



# BRAND SPOTLIGHT

## American Airlines



## American Airlines' Approach to Scalable, Human-Centered Care

In an industry where disruption is the norm and expectations continue to rise, American Airlines is proving that customer care can be both deeply human and remarkably efficient. At the helm of this transformation is Carolyn Truelove, Vice President of Customer Care and Operational Excellence, who is leading with equal parts heart and strategy.

From empowering frontline teams to deploying predictive AI tools, her team is reimagining what it means to care for customers at scale, turning moments of stress into moments of loyalty and everyday journeys into something more meaningful. In this conversation, Truelove shares how American Airlines is meeting the moment and why the future of travel depends on leading with empathy, insight, and bold innovation.



**Carolyn Truelove**

Vice President of Customer & Operational Excellence



**Execs In The Know (EITK): What makes the customer care model at American Airlines different and exciting for you?**

**Carolyn Truelove:** What excites me most is that we aren't just delivering service; we're curating experiences with purpose, passion, and precision. At American, we've architected a care model that's globally scalable and locally personal, powered by data and deeply human in spirit. With more than 350 airports and a global network of multilingual customer engagement centers, we're blending operational excellence with heart.

It's thrilling to lead a team that turns moments of stress into moments of loyalty and transforms the logistics of travel into lasting impressions.

**EITK:** Let's discuss the transition from reactive to proactive care. Why does it matter?

**Carolyn:** Proactive care means becoming a companion in our customers' journey, not just a solution when something goes wrong. By applying predictive analytics, disruption modeling, and real-time communication tools, we anticipate needs before they're even expressed. In 2024, we successfully right-channeled over 20 million contacts from traditional to digital channels, such as our enhanced app and aa.com, allowing us to resolve routine needs quickly while freeing our teams to focus on what matters most: building trust through care.

We are on our way and strive to improve and refine our proactive care approach through new processes and strategies as we learn more about what our customers need. Our goal is to provide accurate information at the right time consistently. We recognize that the balance between digital and human support is crucial to getting this right.

**EITK:** How has American's digital transformation evolved with customer expectations?



**Carolyn:** Our evolution has been nothing short of thrilling. Today, the AAdvantage® app is a personal concierge, helping customers check in, rebook, track bags, and earn miles with confidence and ease. With a fresh design and added AAdvantage® hub, the app now puts elite benefits, priority services, flight credits, and offers just a tap away.

As our Chief Customer Officer, Heather Garboden, says, "We're giving our customers the kind of travel tools they didn't know they could have but now can't live without. Every customer deserves to feel known, respected, and prioritized. That's how we win hearts, not just business."

**EITK:** And how has this transformation impacted speed and intelligence in care? How do you preserve the human touch?



**Carolynne:** By combining people, processes, and platforms in a way that feels seamless. We are excited about providing AI-powered agent-assist tools across our customer engagement centers, redesigned mobile experiences, and eliminating friction points in common service paths, such as baggage, refunds, and rebooking. In 2024, these efforts resulted in a 12 percent improvement in efficiency and a First Contact Resolution rate exceeding 85 percent, while also increasing CSAT and agent confidence.

We use technology to amplify, not replace, the human spirit. Automation takes care of the basics, so our people can focus on human-first moments: listening, understanding, and uplifting. It's that balance between science and soul that defines the American Airlines brand.

AI is our behind-the-scenes co-pilot. It helps prevent fraud, reduces agent cognitive load, and supports personalized care in real-time. We're developing tools that will soon respond to mood, urgency, and historical context, allowing our teams to serve smarter, with empathy on autopilot.

**EITK:** At American's scale, what does it take to build and maintain trust?

**Carolynne:** At our scale, trust is about delivering with consistency, clarity, and empathy across every channel. From the moment a customer begins planning their trip, we're making decisions that reduce surprise and enhance transparency. Whether it's through proactive rebooking, real-time notifications, or retraining our people as customer expectations change, we're showing customers that we're always thinking one step ahead.

**EITK:** How have you embedded empathy into your operations?

**Carolynne:** We've made empathy operational by designing it into our tools, training, and policies. From flexible SOPs to data-informed coaching, our systems encourage meaningful connection. We empower our agents with the authority and emotional space to resolve with grace. Because care isn't measured just by resolution, but by how a customer feels at the end of the conversation, as well as how frequently they choose to fly with us again.

**EITK:** In what ways do frontline teams shape your priorities, and how do you ensure they are empowered to resolve issues efficiently?

