

Persistence, Networking Are Key to Becoming a Business Aviation Flight Attendant



Persistence, performance and professionalism are the qualities needed to land a job as a business aviation flight attendant, say some of the industry's most seasoned professionals. Former flight attendant Susan Friedenber, owner of the Philadelphia-based Corporate Flight Attendant Training, says persistence means researching and approaching flight departments and getting in front of as many hiring managers as possible. Cold calling is tough, but that's the kind of persistence that gets results, she says.

Friedenber, a flight attendant for 25 years, has packaged all of her experience into a four-day course on breaking into the business. Once you get that break, however, it's a matter of performance that will ensure you keep the client or job. "You're only as good as your last mission," she says.

Although professionalism can mean many things, flight departments expect certain things from flight attendants, such as a résumé that shows an investment in training and education and demonstrating the sophistication to know when services are needed and when it's best to stay in the background.

"Just get out there and network," suggests Judy Reif, a contract flight attendant who heads NBAA's Flight Attendant Committee.

One of the best ways is working at a fixed base operator (FBO). "As customers come into the FBO, you get to know the business," she says. But more importantly, these customers get to know you.

What Contract Flight Attendants Need to Know

Contract flight attendants are self-employed. They enjoy the freedom to work when and where they want and can bargain for the highest compensation. But unlike employees, who enjoy a steady paycheck and benefits, contractors need to look out for themselves; it's vital to know a company's daily rate and be certain about what they're signing up for. For those who have any specialized skills, such as fluency in a foreign language, it is important to market them, says Friedenber, and ask questions like: "What are my days off? Will I need to attend company meetings? You don't get what you deserve; you get what you negotiate."

The independence of being a contractor can be priceless, but there are plenty of requirements for flight attendants, whether they are contracted or official company employees. Many operators seek flight attendants with CPR, food safety and training certificates from accredited organizations, says Virginia Lippencott, chief flight attendant at Pfizer. Competitive candidates can think on their feet, deal with the unexpected and display the savvy it takes to assist clients, she adds. Having at least two years of college, some aviation background, military service or experience with irregular schedules would complete the ideal package.

New flight attendants can advance their careers by attending NBAA's Annual Flight Attendants Conference, sponsored by the Association's Flight Attendants Committee. Participants can network with industry leaders and compete for various scholarships. The Committee also provides a checklist for flight attendants and flight department managers highlighting what should be expected from new flight attendants. ✦

FOR MORE INFORMATION

The 2009 NBAA Flight Attendants Conference will be held on June 26 and 27 in New Orleans, LA. More details will become available on the Association's web site in the coming months. In the meantime, learn more about the activities of the NBAA Flight Attendants Committee, scholarships and past events at web.nbaa.org/public/about/committees/flatt.