

# **A FLIGHT ATTENDANT'S ESSENTIAL GUIDE**



# **A FLIGHT ATTENDANT'S ESSENTIAL GUIDE**

From Passenger Relations to Challenging Situations

Colin C. Law



BrownWalker Press  
Irvine • Boca Raton

*A Flight Attendant's Essential Guide:  
From Passenger Relations to Challenging Situations*

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# Preface

**H**ave you ever had a wonderful flight experience? Do you ever pay attention to the safety demonstration exhibited? Did you enjoy your in-flight meal?

Millions of people travel around the globe for various purposes including leisure, business and meeting family and friends. Thanks to modern technology, aircrafts are soaring longer distances and reaching destinations in a much shorter time. With specially-trained airline personnel working on aircrafts, travelers' safety and comfort needs are met.

*A Flight Attendant's Essential Guide* is written for airline executives, university lecturers who specialize in the airline industry, and for undergraduate students preparing for a career as a flight attendants. Those working in passenger, aircraft, airport as well as general communications at an airport or aircraft can benefit from this book though a thorough understanding the responsibilities of flight attendants.

This guidebook primarily focuses on the passenger aspect of in-flight service, including operations and communication skills, and how flight attendants interact with passengers at each phase of a flight.

*A Flight Attendant's Essential Guide* is more than a manual or handbook because it includes authentic dialogue and case studies. The book follows the route a typical traveler while revealing flight attendants' "behind the scene" duties. In an industry that sees hundreds of thousands of travelers every day, there are many "non-normal" occurrences. This book uses such occurrences and situations which the author has first-hand experience with to encourage students to strive for professional excellence in this field.

This is the first book to break down the job of flight attendants into its component parts, all of which are vital to an industry servicing the global travelling community. While each airline has its own training program, this book is designed to 1) interest individuals in this career, 2) provide technical

in-flight knowledge on specific carriers, and 3) develop the mindset required for this field of service.

The first three chapters outline flight attendants' duties and the facilities and equipment on an aircraft. Chapter 1 is an introduction to the cabin crew, the history and their duties. Chapters 2 and 3 explain the different equipment located in an aircraft cabin and their usage and purpose.

The second section of the book explains cabin crew duties during the various phase of a flight. Chapters 4 to 8 focus on flight attendants' duties from preparation to passenger boarding, departure, in-flight services and arrival. Chapter 4 explains the cabin crew's duties before passengers boarding. Chapter 5 explains the boarding process and the flight attendants' responsibilities. Chapter 6 explains the pre-departure preparation and the importance of cabin preparation before takeoff. Chapter 7 looks into various cabin crew tasks on board. Chapter 8 focuses on the arrival process, including cabin preparation before and after landing. These chapters give the reader an understanding of flight attendants' duties in different stages of a flight.

The third section of the book mainly focuses on passenger handling. The section comprises of five chapters to allow readers to understand special passenger handling and emergency procedures. Chapter 9 explains the process of in-flight catering and different equipment that are installed in the galley for meal preparation during service. Chapter 10 highlights different special passengers that the cabin crew encounters on a daily basis. Chapter 11 provides an in-depth explanation on safety, security and irregularities on a flight, and how the cabin crew handles different situations. Chapter 12 outlines the procedures of handling sick passengers on a flight. Chapter 13 explains the use of different equipment that are used during an emergency evacuation.

The last section: chapters 14 to 16 outlines the cabin crew's scheduling process, resource management and administrative duties on the flight, allowing reader to have a clear understanding on what goes behind the scene. backstage of cabin crew. Chapter 14 illustrates how airline work out flight attendants' work schedules. Chapter 15 addresses the importance of crew resource management, and how to deal with situations on a flight with inadequate resources. The last chapter in the book exhibits the documents and forms that flight attendants encounter during their duties. Together, these chapters aim to provide the reader with an in-depth understanding of overall flight operations.

## About the Author

**C**olin C. Law is academician of Air Transportation Management. Prior to joining the academic field, he had worked in the customer service, reservation and finance departments of a major international carrier for nearly ten years. This extensive experience in customer service and airline operations has enabled him to develop multiple airline courses for the tertiary education sector and provide working professionals with insight into the airline industry. Colin is also the author of other critically acclaimed textbooks on airline airport operations, and is the author of *A Practical Guide to Airline Customer Service: From Airline Operations to Passenger Services* and the co-author of *Introduction to Airline Ground Service*.