**Carolynne:** Our teams on the frontlines of airports and customer engagement centers are our deepest well of truth. Their insights have driven significant investments, such as providing agents with better visibility into a traveler's journey, updating our knowledge tools to meet localized needs, and launching a Lost Time Management initiative that reduced absenteeism by 14 percent. Every new idea we implement starts with one simple question: What are our teams experiencing firsthand?

We build confidence through access, autonomy, and accountability. From real-time journey views to modernized technologies that deliver prompts and escalation pathways, our frontline teams are well-equipped to succeed. We also share customer direct kudos and recognize excellence through a global rewards platform with spotlights, travel perks, and local celebrations that keep morale soaring.

**EITK:** What are your methods for listening to customers at scale and responding effectively to their needs?

**Carolynne:** We capture and activate feedback across every step of the journey. From post-trip surveys and social media to operational signals and agent observations, our centralized analytics platform distills insights into priorities. One example: customer concerns about baggage resolution times inspired the development of a digital self-service tracker, which helped reduce resolution times by 40 percent and improved satisfaction scores at that touch point by nine points.

**EITK:** Let's talk data. How is it improving the customer experience?

**Carolynne:** We use data as an insight engine – predicting, not just reporting. Our Performance Analytics and Reporting team connects behavior patterns with operational

realities, helping us adjust staffing models, improve policy design, and surface real-time prompts that assist both agents and customers. From smart crew scheduling to contextual digital nudges, every insight drives a faster, more thoughtful journey.

**EITK:** What global shifts in CX have influenced your strategy?

**Carolynne:** Today's travelers demand relevance, speed, and simplicity wherever they are. We've responded by building personalized, intuitive journeys that scale across borders. From expanding cultural fluency training to investing in inclusive digital design, we're making the American experience feel personalized and powerful from Tokyo to Tucson.



**EITK:** Can you share some CX strategies that improved satisfaction while also lowering costs?

**Carolynne:** We focused on customer-critical moments, paired with a relentless focus on continuous improvement. By modernizing rebooking flows, expanding digital self-service, and optimizing vendor performance, we increased CSAT by 11 percent while generating savings that were reinvested. It's about working smarter and caring deeper.

We streamlined boarding tools for gate agents to improve the boarding experience of our travelers. We continue to invest in leveraging customer feedback at every touch point to inform our prioritization of changes that enhance the customer experience.

**EITK:** Looking ahead, what excites you most about the future of CX at American?

**Carolynne:** The blend of high tech and high humanity. Tools like multimodal AI, emotion-aware guidance, and visual troubleshooting will allow us to scale personalized care in ways we've never seen before. But what excites me most is how I experience our transformation personally.

My husband and I travel frequently with American, often to visit our parents, five amazing children, three grandsons, or our big, beautiful tribe of siblings and extended family all around the world.

Whether it's navigating the app, chatting with agents at the gate, or giving feedback to our team after a flight, I live the journey I help shape. And let me tell you, it's both a joy and a quality check every single time.

**EITK:** Who or what influences your leadership approach?



**Carolynne:** I've always believed in learning from the best to serve the best. Our Customer Experience Advisory Board, established in 2025, comprises leaders from prominent brands such as Disney, Marriott, and Walmart. As Heather describes it, "We design experiences worthy of loyalty. And we invite the world's best minds to help us get there."


**EITK:** How does coaching and team development fit into your leadership philosophy?

**Carolynne:** It's everything. Developing high-performing teams and watching individuals rise to their full potential is my greatest joy as a leader. I genuinely glean vitamins from celebrating others, whether it's a strong and vibrant "good morning," a quick hallway word before a big meeting, or cheering on someone I've mentored as they step into new roles and new heights.

I believe that performance is personal and that the right encouragement at the right time can significantly impact confidence, clarity, and outcomes.

There's nothing more glorious than looking at a dashboard or data report and knowing: these results are the outcome of great coaching, inspired teams, and people who believed in themselves enough to soar. The joy of operational excellence? It's seeing it built by people who feel seen, supported, and unstoppable.

**EITK:** Any advice you'd like to offer emerging CX leaders?

**Carolyne:** Be present. Be curious. Be relentless in your pursuit of simplicity with data as the flashlight. The best leaders I know honor the operation and the customer with equal fervor. I often say, "The best metrics are found in the stories people tell about us." Listen to those stories and build from there. 



## Execs In The Know

Execs In The Know partners with brands that provide outstanding customer service (CX) experiences. The Brand Spotlight Series showcases innovations and solutions to CX challenges today's leading brands face.

Thank you to Carolyne Truelove and the American Airlines team for contributing to the Execs In The Know Brand Spotlight.

Interested in participating in a future Brand Spotlight feature and sharing your story? Contact us at [info@execsintheknow.com](mailto:info@execsintheknow.com).

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