

The airline industry has been heard to proclaim of great financial losses in the recent past. Fuel prices are up as are operating costs. The airline industry is seeking assistance from the federal government. Times are tough, we are reminded. Oh, woe is the airline industry. You know why they can't earn a profit? I think it's pretty simple - because they provide crappy service. Period. Let's face it - the average traveller is hit with hidden costs in their fares. They are faced with flights that are canceled for no apparent reason - at the whim of the airline. They experience long waits and delayed flights. They experience absolutely abysmal customer service, even if they do need to re-book a flight due to a problem of their own making. This was brought to my attention yet again today. My task: to fly from Austin to Huntsville, Alabama, a total of 920 miles. Should I keep the airline nameless? Hell no - American. Scheduled departure: 1:00. Arrival at DFW: 2:00 Scheduled departure: 3:15. Arrival in Huntsville: 4:50. A wait of 75 minutes in Dallas is just about perfect. The weather is just about perfect as well. Of course, this all assumes that they could actually live up to the promise of their own schedule. **Problem number one**: I actually depart Austin at 2:20. No reason provided by the airline - a typical case of "just because". But there's hope - I arrive on the ground at 3:00. (If I had headed to Dallas in my car from Austin when I left home at 11:30, I would be at the airport by 3:00 - but that is beside the point) **Problem number two**: My next flight leaves at 3:15, so I am sure American will have us covered. I arrive at the gate at 3:17 after doing my best Hertz rental car commercial, running through the airport. All the way, I am hoping that they know we are coming, especially since we were on the ground by 3:00 and their system would know this. I was already checked-in. "Oh, we closed the gate at 3:09" are the words from the agent. Last time I looked, the flight was to depart at 3:15 - not 3:09. So now I am sitting on my ass, waiting for a 7:20 pm flight. **Problem number 3**: I arrived at DFW at terminal A. My connection was in the far reaches of terminal C, which, as it turns out, had already left early. I was re-booked and sent back to terminal A for my connection. Once I arrived at terminal A, I was notified that the flight had moved to terminal C. No, I kid you not ... **Problem number 4**: Departure time has been delayed ... and we don't actually get off the ground until 40 minutes after we're scheduled to depart. The reason? "Just because" were the words they didn't say - because they didn't say anything. This puts us in about 30 minutes late, but we are all told by the pilot that the tailwind made a difference! Fair enough - sure, some airlines are worse than others. Perhaps this was just my unlucky day. But are we now at the point that our expectations are so low that we have come to consider this acceptable business behavior? In all reality, would you really mind paying for a service if it is what you thought you would be paying for? If the airlines told us that it was going to cost more to fly, that there were going to be fewer flights, but that they could actually provide this service consistently, would I mind? Absolutely not. And in all of this, they are pleading with the government for assistance. If the airlines fail, why should we bail them out? If your business provides lousy customer service and a lousy customer experience, do you expect someone to bail you out? I didn't think so. ♦