

Southwest's Rapping Flight Attendant And The Power Of A Value Proposition

Southwest didn't climb to the top of the domestic airline dogpile with hard work alone. Their corporate culture helps drive savvy marketing and a lucrative bottom line.

One of the more mind numbing aspects of business travel is listening to a flight attendant drone through the pre-flight safety instructions. Most passengers don't bother to look up from their reading. After all, they've heard the spiel hundreds of times.

However, one creative flight attendant took a different approach [with entertaining results](#).

Having spent many years studying best in class companies, I was not surprised to see that this enterprising individual worked for Southwest. This two-minute video offers additional proof why Southwest has racked up 40 years of consecutive profits as other domestic airlines struggle through Chapter 11, mass layoffs, and mergers.

The foundation for Southwest's unprecedented success is that it focuses all of its organizational energy on delivering its unique value proposition to its customers. One of the cornerstones of Southwest's value proposition to its passengers is that it provides a "fun" travel experience. Other value proposition cornerstones are fastest door-to-door travel times and lowest prices.

While other airlines can try to copy Southwest's winning formula, what differentiates Southwest is its ability to *deliver* its value proposition. Effectively providing unique value to your target customers requires alignment of your entire organization.

YouTube hits such as the rapping flight attendant don't just happen accidentally. It takes an aligned organization to make this happen.

Once Southwest decided that a fun flying experience would be part of the value it provided, each functional group could focus on how they could contribute to creating value to Southwest's target customers.

For example, here are some of the actions each group had to take to make the video a reality.

- The HR organization had to develop processes to find and hire fun and talented people (including some who could rap)
- The training department had to develop an onboarding program that encouraged their individual talents
- Management had to promote out-of-the-box thinking by its employees
- The legal department had to ensure that it was permissible to diverge from standard safety announcements
- And of course, marketing had to acknowledge rapping as a way to enhance the Southwest brand.

It is easy to see how any one group at Southwest could have blocked this. Unfortunately, most businesses behave 180 degrees differently than Southwest.

They don't put the time and resources into developing a unique and compelling value proposition that resonates with their target customers. They lack organizing principles for each functional group. And as a result, each group makes its best guess on how it can create value for the customers and shareholders.

Successful organizations obtain alignment using a process that I call the 4 Vs

- Identify **value beneficiaries** (the customers who will receive the most value from your product or service)
- Develop a **value proposition** that resonates with the value beneficiaries
- Focus to ensure that they can profitably **deliver the promised value**
- **Communicate your value proposition** in a way that builds the brand, increases awareness, and makes selling easier

The instant feedback enablement technology like YouTube and Twitter make it possible to spread "value events" like this one instantly. Promotion of a value can happen very quickly. It no longer takes years to spread by word of mouth, but hours.

Similarly, *not* aligning your organization around delivering a value proposition can rapidly have disastrous consequences.

So it isn't just critical to address get value alignment anymore, it is urgent. By aligning your organization around the 4 Vs, you may not discover a rapper--but you will increase shareholder value.

--Author [Neil Baron](http://NeilBaron.com) can be reached at nbaron@baronstrategic.com