## CHAPTER ONE

# The Flight Attendant

### Learning Objectives

After reading this chapter, the reader should be able to:

- Understand the purposes and responsibilities of the flight attendants
- Understand the differences of airline business strategy and its flight attendants
- Identify the elements within cabin management
- Be familiar with the in-flight service department's organization
  - In-flight services
  - Flight attendant management and training
- Identify the flight attendant classification on a flight

Flight attendants are members of the on-board team recruited by an airline to perform duties on an aircraft. They are also known as cabin crew, air hosts/hostesses or stewards/stewardesses. Their role is to ensure the safety, security, and service (comfort of passengers) for the duration of a flight. Their physical appearance has a direct impact on a customer's choice of airline when travel planning.

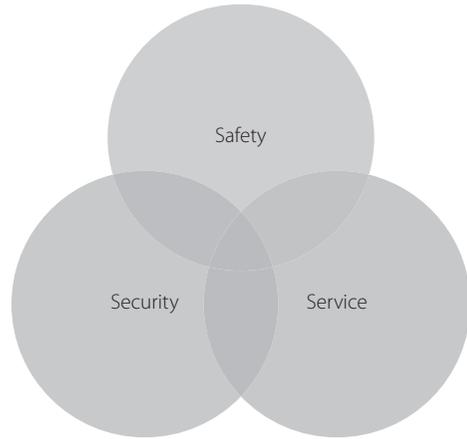
**Table 1** Passenger air travel process

	Process	Time required
	Ticket Purchase Transaction	30 minutes
	Check-in process	15 minutes
	En Route	2–16 hours
	Baggage Claim	30 minutes

From the moment passengers purchase a plane ticket to the time they leave the airport terminal for their destination, passengers are spending the majority of their time inside the aircraft with the flight attendants. Airlines often set higher recruitment standards for flight attendants as they are the most visible representation of service to customers.

An airline is a company within the air transportation industry

offering services to customers. Service cannot be separated from the personnel providing it, and customer satisfaction ratings are affected by the quality of service offered by airline personnel. These ratings are becoming significant measurements in airline choice as customers are using them to evaluate and compare airlines for travel. Flight attendants play an important role in maintaining an airline's image as well as the level of customer satisfaction.



**Figure 1:** Roles of the flight attendant.

## HISTORY

Flight attendants were initially positioned on airships. Heinrich Kubis was reported to be the world's first flight attendant in March 1912, when he began caring for passengers and serving food aboard the DELAG zeppelin LZ-10 Schwaben between Berlin and Friedrichshafen.<sup>[1]</sup> The working environment on an airship is different compared to that of an aircraft. The size of an airship allowed various facilities unlike on a plane, and in the photo on the right, Heinrich is providing services in the dining room of the airship which is similar to a restaurant on the ground.

In the late 1920s, some airlines began to employ male flight attendants known as aerial couriers and cabin boys to assist passengers by storing their luggage, comforting nervous passengers, and helping people get on the plane. The aircraft during the 1920s were relatively small; therefore, teenagers or men of small stature were employed to provide these services.<sup>[2]</sup> Some airlines also assigned co-pilots to provide services to air travelers. The first male flight



**Figure 2:** Heinrich Kubis (center) serves passengers aboard the DELAG airship, the LZ-120 Bodensee, during the summer of 1919.

*Photo courtesy of the Luftschiffbau Zeppelin GmbH Archive.*

attendants, “cabin boys,” were hired by Britain’s Daimler Airways in 1922 to provide assistance to air travelers.<sup>[3]</sup>

The airline industry changed in 1930 when Ellen Church, a registered nurse who had taken flying lessons, was seeking a pilot position at Boeing Air Transport and was offered a job as a stewardess. On May 15, 1930, a Boeing tri-motor left Oakland, California, en route to Chicago with Ellen Church, the world’s first stewardess, aboard the commercial flight.<sup>[5]</sup> Other airlines followed Boeing Air Transport. Swissair was the first European carrier to hire an air hostess in 1934, a woman by the name of Nelly Diener.<sup>[6]</sup>

