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# Aviation bug, martini on the rocks and dancing maasai

Interview by Timo Albiez  
with Marietta Widmer



Marietta Widmer (left) is Maître de Cabine at Swiss and a trainer at Lufthansa Aviation Training in Leadership and Customer Orientation.

**Dear Marietta, who are you really?**

A question I honestly ask myself every morning in the mirror as well. I'm quite a down-to-earth person with a big heart for family and for people in general. Relationships mean a great deal to me – I draw a lot of energy from them. At the same time, I'm curious, open, and walk through life with joy. I take delight in the little things around me and try to focus on the positive. But: when I encounter injustice, I simply cannot look away. Then I stand up until things are set right again.

**And professionally?**

My job is extremely varied. No day is like the other – and that's exactly what I love. On the one hand, I'm in the air, as Maître de Cabine Intercontinental, responsible for both the team and the guests. On the other hand, I'm on the ground, in training, instructing crews. I'm a certified adult educator and Concept Manager for leadership training. This means I'm responsible for ensuring that our cabin crews are well equipped in terms of leadership, teamwork, and service quality. This variety is what makes the job unique for me. I could never sit in an office doing the same thing every day – I would wither.

**How long have you been «in the air»?**

For 27 years now! I began my training with Swissair – originally, I thought I'd only do it for six months, just as a stopover. But as the saying goes: either you catch the aviation bug, or you leave right away. I was bitten by the bug entirely. Of course, it's a life full

of irregular hours, jetlag, and constantly changing teams. But it's incredibly enriching. Teaching gives me the stability that is often missing in flight operations. Today it's about 20% flying and 80% training.

**What if you could no longer fly?**

I would miss it terribly! Flying isn't just a job; it's a way of life. For the younger ones, it might be a «lifestyle», but for me it's a school of life. You encounter so many cultures, languages, and people. You constantly have to adapt to new things, react to them, and remain curious. It's this blend that keeps the mind flexible.

**You train a lot of young people. How do you instill passion for the job in them?**

For me, there's a very clear recipe: leading by example. When I stand at the front as Maître de Cabine, I'm something like a lighthouse for my team. It's not enough to state expectations – you must live them yourself. If I want the toilets to be clean, I pitch in myself. If someone feels unwell, I take care of them personally. Even if someone is sick, I don't stand by – I help wherever I can. This «we're in it together» attitude is far more powerful than any PowerPoint slide. And that's how you spark passion in the younger ones: by showing them that you truly mean it.

**Keyword «briefing» – how does that work on board?**

The briefing is our kick-off. Imagine: I've been flying for 27 years, and never once have I had the same team for consecutive

flights. That means every time I meet new people. Within 17 minutes – on long-haul flights – these individuals need to become a functioning team. After that, the guests board, and we have to work together seamlessly. There's no time for long ice-breakers. That's why the briefing is so crucial: it creates structure, orientation, and above all team spirit. I place great value on making it a dialogue, not just rattling off facts. Safety topics are just as important as hospitality. And: even after so many years, I keep thinking about new ways to present topics so that they remain engaging.

**I don't particularly enjoy flying myself. How do you notice when someone has a fear of flying?**

There are typical signs. Many ask directly as they board: «Will there be turbulence today?» or «Is the flight full?» – that's when my alarm bells ring. Then I take the time. Even if boarding is hectic, I stop, listen, and ask questions. Sometimes I pass on my part of the boarding process to a colleague so I can focus. When someone feels: «There really is someone here for me,» it takes away a lot of fear. That's the key: sometimes facts don't help, but genuine attentiveness always does.

**How do you deal with complaints, for instance about delays?**

The important thing is to remember: every passenger enters great dependency when they board an aircraft. They trust us to have everything under control. Clear, honest information is worth gold. I try to

be proactive with updates, not wait until questions start coming. Consistent wording is extremely important. I believe an honest explanation about a technical issue is better than sugar-coating it. That's how we build trust – and in the end, trust is the most important currency in aviation.

**Do you have rituals that are important to you?**

Yes, absolutely. For me, on board it starts with the «Passenger Address»: «Dear colleagues, our guests are coming on board.» That's the moment it begins. And in the classroom, I always have flowers – for me, that's a sign of appreciation and brings a touch of atmosphere. I also play music during breaks. It brings energy and clears the mind.

**Let's move on to the «classic Blue Paper questions». If you were a cocktail – what mix would you be?**

A Martini on the rocks. Straightforward, down-to-earth, no frills – and simply good.

**And if you were a film?**

Definitely a nature documentary. I love mountains, I love the sea, I find both fascinating. But not a kitschy film – more of a documentary. I'm curious and want to understand.

**What would your ideal party look like?**

A beach party. Barefoot, warm summer, friends laughing, music playing, maybe a small fire. Relaxed, easy-going, full of carefree lightness.

**If you could write a book – what would it be about?**

After almost every flight I could write down an episode. You experience so many brief stories – sometimes funny, sometimes sad. I'd call it «Hello and Goodbye» – because flying is always about meeting and parting.

**Do you spontaneously have an exciting story to share?**

Yes, I do. I was still young when we flew out of Dar es Salaam. On board were three Maasai, drinking Cola for the very first time, putting on headphones, and watching films. At the same time, an American gospel choir of around 60 people was on board. At some point, the Maasai started singing along to the gospel. The whole plane stood

still, business class passengers came to the back, and everyone listened. I had goosebumps all over. The Maasai were jumping to the rhythm, so high I thought they'd hit their heads on the screens. That image has stayed with me ever since – one of those magical moments you never forget.

**Finally: is there something that's particularly important to you?**

Yes. I think our profession is often underestimated. Yet the training is very demanding, and the responsibility enormous. Over 300 people on board – each with different needs. That requires strong social skills, resilience under pressure, solid professional expertise, and the ability to work well in a team.

Many thanks, dear Marietta, for this fascinating conversation! We wish you many more wonderful experiences and adventures «above the clouds»!

**Marietta Widmer**

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