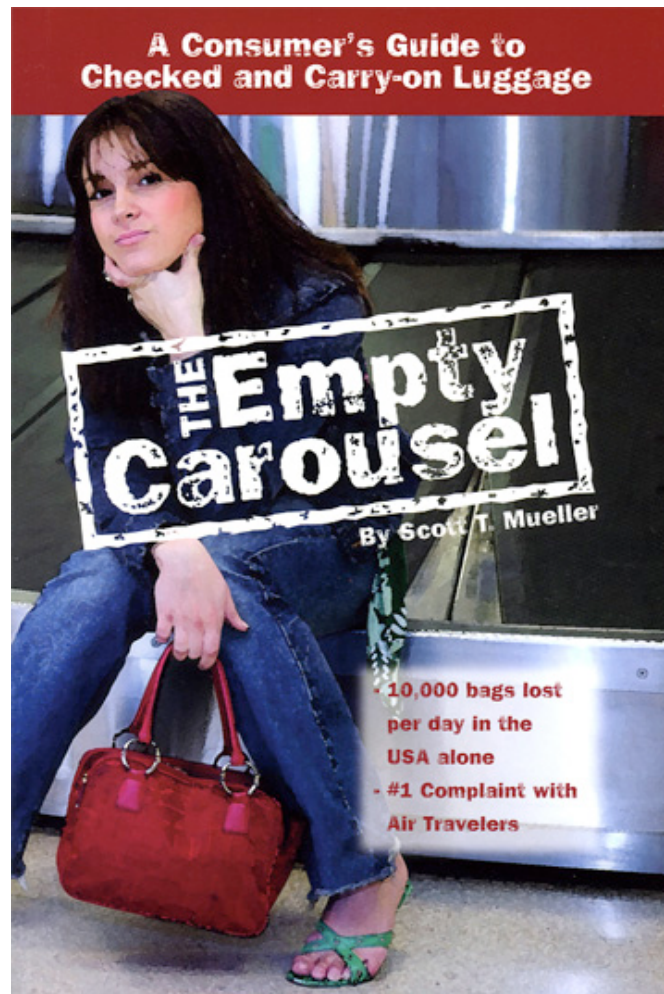


The Empty Carousel:
A Consumer's Guide to Checked and Carry-on Luggage
By Scott T. Mueller¹
(A brief book review by R. Max Wideman)

Introduction

This is not exactly about project management. But, like so many other project managers, having done a lot of traveling in my career this handy little book caught my attention. Besides, it's got a pretty girl on the cover . . .



Author Scott T. Mueller's book, *The Empty Carousel*, is all about **not** losing your luggage and what to do if it is. Or, as Scott puts it, reducing the pain of traveling and taking the right steps to prevent airline baggage claim problems. According to Scott:

"Lost baggage claims are skyrocketing. In 2006 more than 240,000 bags never found their owners. Over 10,000 bags are lost every day in the US alone. More than 1 million pieces of luggage were lost, damaged, delayed or pilfered by U.S. airlines from May to July 2007, according to data from the Bureau of Transportation Statistics."

Scott should know. He worked in the airline industry for almost twenty years and for five years he was the system manager for baggage services for one of the largest domestic airlines in the US. Very simply, his book will confirm your worst fears about how your baggage is handled by the airlines. And then he'll give you the very best advice on what you can do to minimize the risks and reduce the pain. It's all detailed and presented very succinctly and clearly.

Book Contents

The book is very simple and the advice is easy to follow. There are ten chapters:

1. Baggage Check-in: Proper Identification
2. Luggage and Locks
3. Before You Pack
4. Luggage Damage: What's Covered? What's Not?
5. What Thieves Target and When
6. Domestic vs. International Compensation
7. Luggage Security at the Carousel
8. Where Does Luggage Go When It Disappears?
9. Filing a Luggage Claim with the Airline
10. Make the Best of Your Travel Experience.

These chapters are packed with valuable information and helpful advice for the modern traveler. The advice in the book will probably save you many times its cost in contents and inconvenience when you lose a piece of luggage.

