

TRANSCRIPT OF INTERVIEW

By

StoryCorps®

Between

Fred Taylor, Jr. and Julie R. Taylor

January 26, 2016

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StoryCorps Mission, Principles, and Archives

StoryCorps mission is to preserve and share humanity's stories in order to build connections between people and create a more just and compassionate world.

Since 2003, StoryCorps has upheld an uncompromising commitment to excellence throughout the organization that includes an intense focus on the collecting, sharing, and preserving of people's stories; high-quality organizational management; and the care and support of an extraordinary work environment where respect and dignity are paramount.

StoryCorps' Principles:

1. THE INTERVIEW SESSION IS AT THE HEART OF STORYCORPS. WE TREAT PARTICIPANTS WITH THE UTMOST RESPECT, CARE, AND DIGNITY.

2. STORYCORPS MAINTAINS A RELENTLESS FOCUS ON SERVING A WIDE DIVERSITY OF PARTICIPANTS.

3. STORYCORPS IS A PUBLIC SERVICE.

StoryCorps' archive comprises of one of the first and largest born-digital collections of human voices, featuring more than 65,000 interviews recorded in all 50 states and Puerto Rico.

Interviews are housed in the American Folklife Center at the Library of Congress in Washington, D.C.

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INTERVIEW OBJECTIVES

In 2015, StoryCorps contacted Southwest Airlines to speak with Fred Taylor about his job that was featured in *The New York Times* (Bailey, Jeff, "Airlines Fly On A Wing and Apology", *The New York Times*, Sunday, March 18, 2007).

Southwest Airlines Corporate Communications connected Fred with StoryCorps.

StoryCorps initial objectives were to meet individuals who had interesting jobs and feature those stories on the StoryCorps website, as well as possibly have NPR utilize a portion of the interview in an upcoming broadcast.

After several telephone conversations about Fred's past and present roles/responsibilities, the StoryCorps' interests and interview format, and opportunities to record a conversation, StoryCorps requested an interview between Fred and Julie Taylor at their home in Fort Worth (Keller), Texas.

On January 26, 2016, StoryCorps recorded Fred and Julie's conversation that lasted 114 minutes. The transcript of their conversation is divided into four parts.

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Fred and Julie Taylor Interview

Part 1: Describe What You Do For A Living

[00:00:00]

FREDERICK TAYLOR: Hello, my name is Frederick Thomas Taylor junior. I go by Fred. My age is 46. Today's date is January 26, 2016. I'm recording from our home in Keller (Fort Worth), Texas, with my wife Julie. Hi, Julie.

JULIE TAYLOR: Hi, Fred. I'm Julie Reilly Taylor. I'm age 46. Wish I didn't have to tell that. Today is January the 26th, 2016. I'm in Keller, Texas, and I'm with Fred and we've been married for how many years, 23 years? Yes, 23 years.

FT: Twenty four years.

JT: Almost 24. Recently, I found out that Olivia has been telling her friends that her dad is the "sorry man". And to me, that sounds wrong on a whole lot of levels, but it brings up something that I always struggled with. **How do I describe what you do for a living? Can you help me with that?**

FT: I'll try. It's sort of a difficult question to answer because, number one, it describes a job that I used to do recently, and it's a pretty complex position that I had for, gosh, about almost 14 years. And, I say it's difficult because, at the time when I started doing it, it was unique.

It was unique to the company that I worked (work) for, Southwest Airlines, and it was unique to the airline industry.

So, I can understand why she would say that I'm "the sorry man" because my main priority in that job was to send letters of apology to our customers that had been involved with flight disruptions, and from that responsibility lots of new proactive customer service initiatives blossomed based on that simple concept.

And, so, for me, saying "I'm sorry" or apologizing for something became second nature, if you will, professionally. But, I think as we've grown up, and as people who are used to doing things that aren't always right or correct, I think we become accustomed to saying I'm sorry.

Some people, it's easier to do than others.

Some people get concerned about it, particularly in certain types of businesses. They worry about the legal responsibilities around acknowledging mistakes.

But, for me, it was just kind of -- it's been a way of life, if you will, for most of the last 15 years, and it's something that I take a lot of pride in because it's been a really good thing for our company, and it's been good for the industry because I think the industry recognized what

we were doing and in their own way adapted it to their business.

So, I'm "the sorry man" because my job at the time was to let people know that we were sorry for their flight disruption.

JT: I always had a really hard time putting it into words, so that helps.

I know there were so many facets to your job -- the late night phone calls that we would get that you would be involved with, the snow storms where you spent hours, and hours when you were at home on your computer. So that does help.

It was just so much more, I knew, than just being Mr. Apology, as the *New York Times* had said about you. So that does help, but I still really struggle if someone asks me about your job because there were just so many facets to it and I was just not able to put that into words.

So, I thought it was funny that Olivia said, "My dad is Mr. Sorry."

FT: It's funny that she thinks of me that way, but I mean all her life that's pretty much what she's known. And, it is true, you know, the things that we did publicly insofar as our [00:05:00] proactive communications and our letters to our customers, be that in physical letters that we

initially started sending and then we converted those over to electronic or email letters.

There's a lot of work that went into evaluating the customer's circumstances and determining what happened and why it happened, and providing that insight to our customers at the time too was necessary.

We didn't want to seem shallow. We didn't want to seem like we were just giving it a cursory or sort of a gloss over apology for what we were doing.

We wanted it to be sincere, we wanted our customers to know that we knew what they had experienced.

We wanted it to feel like, even though we weren't, we were sitting right next to them on board the airplane.

And, in order to do that, we had to know every detail about what took place.

When we first started doing it, we thought we had to say a lot, but once we got a couple of years into it, we realized that it's not about the quantity of what you say, it's about the quality of what was being said.

So, getting to the right quality meant doing a lot of behind the scenes work to figure out what was going on.

Another facet of what the public didn't see was our effort to deliver the apology before the customers even thought about it.

We wanted it to be in the hands of our customers as fast as we could get it, before they would even feel like they had to ask.

We felt like that was the right thing to do.

We felt like, hey, if there was a disruption and we knew about it, there wasn't any reason to hold back on that.

And, so to be proactive means you have to be in tune with what's going on -- always.

It doesn't mean you work a 9:00 to 5:00 set of hours.

It means when the airplanes are flying and our customers are on board you have to be with them.

And, so that sometimes meant a late night call or working through a snow storm on the weekend or even during the holidays when we're visiting our family.

So, a big sacrifice to make that happen, but I think it was definitely worth it.

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Fred and Julie Taylor Interview

Part 2: Handling Stress

JT: Does it stress you out to deal with people's problems all day and to have to come up with explanations for things when sometimes you made a mistake?

Not you personally, but somebody else did.

I think that would really bother me and cause me a lot of stress.

How did you handle that?

FT: Well, no, it didn't stress me out.

I mean, number one, I saw it as a mission.

I saw it as something that was important, that was valued, that our customers would ultimately appreciate what we were delivering to them.

And, so I took on their issues. I didn't take them on personally, but I tried to empathize with the situations that they were in.

I tried to use my knowledge -- my experience and my knowledge about those situations to help them better understand what it was that took place.

A lot of times my job was to offer them assurance - "Hey, this wasn't as big of a deal as what it may have seemed like on the surface of things."

One of the things that we did, and we liked to do at the time, was to take an explanation and put it into practical terms.

So, that was a challenge to try to figure that out.

So if we could relate the mechanical problem that was going on with the airplane with some household item, we did that because we wanted to level set with our customers and make them feel better about the situation that they had just experienced.

I always try to put myself in the shoes of the customers, and when I was out there flying myself and thinking about "OK, what would I think if I were on board and this mechanical situation or this reason the airplane's returning to the airport or the delay", you know, what would be the questions in my mind?

And, I would try to answer those in the shortest succinct [00:10:00] way that I could to quickly get to the most important thing, which was not only the acknowledgement, but the reassurance that things were OK, they were going to be all right.

So, yeah, you have to do -- I felt like in order to get it right, in order to provide a really high level of service to our customers, I needed to own it -- and, own it meant being available to our customers, our company, and the

people that were on the front lines dealing with the actual situation. I needed to make myself available to them.

And, we built systems and reporting mechanisms and all that to provide information to us quickly.

So, I felt like if they're going to do that, if they're going to fulfill those expectations, I needed to reciprocate that to our front line employees and be available to them.

StoryCorps: What are some examples of that? You said you compare it to household things. Can you give like an example of something that you would write?

FT: Yeah, sure. I'm trying to think about some mechanisms on the airplane that were pretty common.

The pressurization system on an airplane is based on the air that's ingested into the engine, processed, pressurized, and brought into the cabin.

So, I'd think about that and how that relates to a typical air conditioner in the house.

