

Southwest Flight Attendants: Always Prepared

Many years ago, I snuggled into my seat on a Southwest flight with my mind lost in a book. I was suddenly ripped back into reality by the sound of a Flight Attendant asking if there was a doctor onboard. Another Passenger was having chest pains. I was several rows back, so I didn't see much of the situation, but I was impressed by how the Flight Crew handled the emergency. While one Flight Attendant focused on the ill Passenger, the others kept the remaining Customers calm and served them with the Hospitality Southwest is known for. I remember being awed by their composure.

Fast-forward more than a decade, and I was sitting at my desk at Southwest when I received an email containing a report of a Flight Attendant who rendered aid in the food court area of Dallas Love Field. I immediately recalled the memory of those Flight Attendants springing into action that day. It made me curious about what happened.

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Southwest Airlines Flight Attendant Christen Bjornson was in the Dallas Love Field food court when she heard "Mom!!! Mom!!! Mom!!!" bellow throughout the terminal. "I was standing in line at the food court when I heard this call for help," said Christen. "I saw a woman slouched at a table with another woman trying to awaken her. As I helped lay her down on the ground, I yelled for a Southwest Customer Service Agent to call the paramedics. I noticed that the woman wasn't breathing, so I immediately started CPR. Luckily, after only a few chest compressions, she was revived. I stayed with her and her daughter until the EMTs arrived."

Christen has encountered several medical emergencies over her 25-year career, but this was the first time she'd performed CPR. As we spoke, I was impressed by how she didn't hesitate to help and how her muscle memory was activated during a crisis. She instinctively knew what needed to be done and did it. I thought this was a testament to Christen's character and Flight Attendant training. So, I set out to learn more.

