# (CNN) -- If Kerry Drake missed his connecting flight, he wouldn't get to the hospital in time to say goodbye to his mother.

Drake got the news on the morning of January 24 that his mother, who had been ill for years from rheumatoid arthritis and had been especially sick the last four months, was dying.

To get to his mother in Lubbock, Texas, the San Francisco resident booked a United Airlines flight, with only 40 minutes between connecting flights in Houston. When his first flight was delayed, Drake thought he would miss his connecting flight to Lubbock, the last one of the day.

He started crying, obviously distraught. The flight attendants brought napkins for his tears, said they would do what they could to help, and most importantly, got his connecting flight information to the captain, he told CNN.

When he got off the airport train and was running toward the gate, "I was still like maybe 20 yards away when I heard the gate agent say, 'Mr. Drake, we've been expecting you,'" he said.

**The captain had radioed ahead** with the information from the flight attendants, the captain had radioed ahead about Drake's situation, and the Lubbock crew had delayed departure to get him on board.

Until that point, Drake had been rushing on adrenaline to make the flight. Finally sitting on that second airplane, he realized how much had gone into helping him get on that plane. "I was overcome with emotion," he said.

Even his luggage arrived on time. The Houston ground crew made sure of it.

He made it to the hospital in time to see his mother. "At one point she opened her eyes, and I think she recognized me," said Drake, who spent the night at the hospital. "Around 4 a.m. she had a real moment of coherence, a last rally, although we didn't know it at the time. It was the last time."She died that morning.

Drake wrote to United Airlines upon his return to ensure that the flight attendants, pilots, gate agents and baggage handlers who helped him that day were thanked for their service. His story made it into an employee newsletter as an example of what employees could do. "Our employees really worked together that day to help this customer," said United spokeswoman Megan McCarthy.

"This almost never happens," wrote Christopher Elliott, who first told Drake's story on his [airline consumer advocate website](http://www.elliott.org/customer-service-2/united-airlines-holds-plane-so-passenger-can-say-goodbye-to-his-dying-mother/), via e-mail. "Airline employees are evaluated based on their ability to keep a schedule. Airlines compete with each other on who has the best on-time departure record."

"When the crew on this flight heard about this distraught passenger trying to make his connection, they must have said, 'To hell with it,'" wrote Elliott, who's also the reader advocate for National Geographic Traveler. "And they made the right call."

1. Why do you think this is an outstanding example of customer service?
2. Was their any additional advantages to this story other than making one customer happy?
3. What were the disadvantages to the company?
4. How else can airlines demonstrate effective customer service?
5. What knowledge and skills are needed in order to offer effective customer service within the airline industry?