There are flaps on the airplane that extend and retract and those are -- they have sensors within them and so sensors can -- the problem isn't with the flap, it's with the actual sensors, and so we have sensors in our house and things like light bulbs burn out.

So, it's a common thing that seems like a -- you might think it's a big problem, but really it's a simple problem that's causing the disruption of the flight, something as simple as a sensor going on and off.

So, we would try to relate that.

I'll try to think of an example and share that, but that's sort of the mind set right now.

So, since you asked me the question about taking on, or seeming to take on, being available to other people and taking on issues that would seem like problems -- oh, there's a second clock upstairs.

JT: You want to go get it?

FT: Sorry about that. It chimes on the quarter hour.

StoryCorps: Yeah, maybe we should.

FT: Let me know when you're ready.

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Fred and Julie Taylor Interview

Part 3: What Do You Want To Be When You Grow Up?

FT: (To Julie) So I want to ask you a question, dear.

So what did you think when I actually told you that I was going to start working for Colleen in the executive office and we were going to have to move to Dallas, Texas?

JT: I think the move part scared me a lot, but the working for Colleen part, it was like you had won the lottery.

It was just so incredible that you had that opportunity and that you were in Baltimore working and she had never met you and she saw the work that you were doing and she picked you out and wanted to talk to you about your career goals. That was just an incredible thing.

FT: Yeah, I agree.

JT: And I remember that day when we were driving to the airport and we got the mail as we were -- you were driving and I was opening the mail and I said, "There's a letter from Southwest, do you want me to open it?"

And you said, "Yeah, sure, go ahead."

And, I remember reading it, and just being blown away by it.

The move part was very scary, and then moving here right before 9/11, and then having that happen, I think everybody in that time period was sort of unsettled so that was

pretty tough for a few years, being away from our extended family.

But I think, like I said, it was almost like you won the lottery. It was just such an opportunity for you.

And, I felt like early on in our marriage you [00:15:00] were kind of searching for what you really wanted to do and it changed frequently, in fact so much that my co-workers would ask, "So what is Fred doing today? What does he want to be today?"

But once you got with Southwest, it just was such a difference maker. Just so -- you were so much more focused and so much more content, and that made a huge difference for our family.

FT: Yeah, that's funny that you mention that because I remember at the time when I was looking at Southwest Airlines, and I actually went out to the airport to pick up an application -- I mean you wouldn't do that these days, you go online and apply, but at the time I had to literally go to an airport, pick up a paper application --

And, I remember one of the customer service agents, she had been with the company for a long time as it turned out, and her first question to me was, "What do you want to be when you grow up?"

JT: It wasn't easy. I mean because I think you probably remember the military, thinking about that, and looking at so many different things and you just were not happy or content.

So I think probably the first time you won the lottery was when you got hired on at Southwest, even though it was a huge gamble and you took a pretty large pay cut to take that job.

I think it offered us some stability, the benefits, all of those things that we really needed.

And, then when you got the letter from Colleen asking you to come and work in the executive office, that was like winning the lottery again.

FT: Yeah, that was pretty surreal.

I mean here I was thinking I was going in one direction when I was working as a customer service manager in Baltimore, thinking I was going to move up through the ranks of the ground operations department and into different levels of airport leadership, and then all of a sudden out of the blue you have an opportunity to take on a couple of pet projects that she was looking for someone to lead for her.

So that was, like you said, it was amazing.

StoryCorps: Explain who Colleen is for the record.

FT: Of course. You don't know(!)? (Sarcasm)

Colleen Barrett, at the time when she sent the letter that Julie was talking about, was the executive vice president of customers.

Her role was to ensure Southwest Airlines was delivering the highest level of customer service not only in the airline industry, but for any business nationwide and worldwide.

And so, she and Herb Kelleher -- as are most people at Southwest Airlines -- they're known by their first names. So, Herb and Colleen.

So, Colleen had actually sent me a letter because she was transitioning, or about to transition, into her new role which was president and chief operating officer for Southwest Airlines.

And, she had these two pet projects that she was looking for someone to take on, on her behalf.

And, not only sort of carry the flag, if you will, but develop those initiatives and make them part of Southwest's business.

And, those two projects were developing a business continuation plan for our customers that in the event there was an accident, an aircraft accident, and to develop this

concept of proactive -- which would become proactive customer service. It wasn't called that at the time. It was just researching flight disruptions and sending letters of apology, but we turned it into our proactive customer service initiative.

So, those were the two things that Colleen was looking for: Someone to take on, and lo and behold, she sent me a letter - which, even today, I'm not even sure that you would actually get a letter in the mail for something like that. But, at the time, that was the main form of communication. And, what an amazing day that was.

JT: Yeah, for you to get this letter from one of the most powerful people in the airline industry, and you were just a customer service manager at that time or supervisor. To have somebody [00:20:00] notice you with that much power, that was just huge.

FT: Yeah, I mean you know, I had never actually met her in person as it turned out. She had been following the -- she was very attentive to the service that was being delivered at the Baltimore airport because that was going to be a major source of growth and development for the company's future. And, so what was taking place at Baltimore and the airport itself at the time, was how we treated our customers, how

our customers were getting along with our employees, and how happy they were with the service that we were trying to provide in that region.

Because you remember Baltimore was -- it started out as a small airport and is now one of our largest operations system-wide.

So, she knew then that Baltimore was important, it was vital as a customer service center, and so she was watching every detail that was going on in that airport.

I didn't -- I mean I knew that Baltimore was going to be a focus for the company, but I didn't know that it was under such an intense microscope, if you will.

And, apparently she liked what I was doing.

I say that kind of cheeky -- I know now, after getting to know Colleen over the years, she was intensely focused on what we were doing over there.

And, we had a great team in Baltimore -- it wasn't just me.

It started with the station leaders and the assistant station leaders, and both what we call above the wing and below the wing.

So, the leaders and the employees that worked in the airport and those that worked outside on the ramp were all dedicated to success, success in upholding the company's

objectives, its mission for delivering low fares, frequent service, and great customer service.

And we just believed in one another.

We all had our own unique set of circumstances, and we gelled as a team, and part of my responsibilities was making sure not only our customers were happy, but our employees were happy.

And that's one of the keys to Southwest's success is supporting your internal customers, if you will, and those are you fellow team members.

And, so as a leader, I had a big responsibility to try to make sure our employees were happy, were informed, and were doing what -- understood what it was that we were supposed to be doing.

So, she (Colleen) was not only watching what we were doing in terms of service to our external customers, but how we were getting along, how we were motivating each other, how we were trying new and creative things to deal with the growth. Because it was growing leaps and bounds.

I mean, I think when I started there, I think it was like, I don't know, 45, 50 flights a day or something like that. And, I was there, what, a year, year and a half, something like that, and we had almost tripled that.

So, I mean, we were growing monthly.

We were cramming flights in an airport that was not designed to handle that. The airport was literally being recreated practically every other month.

And, so we had to figure out -- it was like, if you've ever seen the show MASH -- it was like dealing with that every day. I mean you had to come up with new ways to entertain yourself to get through the situation that you were dealing with and deliver a high service.

So she (Colleen) took an interest in it.

She was appreciative of everybody's efforts over there, but there was something that she liked that I was doing communication-wise that she felt like I could carry over into this concept of proactively reaching out to our customers while at the same time being prepared to manage a difficult situation and deliver service to our customers if they were involved in a -- if there was an aircraft accident. Which we had had. [00:25:00]

I think if you remember like in 2000 or '99, I've lost track, but we had an incident in Burbank, California where an aircraft had landed and didn't stop and it went through the blast fence at the end of the runway, and stopped at an Exxon (Chevron) station or something across the street.

And, the issue at the time was not only attending to the customers on the aircraft that was involved in this

situation, but even more importantly, were the thousands of customers in that airport that weren't involved in the accident and the airports that the flights were going to and from that were just kind of stuck and left hanging, if you will, because our focus was on handling the aircraft incident.

And, our employees at the time were -- they just kind of -- I don't want to say they let the customers down, but we knew we weren't providing the best service.

JT: You didn't have a process.

FT: We didn't have processes in place to treat those -- to handle the customers that were standing in the airport, the majority of the customers.

And, so that became the other mission for me: Figure out a way to make sure if we ever have a situation like that Burbank incident again that we are delivering the same level of service to the indirectly affected customers as we were to the customers that were on board the aircraft in question.

JT: What was your first day like when you came to Dallas?

You had all that background experience, but you're going from being on the front line into an office setting.

What was it like and how did you feel?

FT: I was really, I was excited, I was energetic, and if I'm not mistaken, I think there was an emergency response meeting that happened that day or one of the few days after. So, essentially, it was like, hit the ground running. Basically, and I know you remember this, we didn't have a house right away. I had to -- we were looking for a home and all that -- so I was living in, I think, a hotel for a week or whatever.

