

MEDIA REVIEWS

Reviewed by Bill Ellet for *Training Media Review*

Southwest Airlines's success has been explained as a shrewd business model paired with a smart operating strategy. The company avoids large, congested, and competitive airports for smaller ones. It flies only one kind of aircraft—lowering maintenance, training, and scheduling costs. It's a no-frills, low-fare airline that offers happy-face customer service and delivers on-time performance.

That analysis begs the question: If success lies in those objective categories, why can't anyone else duplicate it? Southwest has no imitators. What's going on?

The video *It's So Simple* tells Southwest's story differently than it has been told in the past. You meet Herb Kelleher, former CEO, who defined the strategy and operational system, walked around endlessly, and hugged everyone in sight.

But one of the hard-to-see success factors of Southwest is leadership that isn't reducible to Herb or his outgoing personality. Leadership has to start at the top, but when 30,000 employees and operations are scattered over the United States, good leadership has to be exercised every day by thousands of people.

This video, a scant 15 minutes long, doesn't show you leadership at Southwest; it can't. Showing leadership fully would require hours of video capturing what Southwest employees do to keep things running smoothly. But the video can show the leadership values and optimism that characterize what's known as the Southwest Way. The company calls its employees its first customers, and the main function of leadership is to serve employees. To do that, leaders have to be dedicated to others, not to burnishing their egos.

Southwest hires only a small percentage of job applicants because it's serious about only taking on people who like to serve other people and who are committed to working in teams. The video shows that Southwest vets candidates thoroughly and provides excellent training. Management works relentlessly to ensure that employees feel respected and have the necessary skills to perform their jobs at a high level. Southwest's theory is that if you serve employees well, they'll serve customers well.

The video emphasizes the Southwest values of group success and freedom. Individuals do what needs to be done and don't allow such factors as job boundaries to get in the way. Pilots even help load baggage if needed. Freedom means a broad latitude to do a job the way employees think will lead to the best results for the company.

The video's lesson is that leadership should make everyone a leader, with a vignette illustrating how unfathomable that idea is to the conventionally-minded. In a presentation to analysts, Kelleher describes how the

It's So Simple

★★★★	Holds viewer interest
★★★★	Acting/Presenting
NA	Diversity
★★★★	Production quality
★★★★	Value of content
★★★	Instructional value
★★★1/2	Value for the money
★★★1/2	Overall rating

company operates. An audience member asks, almost accusingly, "How do you keep control?" Herb replies, "Never had control, don't want control!"

Charthouse has a signature production style: location shots only, fast action with lots of cuts, comic visual effects, and upbeat contemporary music. The camera follows the Southwest creed; it doesn't linger on the big shots. The leader guide is well written and well produced. It has much background material, a plan for a 60- to 90-minute session, and sections that show how to train on six different topics relevant to the video material.

The odd price of \$737 is an inside joke: the airline flies only Boeing 737s. But it won't be funny to some buyers, given the video's length.

Recommendation

It's So Simple should be a breath of fresh air in many organizations. Leadership at Southwest Airlines is simple but not easy. It requires a major shift in conventional thinking. If your organization or business is open from top to bottom or fairly autonomous, this video could be just the kickoff it needs.


Video Details

It's So Simple, video, 2001, 15 minutes, Charthouse Learning: 800.328.3789, www.charthouse.com. Purchase US\$737. Other material: leader guide.

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