

## Dr Peter Kelly

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Dear Sir:

As a Platinum level customer (615071461) and frequent user of your service, I wanted to take this opportunity mid flight (AY 838 - 23 October 2011) traveling from London Heathrow to provide some frank evaluation and feedback on your service concept. In my many years of flying on business, I have never been offered a feedback form on any of your flights. Blue Wings magazine offers no assistance whatsoever as it provides no details how to reach you; as wanting and poor as your experience and service concept is, this is no wonder.

As an award winning entrepreneurship educator that has worked with entrepreneurs and companies developing and evaluating strategies to create value, I bring an immense base of global experience assessing concepts from an experience design perspective and provide you with the following detailed feedback.

### VALUE FOR MONEY

I paid almost €600 for an economy flight to London albeit on relatively short notice (a little over a week). I upgraded to business class on vouchers but traveling Finnair on the London route is a second best option for me always - even in business class. If I can fix the date of my travel reasonably far in advance, I can get a business class fare (€404 in December for example) no refund, no changes. Traveling on identical dates with your airline would set me back €255 in Economy and €1936 in business! BA's business class cabin is full of equally unimpressed Finnair frequent flyers like me. OWN GOAL #1

## CUSTOMER CARE CENTER 24h

In this instance, I did have to change the outbound flight as I needed to be in my final destination earlier than anticipated. On the back of my platinum card is a Finnair Customer Care Center, 24h. I called it eight times with the same outcome – two rings, automated message in Finnish then Swedish followed by an abrupt cutting of the line. As a top tier member, I expect someone to pick up the phone but apparently your definition of customer care is dramatically different from mine. I was told by one of your service staff that this is a Finnair Plus number but nowhere on the card does it say this. OWN GOAL #2

## CHANGING FLIGHTS

I had little choice but to take time out of my busy schedule to travel to the airport personally to make the change where I found your customer service center in the basement. What a powerfully suggestive image that is evoked for customers and staff alike that customer issues are dealt with in the basement! I can only conclude from this setup that your number one priority is to herd passengers into departure gates. Is this worth a rethink?

It appears that, regardless of fare, there is a charge for customers of €50 anytime they need to speak to a human being to change a ticket. For lower priced tickets this is understandable, but it makes absolutely no sense to me whatsoever charging this fee across the board for all booking classes and for all tiers. This is a real irritant among all Finnair frequent fliers that I know – and that is a lot. My suggestion – give some thought to excluding change fees for particular fare classes and/or tier levels.

Having said this, the only really good experience of the day was in the initiative your ground staff displayed in changing the flight class for me to that of the original ticket – the thought of charging me a €50 change fee + an additional €150 class change fee would have been a step too far. If your service staff were as thoroughly understanding, empathetic and attentive as the one that served me that morning in Helsinki you would be a worldclass airline. Unfortunately, the daily reality aboard your flights does not live up to this standard. I realize that service training is vitally important but frankly your onboard staff appears only to be going through well established routines and are rarely seen up the aisles otherwise. Have a serious look at how busy Singapore Airlines staff is during the WHOLE flight even on short haul. Customers sing their praises and profits follow.

## HELSINKI VIA LOUNGE

I suspect that very few, if any, of your employees have actually gone into one of your One World partner airlines lounges. Compared to the British Airways First Class lounge that I just enjoyed at Terminal 3, yours is a distant and very poor second cousin. I was able to unwind, order a very good lunch (at no charge), be served, and have an excellent choice among 3 red wines, 3 white wines and 2 different champagnes complementary. BA is proud to let you sample what you could have if you travel in their premium cabins. Ubiquitous WiFi with a wellposted password of the month eliminated the need for dispensing annoying login credentials; the irony of course is that Finnavia provides high speed WiFi throughout the airport without them already so why bother?

The food offered in your lounge looks cheap, tastes cheap and reflects badly on the airline. What better thing to accompany awful food but awful wine. If you want something decent – as they routinely serve for free in BA, Cathay, Qantas, American, Iberia lounges – you pay an arm and a leg for it. Your long haul business class cuisine and wines are excellent. The choice is clear you can offer me a taste of what to expect in Finnair business class in the lounge and I will be favorably inclined to book a long haul trip with you. However, in choosing to offer cheap food and frankly horrible wines in the Via Lounge, you send a very clear message to other OneWorld customers “book with somebody else”.

The lounge may have been awarded the Priority Pass Lounge of the Year 2011 – but having been in many of these lounges worldwide – there is not much real competition to speak of. What should matter to you more is becoming the flagship lounge that every OneWorld and, particularly Finnair Plus member raves about. Sadly this is not the case. Every single time I have been in your lounges I have overheard people commenting how awful it is, other than the beautiful and expensive design furniture. OWN GOAL #3

## VIA SPA

I would love to know who was consulted in allocating so much space to saunas and a pool. Paradoxically the notion of fast turnaround times at the airport probably doesn't leave connecting customers any time to make use of the facility. Moreover, I doubt many foreign visitors are inclined to jump in the pool or the sauna as are Finns; having said this I am big fan of saunas!). I would not be at all surprised to hear that the spa facility is significantly underutilized. OWN GOAL #4

## BUSINESS CLASS MENUS

The menus are changing frequently now which is a positive. However, on a previous flight from London, I decided to upgrade my wife and I into business class on points for the outbound. We had worked a full day. There was nothing even remotely appealing to eat in the Via Lounge that afternoon. During the flight, we were presented with gourmet meatballs and mashed potatoes; an unexpected and frankly unpleasant surprise. Looking around our fellow passengers in the business cabin, the mood was underwhelming. OWN GOAL #5

As I write this note to you, your onboard staff has taken away an Asian Flavours menu with a Japanese starter that did not have the ingredients listed, a Korean inspired main course and a tropical dessert. I could not eat a thing. I know that Finnair's attention is primarily focused in one direction, ASIA, ASIA, ASIA, but I am on a flight to Finland and personally feel that you should be highlighting Finnish cuisine inspired by recipes from Finnish chefs as is the customary practice of many airlines in the OneWorld alliance. I am not on a flight to Japan or Korea and frankly if I were fed that main course in business class to Seoul, I would choose to travel with BA via London where I am consistently guaranteed excellent food choices with stunning wines. Even on short haul routes, BA offers two choices of main course in business class. Singapore offers two hot meal choices and wine from the bottle in ECONOMY CLASS! OWN GOAL #6

In my experience, when airlines spend inordinate amounts of time speaking about the fleet and it's new paint job, it is usually a diversionary tactic to disguise the appallingly bad experience and service concept upon which the airline is based. In Finnair's case, the situation has been one of steady decline over many years to the point where I am considering joining BA's frequent flier program.

Please don't take the step of replacing boarding passes with luggage tags - because that is exactly what it is beginning to feel like traveling with your airline. Airlines are in a tough business but you really ought to consider "investing" in experience in addition to aircraft; after all passengers remember the experience not the technical statistics of the plane they flew in.

Yours sincerely,

Dr Peter Kelly