So, I was studying the accident, the Burbank accident, I was trying to get to know my fellow co-workers, I was trying to understand what it was that I was going to have to do to live in this city.

So, I had like, multiple things going on simultaneously, but at the same time I was just, I was fired up. I was ready to go. I was ready to start something new for the company.

I just remember the people that I worked with, and they were all very nice, and the desk that I sat in, they had decorated it and all that.

JT: That's nice.

FT: Yeah, it was just kind of --

JT: The Southwest touch.

FT: Yeah, it was the same thing that you would get in the airport, they were doing in the headquarters.

JT: So you felt comfortable?

FT: Yeah, I didn't feel out of place.

Although I thought it was weird at the time, I was going down the hallways of the headquarters building, and people that I had looked up to, that I had read about in books and magazines, in our newsletters and stuff like that, suddenly are there. They're in front of me. And, that was really weird to get over that awe.

JT: A little star struck?

FT: Yeah, I was. I was totally star struck.

JT: I remember you reading a lot about Southwest before you were ever hired with the company. So you had done your homework definitely.

FT: Yeah, it's important.

Like you said, I was kind of at certain points in my life sort of like a ship without a sail out there trying to figure out what the right course was for me.

And, so I put a lot of research into the company itself.

I didn't go to work at Southwest Airlines because it was an airline.

I didn't go to work for Southwest Airlines because I wanted to travel.

I went to work for Southwest Airlines because, as you had mentioned earlier, it provided a level of stability that, well, for the most part we desperately needed.

We were a young couple, starting our family, and we needed to -- and then we were mid to late 20s and just kind of at the time going, you know, we're making ends meet, but we're not making any progress in terms of career -- I wasn't, at least -- and retirement, and benefits, and [00:30:00] so Southwest offered all those things.

The company had been written about, the great things that it -- the benefits that it provided its employees.

But it also provided much more than that. It provided stability in an industry that was very unstable. It was unique as a company, and I liked that about Southwest Airlines as a stable institution.

I think, at the time, what, 25 years of profitability? Because I started right after it celebrated its 25th year and Southwest wasn't profitable its first two years, but thereafter.

So, that's a pretty good track record in an industry that was -- many airlines had seen bankruptcy up to that point. And, thankfully the company is still profitable.

Notes: In January 2016, Southwest reported its 43rd consecutive year of profitability—a record unmatched in the airline industry. For 2015, Southwest generated \$2.4B Net Income (a company record) from \$19.8 Billion in Operating Revenue, which was equal to a 32.7% Return on Invested Capital. Southwest did this with 704 all Boeing 737 fleet, over 144 M enplaned passengers, and 49,600 Employees working at 97 destinations (86 domestic and 11 international) and the Corporate Headquarters in Dallas, TX.

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Fred and Julie Taylor Interview

Part 4: How Do You Say "I'm Sorry"?

JT: How would you go about writing an apology? What happens, what's the process?

FT: The first thing that I always told myself and my team members at the time, the letter that you write needs to seem personal. It needs to not come across as canned or formish or something that looks like a computer kicked it out with no thought into the feelings of the person that is reading it. And so psychology, I think, is important into trying to understand what it is about a customer's experience that makes them feel one way or the other. And I didn't -- that's not something that was natural to me at that time. That's something that I had to learn in the process.

JT: The empathy piece of it?

FT: Learning how to convert my thought about empathy into something that a customer would read and understand as empathetic. Fortunately Colleen was a master at doing that. Herb Kelleher was a master at doing that. You could read their memos and you could feel the energy coming off of the page. Whether that was something that they were passionate about and wanted our employees to be passionate about or

just the -- Colleen's writing was like the way she spoke. She spoke on paper the way she would speak to you and I in a conversation.

JT: So did you try to model that style?

FT: Oh, yeah, definitely.

I tried to model it because I knew that that was successful. I could see the reaction to people that would read something that she had to say.

And, then when I started incorporating bits of it I could see it in the responses that we were getting back from our customers.

And, I always told my team members that you know you've got it when a customer takes what you say personal.

And, whether that's in a note back -- I always thought the best responses back from our customers were the handwritten notes because you could see the emotion flowing out of their handwriting, but also just the way they speak is different than the way they would typically type something.

But, also, sometimes we didn't always get the facts straight because we weren't there.

We were trying to piece things together.

And I remember one time I was talking about an engine on one of the airplanes that had a mechanical problem, and I

was referring to it as the right engine, but it was really the left engine that had had the mechanical problem.

And, so a customer wrote back and said that, number one, he was pointing out that I was wrong, number two, he thought that because I was wrong I had not taken the time to actually do the right thing.

And, so he was calling me out on it.

And I thought, man, that this guy really takes that personal, he must really think that I was writing to him on this, and not necessarily -- a lot of the customers didn't understand that we were writing to 137 people on board the airplane at the same time.

JT: They didn't realize? They thought it was --

FT: They thought I was writing to them specifically.

JT: That's impressive.

StoryCorps: Can you give an example of like [00:35:00] what types of things did people complain about? Could you list off a few things that maybe --

FT: After we wrote to them?

StoryCorps: No, before. What did they complain about? Just rattle off a list of some things that they'd write to you complaining about.

StoryCorps: Or what issues that you wrote them about.

FT: I think flight disruptions in general.

FT: So, if your flight's delayed, and you miss your connection, or your flight is canceled and your trip gets disrupted because of the cancellation, those are the things that upset our customers.

But, we weren't writing to those things at the time. We were writing to things that we thought caused our customers concern.

We were writing to events in which left our customers wondering what the heck just happened that wasn't so obvious.

JT: You had unruly passengers even that you would have to write to the rest of --

FT: We wrote to flights where customers became unruly on board the aircraft, and we wrote not because it wasn't obvious what was going on.

I mean most people got it that there was somebody that had to be arrested or whatever, but we just didn't want them -- we wanted them to know we didn't want them to have a bad experience. That was the situation with the unruly passengers.

But when your airplane returns because the engine is making a noise, you understand that the engine is making a noise, but you may not understand why it was making a noise. And you may question whether or not you were safe. You may

question whether or not the airline had followed the appropriate mechanical procedures to make sure the engine was good to go before the airplane took off.

And, so all those things are going through your mind, but to me when I'm writing to a customer, those are just sort of cursory details.

Those aren't the actual reasons why the customer may be upset. The customer may be upset because they feel like you don't appreciate them, that you don't take the time to acknowledge their feelings.

And, that's what we were trying to do. We were trying to make them feel better about the situation that they had just experienced.

And, just talking about the engine is not enough. You have to try to relate to them and say, "Look, we understand why you might be concerned. We understand why this would be disruptive to your day. We don't want you to feel that way. We actually want you to know that we're sorry for this disruption. We want to provide you with some detail around that disruption. But, most importantly, we want you to come back and give us another try."

And, all those three things have to be in that correspondence in some way, shape, or form for our customers at the time to just feel like we get it, we

understood what they were dealing with, the gamut of
emotion.

What just happened, am I OK, and do I want to come back?

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Fred and Julie Taylor Interview

Part 5: Utilizing Humor To Diffuse Situations

JT: Do you use your -- you have a pretty good sense of humor.

Did you ever use your sense of humor in the response letters, the apology letters?

FT: Never. (Sarcasm)

JT: Never?

FT: Oh, yes, we always tried to.

JT: Do you think that was well received by the people receiving the letters, the customers that got the letters? Or do you think some of them were offended by sense of humor in a formal communication?

FT: Well, when you're writing about highly disruptive situations, humor -- you don't want to make light. You don't want to come across as --

JT: You have to be careful.

FT: -- you're making light of the situation.

So, the opportunity to inject humor wasn't always there, but when there was an opportunity to be a little bit more lighthearted about the situation we would do it.

I was typically more lighthearted about events as I was writing a summary report about the things we were

addressing, more so than I was in the letters to our customers.

JT: So, the summary went to the people that worked for Southwest, not to a customer?

FT: Right. We developed a report that -- well, I developed a report that was given directly to Colleen to let her know what it was that -- what events had taken place and what it was that we were going to be reaching out to our customers. And, she felt like the information that was contained in that report would be useful for our customer relations department which our PCS team, our proactive customer service team, is now part of.

But also our public relations department, our maintenance department, our ground operations department, our in-flight department, she felt like the leaders of those departments could gain knowledge about how we were [00:40:00] handling these situations because one of the things that I had to do in doing this job, in order to know what took place you have to get details about the event.

And, in order to get details about the event, departments have to tell on themselves essentially. They have to explain what went wrong.

And, so in order to maintain their trust, essentially, we had to demonstrate that, hey, we were taking their

knowledge, we were learning from it, and we were writing about it in a way that wasn't blaming them or making them look like a scapegoat.

We were actually turning it into something good which our customers valued and appreciated.

