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FLYING THE FRIENDLY SKIES: FLIGHT ATTENDANT SNAPS

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A flight attendant, upset because a passenger refused to apologize after accidentally striking him with luggage, allegedly spewed obscenities over the airplane's PA system and then activated and slid down the emergency escape chute before disappearing into a terminal at John F. Kennedy Airport Monday, an airport official said (Gardiner, August 10, 2010).

On August 9, 2010, JetBlue Flight 1052 from Pittsburgh taxied to a stop at John F. Kennedy Airport. Although the flight was less than two hours, subsequent news reports would indicate that it was more than uneventful. Initial reports indicated that as the plane finished taxiing, Steve Slater, a flight attendant, "spewed" obscenities over the public address system berating a passenger he felt was rude, activated the emergency slide, grabbed two cans of beer, departed the plane by the slide, ran into the terminal and left the airport. The implications of this action were complex. Steve Slater had clearly crossed the line of acceptable behavior. The reputation of the JetBlue and its staff were on the line. What steps should JetBlue have taken in the days after the event? What policies should they develop to make sure this didn't happen again?

Initial news reports indicated that the attendant, Steve Slater, a veteran flight attendant, had experienced verbal abuse from a female passenger before the flight departed Pittsburgh. During the interaction, Mr. Slater's attorney said the woman slammed the overhead bin into Mr. Slater's head. Slater was seen with a "gash" on his head. The lawyer also indicated that a second incident occurred when the plane landed and the woman lashed out at Mr. Slater when she could not immediately collect her luggage.

The Wall Street Journal, in related coverage, reported that incidents involving unruly passengers were a growing problem. They stated that according to the International Air Transport