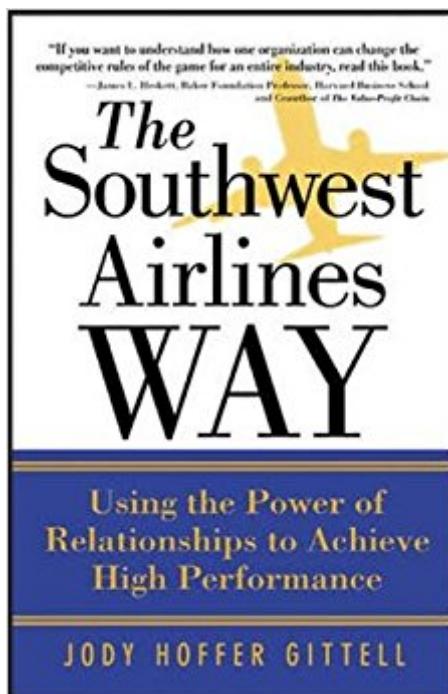


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# The Southwest Airlines Way (Business Books)



## **Synopsis**

"If you look at Southwest Airlines, and I admire what they do, they've been the most successful airline in the industry." --Gerard Arpey, CEO, American Airlines "Through extensive research Jody Hoffer Gittell gets to the bottom of what has sustained Southwest Airlines' positive employee relations and high performance through good and bad times." --Thomas A. Kochan, professor, MIT Sloan School of Management, MIT Global Airline Industry Program In an industry with losses in the billions, Southwest Airlines has an unbroken string of 31 consecutive years of profitability. The Southwest Airlines Way examines how the company uses high-performance relationships to create enormous competitive advantage in motivation, teamwork, and coordination among employees. It then goes further to show how any company can foster these powerful cooperative relationships and explains how to: Lead with credibility and caring Invest in frontline leaders Hire and train for relational competence Use conflicts to build relationships Make unions its partners, not its adversaries Build relationships with its suppliers

## **Book Information**

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## **Customer Reviews**

Management lessons from the world's most profitable airline "As a former Southwest insider, I often wondered why other organizations couldn't duplicate the business model. Anyone who wants to understand how it works should read this book." --Libby Sartain, Senior VP of Human Resources, Yahoo "Professor Gittell has tackled one of the hottest and most important topics in business circles

today--why some airlines continually fly high over the economic wreckage of the rest of the industry." ---Thomas Winkelmann, VP-The Americas, Lufthansa German Airlines "Through extensive research Jody Hoffer Gittell gets to the bottom of what has sustained Southwest Airlines' positive employee relations and high performance through good and bad times." --Thomas A. Kochan, professor, MIT Sloan School of Management, MIT Global Airline Industry Program Fortune magazine calls Southwest Airlines "the most successful airline in history." In an industry that regularly loses billions of dollars, Southwest has had 31 consecutive years of profitability. The Southwest Airlines Way reveals the secret to Southwest's remarkable success--high performance relationships--and it creates enormous competitive advantage in motivation, teamwork, and coordination among Southwest employees. Based on Professor Jody Hoffer Gittell's eight years of field research, this book explores Southwest's innovative policies, strategies, and techniques, showing how these methods can be implemented in any organization, and explains how to: \* Lead with credibility and caring \* Invest in frontline leaders \* Hire and train for relational competence \* Use conflicts to build relationships \* Encourage mutual respect among employees, managers, unions, and suppliers

JODY HOFFER GITTELL IS A PROFESSOR OF MANAGEMENT at Brandeis University's Heller School for Social Policy and Management. She serves as Executive Director of the Relational Coordination Research Collaborative, bringing practitioners and researchers together to transform organizational relationships for high performance. She also serves as Chief Scientific Officer of Relational Coordination Analytics Inc., offering measurement, evaluation and visualization of relational coordination networks to organizations seeking to improve their performance. To learn more visit [rcrc.brandeis.edu](http://rcrc.brandeis.edu) and [rcaanalytic.com](http://rcaanalytic.com). Dr. Gittell's research explores how coordination by front-line workers contributes to quality and efficiency outcomes in service settings. She has developed a theory of relational coordination, proposing that work is most effectively coordinated through relationships of shared goals, shared knowledge and mutual respect, and demonstrating how organizations can support relational coordination through the design of their work systems. Gittell received her PhD from the MIT Sloan School of Management, her MA from The New School and her BA from Reed College, and taught for six years at the Harvard Business School before joining the faculty of Brandeis University. She has served as Chair of the Board for Families First Health and Support Center, as MBA Program Director at the Brandeis Heller School, and as Acting Director of the MIT Leadership Center. She currently serves on the boards of Reed College, the Labor and Employment Relations Association and the Endowment for Health. She lives in

