

When I was about 10, my mother purchased some expensive shoes and asked me to wear them “around the house” to moderately rough-up the slick soles and prevent her from slipping. Taking her literally, I wore the shoes all the way around the outside of the house. Being an overachiever, I decided more was better and roughed the soles until they were almost non-existent. When I proudly showed my mother my work, she shrieked with horror. Fortunately, my father repaired the shoes with black electrical tape. My sister and I still think about that moment and laugh hysterically.

Take the Extra Step



Sandy Palmer Gordon

Sandy Palmer Gordon has been putting herself into other people’s shoes with empathy—and then going the extra mile to help them—for many years.

As Vice President of In-Flight Service Field Operations and Safety at Delta Air Lines, she provides leadership and strategic direction to 22,000 flight attendants spanning the globe in 13 locations in the USA plus 11 international bases. Gordon also oversees the development of in-flight policies and procedures to help ensure the safety and security of Delta Air Lines passengers and flight-attendant crews. In executing her responsibilities, she adheres to a philosophy of extending genuine and sincere care to employees and customers.

One time, for example, a Delta customer experienced trouble with his overseas travel arrangements. He e-mailed Gordon, pleading for her assistance, but his problems were not within her area of responsibility, and the message arrived while Gordon was away on a planned vacation.

Instead of forwarding the message to someone else, Gordon imagined how distressed the customer must have been to reach out to her and

became personally involved to help him. Eighteen hours later, after conquering a significant language barrier, exchanging several e-mails, and enduring many international phone conversations, the customer’s problems were resolved.

“I returned to enjoying my vacation, but it was enhanced with the satisfaction of knowing that the customer was able to enjoy the remainder of his time abroad and that I had restored his commitment to Delta as a loyal customer.”

Joanna D. Smith, Delta’s Senior Vice President for In-Flight Service, often witnesses Gordon’s dedication beyond the call of duty. While nominating Gordon for the Eagle Award, Smith explained that, “In my 30-year career, working with leaders with varied skills and backgrounds, I can think of no one who deserves this honor more.”

Gordon accepted a position at Delta right out of college and is still with the company. In addition to her core responsibilities,

“My life’s purpose is to do and/or be something that leaves the world better than I found it.”

she serves on the Delta Air Lines Diversity Council to help define, implement, and champion corporate global diversity strategies.

Gordon gives back to her local community in numerous ways. Among other volunteering activities, she is on the Board of Directors of Big Brothers Big Sisters of Metro Atlanta, she volunteers with the Girl Scouts, she is Vice President of the Atlanta chapter of National Epicureans—a civic and social organization that promotes and sponsors social, cultural, literary, and charitable affairs—and is involved in the National Sickle Cell Project. She is a member of Delta Sigma Theta, a public-service sorority that provides academic scholarships, book scholarships, and stipends to single mothers needing assistance, and is also involved with Habitat for Humanity.

“My life’s purpose is to do and/or be something that leaves the world better than I found it,” says Gordon. “I want my son and daughter to both be strong, independent thinkers who are always sensitive to the plight of others. If I raise them to be compassionate, with a strong work ethic, I will have fulfilled my purpose. My plan for achieving this is to model the behaviors I want to see in them.”

CareerFOCUS Magazine[™] and the National Eagle Leadership Institute[®] salute 2009 Eagle Award winner Sandy Palmer Gordon.

Nominating Company

Delta Air Lines

Current Position

Vice President, In-Flight Service
Field Operations and Safety

Professional Milestones

- Board of Directors, Delta Benefit Funds Investment Committee
- Member, Delta Air Lines Diversity Council
- R.E.A.C.H. Award, in recognition of leadership on 9/11/2001

Community Leadership

- Board of Directors, Big Brothers Big Sisters of Metro Atlanta
- Volunteer, Girl Scouts of America
- Vice President, National Epicureans, Inc., Atlanta Chapter

Leadership Principle

Remain approachable, have positive energy, and deliver results while maintaining a solid reputation for honesty and fairness.

Education/Training

- Bachelor of Science in Finance, Hampton University, Hampton, Virginia

Birthplace

Frankfurt, Germany

Current Home

Fairburn, Georgia

The Leadership Promise at Delta Air Lines

Delta’s founder, C.E. Woolman, said it best: “All airlines are alike – only people make them different.” Woolman’s words are echoed in our philosophy that diversity is achieved not just by providing opportunities to leaders of all backgrounds, but by demonstrating a willingness to consider multiple perspectives in every area we do business.

As the world’s largest airline, serving more cultures than any other carrier, Delta is proud to support a diverse group of high-performance leaders. We emphasized our commitment to diversity this year with the addition of “Leading Diversity” as a High Performing Attribute against which all Delta leaders and merit employees are measured.

That group is supported through comprehensive training that fosters leadership, team development, and conflict resolution. We strategically focus on recruiting diverse talent through partnerships with numerous organizations. And we strive every day to provide a workplace where all of our employees know they are valued and respected.