During the early years of aviation history, aircrafts such as the DC-3 were unpressurized, making them noisy and uncomfortable. Air travelers applauded the presence of stewardesses on flights as they felt much safer and more comfortable with a registered nurse on board. In addition to serving meals, stewardesses were required to perform various other tasks including the following:

- Welcoming passengers
- Punching their tickets and giving refunds when necessary at each stop
- Weighing the passengers and their baggage
- Loading and unloading baggage



**Figure 3:** Daimler Airways began operations from Croydon to Paris using “cabin boys” on their aircraft.<sup>[4]</sup>  
*Photo courtesy of British Airways; Heritage Collection.*

- Making sure the wicker seats were bolted down
- Dusting the window sills
- Carrying buckets of fuel to the plane
- Swatting flies in the cabin
- Ensuring that passengers did not throw lighted cigarettes out the windows
- Ensuring that passengers did not mistakenly open the emergency exit door when they intended to use the “blue room”, or lavatory
- Mopping the floor when the toilet overflowed
- Adjusting the clocks and altimeters in the cabin
- Handing out chewing gum, blankets and slippers on night flights
- Cleaning passengers’ shoes
- Sweeping the floor

Some of these duties are still carried out by flight attendants today. Many other airlines followed the ideas of employing the registered nurses as a stewardess for their service. Upon the outbreak of World War II, nurses

were called to join the military and airlines began to hire untrained women who were not nurses to become flight attendant.<sup>[7]</sup> In the mid 1930s, airlines only recruited single women to work in flight attendants; their career would be terminated upon marriage or reaching the age of 32 or 35.<sup>[8]</sup> Many flight attendants were transferred to ground positions upon reaching the age limit. This policy was lifted in 1964 when legislation regarding gender discrimination was passed in the provisions of the Civil Rights Act in the United States.<sup>[9]</sup> Today, there are no age limitations for being part of flight attendants, as long as all flight attendants pass their annual training, medical examinations and physical tests.

With the advent of larger aircrafts, more passengers can be accommodated on a flight, and the roles of flight attendants have become even more significant. Positioning sufficient flight attendant on a flight is mandatory by regulations, and in-flight service department has become one of the largest workforce sectors within an airline.

### Case Feature

#### **Longest Serving Flight Attendant in Guinness World Record<sup>[10]</sup>**

Ron Akana entered the Guinness World Record as the longest serving flight attendant. Ron began his career in 1949 when he was still a student and retired in 2012 at the age of 83. He worked in the same company for a total of 63 years.

## **TYPES OF AIRLINES AND THEIR FLIGHT ATTENDANT**

As per aviation regulations, all commercial airlines require flight attendant on board flights. The flight attendants' main responsibility is to ensure the safety of all passengers on board. Today flight attendants are assigned with additional duties of ensuring passengers' comfort.

Airlines operate differently according to their business strategy, and these strategies can be classified under four categories: network carriers, low-cost airlines, charter airlines and corporate airlines.

### **Full service network carriers**

Perhaps the most well known type of flight attendant is from full service network carriers, and many of these are international airlines offering both intercontinental and domestic services. Flight attendants perform duties

on network carriers and are able to fly around the world. Network carriers fly a variety of aircraft, including wide-body and narrow-body aircraft. The aircraft ranges from jumbo size (A380-800 and the Boeing B747-8), medium size jets (A330-300 and B777-300), single aisle jets (A320 and B737) and regional jets (E170 and CRJ 200). In addition, flight attendant working at network carriers offer full services to passengers as amenities are included with their tickets. The majority of today's network carriers are also offering both long-haul and short-haul flights. Flight attendant assigned to long-haul flight duties often require staying overnight in cities in different countries. Flight attendant recruited by network carriers enjoy a full range of benefits, including an attractive pay scale and travel benefits.

### **Low-cost airlines**

Low-cost airlines are also known as “no-frill” airlines. Low-cost airlines mainly offer short-haul and medium haul flights that provide both international and domestic services. Many low-cost airlines fly single type narrow-body single aisle jets (A320 and B737). The majority of the flight attendant return to their home base city at the end of their workday. Low-cost airlines' business strategy is based upon the concept of “you get what you pay for,” and many amenities are not included in the ticket. The flight attendant offers in-flight sales including meals, beverages and merchandise. Flight attendant working for low-cost airlines generally receive fewer benefits compared to network carriers, and the majority of low-cost airlines do not require staying overnight in other cities.