Very simply, the baggage handling system is a nightmare for the airlines. Like it or not, it's complex, and daunting. Apparently, lack of proper identification is the number one reason why bags are not reunited with their owners. "When you check your baggage, you are gambling that whatever is in your luggage is going to arrive safely [but] luggage is often lost, damaged, delayed or pilfered" Scott says.

What we liked

Here are just some of the valuable tips that Scott offers you to minimize the risk of problems. Some of them are pretty obvious. However, while closely following these steps does not guarantee your bag will not get lost, as Scott says, "It will improve your chances of avoiding a problem".

1. The name on the bag has to match the name of the person traveling; and the name, address and telephone number must be written clearly and understandably.
2. The nametags must be sturdy and attached firmly enough to withstand: getting caught and pulled in mechanical belts; stresses your bags will experience as they are transported through the system; and handling by the airport workers. The best place to put identification is in a holder that is flush with the design of the luggage or bag, and make sure the holder is affixed firmly and securely to the bag.
3. In addition, you should put a legal size sheet of paper with your identification and itinerary into a plastic zipper locking bag and place it inside your luggage right on top. This way, it will be clearly visible when someone opens your bag looking for identification. Your name and telephone number will be sufficient for the airline or a law enforcement inspector to locate you.

4. You should also add a colorful and unique visual means for identifying your luggage. This way you can distinguish it visibly, quickly and reliably from other people's luggage of the same color and appearance. For example, add a colorful or unique ribbon, rag, or similar marker.

5. When you check in, make sure that you ask the airline to check your bags all the way to your destination.

Scott adds that his most important advice to travelers is really simple: "If you can't replace it, live without it, or seal your next deal without it, just don't pack it!"²

Interesting tidbits

"I was the system manager of baggage services for [a] carrier for five years" he says. "When I started in this position, this airline mishandled four bags per 1000 customers: relatively large numbers for this airline, but average for domestic carriers according to the [US] Department of Transportation, who publishes these statistics on the 'Air Travel Consumer Home Page'. When I left the position, dubbed by many as the 'worst job in the company', the average number of mishandled bags had dropped to a record low numbers of less than two bags mishandled per 1000 passengers."³

"Mishandled baggage ratios vary from airline to airline. Reported statistics show that, depending on the airline you travel, 1.5 to 19 or more bags are mishandled on a regular basis per 1000 passengers who check in for a flight."⁴

In identifying your bags

"Use ID pockets that are attached flush on the side of the bag."⁵

And for

"Additional Security: Place a legal size sheet of paper inside a zipper-locking clear plastic bag or laminate it to protect it from moisture. Place the protected information on top of the bag's contents so it is immediately visible if an agent opens the bag."⁶

Another tidbit that most travelers don't realize these days is that you can buy and use a US Travel Safety Administration approved lock. You can find information on approved locks here:

<http://www.tsa.gov/travelers/airtravel/assistant/locks.shtm> This way you can lock your luggage and inspectors can still inspect your bags without causing damage to the lock or the bag. If you don't use a TSA approved lock, you should just use a zip tie to secure the luggage zippers.

Also, don't pack critical medication in your checked luggage, especially if your life may depend on it. It's no help if your bags go missing!⁷

And finally

"Before going to claim your luggage, have you ever stopped to eat, get a cup of coffee, or have a meeting? If so, you might have been a victim of luggage theft. Some thieves consider the type of identification on a bag to be indicative of its contents. On an ID tag,

the title president, vice president, attorney, doctor, director can equate to dollars in the mind of the thief: the bigger the title, the more money is made; the more money you made, the nicer the contents in the bag will likely be."⁸

In which case, you might not want to add "PMP" after your name. If the thieves even happen to know what "PMP" stands for, they will obviously conclude just how rich you are – and make you their special target!

¹ Scott T. Mueller, *The Empty Carousel: A Consumer's Guide to Checked and Carry-on Luggage*, Millkot Publishing & Marketing, FL, 2007, or visit <http://www.theemptycarousel.com/>

² Ibid, p13

³ Ibid, p iii-iv

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid, p6

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid, p13

⁸ Ibid, p26-27.