

# Root Cause Analysis Report

United Airlines--Reputational Damage (Revision 2)



## Problem Statement

Report Number	RCA-21-04-2017-108	RCA Owner	Chris Eckert
Report Date	4/20/2017	RCA Facilitator	Chris Eckert

## Focal Point: Significant Negative Publicity for United Airlines

### When

Start Date: 4/9/2017

End Date: 4/8/2017

Start Time: 5:20pm

End Time:

Unique Timing

After passengers had taken their seats on United flight 3411 from Chicago to Louisville. After flight had been overbooked by one seat. After a four-person flight crew was re-booked on this flight.

### Where

Company

Republic Airlines (United contractor)

ID or Serial Number

United Express Flight 3411

Location

O'Hare Airport

### Actual Impact

Other Impacts	United Airlines stock value declined initially, and then recovered.	\$0.00
Legal	Lawsuit from injured passenger (Amount not disclosed, estimated by Sologic)	\$500,000.00
Safety	Passenger sustained broken nose, contusions/abrasions, two broken teeth. (Estimated by Sologic)	\$25,000.00
Revenue	Refunded all passengers ticket fare (Estimated by Sologic) \$330 * 70 passengers (Ticket price one-way O'Hare to Louisville, 4/28/2017)	\$110,000.00
Customer Service	Significant Negative PR. Top story in most news media. Video was viewed 6.8 million times in one day	\$0.00
Investigation Costs	Estimated by Sologic	\$25,000.00

**Actual Impact Total: \$660,000.00**

Frequency	times Overall
Frequency Note	47,000 passengers bumped in 2015. Source: Powley, Tanya (April 11, 2017). "How big a problem is overbooking on airlines?". Financial Times. This is the first time a person was both injured and video taped being forcibly removed.

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**Potential Impact**

Cost	New regulations on dealing with overbooking may impact future revenue	\$0.00
Revenue	Lost customers (Estimated by Sologic)	\$10,000,000.00

**Potential Impact Total: \$10,000,000.00**

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## Report Summaries

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### Executive Summary

#### **READ THIS FIRST!**

First, we need to disclose that this EXAMPLE RCA is based upon publicly available information from a variety of sources (mostly newspaper articles) and **not from any independent investigation conducted by Sologic**. Sologic has not investigated this incident in any official capacity, and we do not want to imply that we were in any way associated with this event. The **only** purpose of this root cause analysis report is for it to be used as an example for our students and other interested parties.

A root cause analysis has two primary goals: 1) Organize a wide array of information from disparate, reliable sources in a way that makes it easier to understand, and 2) Identify a set of evidence-based solutions to present to decision makers.

### Cause and Effect Summary

We were able to create this example from the wide variety of source material available. But just as we were about to publish it, United themselves released their internal report. In our opinion, this was a very forthright, introspective, candid, and complete assessment. We copied their solutions verbatim and attached them to the appropriate causes on the chart.

A quick note about the financial impact shown in the Problem Statement and the cost of Solutions: No actual financial impacts were disclosed by United, so WE MADE THESE UP with the purpose of showing readers how financial impacts CAN BE disclosed in an RCA report. If United ultimately discloses financial information, we will update this RCA.

Because United's report closely mirrors our own cause and effect chart, we did not write an independent summary statement for this particular example. Instead, we recommend reading the United report in its entirety - it is available here:

<https://hub.united.com/united-review-action-report-2380196105.html>

**-- End of Report --**

## Solutions

SO-0001	<b>Solution</b>	From United Report: United will limit use of law enforcement to safety and security issues only.		
	<b>Cause(s)</b>	Law Enforcement team directed called to remove passenger		
	<b>Note</b>	United will not ask law enforcement officers to remove customers from flights unless it is a matter of safety and security. United implemented this policy on April 12.		
	<b>Assigned</b>	Brian Hughes	<b>Criteria</b>	Passed
	<b>Due</b>	5/2/2017	<b>Status</b>	Completed
	<b>Term</b>	short	<b>Cost</b>	\$0.00
SO-0002	<b>Solution</b>	From United Report: United will not require customers already seated on the plane to give up their seat involuntarily unless safety or security is at risk.		
	<b>Cause(s)</b>	United prioritized their employees over customers		
	<b>Note</b>	United implemented this policy on April 27.		
	<b>Assigned</b>	Brian Hughes	<b>Criteria</b>	Passed
	<b>Due</b>	5/2/2017	<b>Status</b>	Completed
	<b>Term</b>	short	<b>Cost</b>	\$0.00
SO-0003	<b>Solution</b>	From United Report: United will increase customer compensation incentives for voluntary denied boarding up to \$10,000.		
	<b>Cause(s)</b>	United didn't offer enough money to give up seat		
	<b>Note</b>	United's policy will be revised to increase the compensation levels up to \$10,000 for customers willing to volunteer to take a later flight. This will go into effect on April 28.		
	<b>Assigned</b>	Brian Hughes	<b>Criteria</b>	Passed
	<b>Due</b>	5/2/2017	<b>Status</b>	Completed
	<b>Term</b>	short	<b>Cost</b>	\$0.00
SO-0004	<b>Solution</b>	United will establish a customer solutions team to provide agents with creative solutions.		
	<b>Cause(s)</b>	Employees are not trained or empowered for this type situation		