### **Charter airlines**

Charter airlines do not operate with a fixed schedule and are often chartered by tour groups. The schedules of charter airlines are not fixed, and the requirements of flight attendant depend on the chartered operations. Subject to the airline's market and size, charter airlines operate both wide-body and narrow-body aircrafts. In-flight services are similar to those of full service network carriers; however, the chartering party may amend these services. Some charter airlines employ temporary or seasonal flight attendants with short contract periods (two to three months) for charter operations during high travel seasons. Flight attendants working for charter airlines receive limited benefits compared to those working for other types of airlines due to the terms of their contracts.

## Corporate and private jet travel

Corporate or private jet travel refers to a company or individual who owns and flies their own aircraft as opposed to an airline. The aircraft they fly is generally a small, narrow-body business jet (Learjet 750) with few passengers on board. Flight attendants working for a corporation fly to a location that is required by the organization or individual. The work schedule of the flight attendant is variable and subject to change with the company's demand, and each trip may last for weeks. Due to the need for flexibility, the pay scale for flight attendant is relatively higher and other benefits are offered.

## CABIN MANAGEMENT

Flight attendants' main responsibility is to ensure the safety of passengers on a flight. According to the International Air Transport Association's (IATA) cabin safety management program, cabin safety consists of six areas: cabin design and operation, equipment, procedures, crew training, human performance and passenger management.<sup>[11]</sup>

### Cabin design and operation

The aircraft cabin is designed to protect passengers. Aircraft manufacturers use nonflammable material in the cabin to minimize areas of risk of fire, such as the carpet and ceiling. Every aircraft must be equipped with sufficient emergency exits to allow passenger evacuation in the event of an emergency. The amount of passenger seats and the seating configuration on board are regulated and certified for evacuation, according to Federal aviation regulations FAR Part § 25.817 of the United States.<sup>[12]</sup> Regulations state



**Figure 4:** Embrarer 2-1 configuration (left), Embrarer 2-2 seating configuration (middle), Boeing B737 economy cabin 3-3 seating configuration.



**Figure 5:** Boeing B777 economy class in 2-5-2 configuration (left) (photo permitted by Chris Sloan/*AirwaysNews.com*), Boeing B777 3-3-3 configuration (middle) (photo permitted by Bildarchiv der Lufthansa AG), Airbus A380 economy cabin 3-4-3 configuration (right) (photo permitted by Bernie Leighton).

that on an aircraft with one aisle, no more than three seats may be installed on each side in any one row to ensure passengers seated by the window can safely evacuate. When an airline is designing the seating layout, the maximum number of seats on each row of a narrow-body aircraft is 3-3. Depending on aircraft size, airlines have the option to configure their seating as 1-1, 1-2, 2-3 or 3-3.

A wide-body aircraft consists of two aisles in the cabin. Airlines have a variety of different seating configuration patterns to choose from, such as 2-4-2, 2-5-2, 3-4-3, 3-3-3 and 3-5-3 to maximize passenger capacity. Some airlines, however, install fewer seats to increase customer comfort. The seating layout is also designed to allow flight attendant standing in the front or rear of the cabin to have a complete view of the aisle from one end to the other. This allows the crew a clear visual of the entire cabin, especially when the aircraft is taxiing, taking off and landing.

## Equipment

A variety of safety equipment, such as life vests, oxygen generators, first-aid kits and an emergency slide are installed in all aircrafts to ensure the safety of passengers during flight. There are also routine precautions or warning devices on aircrafts to ensure a safe cabin environment, including fire and smoke detectors, cabin pressure monitors and warning systems.

