. However, those folks extravagant enough to absorb a \$95 annual fee surely have an airline credit card already. I observe not a single hand reach for the application.

Left with little alternative, I consider doing some work. Predictably, just as my laptop fires up, the seat in front comes flying back to the maximum recline position, violently displacing my computer from the tray table. The more experienced flyer in front of me evidently knew enough to schedule her nap after the banal credit card solicitation.

My futile effort to find room to work enables the belligerent middle seater to quickly reclaim her armrest, leaving me nowhere to put my laptop — or my arm. I’m about ready to trade Jose the laptop for another dose of Belgian sugar, when my delightful, svelte neighbor unexpectedly offers me the use of her tray table. Suddenly, I’m in business.

“Ladies and gentlemen, we are beginning our approach into Chicago and should have you on the ground in about 20 minutes,” begins the announcement. “Please power down your larger

devices, return your seatbacks and tray tables to their upright positions and ensure your seat belts are securely fastened.”

Twenty minutes out, and tray tables go upright? Tray tables get closed to ensure emergency egress during takeoffs and landings. Who needs emergency egress when we're still 20 minutes outside O'Hare? What happened to sounding the "return your seatbacks and tray tables" refrain five minutes before landing?

Although the captain promised to make up as much of the delay as possible en route, we land precisely 2½ hours late, and the reason for the delay remains mysterious. It was a bruising, non-productive flight home, and I deplane tired and hungry in my newly wrinkled winter coat.

Fortunately, my trip next week is to St. Louis, a destination close enough I can train or perhaps even drive.

Wait a minute. Travel by train? What is this, the 1920s? Or drive? I didn't even drive to O'Hare.

On the Uber ride home, I book my St. Louis trip on the airline's app. And I put it on my airline credit card.

©2018 by Law Bulletin Media. Content on this site is protected by the copyright laws of the United States. The copyright laws prohibit any copying, redistributing, or retransmitting of any copyright-protected material. The content is NOT WARRANTED as to quality, accuracy or completeness, but is believed to be accurate at the time of compilation. Websites for other organizations are referenced at this site; however, the Law Bulletin Media does not endorse or imply endorsement as to the content of these websites. By using this site you agree to the [Terms, Conditions and Disclaimer](#). Law Bulletin Media values its customers and has a [Privacy Policy](#) for users of this website.