And, so, when they saw the report, and we would send them copies of the letters that we sent to the customers, then they got it. They quickly began to understand hey, now I see what Taylor's doing.

JT: Do you think that using that humor in those reports helped you to be less threatening to them?

FT: Absolutely.

JT: Since they were having to tell on themselves, maybe they had made a mistake --

FT: They just knew that I got it. They knew that I understood the difference between something serious and something that wasn't as big of a deal as what an outsider might think it would have been.

JT: So, you were essentially writing pretty much your entire day? That was your job? A lot of writing?

FT: I was writing -- if you remember, my day was about 12 to 14 hours, so yeah, take the two hour commute out of it, you're talking about a 10 to 12 hour day.

So, half of it was spent researching, the other half was spent writing.

JT: And that's one thing I think that's pretty incredible about you, the fact that when you were in college -- you probably won't want me telling this -- you were in a remedial English class your freshman year.

FT: I don't mind you telling me. (Sarcasm)

JT: And then you were able to make a career where you were writing for a living. That's pretty amazing to me, that you got to that point.

FT: Yeah. Well, it was something that I had to do. At the time I had not invested a lot of time in language arts, if you will.

JT: In high school.

FT: In high school, yeah. So I needed that.

But I also valued it. Even though I couldn't necessarily do it as well as I do now, I just had an appreciation for people that could write and could take their thoughts and incorporate those into stories and letters, and whether that was for business writing or for fiction or what have you.

So, to me it was an necessity that I needed to do it if I wanted to get through college, but I also knew that I was bettering myself and I appreciated --

JT: You had a desire.

FT: And I wanted to do that.

JT: And you really enjoy writing.

FT: Yeah, I do. I wish I had more time to do it.

JT: It kind of makes me a little bit mad now that I feel like you're ahead of me and I have to go to you to --

FT: You shouldn't be mad. (Sarcasm)

JT: -- to proofread my things. But I mean I think that that's the way you approach a lot of things in your life. If it's something you're interested in you're going to work super hard to get where you want to go. And I guess that's how you managed to go from that freshman in college who was taking a noncredit course to somebody who was essentially writing for a living. That was your main job function. Or you were so dependent on your writing skills.

FT: Yeah, it's funny how things turn out that way --

JT: It's pretty incredible to me.

FT: -- when you look back on it. I just kind of see it as where there's a will there's a way.

I guess that's one of the interesting things about my life and my career our life in general.

I've just kind of seen things through different lenses, if you will.

I knew there wasn't going to be a direct path to a particular career for me, so I had to figure out ways to demonstrate to myself and to others that there's value in not knowing.

There's value in -- there are opportunities that can be made in gaps, if you will.

There are things that people want to do and strive to do, there are things that people don't want to do, and for [00:45:00] a large portion of my career I just gravitated toward things that other people didn't want to do, and found ways to make those situations better.

They were kind of like my personal niches, if you will.

JT: So you found ways to make it work for you.

FT: Make it work for me, but also make it work for the people that I was working for.

JT: Right, to provide a service.

FT: Provide a service to them, absolutely.

StoryCorps: Going back, can you give some examples of a time when you used humor both in the reports and to a customer? An example of something funny you said or a joke that you slipped in.

FT: I can't off the cuff. I mean, I'm kind of -- I would have to be in the moment in order to remember it, and I just

don't. I'm sorry, I don't have a good example of that. Do you (to Julie) know?

JT: I remember you talking about the lady that I guess had mixed some pills and alcohol --

FT: (laughter)

JT: This might help. Do you remember now?

FT: Yeah.

JT: I'll let you finish.

FT: You're talking about the Linda Blair moment on the airplane that Jeff wrote about?

JT: But there was another lady that was chewing on the seat.

FT: Oh, yeah!

JT: I think that's even more --

FT: So, one of the flights that we wrote to was about an unruly passenger who had caused a disturbance on the airplane. And, for most guys, at least, they probably wouldn't have felt uncomfortable about it, but ladies may be another story.

But, essentially, alcohol and prescription medication, and the change in cabin pressure, don't mix; and, so, this lady had, from what I understand, had tried to self-medicate essentially.

She was a nervous flier, and so she had popped whatever pills she had on her, and she ordered a couple of drinks,

and she immediately started doing things that a normal person wouldn't do.

And, what she did -- and you have to kind of picture yourself sitting in a row on an airplane and you know how tight the seats are -- she was in the middle seat of a row, she stood up, turned around, got on her knees, and started chewing on the seat bottom cushion of the airplane.

And, there were two people seated next to her, and so you can imagine what they were thinking about this lady who's just gnawing on the seat.

And, the story just kind of gets worse from there.

So, the flight attendants kind of pick up on what's going on, and they try to get her out of the aisle.

She starts taking her clothes off, and so she's running down the aisle of the airplane half naked.

So, they finally secure her in the back of the airplane.

So, you know, when I'm reading about it, I'm reading about the disruption.

We get a notification that says, "Unruly passenger on the flight. We've got the customer secure, they're safe, they're not harming anybody else. More information to follow."

Well, the reports start coming in about the situation, and so you start reading the flight attendant reports, you

start reading the reports from the ground crew, and you just start imagining how this is even possible and you start picturing these things.

And, so what I try to do is put some color commentary around it without obscuring the facts, but to paint the picture to the people that are reading my report.

And, then I have to turn around and apologize to the customer about that situation.

StoryCorps: How do you begin to apologize for that? Do you remember how you started those letters?

FT: No, I don't remember how I started those letters. I would just have to think how I would start it now, but it would probably be -- in a situation like that, it's so obvious, I think I could probably pull off saying something a little witty on the front end like, we all know that -- we've all been there or something like that. Or, these are the moments we regret the most or something like that.

I'd try to spin it to where everybody feels like they've had some -- at some point in their life -- have been in that type of situation whether they were chewing on the seat bottom cushion or not, but basically intoxicated and you've done some squirrely things because you've gotten intoxicated.

To try to level set and bring some humility into the situation.

Save face (of course) for the customer in some way, shape, or form, but know that you're having to write to [00:50:00] everybody else on board and acknowledge the disruption.

I think that's one you could get away with being a little bit more witty about.

But you also have to remember that she could have been traveling with one of her family members or something like that, so you don't want to be disparaging in your comments, but you also want to --

JT: A fine line, to be careful.

FT: Yeah, you have to know your audience sometimes.

And, sometimes you have to roll the dice and say "OK, we're going to try this and see what the reaction is to it as well."

FT: But enough about me. I want to talk about you a little bit too, if that's OK.

So, we always make a big joke about how you and I met in college, and for anybody that's listening to this and doesn't know, we met one another in an algebra class as freshmen at the University of Louisville.

And, you were seated behind me and a couple of my friends. I think you might have been with one of your friends as well.

And, the first thing that I said to you was, "You're gross, knock it off" because you were blowing your nose behind me. So, here we are, almost 30 years later knowing the time we dated and were engaged.

What about that smart aleck remark didn't turn you off?

JT: I think obviously -- I mean I thought you were cute, so I was attracted to you because of that, but basically your sense of humor.

You had friends in the class, and I wouldn't say that you were disrespectful or disruptive, but you guys were kind of the class clowns in there.

And, so that sense of humor that --

FT: We were on a one way trip to failing!

JT: Pretty much.

You had friends that weren't even in that class that came to the class just to hang out with you.

And, you would high five when you got a problem right.

And, when the professor walked in, in that huge lecture hall, you were waving to her and --

FT: Miss Ainsworth.

JT: Yeah, I don't think she thought you were disruptive or disrespectful -- well, maybe a little disruptive, but I think she liked you.

You guys were obviously excited to be there, and I think you looked at it as, we have to be here, so we might as well have some fun.

FT: Yeah.

JT: And, I think that sense of humor attracted me to you.

And then I think that's also what's kept us together through some pretty rough times at points.

So, I think definitely that sense of humor.

I think that's helped you in your job.

I think you should probably mention about your first day in Dallas or your meeting in Dallas when you introduced yourself.

FT: My meeting in Dallas?

JT: When you first started and you introduced yourself as "Chicks Dig Me".

FT: Oh. (Laughter)

JT: That would be an example of the sense of humor that you should remember.

FT: Well, Colleen was known to -- she had a -- I don't remember if this was a new employee breakfast or if it was just a

monthly breakfast that she would have, but anyway she would have these regular breakfasts.

And part of the breakfast, anybody that was new to the office had to introduce themselves and tell something about themselves.

I think there was one, maybe two, other people that was in the office that was new and they were just kind of going through their normal story and everybody's just kind of going about their business and being very respectful of one another, but when it came to me, I said (to myself), "I'm going to mix this up, and I'm going to kind of use a line that I always thought was pretty creative."