	<b>Note</b>	From United Report: United will create a team to proactively identify and provide gate agents with creative solutions such as using nearby airports, other airlines or ground transportation to get customers and crews to their final destinations. Separately, the team also will work to provide solutions to help get crews to their final destinations. United expects the team to be operational by June. Examples include: - Suggest flights to close-by airports and then provide transportation to the customer's preferred destination. - If a customer's travel includes a connecting flight, provide options that would eliminate the connection and still get the customer to the destination. - Offer ground transportation where practical.	
	<b>Assigned</b>	Brian Hughes	<b>Criteria</b> Passed
	<b>Due</b>	5/2/2017	<b>Status</b> Completed
	<b>Term</b>		<b>Cost</b>
SO-0005	<b>Solution</b>	From United Report: United will ensure crews are booked onto a flight at least 60 minutes prior to departure.	
	<b>Cause(s)</b>	United did not deploy alternative travel plans for crew	
	<b>Note</b>	Unless there are open seats, all crew members traveling for work on our aircraft must be booked at least 60 minutes before departure. This policy was implemented on April 14.	
	<b>Assigned</b>	Brian Hughes	<b>Criteria</b> Passed
	<b>Due</b>	5/2/2017	<b>Status</b> Completed
	<b>Term</b>	short	<b>Cost</b> \$0.00
SO-0006	<b>Solution</b>	United will provide agents with additional annual training.	
	<b>Cause(s)</b>	Employees are not trained or empowered for this type situation	
	<b>Note</b>	From United Report: United will provide annual training for frontline employees to enhance their skills on an ongoing basis that will equip them to handle the most difficult of situations. This training will begin in August.	
	<b>Assigned</b>	Brian Hughes	<b>Criteria</b> Passed
	<b>Due</b>	5/2/2017	<b>Status</b> Approved
	<b>Term</b>	short	<b>Cost</b> \$0.00
SO-0007	<b>Solution</b>	From United Report: United will create an automated system for soliciting volunteers to change travel plans.	
	<b>Cause(s)</b>	Employees are not trained or empowered for this type situation	
	<b>Note</b>	Later this year, United will introduce a new automated check-in process, both at the airport and via the United app, that will gauge a customer's interest in giving up his or her seat on overbooked flights in exchange for compensation. If selected, that customer will receive their requested compensation and be booked on a later United flight.	
	<b>Assigned</b>	Brian Hughes	<b>Criteria</b> Passed
	<b>Due</b>	5/2/2017	<b>Status</b> Approved

	<b>Term</b>	medium	<b>Cost</b>
SO-0008	<b>Solution</b>	From United Report: United will reduce its amount of overbooking.	
	<b>Cause(s)</b>	Accepted practice by airlines	
	<b>Note</b>	United has evaluated its overbooking policy. As a result, adjustments have been made to reduce over-bookings on flights that historically have experienced lower volunteer rates, particularly flights on smaller aircraft and the last flights of the day to a particular destination.	
	<b>Assigned</b>	Brian Hughes	<b>Criteria</b> Passed
	<b>Due</b>	5/2/2017	<b>Status</b> Completed
	<b>Term</b>	short	<b>Cost</b> \$0.00
SO-0009	<b>Solution</b>	From United Report: United will empower employees to resolve customer service issues in the moment.	
	<b>Cause(s)</b>	Employees are not trained or empowered for this type situation	
	<b>Note</b>	Rolling out later this year, United will launch a new "in the moment" app for our employees to handle customer issues. This will enable flight attendants (by July) and gate agents (later this year) to compensate customers proactively (with mileage, credit for future flights or other forms of compensation) when a disservice occurs.	
	<b>Assigned</b>	Brian Hughes	<b>Criteria</b> Passed
	<b>Due</b>	5/2/2017	<b>Status</b> Approved
	<b>Term</b>	medium	<b>Cost</b>
SO-0010	<b>Solution</b>	From United Report: United will eliminate the red tape on lost bags.	
	<b>Cause(s)</b>		
	<b>Note</b>	Note from Sologic: While United's customers will certainly appreciate this, we aren't sure how this is a solution to this specific problem. United will adopt a new no-questions-asked policy on permanently lost bags. In these instances, United will pay a customer \$1,500 for the value of the bag and its contents. For claims or reimbursement over \$1,500, additional documentation may be required. This process is expected to be in place in June.	
	<b>Assigned</b>	Brian Hughes	<b>Criteria</b> Failed
	<b>Due</b>	5/2/2017	<b>Status</b> Completed
	<b>Term</b>	short	<b>Cost</b> \$0.00