## Procedures

The airline prepares procedures that give directions to flight attendants to offer services and handle numerous situations during a flight. These procedures are often written in the flight attendant handbook, which enables the flight attendant to review at any time. This manual contains

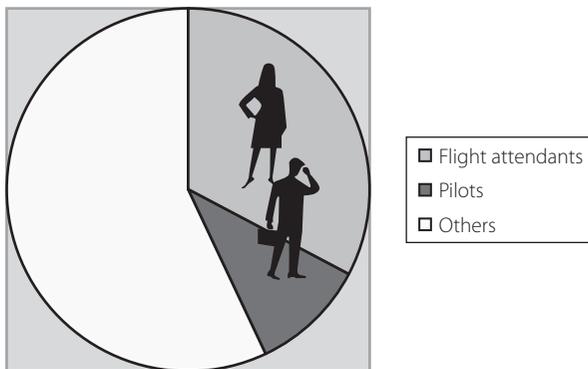
information about the usage of different service and safety equipment in the cabin.

### Flight attendant training

To guarantee flight attendants can perform safety procedures effectively, all flight attendants must attend intensive initial training sessions and refresher courses. These training sessions prepare and refresh flight attendant knowledge and update information on procedures. The flight attendant also participates in practical drill activities to ensure they can perform their duties during various emergency scenarios.

### Human performance and crew resource management (CRM)

Human performance refers to a flight attendant's leadership, communication, situation awareness, assertiveness, participation and



**Figure 6:** Flight attendant ratio in an airline company.

decision-making ability. Flight attendants rarely meet again for their next duty after returning to their home base, and therefore human performance training becomes essential to prepare a flight attendant that may or may not have worked together before. This is especially when most network airlines are employing flight attendant from different countries with diverse nationalities and cultural backgrounds—human performance abilities are become even more important. The main objectives of human factor trainings are preventing the occurrence of incidents and accidents, and reducing risk in cabin operations.

### Passenger management

Flight attendants are trained to handle the majority of customer problems on a flight. During flight, flight attendants are required to handle all passenger-related issues. Having an aircraft diverted to handle a passenger issue is costly to the airline and creates inconveniences for all passengers on a flight. Flight attendants are trained to handle most problems related to general services, including medical problems and disruptive passengers.

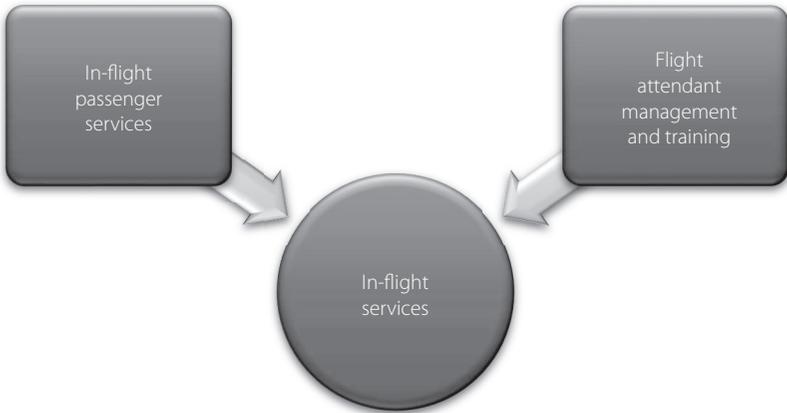
## ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE OF IN-FLIGHT SERVICE DEPARTMENT

Flight attendants are allocated within the in-flight service department of an airline. Compared with other departments, the in-flight service department coordinates the most staff due to the number of flight attendants required for an airline's flight operations.

As of March 31, 2018, Singapore Airlines has employed a total of 14,729 staff that includes 8,207 cabin flight attendants and 4,457 ground staff.<sup>[13]</sup> The flight attendant accounts for more than 56 percent of an airline's total staff.

### In-flight services

The main responsibility of the in-flight services department is to ensure the safety, security and comfort of passengers during a flight. This branch

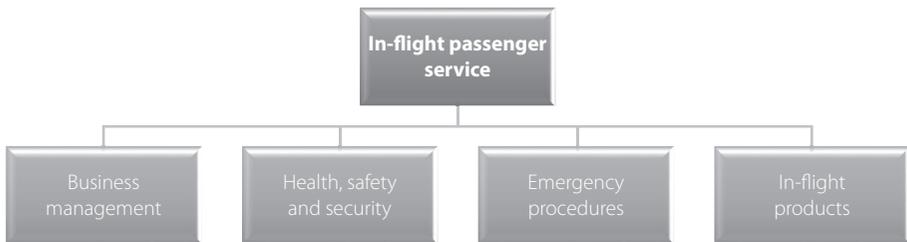


**Figure 7:** Airline's in-flight service department.

mainly manages the flight attendant employees group. The department is divided into two streams: in-flight passenger services and flight attendant management and training.