And, I just say, "Hi, my name's Fred. Chicks dig me, and I rarely wear underwear."

JT: Is that from Stripes?

FT: From Stripes, yeah. And, everybody instantly was like, what?!

JT: Instant reputation.

FT: So, the reputation of "chicks dig me" kind of stuck.

JT: Has followed you.

FT: Followed me around.

JT: Throughout your career.

FT: Just kind of loosened it up a little bit.

I mean, they didn't know me from Adam, so what did I have to lose?

JT: Right.

FT: But you know, it's just kind of quirky things.

I think we have had to have a sense of humor about our life together, not because you and I don't get along. I mean I think we get along great.

I just think we've [00:55:00] pushed the envelope insofar as what we want, and what we want to do, and we've never settled for -- when we wanted a house we went out and got a house. When we wanted a car we would go get a car.

And, so, there's prices that have to be paid for that.

So we've always had challenges. You know, making enough money to pay for the expenses and stuff like that, but we've always found a way to do it, and we've always worked odd hours too.

I mean, ever since I've worked with Southwest, you've either worked during the week and off on the weekends or vice versa. I worked during the weeks and now you --

JT: We worked opposite schedules.

FT: Yeah, opposite.

So, I mean we're never -- unless we're on vacation we're never around each other on a regular --

JT: It's probably why we're still married. That and the sense of humor.

FT: But, I mean when you go through difficult challenges in your life, and things just seem to be rough, and at times you might think, man, there's no way out of it, you always have a sense of humor.

You can always try to make yourself feel better about the situation. I just try to do that.

JT: I think that's certainly helped you in your job and definitely helped us in our life.

Even when my dad died, and you took it upon yourself, you didn't ask anybody, you just wrote a eulogy.

And, I can remember hearing the people behind me crying when you were talking, when you first started.

And, then you started with the funny stories, and then I could hear the people behind me laughing.

And, that was humor that was so perfectly placed and so needed at that time --

FT: I caught him in the kitchen rummaging through the cabinets in his underwear?

JT: Yeah, and I wasn't expecting that, had no idea what you had written, and it was just perfect.

I mean, so perfect that someone that didn't even know you said, "Hey, when I die will you write my eulogy?"

afterwards. I think you probably remember that.

So, I think that sense of humor has helped not only in our personal life, but probably helped you in your job too because you're very relatable and the people that you work with can relate to you.

And, you have a knack of knowing when to use that humor and to put people at ease too.

And, maybe that helped some in your letters too when you did employ that, that kind of laid back --

FT: You have to be humble.

Humility, I think, is key to all of this, especially if -- the airline industry is just rife for mistakes and things not going according to plan and if you're not --

JT: People getting upset, frayed nerves.

FT: People getting upset.

Your control is lost when you go into an airport.

You have to be subject to the security, the airline's regulations, and a lot of business people can't handle that. They're used to being in control of their own destiny and they get upset pretty quick.

And, so the best way to help things settle, help get things back into the right place that they need to be, is sometimes you just have to crack a joke.

Or when you could easily get upset with a situation, go the opposite direction.

I remember when I was working in Louisville, a lot of good things happened when I worked in Louisville, but this one particular a flight was just like, delayed forever, and it was just one mechanical problem after another.

And, you put one part of the plane, and something else would break, and we'd have to go get another part.

Well, the customers on this flight were going to Phoenix, and they were going out to the Fiesta Bowl that their team -- this whole planeload of customers, I'd say 75% of them -- were going out for the team.

And, at the time, Southwest had plastic boarding cards.

You remember those? Those things were wild. It was a great concept at the time until electronic check-in and stuff came along.

We used to make fun of people, we'd see how many people would find those plastic boarding cards on the men's rest room floor, and then you'd see somebody chewing on one over in the galley (gate lounge) --

JT: A kid.

FT: But anyway, we had these plastic boarding cards, and this man got so upset with the delay, and he felt like we were making excuses for the delay, that he had literally wadded up his plastic boarding card [01:00:00] to a point, and he had been holding onto it so long, that it had almost fused together into like a wiffle ball.

And, he got so upset with the explanation that I was giving, he used a couple of cuss words and he threw that boarding card, and it hit me right in the forehead, bounced on the counter there, and just kind of spun around like a top and then came to a stop.

And, I remember the agent that was working next to me just kind of pushed the keyboard back and was like, "Uh-oh, what's going to happen next."

And, I knew he was at his wit's end. I knew he had just kind of minorly assaulted me, so I mean I had options.

But, I just looked at him, and I was like -- and I pointed to that boarding pass, and I was like, "That's impressive."

And everybody around was just like -- they just (whew), and just relaxed, and kind of joked, and laughed, and he kind of chuckled.

And I said, "Would you like it back?"

And he's like, "Yes."

So, I mean, you know, you just have to like use just a little bit of humor and humility helps defuse those situations.

JT: And, probably those experiences that you had on the front lines really helped you.

FT: They carry over, absolutely.

StoryCorps: That was before the letter writing, right?

FT: Yeah, that was when I was a customer service supervisor.

And, so those real life experiences you take with you into this corporate world where you're trying to understand and appreciate what has taken place so you can turn around and write about it.

JT: Not only from the customer side, but the employee that was involved in that sometimes volatile situation too.

FT: Absolutely.

A lot of the things that our customers didn't see was the communication back to our employees.

That's just as important and as valuable as the letter that goes out to the customer.

Letting them know, "Hey, thank you for taking the time to provide those details because if you hadn't done that I wouldn't be able to translate that into something that the customer knows and appreciates that I know about the situation."

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Fred and Julie Taylor Interview

Part 6: Knowing Your Audience

JT: What was the hardest letter that you've ever had to write?

FT: Probably situations that appear to be a safety related issue, but you know deep down it's really not.

So when an airplane is flying or when it takes off at night there's a lot of noise from the engine rev-up, it's dark outside, everybody's kind of on edge, and particularly people that don't travel a lot, that don't fly.

There are white knuckle travelers out there.

And, so if an engine shuts down or what we call "shells" because parts of the fan blade come apart and they start going through the center of the engine, through its normal flow of air, it makes a lot of noise.

It also makes a lot of spark.

It causes the engine to sputter.

When the engine sputters the mixture of fuel to air ratio gets off balance and you can see plumes of fire that come out of the --

JT: Pretty scary stuff if you don't know what's going on.

FT: It's an emotional event, and if you don't know that about an engine, you think the engine is coming apart, is blowing up on you.

And really it's not. It's designed to function safely even if there are -- if it's malfunctioning.

And there's another engine on the other wing that maintains the aircraft's level balance.

And, so there's safety always built in through redundancy and technology, but if you don't know that about an engine it makes you upset.

And even if you do, if you've ever been on an -- you've been involved in an incident where we sucked in a duck, right?

JT: Right. And the pilot came back with a handful of feathers.

FT: Yeah, and the kids were carrying them down the concourse, right?

JT: Yeah.

FT: So, I mean you have a firsthand experience that I've never had.

JT: So, it's a little bit harder to put yourself in that position maybe if it's one of those things that could be really frightening for the customer you really have to -- that's what makes it more challenging for you?

FT: I just think it's trying to relate.

But when it's a safety issue, I think it's harder to write because you don't want to make it look like you're trying to protect something that doesn't need to be protected.

You can get real apologetic and, "Oh, sorry, we know this was scary," [01:05:00] but you don't want to be lighthearted about it either. You don't want to overdo it, you don't want to underdo it.

You want to get that right balance.

JT: So you have to find that perfect balance.

FT: So when the customer reads it, they're like, "This guy gets it. He knows what we went through and he also has made me feel better about the situation."

JT: So, they won't be terrified to fly again?

FT: That's right, so they'll come back.

And not only -- that was one of the reasons why we were writing these letters is to make sure that we expressed to our customers we wanted them to come back -- but we also, more importantly, we wanted it to be delivered with that heartfelt sincerity, that love.

And, so one of the things that Colleen encouraged me to do was write it just like you were telling it to your family members.

And, then you can go back and edit it if it would end up raising more concern or whatever.

Or write it as if you're telling your mom who might be sitting next to you on the airplane what just took place.

JT: I know you've had to calm me down a few times in flight.

FT: Yeah, usually going into Dallas because the weather's kind of rough.

JT: The turbulence.

FT: It's true. I remember --

JT: You've had some personal firsthand experience with that.

StoryCorps: What do you mean - can you explain?

JT: I'm a nervous flier. We had one flight where we were flying in pretty bad weather.

FT: It was choppy.

JT: And, it was one of those where the plane would drop and then quickly rise, and then drop again. And I've gotten almost hysterical.

FT: You did. I was really worried about you. I thought you were going to start munching on the seat bottom cushion!

JT: It was very frightening for me and kind of embarrassing to be married to somebody that works in the airline industry and to be so frightened by it, but it was pretty scary.