## Team

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**Facilitator**

Chris Eckert

chris.eckert@sologic.com

**Owner**

Chris Eckert

chris.eckert@sologic.com

**Participants**

Cory Boisoineau

cory.boisoineau@sologic.com

Brian Hughes

brian.hughes@sologic.com

www.sologic.com

## Evidence

EV-0001	<b>Evidence</b>	Observation
	<b>Cause(s)</b>	<p>Video footage (bloody passenger) was an attention-grabber                      Passenger had implied contract to remain on flight                      Flight was overbooked                      Accepted practice by airlines                      Want to assure full planes                      Excessive force used to remove passenger from plane                      Law enforcement applied aggressive tactics                      Airline industry not in great favor with general public                      United and Republic Airlines are separate companies                      Event occurred on Republic Airlines flight (contractor to United)</p>
	<b>Location(s)</b>	
	<b>Attachment(s)</b>	
	<b>Contributor</b>	
	<b>Type</b>	Other
	<b>Quality</b>	★★★★★
EV-0002	<b>Evidence</b>	United statement
	<b>Cause(s)</b>	<p>United needed a passenger to give up their seat                      expecting some ticketed passengers to cancel                      United needed one more seat                      United added 4 employees (traveling as passengers) to the flight at last minute                      United/Republic crew needed to work flight out of Louisville next day                      United and Republic Airlines are separate companies</p>
	<b>Location(s)</b>	
	<b>Attachment(s)</b>	
	<b>Contributor</b>	
	<b>Type</b>	Other
	<b>Quality</b>	★★★★★
EV-0003	<b>Evidence</b>	Author opinion based on personal observation

**Cause(s)** Many people could empathize with the injured passenger  
Goal of maximizing revenue  
United prioritized their employees over customers  
United didn't want Louisville flight (next day) delayed  
United did not deploy alternative travel plans for crew  
Airline industry not in great favor with general public  
Many people have experienced overbooked flights

**Location(s)**

**Attachment(s)**

**Contributor**

**Type** Other

**Quality** ★★★★★

EV-0004 **Evidence** CEO statement  
**Cause(s)** United CEO initially supported the removal of passenger  
**Location(s)**  
**Attachment(s)**  
**Contributor**  
**Type** Other  
**Quality** ★★★★★

EV-0005 **Evidence** Passenger statement  
**Cause(s)** Passenger was issued a boarding pass  
Needed to be at work the next day  
**Location(s)**  
**Attachment(s)**  
**Contributor**  
**Type** Other  
**Quality** ★★★★★

EV-0006 **Evidence** News coverage  
**Cause(s)** United didn't take 'ownership' of the problem  
United CEO initially supported the removal of passenger  
Many people interested in story  
Injured passenger event received significant coverage  
General public disagreed with United's initial, public response  
Passenger injured during forced removal from United flagged flight  
**Location(s)**  
**Attachment(s)**  
**Contributor**  
**Type** Other

	<b>Quality</b>	★★★★★
EV-0007	<b>Evidence</b>	Social Media comments
	<b>Cause(s)</b>	Many people interested in story Injured passenger event received significant coverage General public does not believe forced removal is acceptable Airline industry not in great favor with general public
	<b>Location(s)</b>	
	<b>Attachment(s)</b>	
	<b>Contributor</b>	
	<b>Type</b>	Other
	<b>Quality</b>	★★★★★
EV-0008	<b>Evidence</b>	Passenger video
	<b>Cause(s)</b>	Video footage of injured passenger shared globally Excessive force used to remove passenger from plane Passenger resisted being removed from plane
	<b>Location(s)</b>	
	<b>Attachment(s)</b>	
	<b>Contributor</b>	
	<b>Type</b>	Other
	<b>Quality</b>	★★★★★
EV-0009	<b>Evidence</b>	United Express Flight 3411 Review and Action Report
	<b>Cause(s)</b>	Law Enforcement team directed called to remove passenger Once decision is made, there is no mechanism to change United didn't offer enough money to give up seat United didn't provide adequate, acceptable alternate travel options Customer would not comply Employees are not trained or empowered for this type situation Internal procedures were followed
	<b>Location(s)</b>	Investigation Folder
	<b>Attachment(s)</b>	United+Flight+3411+Review+and+Action+Report.pdf
	<b>Contributor</b>	Chris Eckert
	<b>Type</b>	Document
	<b>Quality</b>	★★★★★

Chart Key

- Transitory
- Non Transitory
- Transitory Omission
- Non Transitory Omission
- Undefined
- Chart Quality Alert
- Focal Point
- Timeline
- Tasks
- Solutions
- Tasks

★ Significant Negative Publicity for United Airlines

Passenger injured during forced removal from United flagged flight

Excessive force used to remove passenger from plane

Law Enforcement team directed called to remove passenger

Passenger resisted being removed from plane

United didn't offer enough money to give up seat

United didn't provide adequate, acceptable alternate travel options

Needed to be at work the next day

Once decision is made, there is no mechanism to change

Employees are not trained or empowered for this type situation

Law Enforcement team directed called to remove passenger

Solutions

From United Report: United will limit use of law enforcement to safety and security issues only.

