

The Problem With Using Points For Upgrades

Most travelers think using points to upgrade their seat is “playing the game well.”

In reality, upgrades are often one of the least strategic ways to deploy points.

Not because premium cabins aren’t valuable.

Because upgrades usually force you to pay twice for the same flight — once in cash, once in points — while still leaving the final outcome uncertain.

And that uncertainty matters more than most travelers realize.

The Upgrade Illusion

Most upgrade strategies work like this:

- 1 | Purchase a cash economy or premium economy fare
- 2 | Request an upgrade using points or miles
- 3 | Wait for inventory to open
- 4 | Hope your request clears

Psychologically, travelers start imagining themselves in the upgraded cabin the moment they submit the request.

Operationally, though?

They still own the original seat.

That distinction is everything.

BEACUSE UNTIL THE UPGRADE CLEARS:

- The premium cabin is not guaranteed
- The routing is already committed
- The cash has already been spent
- The points are often tied to a speculative outcome

*You are not booking business class.
You are entering a queue.*

ClearSkies Philosophy:

Certainty > Aspiration

At ClearSkies, we generally prefer using points to directly confirm the cabin you actually want.

Why?

BEACUSE AWARD BOOKINGS PROVIDE:

Confirmed inventory	Known value at booking	Immediate clarity
Fewer moving parts	Less emotional friction leading up to travel	

You know exactly what you purchased the moment the ticket is issued.

- No monitoring upgrade lists.
- No hoping inventory appears.
- No wondering whether elite status priority will matter.
- No "maybe."

That certainty has value.

Airlines Benefit When You Think *Emotionally*

Airlines understand that upgrades *feel* aspirational.

That's why upgrade offers are often framed around:

Luxury	"Treating yourself"	Exclusivity	Dramatic retail seat pricing comparisons
--------	---------------------	-------------	--

And while the retail business class fare may technically cost thousands more, that does not automatically mean the upgrade redemption itself is efficient.

THE AIRLINE WINS WHEN TRAVELERS THINK:

“I’d never pay cash for business class... but I would spend points to upgrade.”

BEACUSE NOW:

The airline still captures
cash revenue

Premium seats still get filled



Points liabilities get reduced

And while the retail business class fare may technically cost thousands more, that does not automatically mean the upgrade redemption itself is efficient.

The Better Strategic Framework

INSTEAD OF ASKING:

“Can I upgrade this flight?”



WE PREFER ASKING:

“What is the most efficient way to secure the experience I actually want?”

Very often, the answer is:

- | | |
|--|-------------------------|
| • Book the premium cabin outright using points | • Preserve cash flow |
| • Confirm the seat immediately | • Eliminate uncertainty |



BUT WHEN IT DOES:

*Not every route
deserves business class.*

We’d rather structure the redemption intentionally from the *beginning* than build a trip around upgrade hope.

The Core ClearSkies Lens

POINTS ARE NOT:

“Free travel tokens.”

THEY ARE:

Flexible financial assets.

— WHICH MEANS —

THE GOAL IS NOT:

Maximizing the
feeling of luxury.

THE REAL GOAL IS:

Maximizing strategic value
while minimizing
uncertainty.

- SOMETIMES THEY OVERLAP BEAUTIFULLY.

But the best redemptions
are usually the ones where:

The structure is efficient

The cabin is confirmed

The value is clear

The traveler knows exactly what they own at purchase

That's the difference
between *chasing upgrades*...

...& building *intentional
travel strategy*.