

Michael A. Crawford, CPA, is chairman of Crawford & Associates, PC in Oklahoma City. He is a past president of the OSCP, past chairman of various OSCP committees and a member of the Oklahoma Accounting Hall of Fame. He is a current vice chairman of the Governmental Accounting Standards Advisory Council, frequent national lecturer and speaker, an author of various AICPA technical publications and the current co-author of the CCH Governmental GAAP Guides and Updates.

## A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to Work...

# Up, Up and Away – A Guide to Air Travel Seating

By Michael A. Crawford, CPA

Frequent air travel provides the opportunity to spend some “quality” time with perfect strangers. I’ve experienced my fair share of flights during the past 30 years and sat next to or near a wide variety of people. While I have enjoyed many of these new travel companions, I have also endured some not-so-pleasurable experiences. The spirit of these encounters inspired a desire to help other air travelers. I prepared passenger classifications to alert you to your potential flight experiences with future seating partners and valuable advice on how to prepare for and react to what you are likely to encounter.

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### The Rookie

This passenger is experiencing his first or near first flight. He is easy to spot because he has a dazed and confused look about him. If you are seated next to a rookie, you are about to become the teacher and reassurer for this anxious passenger. You’ll be explaining the entire flight process from take-off to landing and explaining every sound or unusual movement the plane makes.

*Guidance: Use your parenting skills. Be prepared for plenty of questions and forget about*

*what you had originally planned to do on the flight.*

### The Queasy

The nervous or queasy flyer likely had little choice on the mode of transportation to her destination. She hates flying and always thinks the worst will happen. This passenger is also easy to spot while boarding the plane. The nervous flyer may be sweating profusely, even while the plane is on the ground. She wants the window shade closed, prefers a middle or aisle seat, and immediately

fastens her seatbelt tightly. If seated next to the queasy flyer, you can expect to periodically feel a strange hand squeezing your arm or leg and, similar to sitting next to the rookie, answer frequent questions about unusual movements or sounds aboard the plane.

*Guidance: Be prepared for physical contact with the nervous or queasy flyer and for possible assistance with the airsickness bag.*

### The Emotionally Distressed

Sitting next to an emotionally distressed passenger can be taxing and challenging. The emotionally distressed passenger may be melancholy, frustrated,

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anxious or just plain angry. Once, I sat between a husband and wife who were in the middle of a major disagreement and would not sit next to or talk to each other. I soon found myself integrally involved in their feud. When one of them had something to say to the other, they would tell me to tell the other what they had to say. I often found myself attempting to be a psychologist and dispensing marital advice.

*Guidance: If you find yourself seated next to or between the emotionally distressed, I recommend you act like you are asleep.*

### **The Temporarily Inconvenienced**

The temporarily inconvenienced flyer is unsure how to perform ordinary tasks while being confined to her uncomfortable airline seat. For example, on a recent flight, I sat next to a mother and her infant child. As you can guess, the child was crying loudly and the mother was unsuccessfully doing her best to comfort the child. The seatbelt sign was illuminated, so there was nowhere to go with the child. The mother suddenly raised the child in the air in front of her and smelled the child's behind. Sure enough the child was in need of a new diaper. Because of rough air, the seatbelt sign was likely to be on for an extended period of time. The mother needed to take action. So there in the middle seat between us, the child's pants are lowered, the bottom cleaned, a new diaper applied and the dirty diaper folded. Unsure what to do with the loaded diaper, the mother looked at me perplexed. I immediately rang the flight attendant call button and asked the mother to pass on the package.

*Guidance: Be prepared to react quickly and instinctively to unusual situations and recommend alternative strategies for the inconvenienced passenger.*

### **The Incredibly Inconsiderate**

Some passengers seem to be self-involved to the point where they become incredibly inconsiderate to others around them. They often act as though they are the only individuals on the plane. These

passengers are also referred to as "bleeders" because they are bleeding into your seat space. For example, these individuals don't give a second thought to using your foot space for their extra carryon baggage or doing the elbow movements to the chicken dance in order to vigorously play video games. They'll turn on your overhead light so they can read better, use your shoulder for a pillow or, and this is always a treat, excessively drink and become more obnoxious.

*Guidance: The key to dealing with the incredibly inconsiderate is patience. Remember, in*

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*a few hours, you will likely never see them again.*

### **The Workaholic**

The workaholic brings his or her office to all locations, including his airline seat. Armed with a long-battery laptop, and other briefcase essentials, this passenger just can't seem to relax. Often he even turns down a scrumptious airline meal to complete an extra 20 minutes of work. The above headlight is on at all times, and his concentration is so intense, he rarely smiles, talks or otherwise recognizes that another person is seated next to him.

*Guidance: Open one of the airline magazines to a page displaying an exotic vacation resort and hold in a manner that forces the workaholic to see the advertisement. Maybe he will get the hint.*

### **The Constant Conversationalist**

The constant conversationalist is always looking for an ear to bend. Forget any sleep you were planning to get. There are stories to be told and pictures to be shown. I once learned the entire life history of a family from Guam on a seven-hour flight. You don't need good conversation skills to sit next to this one, only good listening skills. On longer flights, your endurance will be significantly challenged.

*Guidance: I recommend you bring headphones along with you on all flights. When*

*the conversationalist takes a restroom break, slip the headphones on, whether you have something to listen to or not.*

### **The Celebrity**

On rare occasions, you may get the opportunity to sit next to a celebrity. Over the years, I have had the pleasure of sitting next to a number of celebrities, including actors, sports heroes, high-profile politicians and corporate notables. In these situations, you find yourself wanting to carry on meaningful conversation with them but are apprehensive because you don't want to invade their privacy or say something stupid.

*Guidance: Try not to act like a star-struck fan. Remember celebrities are people just like you. Well, not just like you—they are generally filthy rich. Be prepared to be the middleman for other passengers trying to get autographs.*

### **The Directionally Challenged**

"Please stay seated with your seatbelt securely fastened until the seatbelt sign has been turned off." While this is a simple instruction, the directionally challenged passenger is not inclined to follow such direction. "All electronic devices must be turned off until further notice." Once again, this is a simple instruction, but the directionally challenged passengers feel compelled to ignore.

*Guidance: Do not bother attempting to remind them of the flight instructions. Remember—they don't follow directions well.*

### **The Continuous Complainer**

The service is terrible, the plane is too hot or too cold, the flight is too rough, the food is pathetic, the coffee is too strong, the babies are crying too much, the seat is too uncomfortable, the movie is no good, that other passenger is snoring too loud and the restroom, which is too small, is always occupied. The continuous complainer wants as many people as possible to know he is unhappy. Seemingly, he would like for you to be unhappy, too.

*Guidance: Ring your flight attendant call button and complain about the passenger complaining too much.*

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