Criteria Pass Status Completed

United will not ask law enforcement officers to remove customers from flights unless it is a matter of safety and security. United implemented this policy on April 12.

Solutions

United will establish a customer solutions team to provide agents with creative solutions.

Criteria Pass Status Completed

From United Report: United will create a team to proactively identify and provide gate agents with creative solutions such as using nearby airports, other airlines or ground transportation to get customers and crews to their final destinations. Separately, the team also will work to provide solutions to help get crews to their final destinations. United expects the team to be operational by June. Examples include: - Suggest flights to close-by airports and then provide transportation to the customer's preferred destination. - If a customer's travel includes a connecting flight, provide options that would eliminate the connection and still get the customer to the destination. - Offer ground transportation where practical.

United will provide agents with additional annual training.

Criteria Pass Status Approved

From United Report: United will provide annual training for frontline employees to enhance their skills on an ongoing basis that will equip them to handle the most difficult of situations. This training will begin in August.

From United Report: United will create an automated system for soliciting volunteers to change travel plans.

Criteria Pass Status Approved

Later this year, United will introduce a new automated check-in process, both at the airport and via the United app, that will gauge a customer's interest in giving up his or her seat on overbooked flights in exchange for compensation. If selected, that customer will receive their requested compensation and be booked on a later United flight.

From United Report: United will empower employees to resolve customer service issues in the moment.

Criteria Pass Status Approved

Rolling out later this year, United will launch a new "in the moment" app for our employees to handle customer issues. This will enable flight attendants (by July) and gate agents (later this year) to compensate customers proactively (with message, credit for future flights or other forms of compensation) when a disservice occurs.

United needed one more seat

Employees are not trained or empowered for this type situation

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Employees are not trained or empowered for this type situation

Law enforcement applied aggressive tactics

Customer would not comply

Connects To: Passenger resisted being removed from plane

Flight was overbooked

Want to assure full planes

Goal of maximizing revenue

Accepted practice by airlines

expecting some ticketed passengers to cancel

United needed a passenger to give up their seat

United/Republic crew needed to work flight out of Louisville next day

Terminated Because: Other causal paths more productive

United didn't want Louisville flight (next day) delayed

Terminated Because: Desired State

United did not deploy alternative travel plans for crew

United did not deploy alternative travel plans for crew

Many people have experienced overbooked flights

Terminated Because: Other causal paths more productive

Airline industry not in great favor with general public

Terminated Because: Systemic problem - new RCA

Video footage (bloody passenger) was an attention-grabber

Terminated Because: Other causal paths more productive

United CEO initially supported the removal of passenger

Internal procedures were followed

Terminated Because: Other causal paths more productive

United didn't take 'ownership' of the problem

Event occurred on Republic Airlines flight (contractor to United)

Terminated Because: Other causal paths more productive

United and Republic Airlines are separate companies

Terminated Because: Other causal paths more productive

General public does not believe forced removal is acceptable

Passenger had implied contract to remain on flight

Terminated Because: Other causal paths more productive

Passenger was issued a boarding pass

Terminated Because: Other causal paths more productive

Video footage of injured passenger shared globally

Terminated Because: Other causal paths more productive

Many people interested in story

Many people could empathize with the injured passenger

Many people have experienced overbooked flights

Terminated Because: Other causal paths more productive

Airline industry not in great favor with general public

Terminated Because: Systemic problem - new RCA

Video footage (bloody passenger) was an attention-grabber

Terminated Because: Other causal paths more productive

General public disagreed with United's initial, public response

United CEO initially supported the removal of passenger

Internal procedures were followed

Terminated Because: Other causal paths more productive

United didn't take 'ownership' of the problem

Event occurred on Republic Airlines flight (contractor to United)

Terminated Because: Other causal paths more productive

United and Republic Airlines are separate companies

Terminated Because: Other causal paths more productive

Injured passenger event received significant coverage

Many people interested in story

Many people could empathize with the injured passenger

Many people have experienced overbooked flights

Terminated Because: Other causal paths more productive

Airline industry not in great favor with general public

Terminated Because: Systemic problem - new RCA

Video footage (bloody passenger) was an attention-grabber

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General public disagreed with United's initial, public response

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