### ***In-flight passenger service***

To ensure the safety, security and comfort of passengers, airlines pay attention to how services are safely provided to passengers during a flight.



**Figure 8:** Organization structure of in-flight passenger service's subdivisions.

These services include in-flight catering, air travel knowledge and first aid. This sub-department oversees and develops an airline's operating manual to ensure in-flight employees are following safety and service procedures, and that service for passengers is provided in a satisfactory manner. The manual contains regulations, standards, policies, and procedures to assist the flight attendant in performing their duties during flights. It is the responsibility of the flight attendant to ensure all elements of a flight are in compliance with company and government safety regulations, security rules and procedures.

### ***Business management***

- Management of overall in-flight service activities such as providing administrative and operational support for flight attendants and staff.

### ***Health, safety and security***

- Develop programs to address health, safety and security issues for flight attendants.
- Track occupational injury causes and effect, so that relative safety and security policies may be amended and implemented.

### ***Emergency procedures***

- Develop emergency procedures that are essential for events. These include emergency landings, land and water evacuation, turbulence, in-flight medical situations, smoke in the cabin, fires, cabin depressurization, onboard births and deaths, dangerous goods and spills in the cabin, emergency evacuations and hijackings.

### ***In-flight products***

- Design and implementation of in-flight products that enable flight attendants to provide consistent quality services to passengers.
- Provide procedures for food and beverage preparation and the use of catering equipment.

## **FLIGHT ATTENDANT MANAGEMENT AND TRAINING**

The number of flight attendant on a flight and their length of duty time are governed by different regulations. As such, scheduling of flight attendants plays a main role within airline operations. One of the major responsibilities for the in-flight services department is to plan for adequate flight attendants for each operating flight complying with regulations. Flight attendants must undergo recurrent training annually or bi-annually.



**Figure 9:** Organization structure of flight attendant management and training subdivisions.

### ***Training***

- Provide training resources in support of flight attendants' service delivery and the safety of passengers is essential. These include service design and development and offering training sessions for flight attendants.

### ***Scheduling and support***

- Organize schedule for flight attendants. These include sick leave, vacation and salary.

- Responsible for ensuring sufficient flight attendants are prepared for an airline's daily operations. If a flight attendant reports being ill, the scheduling department is required to arrange a replacement flight attendant so that flight operations are not disrupted.

## **FLIGHT ATTENDANT'S RANKINGS**

Multiple flight attendants are assigned to a flight with different duties and positions. All flights are assigned a lead flight attendant, often known as the purser, to oversee a number of other flight attendants. Some airlines operating wide-bodied aircraft assign two pursers to ensure service quality.

### ***Chief purser***

The chief purser is the head flight attendant of a flight. The chief purser is responsible for ensuring the safety and comfort of airline passengers and coordinating with all flight attendants on board. The purser gives instructions to secure the aircraft door before takeoff and makes passenger announcements during flight. Finally, the chief purser fills the role of evaluating onboard staff, ensuring high service standards and prepares all reports after every flight.

### ***Flight purser***

Some airlines assign additional lead staff to provide assistance to the chief purser. This position is known as the flight purser or aft purser as they are often assigned to be in command of the aft (rear) cabin. Their responsibility is to provide support to the chief purser in different locations of the aircraft. For example, the chief purser is in command of the forward cabin, while the flight purser may be assigned control of the rear cabin.

### ***Flight attendant***

The number of flight attendants deployed on a flight is dependent on aircraft size and the airline's service standard; this ranges from a limited crew providing services on a small propeller aircraft to up to 20 flight attendants on some larger airliners. The major duties of the flight attendant are to ensure safety, security and comfort for all passengers on board a flight. They are responsible for cabin checks and preparation before takeoff, and landing and offering services during flight like meals, duty-free sales and other onboard services for those airlines that offer complimentary amenities or in-flight sales on low-cost carriers.

