

## Southwest Airlines' Nonstop Culture: Flying High with Transparency and Empowerment

Kelsey Harper,<sup>1</sup> a budding leader at Southwest Airlines Co., was looking forward to another day on the job. Recently promoted within the People Department<sup>1</sup> (Southwest's equivalent to a human resources department), it was her first opportunity to be a part of the hiring process. Southwest valued those who wanted to make a career with the airline, placing a strong emphasis on hiring for attitude and training for skill.<sup>2</sup> Hiring at Southwest went beyond its group and phone interviews; instead, the interviewing process helped signal to recruiters the types of characteristics that the company sought to propel in its organizational culture.

Harper knew the importance of finding the right candidate for Southwest, but was nervous at how to appropriately identify candidates who fit Southwest's eccentric culture. Beyond the uneasiness in her new role, the job she was helping hire for was a coveted pilot position, which required the People Department to identify technical competencies, as well. To do so, she would be interviewing with an active Southwest pilot who could better facilitate technical questions to candidates.

Harper could easily recite the qualities desired in prospective hires, but the question remained as to how she could identify these traits in practice. As she joined her co-interviewer, five hopeful pilots filed in for the first of three phases of their group interview—the human resources aspect.<sup>3</sup> Her role in this initial meeting was to find out more about who the interviewees were beyond the résumé: What were they most proud of? How had they achieved this accomplishment? What tone did they set with their crew before a flight and why?<sup>4</sup> Harper smiled widely at the recruits as these questions buzzed in her head, hoping to instill confidence in them to ease the stiff looks on their faces, beginning the interview process by asking the pilots to loosen their collars and sit back.

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i Kelsey Harper and the recruiting scenario were fictitiously developed by the author for the purposes of facilitating a learning scenario and does not necessarily reflect the views of Southwest Airlines Co.