FT: Yeah, and I can understand why you would be.

The plane was, it was going up and down and rattling and making sudden moves.

JT: To you, it was all routine. You weren't --

FT: Even if I didn't work for the airline, it would be kind of cool, but also I know they fly airplanes into hurricanes,

so I know airplanes can withstand a tremendous amount of energy.

You've seen in World War II planes that have been shot up that come back safely. So, I mean, the Boeing 737 is a pretty resilient piece of equipment.

So I had a level of confidence, but I understood why others wouldn't.

JT: The pessimist in me did not.

FT: I didn't want you to have that.

One of the awesome things about you, and one of the things that I almost knew instantly about you, is you were kind of like one of the guys in our group.

You weren't overly emotional about things that would seem to get on guys' nerves. You just fit in.

But you were the type of person that I knew I could get along with immediately.

I remember just the conversations that we would have, our thoughts, our ideas on things, they were just kind of in line.

And, I always knew that -- the more I got to know you, I always knew that there were things in my life that would be incomplete without having you and your family in it.

And, so I just, and I don't know why I realized that early on in life, but there's not a day goes by since I've met you that I haven't felt that way.

And, so for me, getting to know you and having you part of my life has been a crutch that I've needed.

You've filled a massive void in me as a person and you've made me be more empathetic to the people that I work with and to the customers that I write to.

JT: I think probably your job helped you to grow even as a person too.

Just having to start thinking in that way of trying to put yourself in someone else's shoes and I think it's taught you a lot of patience that maybe you didn't have as a younger person.

FT: I always knew what my weaknesses [01:10:00] were, or are. I still do.

But I also know that I have somebody that can keep me right with myself and keep me on the right track.

There's just a sense of comfort that I have about what I'm doing, why I'm doing it, my purpose.

And it's not necessarily because I'm trying to earn a living or anything like that.

It's just because I feel better about being me because I always know that I have you.

JT: What's your proudest moment? What's the thing that makes you most proud?

FT: Like in my life in general?

JT: Sure.

FT: I know it's going to sound redundant, but I mean the fact that we met. The fact that I have you, that we have our family, that we've through the 24 years of marriage and then five years of college that we knew each other, I can't imagine it not -- I can't imagine not sharing that without you. I can't imagine looking into the future and not knowing that we won't somehow figure out ways to make whatever challenges that we have, overcome those things.

JT: So you're more than just the sorry man, I guess.

FT: I'm the lucky man!

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Fred and Julie Taylor Interview

Part 7: Dealing With Change

JT: What do you want your legacy to be?

FT: I don't care. I really don't want -- I'm not working toward a legacy. Whatever it is will be.

If I can help people who might be in similar situations - OK that would be a noble cause.

If I can get our kids through their teen years and get them into a productive adulthood then that would be successful.

If I'm able to have good health then that'll be successful.

And if we can have 20, 30, 40, 50 more years of marriage then that will be successful.

JT: So more than just work? Family is important to you.

FT: Work is just a means to an end sometimes. That's not necessarily that important.

FT: So this is a good question that I think deserves to be asked. So we talked about me apologizing to customers and getting along with my team members, but how am I at apologizing at home with you and Ben and the girls?

JT: I think better since you've worked at Southwest in that position than maybe in years past.

I think you are so focused, driven, such a perfectionist, and I think through your job you've had to be a

perfectionist to do your job, but at the same time the job that you've done in working with people, you've really learned some empathy and some real communication skills and people skills that maybe you didn't have when you were younger.

I remember somebody telling your mom, an attorney that you worked with back when you were clerking when you were in college, saying, "He's a great kid but he's wound too tight."

And, I think for the longest time you could fall back into that pattern sometimes too, but I believe because of the job that you've done you've really grown as a person and you're much better at apologizing maybe than you were in the past.

So that's a bonus for me.

Not only the job security that you have, but the fact that I think your job has really helped you to grow as an individual and to become a better person.

FT: I think one of the reasons why I might be better today [01:15:00] than I am (was) in the past is when you're young and you're dumb and you're trying to make something out of yourself in life or just to make ends meet, the stress of the moment makes you forget about all of the important things that are around you.

And, so as you get older and you take on more responsibilities, and you build a little bit of a nest egg, and a nest that you call your own, you start to reflect on what it took to get there and the importance of sticking with things.

And, setting a plan, and sticking to the plan, and being faithful to the plan, and following through with the things that you said you were going to follow through with, and you start to gain an appreciation that things just don't happen overnight.

You (realize) don't have control over everything.

Little things have to come together to work out.

And, so as I've gotten older, and as we've fought through challenges, and we made a great living for ourselves, I've learned that, hey, man, it's OK to relax a little bit sometimes, to let things happen, and know that you can be flexible and you have the resources and support behind you to adapt to change.

And, especially at Southwest Airlines over the past eight years we've gone through some pretty monumental change as a company.

Definitely over the past decade.

Ever since 9/11 the face of the company, the things that we do are night and day different.

And, I had to learn to live through that, adapt through that.

I started my job in the executive office before 9/11, and I remember one day, after the dust had settled and we were trying to sort out where we were going to be as a company, Colleen calling everybody in to the board room and going, "I don't know what the long term future is going to look like for Southwest Airlines, but what I do know is I believe in everyone that's in here and I believe that everyone will figure out a way to help this company continue on its path of success. I don't know what that looks like, but I just believe in you. I believe that you all will be able to figure it out."

And, I remember hearing that and going, "It's OK not to know. It's OK to kind of relax a little bit."

JT: That's a pretty powerful message at such a crazy time when things were very uncertain, especially in the airline industry and for your job.

FT: Talk about a period of uncertainty.

I mean, our airline didn't have the immediate shock of the tragedy that had taken place at American and United.

We were just trying to get back in the sky, but we knew that, man, everything was going to change about the way we ran our business.

We were losing money left and right.

Every day, every minute, that we didn't have a plane in the air was money that wasn't being earned.

And, we were worried about not only not making a profit, which somehow we figured out a way to do it, but we were worried about possibly not existing as an airline because we were worried that the industry itself might have to reshape itself and the way Southwest did business was going to have to change.

JT: Wasn't compatible with the possible future.

FT: But Colleen, she was right. We figured it out. But the weird thing was we had just moved.

JT: Yeah, that was pretty -- and had very young children.

FT: Young kids. So, what we had thought was going to happen with our future... [snaps] changed just like that.

JT: And you even thought you might have to -- [01:19:57]

[end disc 1]

[begin disc 2]

[00:00:00]

JT: -- go back to working in the airport.

FT: I didn't know. I mean I would have been happy to do that if that meant, you know...

JT: If that's what was needed.

FT: Yeah. And, I also remember asking Colleen sort of on the side, do we even need to write these letters anymore?

JT: Are they even relevant?

FT: Yeah, are they even important. She said "Hell, yes. Even more so today than they were two weeks ago." Because we were trying to offer that assurance to our customers. And, so it became a mission for me.

Now, the flip side of it was, it required a lot of my time.

And, so one of the things that -- I don't regret the work that I did, what we built, all the things that we were

doing for the company and for the industry and for our

customers. That was all great. But, one of the things I

do regret is not spending more time at home and not being available to everybody, as kids, as they were growing..

Max is snoring. Sorry about that. Our dog is here with us and he's starting to snore.

JT: He's bored.

FT: What I'm saying -- we've bored the dog to sleep!

JT: I think I remember Hurricane Katrina we didn't see you for about a month hardly because you were at the office constantly.

But I think I always understood, and I think the kids

understand, that that's what was needed. And, your job was,

like I said, there were so many facets to it. Your job was

important to getting people back in the air too because you had the continuation plans. Not only were you writing apology letters, but you were working on trying to get planes back in the air and people accommodated.

FT: It was the warrior spirit.

JT: So I think that's kind of a lesson for our children too even though they might not have been happy that you weren't home. They saw that strong work ethic and hopefully some of them, if not all of them, will carry that when they're out and about and working in their careers.

FT: I hope so.

JT: It wasn't all bad.

FT: Work ethic has always been important to me, and that started with watching my dad. He never stopped unless he finished something, whether that was putting a roof on my grandmother's house or building an addition onto his house or some side project that he had going on. He always completed, he always put the highest level of energy and detail into it. And I just remember that. I just idolized him for that tenacity that he had.

And, then when I learned about Southwest Airlines, and I learned about what our employees had done to make that airline a success up to the point where I was learning

about it, I thought, man, if they embrace that -- I've got that energy.

JT: That appealed to you.

FT: Yeah, I can do this. If they're willing to accept me as an employee, I can give back to them what their employees have been giving for decades.

So, I mean, when you get into a situation, an event, and I've told reporters this, it's not a 9:00 to 5:00 job. The airline industry is around the clock and, so, you just can't turn on and off at your convenience because there are customers out there that need the service.