Portsmouth, New Hampshire with her husband Ross and their daughters Rose and Grace. Print this

"The Southwest Airlines Way" is an outstanding book which looks at the reasons that Southwest Airlines is so successful. It's not just a cheerleading book for Southwest, but actually describes in detail a study which proves that the techniques used at Southwest result in better business performance when compared to United, Continental and American. The author describes 10 different techniques that Southwest uses to improve its performance, including those focusing on leadership, excellent union relationships, clear and appropriate performance evaluation, and conflict resolution. What's really interesting about this book is that it's a book about a philosophy that happens to be shared and utilized by Southwest. When you read the individual examples of the different areas of focus, you will find that they are not necessarily limited to the airline industry or Southwest in general; rather, they are simply good, solid business techniques that any successful business should use. You may find yourself saying something like "Well, of course.." but then wonder why they don't do that where you work - I sure did. In the end, if you are interested in understanding why Southwest is so successful, and how any other business can be the same, then read this book. It's first class business reading which will provide rewards for years to come.

Below are key excerpts from the book that I found particularly insightful: 1- "How did this remarkable transformation occur? How did Southwest grow from an idiosyncratic Texas airline to an organization that managers all over the world are seeking to emulate?

Efficiency...Quality...Controlled Growth Demand for Reliable Low-Fare Travel...Competitive Threats...Success Factors"Leadership, Culture, Strategy, and Coordination." 2- "However, leadership is not confined to the CEO. Leadership is better understood as a process that can take place at any level of an organization.^ Indeed, leadership is needed in today's organizations to motivate, support, and enable employees to work together in support of a set of shared goals." 3- "In their classic book on organizations, James March and Herbert Simon' describe the potentially disintegrative effects when employees in an organization pursue their own functional goals without reference to the over-arching goals of the larger work process. Shared goals play an especially important role when different functions are involved in delivering the same service." 4- "The three conditions that increase the need for relational coordination"reciprocal interdependence, uncertainty, and time constraints" are increasingly common in the service economy of today. As advanced economies have shifted from a manufacturing to a service focus, work settings that require relational coordination have become increasingly common. Many service operations are

characterized by reciprocal interdependence, requiring iterative interactions among service providers rather than the sequential handoffs performed by workers on production lines. Many service operations also have high levels of uncertainty relative to manufacturing due to the difficulty of buffering service operations from the external environment and from differences in customers themselves. Finally, most service settings are highly time-constrained; they are designed to provide a service to customers, real time, simultaneous with the demand, without imposing excessive waiting times on customers.<sup>5</sup> "Not every leader of a successful organization must be charismatic. What successful organizations do need from each of their leaders, however, is credibility" the ability to inspire trust; and caring"the ability to inspire a belief by employees that their leaders care deeply about their well-being.<sup>6</sup> "Leadership is better understood as a process that can take place at any level of the organization."<sup>7</sup> Indeed, leadership at the front line can play a critical role in organizational success. Rather than undermining coordination among frontline employees, supervisors play a valuable role in strengthening coordination through day-to-day coaching and counseling.<sup>8</sup> "Increasingly, jobs require not only functional expertise but also relational competence"the ability to interact with others to accomplish common goals. Indeed, people who perform jobs that require high levels of functional expertise also tend to need high levels of relational competence to integrate their work with the work of fellow employees. Organizations like Southwest Airlines that recognize the importance of relational competence, look diligently for employees who have it, then develop it to even higher levels through training, will have a distinct performance advantage over organizations that do not.<sup>9</sup> "Organizations should proactively seek out conflicts rather than allowing them to fester. Then managers should bring the parties together to better understand each other's perspective. If organizations do not identify and resolve cross-functional conflicts, those conflicts will weaken critical relationships of shared goals, shared knowledge, and mutual respect. When managers treat cross-functional conflict as an occasion for learning, they strengthen relationships between employees and boost performance of the work processes in which those employees are engaged.<sup>10</sup> "The energy and learning that employees gain from building strong family and community ties can be brought into the workplace and leveraged to achieve stronger working relationships and better organizational performance. Organizations should therefore be vigilant to ensure that relationships at work do not overwhelm and undermine the family and community relationships that are needed to sustain strong working relationships.<sup>11</sup> "Though information technology can be a facilitator, it is not expected to be an effective substitute. When a job is mediated largely through a computer or a telephone, an important element of social interaction is lost. The loss of social interaction weakens relationships, and