**Case Feature****Flight attendant: easy job?**

To many people, flight attendants are similar to restaurant servers with duties of serving and clearing meals for guests. The only difference is flight attendants work on an aircraft while servers work in a restaurant.

In reality, my job is not simple at all as the main responsibility is to ensure the safety of passengers on a flight. Basically, my team is accountable for anything that happens in the passenger cabin during a flight from assisting a passenger who suffered a heart attack to resolving disputes of passengers due to reclining seat or armrest conflict.

Thinking back when I first started, I have gone through an initial training of services, security and emergency for about two months before I was assigned to take my first assignment. I was very nervous, but luckily the senior staff helped and taught me a lot.

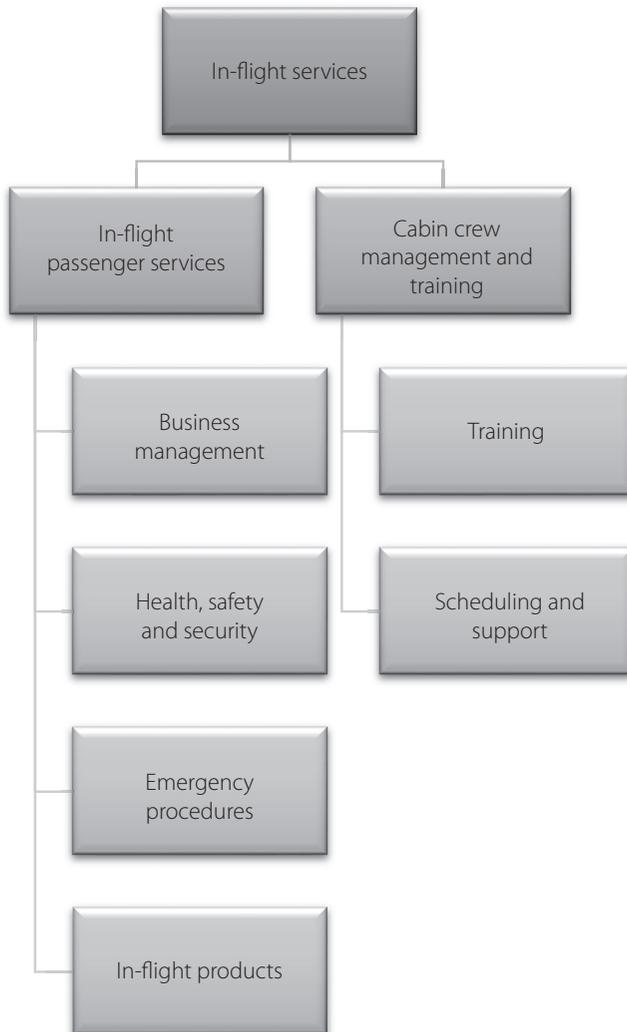
I believe that being healthy is the most important for flight attendant. This job requires long working hours; around the clock at days, nights, weekends and even holidays based on the schedule issued by the airline company. To me, the most challenging issue is dealing with jet lag.

During my duty period, I must stay alert to the condition of the passenger cabin, even when all passengers are sleeping. However, after working several years, I have overcome this problem. Now I can sleep anywhere, anytime, even not during my normal sleeping hours when I am off-duty.

**UNIONS**

The first labor union for flight attendants was formed in the 1940s in the United States.<sup>[14]</sup> Several flight attendants came together to discuss issues with airline management. The union represents their members to negotiate for better pay, benefits and working conditions. In return, the flight attendants are required to pay union membership fees. Many airlines today have large flight attendant union groups. The role of the union is becoming more influential because they have proved to be effective in creating good relations and settling disputes between union members and airlines. When there is an especially important subject, each flight attendant casts their vote to help make a decision. Most often, subjects include industry action or strikes due to unsatisfactory salary ranges and benefit cuts.<sup>[15]</sup>

## TYPICAL ORGANIZATION STRUCTURE OF THE IN-FLIGHT SERVICE DEPARTMENT OF AN AIRLINE



### SUMMARY

Flight attendant plays an important role in securing the safety of passengers on a flight. The first recruitment of a flight attendant dates back to 1912. Later, registered female nurses were specifically sought after to fill such positions, but today this career is open to everyone.