And that was what was going on during Hurricane Katrina. We were having these meetings round the clock, we were trying to figure out what was going on, how we were going to not only recover from the disruption that was happening in New Orleans, [00:05:00] but we were trying to keep up with our employees.

JT: Who had been affected and lost their homes.

FT: Yeah. What was going on with them? I remember one meeting, we were all exhausted, it was like 6:30, 7:00 at night and I was in Colleen's office, and Herb was there, and a couple of other executive vice presidents from our operating groups were all just kind of sitting on a couch in

Colleen's office, and we had just gone through another briefing and we'd put together a plan.

And, I remember Herb just -- and he was perfect at doing this, always finding the right time to say something -- but he said, "God, can we just talk about something other than Hurricane Katrina? I mean can we talk about sex, can we talk about movies, can we talk about drinking?"

Something other than this destruction that had taken place because it had been with our lives so on.

And, I thought, man, here's the guy that helped rebuild the airline industry after 9/11 and he's finding a way to make it real for the rest of us through this one tragic moment that had taken place down in New Orleans.

So, yet another example of where you can interject a little humor into an otherwise --

JT: A stressful --

FT: -- stressful, tense situation.

JT: Right, any time you deal with people you've --

FT: Yeah, keep it real.

JT: The public. You have to defuse sometimes.

FT: Take the situation seriously, but not yourself. Absolutely.

JT: Good motto.

FT: Yeah, that's something that we've always tried to live by.
So let's see, what else? You seem to have a lot of
questions over there.

StoryCorps: I've got a couple.

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Fred and Julie Taylor Interview

Part 8: Knowing When You Got It Right

StoryCorps: I have a question if you all don't mind me asking that I think might be -- just a few that maybe might be nice to be in the archive. Is there a customer or a letter that you received back -- you had mentioned that sometimes you get notes back -- that was especially memorable or significant for you? Maybe a nice response from somebody or somebody thanking you.

FT: That like comes to memory or whatever?

StoryCorps: Yeah, comes to mind. That sticks out.

FT: I used to keep every letter that we would get back. And I'm not kidding, when we wrote initially -- before we converted over to email -- we would probably get 10 to 15 letters back from our customers, most of the time thanking us or maybe a follow-up question.

In fact, another way that we would gauge our customers -- the impact that we had on our customers -- is if they thought we knew everything about their lives.

So, we might be writing about a mechanical problem, but they would send a "how dare you overlook the fact that you haven't mentioned one thing about the bag that was damaged

in the process" or "the fact that I missed my rental car" or whatever.

And I would never take offense at those types of comments because I would always think "oh, yeah, I hit a nerve, it was personal for this individual".

Those are examples of things that I would remember, and I would go "you know you've got it right when you can create that type of emotion."

But there really aren't particular letters that stand out to me -- not because I don't appreciate the responses that I would get. It's just the volume of responses, it just doesn't jump out of my head right now...

JT: I can remember one. It may not have been a letter, but it's something that I think made a big impact. When you had written to someone who happened to write for the *St. Louis Business Journal* and she wrote an article about the letter.

FT: Yes, that's true.

JT: And I think that was huge, and kind of got your product out there in the media, and got the message, what you were trying to do with your job, then it was out there. And, then you started getting requests for interviews.

FT: Yeah, that's right.

JT: That's been so long ago, but that was very early on when you were just getting started with the letter writing and that made a real impact on her life and so much so that she wrote about it.

FT: That's true. She and a couple of girlfriends were flying to Chicago to do a little holiday shopping and there was a snow storm in St. Louis; and the flight was delayed, but then it got hung up in some de-icing issues; and so it sat off the gate for a couple of hours; and then it came back. It was just this snowball effect, if you will, of a disruption. [00:10:00]

And, so we sent an apology letter for the bad experience. And, I remember her saying that, number one, I received this letter before I could complain to the airline - so, she was impressed with the fact that we were proactively reaching out to them, which was our intention all along -- and I'm impressed with the fact that he would take the time to empathize with our situation. And she said something like I want to be Fred Taylor or something like that.

JT: I remember that.

FT: And I was like --

JT: No, you don't. You'll have four kids.

FT: (Right) Be careful what you ask for!

But, so that was sort of the milestone that said we had arrived at what we were trying to do, and now we have to figure out a way to emulate that going forward, and do it better, and come up with ways to get it into the hands of our customers faster. Absolutely. So, those are the kinds of things that I'm really happy that we accomplished with our proactive program -- for sure.

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Fred and Julie Taylor Interview

Part 9: Courage to Take On Difficult Tasks

FT: So let me ask you this. What was it like for you when I first started working at Southwest Airlines and then after we moved to Dallas? Or better yet, when I was working over in Baltimore and I was flying, I was commuting back and forth?

I remember you calling me one time, and we were in the middle of whatever the daily chaos was, and you were telling me that there was a snake crawling across the front porch.

JT: And, you said, "Just make sure it's gone before I come back."

That was pretty rough going because we had two small kids when you got that job, and I was pregnant with the third child, and working full time. And, so you were gone during the week and would come home two days maybe, two and a half days. We were trying to sell our house and looking to possibly move to Baltimore. It was a pretty rough, rough time. But, again, you were very happy with what you were doing even though you were putting in a lot of hours. You were happy and that made a big difference. The fact that

you enjoyed what you were doing and you weren't miserable or constantly searching for something else to do. You were content, and so I think that made you maybe a better husband, better parent. The fact that you felt content and that you had a purpose.

FT: Yeah, happiness does make things a lot easier, doesn't it? I guess that's where the humor comes in too.

JT: Sure.

FT: I'm just kind of curious to know, I think one of the funniest things that you said to me when I was over in Baltimore was when we found out that the lady that was living with, she had a townhome, and she had an apartment in the bottom of the townhome, learned that she and her boyfriend were going to have a baby. And, then when I found another place to stay I remember you saying -- I guess you have to understand that the third place that I found to live was with two other women in Annapolis overlooking the Naval Academy -- and you said, "Look, if one of those women turns up pregnant, then I know we're going to have a problem." So, that to me, I think helped me understand that you were getting through with it. You found a little bit of humor in light of the challenge that we were facing in that

moment. But I always wondered what did you think about my decision to go to work over there?

JT: It wasn't -- maybe I wasn't thrilled about it because all of our family was in -- and that meant moving and being away from them, but I also knew for you if you wanted to move up in the company in any way you had leave.

Louisville was just too small a market, so it was a necessary evil.

FT: It's true because, had I stayed in that position in Louisville, I would still be working probably the same hours with the same days off.

JT: The same job.

FT: So upward mobility was necessary in order to [00:15:00] make that move.

And, I remember when the offer came to go to Baltimore as an assistant customer service manager, I had asked, "Is there a cost of living adjustment or anything like that?" And the response from the director was, "No, but are you still interested?"

And, so I had to a choice to make, and the choice was you accept the position and the challenges that go along with it, and if you can make it there, you can make it anywhere at Southwest Airlines.

And, so I said I'm going to take the challenge. What do I have to lose, right?

JT: Right.

FT: That was probably a pretty bold statement to make, but what was your reaction to it, is really kind of what I'm interested in.

JT: I just saw it as something that had to be done.

FT: You've put a lot of trust and faith in me, and I really appreciate that.

You've put up with a lot of crazy ideas sometimes.

You've put up with a lot of long hours that I've worked, and I don't know if I -- I've tried to make sure you understood how much I appreciate that about you and how much I admire that in you.

JT: I know. I know that you appreciate it.

FT: And, I value your resiliency in that regard. I don't know if there are other people -- I'm sure there are -- that would be as tolerant as you have been throughout my tenure at Southwest Airlines, and before that. So, thank you. There's been people that have been through a lot worse in their lives.

JT: Oh, yeah. This is minor.

FT: I don't want to paint the picture that it's been doom and gloom. It's just daily --

JT: Day to day.

FT: Daily grind can really be rough. It's rougher than a lot of people admit, and for young couples, it's hard to understand the challenges that you're going to be faced with.

And, one thing that I always knew when we decided to get married was -- I'm marrying you because you're the only person that I want to spend the rest of my life with, and I am dedicated to making sure that, no matter what challenges we face, we will be happy and we will find a way to have a fulfilling life.

And, so what if challenges come our way. We'll figure out a way to get through them.

I always just knew that about me myself, and I always knew that about you.

And, I don't take it for granted. I take comfort in it.

And, I think couples that -- or people that are getting married and they're going down that road of life you have to know that about -- you have to be 1,000% certain that the person that you want to marry today is the same person you want to be married to 50 years from today.

And, I just deep down I always knew that about you.

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Fred and Julie Taylor Interview

Part 11: Being Open and Honest

StoryCorps: Fred, is there anything that you haven't told Julie that you'd like to?

