

THE AMERICAN AIRPORT SCREENER

A Book on Successfully Circumnavigating the
Modern-Day Airport Experience and Other Stories

By

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PBS (Pre-Board Screener)

“Sir we have a little problem with your bag!”

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Introduction

As I peered into the Customer's bag in utter disbelief, my mind didn't want to believe what my eyes told me was true!

This book is an eclectic gathering of information and real-life experiences. After almost 5 years at the airport, I've noticed an informational gap. I've also noticed an uncertainty or even mistrust from the flying public about the T.S.A (Transportation and Security Administration). Hopefully this book will address these issues.

After passing by the airport bookstore for the millionth time or so, it occurred to me that there are no books or even pamphlets on what all these people here were about to do. That is, check in, go through a security checkpoint, and board a plane. In short, all the things people do before, during, and after their modern-day airport experience.

I guess in a lot of ways I've been part of that experience - me and 45,000 other Airport Security Screeners across the country, that is! Being part of the Screening force just after 9/11 (the Private Screening Force) and now the Government Screening Force (the T.S.A.), I've seen many changes take place.

The constant evolving and growing process that has occurred has been interesting and enlightening and sometimes painful. In many ways we were part of a tragedy - the tragedy born out of the tragedy of 9/11.

The airport is a transitional place – a microcosm of life in many ways. These are real stories about real people. After dealing with thousands of airline

passengers, both at the checkpoint and baggage department, we deal with the good, the bad, and the ugly on a daily basis. And I've seen the recurring mistakes passengers make. So hopefully this book will enlighten some of them.

This book also addresses the flying public and examines how they perceive us. What do they know about the T.S.A.? Are we doing a better job than the private companies? Or is it more of the same? How safe are we really? In this book I will address these questions with some of my own "real-life" experiences.

Chapter 1

9/11

I wrote down this incident just a few weeks after 9/11 when I was still working for the private screening force. It deeply affected me then and best exemplifies the seriousness of a very tumultuous time in our nation's history. Many of us got involved with airport security after 9/11 because we wanted to help, to contribute to the common good. It sure wasn't about the money. I was making \$6 per hour at the time. I made much more selling insurance.

The Incident

As a new PBS (Pre-Board Screener) at the airport, I didn't know quite what to expect. I would settle into some typical mundane routine of an average job. I soon discovered there was nothing typical, mundane or routine about this job. Every person who walked through the "MAG" was somehow different, which presented a unique situation every time. We were dealing with human beings and human nature, and with that being said, anything was possible.

The day came and the incident that would help define why we were there in the first place, a valuable learning experience and a lesson in reality.

We were about half-way into our shift in Terminal 3, checkpoint North, (Northwest & Delta side) when we had just rotated our shift. I was at the hand-

wand position, where I was afforded a clear and unobstructed view of what was about to transpire. Things were going smooth that day, maybe too smooth. That is when things happen, and it is no time to become complacent.

Suddenly, the PBS on the X-Ray spotted something!