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Cabin Emergencies . . . Are You Prepared?

When in-flight trouble allows no time to stop and think, each aircraft crew member must react not only quickly, but appropriately, to discharge his or her responsibilities both as an individual and as a team member.

by

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Each crew member must know the duties and responsibilities expected of him or her during an emergency. In addition, crew members should be familiar with the duties and responsibilities of their fellow workers so that they can be assumed if necessary.

Other crew members may become incapacitated during the course of an emergency landing or ditching — or may be away from their normal duty stations at the time of an emergency. The assuming of another's duties should be done immediately and positively when the need to do so is recognized.

According to *Webster's Dictionary*, the word, morality, means "the quality of that which conforms to right ideals or principles of human conduct." To put it another way, the person with the highest morality is the one whose conduct most closely conforms to principle.

'Highest Morality'

For the flight attendant, the "highest morality" is conduct that most fully assures the safety and well-being of the passengers. You cannot do it unless you know your equipment and procedures — backward, forward and in the dark.

Nor can you do it if you become incapacitated. A flight attendant with a shattered ankle cannot successfully cope with an emergency.

You cannot do it if you are indifferent — that is, if it is "too much trouble" to personally check for carry-on baggage, fastened seat belts and seat backs at their proper angle.

You cannot do it if you are not in good health, if you are poorly nourished or fatigued.

How is your conduct?

What is your measure of morality?

Morality of Safety

If you can honestly answer "No" to any one of the following questions, you are not practicing the morality of safety at the prime level. The following questions provide a handy personal checklist before each flight. The checklist is by no means complete, but it may serve to jog the memory and bring to light those areas that need some soul searching:

- Do you mentally review emergency procedures when you board each flight?

- Do you visually note the location of emergency equipment when you board, even though it may not be your duty position? Are you particularly observant of this when boarding aircraft which you have flown infrequently?

• When handicapped passengers are boarded, are you aware of how they should be handled in an emergency? Do you ensure that they are properly briefed on emergency exits, the operation of seat belts, etc.?

• Are you aware of able-bodied passengers or traveling crew members who could help in the event of an emergency?

• Whenever the main cabin door is open and there are passengers on board, do you understand that you are a "fire watcher," keeping an eye on the door and being aware of anything unusual?

• Are you alert to passengers smoking while on the ground?

• Do you check the cabin for over-sized carry-on items and make every effort to properly stow all items before each and every takeoff?

• Do you ensure that your seat belt/shoulder harness is properly fastened for every takeoff and landing?

• Inflight, are you constantly aware of any unusual air leaks or smells within the cabin, sounds of power changes of the engine, attitude of the aircraft and altitude levels?

• Do you effectively communicate with other crew members and work as a team on all flights?

• On takeoffs and landings, are you mentally prepared to quickly review the actions you are expected to take should an emergency occur?

Pre-Flight Briefing

The pre-flight briefing assures readiness for any emergency that might arise during a particular flight. It is, in essence, a preplanning that saves valuable time during an emergency period when the actions of the crew must harmonize to assure success. There must be no hesitation! All decisions and actions taken must be made in a confident, expeditious manner.

Basic to that success is correct knowledge, current information and proper briefing. It is not sufficient to merely know the location of emergency equipment or how to use it. Just as, or more, important is knowing the proper sequence of actions to be taken to meet the requirements of the particular situation. This is basic to the emergency and is the same for each aircraft.

No one becomes prepared for an emergency in a moment. What a person does in an emergency is determined by what he or she has done over a long period. That is the true value of experience.

Cabin Door Preparation

One example of repeated procedures followed in a routine situation paying off in a non-routine situation involves the preparation of a cabin door. We routinely arm and disarm evacuation slides or place the door(s) in an automatic/emergency or normal mode.

Our training provides the basis for the procedures to be employed when, and if, an emergency should occur during any phase of flight, with daily responsibilities and procedures a form of conditioning to ensure a proper response in any emergency.

Since we are "creatures of habit," training, emergency procedures and checklists are — and should be — stressed repeatedly. Recurrent training can be one of the most effective means of providing an atmosphere of safety awareness and instilling confidence relative to that vital safety role while on the aircraft. This training is a shared responsibility between the individual air carrier and its cabin flight attendants.