FT: No because I don't think that -- I don't hide anything.

JT: No confessions?

FT: I don't have any confessions. I mean, I tell you that I love you all the time.

JT: Yeah, you're pretty open.

FT: I'm not shy about saying that. If I haven't -- if there's something that I haven't told you or that you feel like I need to say -- I don't even think there's anything like that.

You've always been pretty open and honest with me that I'm aware of. I think that's a fair question, but I feel like Julie and I know each other pretty well at this point.

How about you? Is there something that you have to tell me?

JT: I'd say you're probably more open about your feelings than I am. I keep things to myself. So just how much I admire how hard you've worked to get to where you are because I know it wasn't easy and I know that you did most of it on your own.

You had family support, but not -- you were the first in your family to graduate from college -- so I don't think [00:20:00] they were able to relate to some of the issues that you were having.

And I know that you paid for most of your school on your own while you were working full time, going to school full time.

And, so I just really admire all that you've done, and all that you've tried to do to take care of our family.

FT: The things that I admire the most about you are the fact that you're very -- you seem to be -- very calm.

JT: Unless I'm on an airplane.

FT: Unless you're on an airplane that has turbulence.

JT: Then watch out.

FT: You're very smart. Obviously people that are listening to this can't see you, but you're a very beautiful person. My friends used to always say that you're the perfect wife because --

JT: That's kind of funny.

FT: It's true though. You're perfect because not only are you smart, attractive, and outgoing, but you're a wonderful mother -- you're great with our kids.

I think that they look up to, and know that, you are just a rock of support for them.

And you're always fair with them. You're very generous and tenderhearted when it comes to understanding whatever issues that they're dealing with.

Like I mentioned before, you're like one of the guys. You like sports, you like hanging out, you like cutting a good joke every now and then and being part of the action. And, so to them, they see you as perfect, and I just see myself as very lucky.

JT: That's a hard thing to live up to now.

FT: But you're living up to it every day.

JT: That's a pretty major compliment. It's very nice.

FT: I don't think you have to worry about living up to anything. Just continue being yourself and you'll be right on track. What else?

StoryCorps: Is there any other final things you want to say or wrap up the recording in any particular way? Sometimes people do it their own way. Sometimes they thank each other. Is there any last words that you want to close the recording with?

FT: In thinking about what I have done in my life, and thinking about how I've gotten to where I am in my life, I know that I didn't do it by myself.

And, I think the message to anybody that cares to listen to this would be, it's OK, you can't do everything on your own.

In fact, there are people that you admire, that you model yourself after; there's people that you look up to, appreciate, and respect. There are people that will mentor you. There are people that will be by your side no matter what, and I'm fortunate that you, Julie, are that person. And, then there are people that will be your champions and you need to have champions in your life in order to be successful.

And, I don't want to put any definition around success because I don't think you can, I don't think it's possible, but in order for you to fulfill what it is that you want to achieve, you have to have a champion in your life.

And, those champions change and they're not always there. You find that they kind of ebb and flow like tides or sometimes they go away and you have to find a new champion, but I think the message that I want to offer to anybody that's listening is look for mentors, look for coaches, and when you have that opportunity, and that champion comes along, embrace it, do whatever you can to take advantage of that opportunity.

And, I don't mean that in a negative, but to fulfill what it is that you want to achieve.

And, I've been fortunate in my life to where I've had great role models in my father, my mother.

I'm lucky, and you know that I've said this [00:25:00] many times before. I say that I have three mothers and that's my natural mother, my stepmother -- who's been like a mother to me, and your mom, my mother-in-law. And, they're wonderful resources to have, my parents.

I've worked for people in my life that have provided me with great guidance and direction, whether that's been at the law firms or Southwest Airlines.

Wonderful friends that have offered their feedback and helped keep me humble.

And, then, of course, in my professional career, I've had wonderful leaders that have taken an interest in me at Southwest Airlines, and have made sure that I've had the resources that I need in order to be successful.

When I started at Southwest I had a great station leader in Louisville. His name is David Young.

I had an outstanding station leader in Baltimore. His name is Matt Hafner.

When I came to headquarters, obviously Colleen Barrett was a huge difference maker in my life professionally, personally, and I could not imagine myself being where I am today without her.

And, today in my present life, the VP of the department that I work in, Customer Relations, Jim Ruppel, plays a

huge role and is very important to me and my success as I go forward.

So, you need people like that to bring you along, and I'm just fortunate to work with a company that provides that level of support on a regular basis to its employees.

And, so that is an unwritten benefit that I've had that many people within Southwest Airlines have had, but I know there are other people out there in the world that offer the same to their employees as well, and when you have those opportunities, you should take them.

And, then if you're lucky, try to find someone like Julie to spend the rest of your life with.

JT: The perfect wife.

FT: The perfect wife.

JT: Perfect partner.

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Fred and Julie Taylor Interview

Part 12: Closing Acknowledgments

StoryCorps: What are your parents' names?

FT: I'm Fred junior, so Fred senior, Fred Taylor, my father.

And, Judy is my mom. And, my stepmother is Margaret, and my mother-in-law is Kathleen.

StoryCorps: Julie, early on in the recording you mentioned Olivia. Can you say for the record who Olivia is?

JT: Olivia is our daughter, and she's 15, and she always has kind of a unique way of looking at things.

Usually not without trying to be funny, she's definitely very funny.

She sometimes gets things a little mixed up, and so I thought, "My dad's the sorry man," I thought that was just classic Olivia.

FT: And, we probably better save ourselves here because we owe a little bit of air time to our children because they're so important in our lives.

So, we should talk about Benjamin, who is our oldest son. That kid is unbelievable if you ask me insofar as his level of intelligence and his determination when he locks in on something to do things.

I think he has a very analytic and mechanical mind.
He's very witty in terms of the things that he likes to do.
He's very outgoing. But, he also, one of the great things
that I admire about him, is he kind of has the same
personality as you do insofar as the way he gets along with
people, the way he interacts.

JT: Yeah, he's a little bit less of a perfectionist than you,
so he takes after me. He's a little more laid back.

FT: Yeah, he's very laid back, but he's a very personable kid.
All of them are really.

Madeline, our second child, she's probably more like me
than the rest of them. [00:30:00] So, sorry, Madeline
that you have those traits, but she's a lovely young lady.
She's our oldest daughter.

JT: Artistic.

FT: Very artistic.

JT: A little quirky.

FT: Definitely quirky. She's an introvert, much like me, but
she has a huge sense of pride about herself and she's a
very responsible individual.

And, she's a teenager, so she's starting to figure out
things in life, but I think she's handling herself very
well, and I'm very proud of her.

I also think she's pretty loving too. She doesn't express it always, but I know deep down she has a huge heart.

And, we have Olivia, that's our middle daughter. She's --

JT: Definitely extroverted.

FT: She is totally extroverted.

JT: We learned that she could not sit on the aisle seat of the airplane because, as a young child, she talked to everyone. So, had to learn that quickly, had to move her. She had to sit by the window because she was chatting up all the strangers.

She's a very organized kid, and I think does get that from you, the organizational skills that she has. Very hard worker.

FT: Thank God one of them does!

JT: Also gets that from you, her work ethic.

FT: One of the things that I learned about her at a young age is when she sets her mind to something, she locks in, and does it.

And, she's very resilient too. She can put up with a lot of -- she's tough as well.

JT: I can remember taking her ice skating when she was about five and she was determined she was going to do it by herself, not hold anybody's hand.

And, she probably fell 20 times, but she just kept getting back up and kept going. And that's the way she is. That's just her.

FT: It's one of the things I love about her.

And, then we have Zoe. Zoe's great. She's the youngest of the four, a fiery personality, very opinionated to say the least.

JT: She announced to her brothers and sisters when she was in second grade that she was the only one that was going to make anything of herself because she was in gifted and talented program at school, and none of them were, so they were just basically going to be losers, but she had it in the bag.

FT: I think being the fourth kid she's had to learn how to survive amongst the rest of them.

JT: She has a lot of bosses.

FT: She definitely has a lot of bosses, but she's become the boss as a result of that. She likes to lay down the law. And, she's a big horse lover too, which is something that I admire about her. Race horses. So, definitely wanted to give the kids some time.

JT: Sure, absolutely.

FT: And there's much more than can be said about them as well. Probably shortchanging them.

JT: That would be a 24 hour (laughter).

FT: So, thank you for giving us the opportunity to --

JT: This is wonderful.

FT: -- reflect on these things about our lives. It's got to be difficult for you guys to go around and try to encapsulate these personal histories about people because there's just so much that can be said.

So I admire the work that you all are doing and grateful

that you've given us the opportunity to do this. Thank you.

JT: Yes, thank you very much. [00:34:05]

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