

NPR: Morning Edition

For The Man With A Thousand Sorries, Apologizing Became Second Nature

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This holiday season, it's estimated that more than 45 million people will board airplanes by the time the year ends. With that many people on the move, delays and disruptions are inevitable, and with them come disgruntled passengers.

That space between happy passenger and dissatisfied passenger is where Fred Taylor Jr. worked for 15 years in [customer relations with Southwest Airlines](#).

"My job was to send letters of apology to customers that have been involved with flight disruptions," the 47-year-old said during a recent visit to StoryCorps in Fort Worth, Texas. His daughter Olivia tells her friends he is "the Sorry Man."

I don't think I can provide you with a rational explanation for the myriad of frustrating delays that occurred with your December 1st flight from ...

"For me, saying 'I'm sorry' became second nature," Fred told his wife, Julie. "It's been a way of life."

Of course, you have to know your audience, he explained.

"You know, there are white-knuckled travelers out there, and so they get upset pretty quick," he said. "If an engine shuts down because parts of the fan blade come apart and you can see plumes of fire, it's an emotional event. My job was to offer them assurance: 'Hey, this wasn't as big of a deal as what it may have seemed like.' "

And I know that no matter what I say in hindsight cannot make up for the poor service you were given that exhausting day ...

"I remember an unruly passenger. She was a nervous flier who tried to self-medicate. And alcohol and prescription medication, the change in cabin pressure don't mix," he recalled. "And so, this lady, she starts taking her clothes off and started chewing on the seat-bottom cushion. And then I have to turn around and apologize to 137 people."

Of course, measuring the total amount of each person's inconvenience is difficult to do, but I ask you to accept this gesture in order to give us another chance ...

But Fred has other ways to turn a frown upside down.

"When you were in college you were in a remedial English class," Julie said. "And then you were able to make a career where you were writing for a living. Even when my dad died and you wrote a eulogy, I can remember hearing the people behind me crying. And then you started with the funny stories, and I could hear the people behind me laughing. It was just perfect. You put people at ease."

"So, you're more than just 'the Sorry Man,' " she said with a laugh.

Today, Fred is Southwest's liaison to the Aviation Consumer Protection Division of the Transportation Department.

Audio produced for Morning Edition by Liyna Anwar and Michael Garofalo.

StoryCorps is a national nonprofit that gives people the chance to interview friends and loved ones about their lives. These conversations are archived at the American Folklife Center at the Library of Congress, allowing participants to leave a legacy for future generations. Learn more, including how to interview someone in your life, at [StoryCorps.org](https://www.storycorps.org).