

Roger Cordiner: Keeping Planes in the Sky

Part One: *Read to the bottom of this page and then stop until your teacher tells you to turn the page.*

It was only 6:00 in the morning, and Roger Cordiner had a headache already. Roger was the Lead Aviation Technician for United Airlines. He worked at Sea-Tac International Airport outside Seattle. It was his job to keep United's planes flying, making sure that they were safe and on time every day. He knew that people's lives depended on the quality of his work.

Roger had to fix problems on planes every day, and today's problems had started early. Sometime during the night, the night crew had discovered a hydraulic leak on one of United's DC-10 planes. Not a big problem, except that the leak was on a part that was not kept in stock in Seattle. The closest part to fix the plane was in San Francisco.

The night crew had all gone home, leaving Roger with the problem. The broken DC-10 was supposed to fly out of Sea-Tac for Washington DC at 9:00 that morning. But the first plane from San Francisco that could deliver the part Roger needed to fix the broken plane wasn't due until 8:30. And Roger knew it would take at least an hour to make the repair once he had the correct part. Even if everything worked perfectly, the DC-10 wouldn't be able to leave Sea-Tac until 9:30, half an hour late.

Well, Roger thought, he didn't have a choice. He had to get the right part to fix the plane. He called the United office in San Francisco and asked them to send the part on the next flight. But what should he do about the fact that his repair would make the DC-10 late?

STOP

Part Two: *Read to the bottom of this page and then stop until your teachers tells you to turn the page.*

Roger knew that the late plane would make hundreds of passengers late. Some of them might even miss their connecting flights because of the delay. And so, even though his job was simply to fix the plane, he knew he had one more important thing to do while he waited for the part to arrive. He had to communicate what he had learned to the rest of the people who worked for United. That way, they could decide what to do about all the passengers who would be late.

Roger quickly called the people at United's planning center at Sea-Tac. He told them that the earliest he could fix the DC-10 would be by 9:30 that morning. They decided to add an extra half hour, just to be on the safe side, and rescheduled the plane to leave at 10:00. They then called all of United's customer service agents – the people who check in passengers when they arrive at the airport – and told them about the new schedule.

Now that the customer service agents knew what was going on, they could help passengers decide what to do. Some passengers would just wait at the airport for an extra hour until the plane was repaired. But others had to be moved to different flights to get where they were going.

Roger knew that good communication was especially important when there was a problem. Even if he did a great job repairing the plane, the rest of the people at United couldn't do their jobs unless they knew what he was doing. With that in mind, he called the San Francisco office one more time just to make sure the part he needed was on the way. They assured him that it was.

Well, Roger thought, at least everything's under control. He poured a cup of coffee and then helped his crew get everything ready to make the repair.

STOP

Part Three: *Read to the bottom of this page and then stop.*

If Roger thought his headache was over, he was wrong. At 8:45, the crew unloading the baggage from the San Francisco flight called Roger to tell him they couldn't find the part he needed. It looked like it hadn't been put on the plane after all. Now Roger couldn't fix the broken DC-10.

Roger wanted to know what had happened to the part, but he didn't have any time to lose. He needed to resolve the crisis first and ask "why" later. So, he started all over again. The part from San Francisco was lost. The only other part he could find to fix the plane was in Chicago! And the next flight from Chicago wouldn't arrive until 1:00 that afternoon. This was a real problem.

Once again, Roger got on the phone to communicate his news with the other people who worked at United. Now, the earliest the plane could leave was 2:00 that afternoon. And since no passengers would want to wait around at the airport that long, all the passengers would have to be moved to other flights and this flight would have to be canceled. What a lot of upset people there were going to be inside the airport.

Before the flight was canceled, though, Roger decided to see if there was anything he could do to fix the plane. He spent a few minutes studying the broken part again, then tried a simple fix... not his first choice, but it might work. He tested the part and it worked. No more leaking.

One more time, Roger got on the phone, this time to say he could have the plane ready to leave Sea-Tac in 30 minutes. Too late, he was told. The flight had been canceled already.

And just then, the part he had been waiting for all morning was delivered to his office. The crew in San Francisco that morning had forgotten to tell the baggage handlers there to load the part into the plane, so the part had been left behind. Someone finally found it and sent it up to Roger... but it was too late. Hundreds of passengers had had a bad day all because people hadn't talked to each other.