Flight attendants have the responsibility of remaining current in their jobs, of reinforcing, reviewing and enhancing their knowledge and carrying out any, and all, established policies and procedures required in the furtherance of passenger safety and well-being aboard the aircraft.

The air carriers have the heavy responsibility of providing practical, accurate training in a realistic manner, training that conforms to the state-of-the-art and will equip its crew members with the skills, knowledge and experience needed to provide essential guidance in the event of an emergency.

'Hands-On' Experience

It goes without saying that the best practical training is "hands-on," working experience. Films, videos, work books and manuals are excellent training aids, but they should be used as supplements to, not substitutions for, working experience to reinforce what is expected from crew members in non-routine situations.

Without such "hands-on" experience, one may become a good theoretician, but that is not enough. There is no way to practice emergencies during a normal, routine flight.

Recurrent training should provide the necessary tools to test reactions and abilities rather than only one's ability to memorize. Recurrent training is a built-in opportunity to teach safety awareness that will be there to be used if needed.

If you feel you are ill-equipped, you may not be putting as much into your recurrent training as you should. Possibly your training is not giving you the tools to effectively do your job.

Feedback Essential

If this is the case, your thoughts and ideas should be made known through the proper channels within your airline. Training departments should want to hear from its flight attendants to ensure that they are providing the best possible training. Feedback is essential.

The "30-second review" on takeoffs and landings is a form of reinforcement, or super-conditioning, of those procedures taught initially and hopefully reviewed in each recurrent training session in a meaningful manner. It stands to reason that, if a person is already thinking about procedures and actions to be taken, he or she will tend to function more effectively and expeditiously when faced with an actual emergency.

In today's working environment within the airline industry, there is no room for complacency. We must be constantly aware of our tremendous safety responsibilities and how they interact within our community. We must ensure that we are in a position to react quickly to any non-routine situations and make the best possible decisions when confronted with an emergency.

Are you prepared? Maybe that personal checklist is in order to ensure your readiness, your preparedness, your fitness to function competently and responsibly at all times, to ensure that you are functioning with the highest morality. ♦

The Whys of Ear Problems

A basic understanding of the reasons behind passenger ear discomfort during air travel may help cabin crews deal with individual situations.

Ear Block Can Last for Days

As aircraft cabin pressure decreases, the expanding air in the middle ear pushes the eustachian tube open and, by escaping through it to the nasal passages, equalizes the pressure with that of the cabin. However, when it increases, as it does during an unpressurized descent, crew members and passengers must periodically open the eustachian tube to equalize pressure.

An upper respiratory infection, such as a cold or sore throat, or a nasal allergic
condition, can produce sufficient congestion around the eustachian tube to make equalization difficult. Consequently, the difference in aircraft cabin can build to a level that will hold the eustachian tube closed, making equalization difficult, if not impossible. The resulting problem is commonly referred to as an "ear block."

An ear block produces severe ear pain and loss of hearing that can last from several hours to several days. Rupture of the ear drum also can occur in flight or after landing, and fluid can accumulate in the middle ear and become infected.

An ear block is prevented by not flying with an upper respiratory infection or nasal allergic condition. Adequate protection usually is not provided by decongestant sprays or drops to reduce congestion around the eustachian tubes. Oral decongestants have side effects that can significantly impair performance.

If an ear block does not clear shortly after landing, a physician should be consulted.

Sinus Block — The Agonizing Descent

During ascent and descent, air pressure in the sinuses equalizes with the aircraft cabin pressure through small openings that connect the sinuses to the nasal passages. Either an upper respiratory infection, such as a cold or sinusitis, or a nasal allergic condition can produce sufficient congestion around an opening to slow equalization and, as the difference in pressure between the sinus and cabin mounts, eventually plug the opening. This "sinus block" occurs most frequently during descent.

A sinus block can occur in the frontal sinuses located above each eyebrow or in the maxillary sinuses in each upper cheek. It usually will produce excruciating pain over the sinus area. A maxillary sinus blcok also can cause the upper teeth to ache. Bloody mucous may discharge from the nasal passages.

A sinus block is prevented by not flying with an upper respiratory infection or nasal allergic condition. As in the case of ear block, adequate protection usually is not provided by decongestant sprays or drops to reduce congestion around the sinus openings. Oral decongestants have side effects that can impair performance.

If a sinus block does not clear shortly after landing, a physician should be consulted. ♦

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