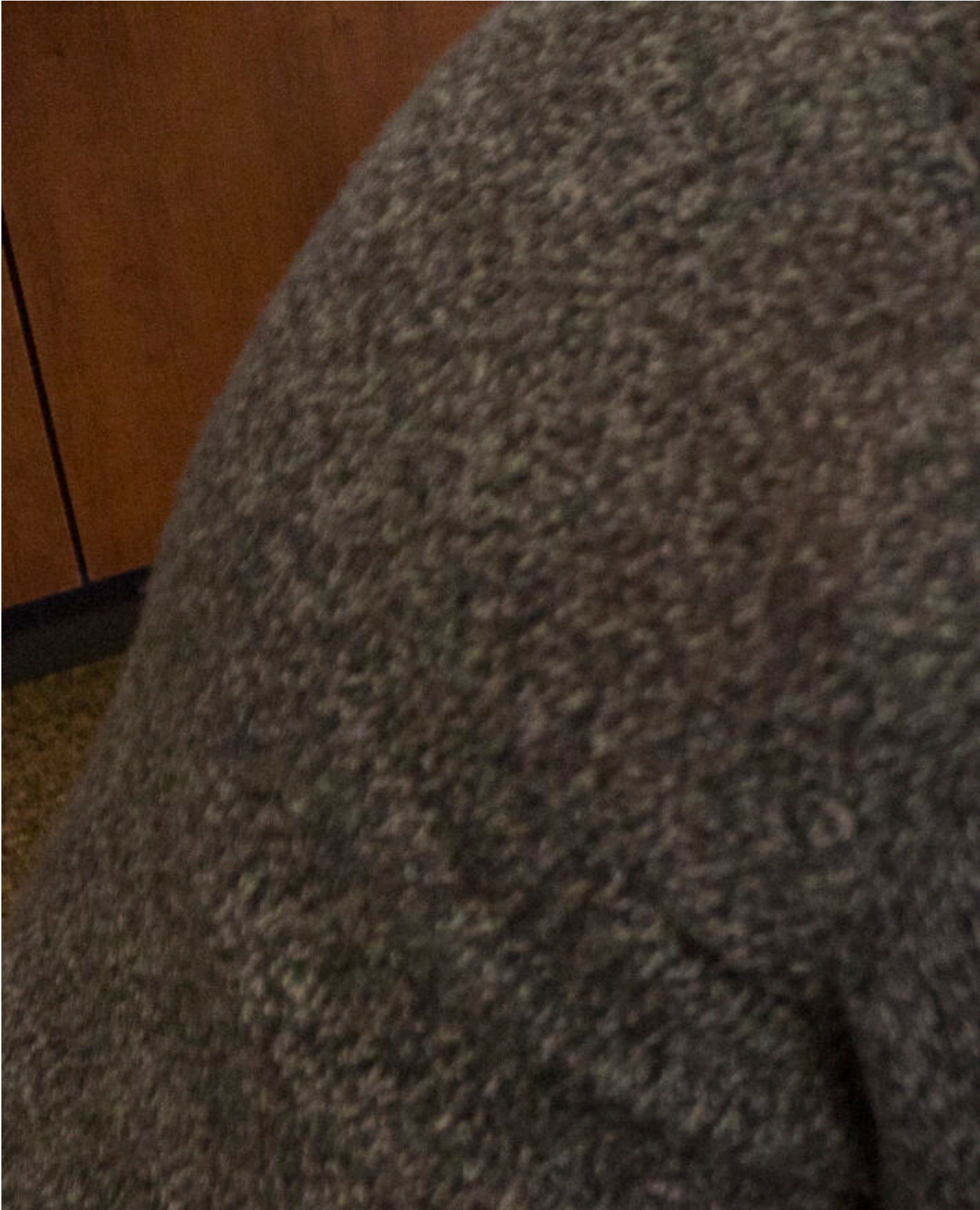
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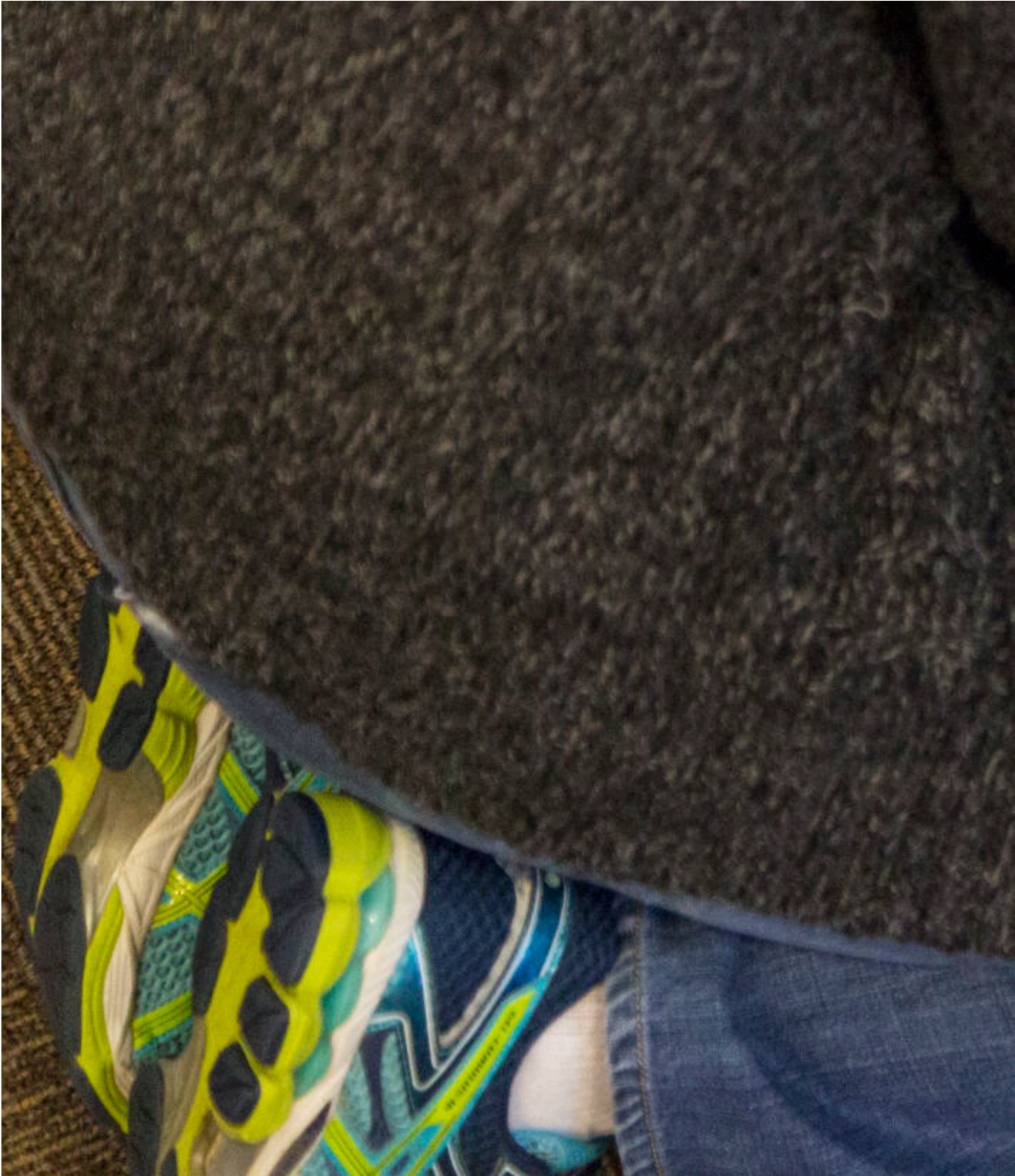




A Look at Southwest's Flight Attendant Training

Southwest's Senior Manager Inflight Learning, Donna Whitehead, states that each Flight Attendant Candidate must complete Initial New Hire Training before being qualified to work as a Southwest Flight Attendant. "Initial New Hire Flight Attendant Training runs for four weeks, and candidates are in class 9 to 10 hours daily," Donna shared. "The Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) requires Flight Attendant candidates to complete numerous hours of training on subjects such as aircraft types, firefighting, medical emergencies, evacuating aircraft, and more. Candidates must also demonstrate proficiency with aircraft evacuation drills and emergency equipment usage and complete an inflight operating experience before graduating from training. There's a lot to learn in a short period."





Each airline is responsible for conducting its own training program. Southwest has a dedicated and experienced Training Team accountable for instruction and ensuring candidates are equipped with all they need to succeed in training and when they get onto the Flight Attendant line. Following graduation, each Southwest Flight Attendant must attend Recurrent Training annually, where they continue to demonstrate their ability to perform the duties and responsibilities of a Flight Attendant. After learning more about the training that Southwest Flight Attendants undergo, I'm reminded of the Franz Kafka quote, "Better to have, and not need, than to need, and not have." While on good days, Customers simply see the Hospitality that Flight Attendants offer, they should take comfort in knowing that these highly-trained professionals are prepared for various emergencies—both on the ground and in the air.

Christen summed it up best, "Being a Flight Attendant doesn't stop when we get off the plane. It's a spirit that lives within us."