

## Adventures in Air Travel

By Norman M. Goldfarb

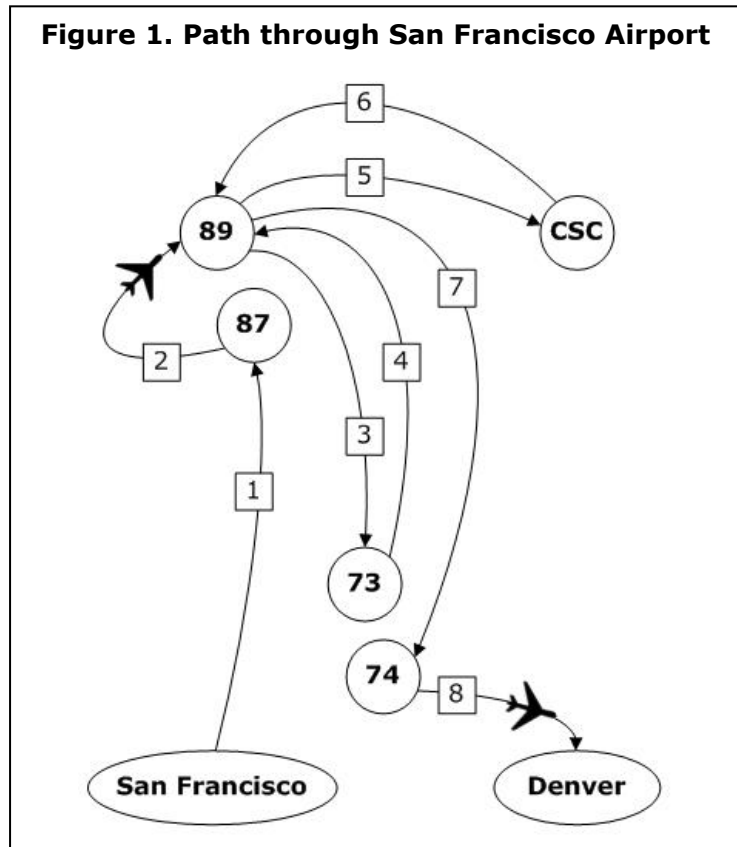
Any site monitor can tell you that air travel can be an adventure. But, with the right mixture of boldness and patience, the experienced traveler can overcome the obstacles, or maybe not...

The Association of Clinical Research Professionals (ACRP) is holding its annual conference in Denver this year. I book a seat on flight 598, scheduled to depart from San Francisco at 8:00 AM and arrive at 11:28 AM. Even if the flight is delayed, I will have plenty of time to check into my hotel, see some sights, and obtain my conference badge before the exhibit hall opens at 3:00 PM. The airline reschedules my departure to flight 579 at 7:00 AM, a bit early, but OK.

Arriving at the airport, I see that my flight is scheduled to depart from gate 73. However, having arrived early at the airport and not checking any bags, I am able to board flight 287 at gate 83 [1 in Figure 1], scheduled to depart 65 minutes earlier, at 5:55 AM. The airplane leaves the terminal on schedule and makes it to the runway before a hydraulic problem is discovered. Mechanics are summoned. They think they have fixed it, but it reappears. The flight returns to gate 89 [2] at 6:38 AM with a "decision" expected in 30 minutes.

I am skeptical that the problem will be fixed quickly, and the flight may be cancelled, so I decide to see if I can still catch flight 579 at 7:00 AM. After a few minutes, the flight attendant allows me to leave the airplane at 6:46 AM. I am the first passenger off the airplane, but not the last. I hustle over to gate 73 [3], arriving seven minutes before the scheduled departure time. The doors have already closed (with empty seats), so I miss the flight. The gate agent says there are ten open seats on flight 894, leaving at 8:40 AM from gate 74 and gives me a standby ticket. What luck! However, he cannot give me a regular ticket with an assigned seat because my original flight has not been cancelled. But, he says that when I left flight 287, I lost my seat on that flight. (Huh?)

I race back to gate 89 [4] to see if there is any news about flight 287. The gate agent says that a decision is now expected at 8:30 AM. Since I have a standby ticket on flight 894, scheduled to depart at 8:40 AM, I hasten over to the customer service center next to gate



80 [5] to try to convert my standby ticket into a regular ticket with an assigned seat. While waiting in line, I call airline reservations to do the same thing. The telephone agent tells me that there are now no seats available on flight 894 at 8:40 AM, but there are an unknown number of open seats on flight 5, scheduled to depart at 10:40 AM. There are also seats available on flight 336, scheduled to depart at 12:40 PM. What luck! To play it safe, I ask her to change my reservation to flight 5 at 10:40 AM. She says it will cost \$75 for her to change it, while there will be no charge at the customer service center. Since I expect to be in line for at least another 10 or 20 minutes, to play it safe, I tell her to change my reservation; I am willing to pay the extra \$75. After about 15 minutes on hold, she tells me that the system will not allow her to change my reservation.

I eventually reach the front of the line and start explaining my situation to a customer service representative. Before she can respond, a nearby customer service representative announces that my original airplane's hydraulics problem has been solved and passengers on that flight should go to the gate immediately. What luck!

I rush back to gate 89 [6], with three other passengers behind me. When we are about 50 feet away, the gate agent leaves the counter and enters the jet bridge to the airplane, using his card key to open the door, which locks behind him. He does not reappear. After about 10 minutes, the jet bridge starts pulling away from the airplane so it can depart. The other passengers and I head back to the customer service center. On the way, I hear an announcement that flight 894 at 8:40 AM is about to finish boarding, so I hotfoot it over to gate 74 to see I can use my standby reservation after all. When I arrive at gate 74, the gate agent tells me there is one open seat left. I board the airplane with an assigned middle seat of 8B. What luck!

All of the overhead luggage bins through row 10 are full, so stowing my suitcase could be a problem. However, seats 7B and 7C are empty. Given that the flight is about to leave, I stow my bags under those two seats and sit in seat 7C. The passengers holding tickets for those two seats may not appear. After about 10 minutes, the doors close and I end up as the only passenger on the airplane with an adjacent empty seat. What luck!

I arrive in Denver at 11:50 AM [8], only 20 minutes behind my original scheduled arrival time. What luck!

### **Author**

Norman M. Goldfarb is Managing Director of First Clinical Research LLC, a provider of clinical research best practices information, consulting and training services. Contact him at 1.650.465.0119 or [ngoldfarb@firstclinical.com](mailto:ngoldfarb@firstclinical.com).