weakens critical performance parameters. These limitations on the effective use of information technology exist because coordination is not simply about the transfer of information. Instead, coordination requires the construction of shared meaning in order to facilitate collective action. As we see at Southwest Airlines, boundary spanners can play this role, building relationships of shared goals, shared knowledge, and mutual respect across functional boundaries.<sup>11</sup> "Traditional measurement systems are flawed because they orient employee attention toward functional rather than cross-functional outcomes and because they provide inadequate information for learning.' To orient employees toward cross-functional outcomes and to provide more useful feedback about what to do, cross-functional performance measures should be used to supplement traditional functional measurement systems."<sup>12</sup> "We have seen in this chapter the importance of flexible jobs for building strong relationships and high performance."<sup>13</sup> "At Southwest Airlines, respectful relationships between company management and the unions chosen by frontline employees appear to set the tone for respectful relationships throughout the company. As Southwest's leaders pointed out on several occasions, however, positive labor/management relations are not achieved once and for all. Rather they have to be reproduced every day."<sup>14</sup> "Southwest's partnership approach is radically different from the traditional approach to supplier relations. In the old model, organizations were independent parties who transacted with each other at arm's-length through formal contracts, keeping information close to the chest. Cooperation occurred only within organizations, while careful arm's-length negotiation with minimal information sharing was the normal mode for dealing with parties external to the organization.<sup>15</sup> But when there is more uncertainty in the environment, there is much more that organizations can learn from one another. Because of the benefits of learning, both parties have more to gain than to lose from the sharing of information. Although there may be doubt and mistrust at the outset, "neither the cooperative exploration of ambiguity begins, the returns to the partners from further joint discoveries are so great that it pays to keep cooperating." Ultimately, this ability to partner is an acquired skill like any other, and one with potentially significant effects on organizational success".

This book is loaded with tips about how to create and sustain a high quality organization. In a day and age when airline after airline is losing money or folding, Southwest continues to be profitable year after year after year. This book describes how they do it--through the power of relationships. Does that seem too simple? It should because it is. Simple to understand, extremely hard to pull off. Most organizations get lost in trying to win or make profits or prove a point. Southwest is simply trying to make the world a better place through relationships---and we all get to benefit from their

methods. They have a system that hires for relational competence. When you call Southwest, a human will answer. Go ahead, try it, right now. I told you. When you use their website, it is easy, clear, and fast. Southwest is able to do this because they value user experience (hear relationship) above most everything else. When it comes to employee reviews, they value learning over accountability. They are always trying to improve their employees as opposed to punishing or grading them. In a day when test scores are used to judge teachers, I hope we can learn from that one. Analysts have scratched their heads wondering how Southwest--the most highly unionized airline in the US airline industry--keeps making money in good and bad times. This book will reveal their secret of valuing their employees as much as possible. Southwest employees for the most part enjoy working for the company because they get respect and treated well. As a result, staff give all of themselves to the work, and when employees bring 100% to work, they kill competition that has people bringing 60 to 70% of themselves and not doing their best work. Oh yeah, and your bags will fly free. It is nice to know someone is trying to be different.

Needed this for college management course. But it's a interesting read regardless. arrived quickly and in good condition

A great read...

If you are looking for a dissertation type booking comparing SouthWest with the other airlines, this is your book. I was looking for more of a general "how do they do it" type book and not a well-reason statistical type book. That's the only reason for 3 stars.

Southwest airlines is a model of the way the rest of corporate america should treat their employees! This book is a great read.

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