

Southwest Misleads its Employees and the Public



May 13, 2020

SETTING THE RECORD STRAIGHT

While Southwest has been going through the same hard times as all other airlines, they have continued to mislead employees and the public on a very important fact. In spite of their repeated claims otherwise, furloughs have indeed occurred at Southwest Airlines. The Machinists Union has reached the end of its tolerance of allowing Southwest to continue this myth. Just last Friday, Southwest CEO Gary Kelly did it again – enough is enough.

As most great ideas begin, so did Southwest Airlines Co. The idea of Southwest sprang from Herb Kelleher and Rollin King at a table in a cocktail lounge in 1967. In 1971 SWA began operations flying from Dallas, Houston and San Antonio. At the time, Southwest Airlines was a small, regional airline, having fewer than 200 employees. Today, however, Southwest has grown to be a major domestic carrier in the United States.

Like all major carriers, Southwest has had operations in some locations that were not profitable, realized that work could be moved to other locations and aircraft could be more useful elsewhere. In these cases, Southwest Airlines, just as all other airlines, ceased operations, closed reservations offices and eliminated jobs in those locations. When that happened,

the employees affected were furloughed, and followed their work, took a layoff, or accepted severance as provided by the collective bargaining agreement and ended their employment.

Although Southwest executives like to proclaim that the company has never had a furlough, that is simply not true. Such self-serving statements mislead current employees and the public, and it is an insult to all the Southwest employees that had been previously furloughed. Southwest may have forgotten them, but the Machinists Union has not.

Some examples of Southwest Airlines' involuntarily furloughs were the stations of Newark, Flint, Dayton, Canton/Akron, Key West, Branson, Sarasota, Atlantic City, Asheville, Knoxville, Newport News, Lexington, Jackson, and the reservations centers in Dallas, Salt Lake City, Charleston and Little Rock. All told, thousands of employees suffered the loss and turmoil of losing their job or moving across the country.

Southwest Airlines has painted the false picture to their employees and the rest of the world that they have never furloughed a single employee. However, on February 28, 2004, over 1,900 hardworking and dedicated Southwest employees were involuntarily furloughed from DAL, SLC and LIT reservation centers. The Collective Bargaining Agreement provided the difficult options for workers to transfer to other locations, accept furlough with recall and bidding rights, or terminate their employment and go to the street.

Many employees struggled over these decisions: family disruptions, relocation to unfamiliar places, removing and disrupting children from schools, selling and buying homes, commuting, paying for apartments while maintaining a mortgage. Some faced the worst decision of all: not moving, not accepting the layoff with recall but accepting their meager severance allowance and permanently losing their job.

Relocation or not, employees suffered the consequence of

working for a major airline. Families were uprooted, some marriages did not survive, children had to leave schools and the comfort of home, financial ruin came to some. Many continued their employment and remain today dedicated and loyal Southwest Airlines employees.

Whether one wants to call being let go from work because of a reduction in force, the closing of a station or reservation center an involuntary furlough, furlough or layoff, the results are the same. Employees pay the price. The story Southwest Airlines would have us believe is an insult to everyone who has experienced the truth.

The only way for Southwest to successfully move forward as we navigate the changing industry is by recognizing that management and employees are partners who must work together. Trust is an essential component to that partnership, and that starts with honesty.

Dedicated Southwest employees deserve better. They deserve the truth.

Fraternally,



David Supplee

PRESIDENT-DIRECTING

GENERAL CHAIR

POST ON ALL IAM BULLETIN BOARDS