**Case Study**

**Putting on the Human Face for Management-Airline Crew Relations**

In 2010 Cecilia Leung was General Manager of Inflight Services for Hong Kong based DragonAir (later re-branded as Cathay Dragon Airlines in 2016), an award winning Asian airline which served fifty destinations around the region at its height. Cecilia’s responsibilities also included the airline’s cabin crew management. In August of that year, due to severe air traffic control problems in PRC, disrupted flights and crew rosters had to be re-planned urgently, requiring more work hours from them to meet the delay and waiting passengers. Management and crew relations had traditionally been a sensitive one often characterised with mistrust by both sides and this situation fuelled these already strained relationships. The crew feeling that these management demands were not justifiable. The cabin crew union took up the issue, which escalated to become a threat of industrial action. It was finally resolved after a whole month’s negotiation with the Labour department of Hong Kong government’s intervention and mediation. Despite the resolution, relationship between the management and crew was still tensed. At this point Cecilia took it upon herself to break with the typical management position that was often fixed with a priority for operational needs, and urgently reassess the situation by looking beyond her management eyes. She asked herself, what had broken down the communication and understanding, what do crew members truly need, and how can the management team supports them to grow and do their best? This called for her to present herself as a caring, human first, ahead of her management face. One of the first things she did was fly out every Friday evening on a Dragonair flight to visibly show up for them and then had dinner with them once at the destination. She asked what problems they faced, how they felt about management and offered transparent communications from her side. Most importantly, she explained management decisions clearly and answered crew’s questions directly to avoid misunderstanding. And she listened without making them wrong. Their answers were often revealing and new to her. Eventually Cecilia got to know crew members by name including all the chief and senior pursers personally. However, this exercise wasn’t only about placating disgruntled crew and avoiding a possible strike action, it was also because she knew that these individuals fronted the service to customers and it was only when they felt good were they motivated to go out of their way to look after passengers with acts of kindness and deep down from their hearts, such as making a hot drink for passenger with a cold. Disaster for the airline was averted, furthermore Dragonair won the Best Regional Airline award by Skytrax in 2010.