

Hello and thank you for coming, there are 2 questions I would like you to think about as I give my presentation, how are you, and are you ok? I grew up 20 miles north west of here in a little town where not much ever happened. In fact the area where we are right now was cow pastures and orange groves back then, where not much ever happened. My dad was a pilot and even though that profession did not interest me at all, when I was 19 he suggested that I apply to be a charter Flight Attendant. I thought that would be a fun job for a year and so after a whirlwind interview and 6 weeks of training I got my first set of wings and headed off to my "temporary job" 26 years ago. I bought my first house at the age of 22 on September 7, 2001. 4 days later our entire world and industry changed forever. I flew home from London on September 10, 2001 and woke up to horrors that none of us had ever seen before. That Friday I was scheduled to fly back to London, I was not sure if we would, since the skies were silent that entire week. We did fly back, we were the first US carrier to land in Gatwick that Saturday morning, where everything had changed. We showed for our flight like normal, but our briefing was different, the passengers were somber, and we felt like it was our patriotic duty to show up and go to work. We discussed what would happen if anyone tried to do it again, what was security going to look like, what base were we going to choose because ours was closing, should we take the 3 month voluntary furlough, but one thing we didn't get asked or ask each other, was "are you ok?".

I did take the furlough, I was 22 and unsure if this is what I even wanted to do with my life. Those 3 months passed quickly and I did return to work at a new base as a commuter, with new people, new routes, I flew mostly military charter and still no one asked if we were OK. We were happy to be employed, scared to be there, unsure of the dangers. We were given chemical warfare suits and gas masks to don if we heard the sirens while we are on the ground in Kuwait, all in about a 15 minute training in a hotel room in Larnaca Cyprus which at the time was our staging city.

My passengers changed overnight from British beach loving excited families going to theme parks to 18 year old kids going to war. No one asked if we were OK and I am sure no one asked if they were. On more than one flight I had passengers who I grew up with sitting somberly as soldiers as we took them into cities we had never heard of to places we never imagined we would go to face things we never talked about. Aviation and life in general changed in those years, but we still didn't really talk about if we were OK. 2008 saw that airline along with many others file bankruptcy and cease operations. I found myself out of a job along side not just my own flying partners but crew from 3 other airlines that had gone out of business at the same time we did. I was not OK.

After flying at 2 other carriers, I found myself gaining my last set of wings at Southwest Airlines. I had always heard about the LUV airline and I soon saw first hand that it isn't just talk, but a true culture and way of life. About 4 years after I started flying I went into the office as a Supervisor, it was a fun and challenging new role with seeing how the other side of the company worked with our day to day operations. During that time, I met the man who would become my husband, we were married in December of 2018 and one year later COVID hit, and once again none of us was OK.

He is a Police Officer and we were both essential personnel so time off together was almost non existent, for 6 months we saw each other only in passing when he was coming home from a shift and I was getting ready to leave for mine, and we tried to have date night for the 2 Tuesdays nights a month that we had off together. My personal and professional life were taking a toll on me mentally. I was not allowed within 6 feet of my work colleagues and due to our professions I did not get to see my husband on a regular basis. We were flying reduced schedules with mostly empty planes, no food available to

our crews at hotels, empty airports, a very uncertain future, and we were still not asking if we were OK. But around this time I did feel that at least we were beginning to talk about not being OK. We tried very hard to keep moral up, we had food available in the bases for our crews, we were talking more about our feelings with each other and offering new resources with virtual therapy and medical visits and we were really showing up for each other in any way we could. Slowly our lives returned to what we now called our new normal. We all suffered losses in those 2 long years, we lost loved ones and co workers, we lost a sense of humanity, and we lost normalcy. None of us came out of that time frame OK.

In 2022 a new job opportunity came available to me and I knew, that helping other people could also help me help myself and I applied for the position to work with our Crew Assistance Programs. I help to support our 3 peer based teams, and our overall mental health and wellness programs. We work every day to change the face of mental health and we try to make sure to ask if our people are OK. We had all lost people during the pandemic and there was a struggle to combine our old lives and ways with what was happening in the now. We support our 3 peer based teams, CISM, FADAP, and Professional Standards. I get to be part of a team that helps the helpers.

We all know that Flight Attendants get first aid training in initial and recurrent training, we now are able to offer our staff and peer teams mental health first aid training. Years ago an instructor told my class to learn CPR to save the life of someone you love, 2 weeks later I held my best friends 2 year old as he was choking on a doughnut, and I was able to get him breathing again. We tell our staff and peers to take the mental health first aid training classes to help not only in their work life but to help in their day to day life. This program has been immensely successful. Our peer teams work well with our management team to make sure our Flight Attendants are OK, that they can perform their jobs but also have their personal life in balance. I'll give you some numbers of our teams and the calls they took last year: FADAP took over 400 calls, CISM took over 2,500 calls and Professional Standards took over 650 calls this is with a Flight Attendant head count in 2023 of over 19,000. Mental health is health, we strive every day to end the stigma that surrounds people being embarrassed to ask for assistance or not knowing where to get the help.

*****Reference slides*****

21% of adults are experiencing a mental illness. That is equivalent to over 50 million Americans.

15% of adults had a substance use disorder in the past year and of that number 93.5% did not receive treatment

55% of adults with a mental illness receive no treatment that's over 28 million individuals.

Asking someone “how are you” and “are you OK” is the same word count but can give you totally different answers and results. We have worked hard to train our leaders to recognize what someone in crisis looks and sounds like. We train our staff to be compassionate and caring when someone is hurting. We have found that peer based programs have been highly successful and that our Crews want to hear from someone who has been in their shoes, and sat in their jumpseat. Our peers are not meant to take the place of licensed clinicians but hopefully be the first step in helping our people get the assistance they need. We strive to have a level of trust with someone who needs our help. We let our people know that it is OK to say, “I can’t help, but I will find someone who can.” Our peer teams provide valuable resources to our people who are going through tough times and needing help.

We have all seen a rise in addiction as a result of mental health issues. This industry is not immune to substance abuse and the effects that has on our people. We work very closely with the Flight Attendants who test positive while either on duty or on a random screening to get them into treatment and to help save their lives. If a Flight Attendant comes forward with a need to go into a treatment facility the FADAP peer team walks with them every step of the way through their recovery and after care.

Since we introduced mental health first aid training we have had over 150 staff members take the course. We have utilized grants given to us by Texas Health so the cost has been free and the training has been virtual. We have had amazing feedback from our staff members who report that the course has helped them not only with their work life duties but in their homes and personal relationships with friends and family members. It was even said to is that anyone who answers the phone at a base should take the mental health first aid training. We have seen that the course has been extremely helpful for our Inflight instructors both with new hire training and recurrent where triggering issues may arise in the training and classroom setting. We never know what someone is going through and how a CPR or medical event, either stimulated or on the aircraft may effect them. The training we provide our staff will help them best assist the Flight Attendants who are in moments of crisis.

Last Slide

I want to thank you all for your time here today, this is such a passionate and close to home topic for me and I thank you all for your attention and questions on how we can help others. It is my wish that everyone can find a safe place to discuss mental health to receive the help they need and to be genuinely asked, “are you OK?”.