



Growing a Business, but Maintaining Your Values

by Dr. Woody

Published May 12, 2014 | FOXBusiness

The most successful entrepreneurs blend their passions into their business ventures, and Denise Wilson, founder and CEO of Desert Jet, is no exception.

As the founder and CEO of Desert Jet, an aviation management company, Wilson, a former pilot, is trying to simplify private air travel.

While attending the 2013 Annual EY Entrepreneur of the Year Awards in Desert Springs, Calif., I had the opportunity to sit down with Wilson to learn more about how her business and the role her values play in everyday operations. Here's what she had to say:

Woody: Tell me about Desert Jet and where the idea for building this business came from?

Wilson: Desert Jet is an aircraft charter management and maintenance company. Think of us as the private car service of the sky. What makes us unique is that we have no requirements to buy an aircraft, to buy a share of an aircraft, or to even by a jet card. People just call us when they want to fly and fly with us. It's a very simple process.

Woody: How has the transition been from pilot to entrepreneur to business executive?

Wilson: It's been an incredibly fun and challenging experience. It goes from working in the business to on the business. That concept of being and working in the business, to now trying to be more of a strategist for the company and cheerleader for my employees, and also working on the business and really focusing on the growth of the company--it's been a challenge. To this day, I'm still a pilot for the company, but I'm trying to find a balance between leading the company and basically having fun as a pilot.

Woody: What have been some of the toughest people management challenges you've had to learn?

Wilson: These days, I really am a coach and teacher in my company. It's really been trying to transfer all of the knowledge I have about the operations of the company to others so that they can successfully run the company, which allows me to really lead the company.

Woody: How do you instill your philosophy and your values in those who work for you?

Wilson: It takes a lot of time and patience. It's really being able to have those philosophical discussions about what I believe in and what my values are. That's an almost easier conversation to have than talking about the micromanaging and nitpicking of how do you particularly serve a client in the particular way they want to be served.

Woody: What are some of those core values or guiding principles that you rely on as an executive?

Wilson: As long as everyone in my company keeps in mind the values of kindness and caring and basically thinking of ways that business aviation can give back to our community, then everything runs perfectly.

Woody: How do you instill that in those around you and make sure it spreads throughout the organization?

Wilson: By setting an example. If one of my employees comes to me and says one of our clients just fell ill, and I want to do something nice for them I show them the example and say this is what we are going to do: let's send flowers, let's go visit them in the hospital, let's do these things...

Woody: So where do these values come from?

Wilson: Well, you know, I had a decision early on in the company about what the company was going to be about. And, it's really not about the profits, it's about what your life is going to be like. To me, I really want to enjoy walking down the halls of my company and looking at my employees and seeing that everyone is enjoying being there and having a good time. I want to see my clients be happy and really that's what it's about. I want to have a happy life, I want to enjoy my job and my work, and that's really the big determining factor, do we live our values?

Woody: What advice do you have for women entrepreneurs looking to build their businesses while maintaining their values?

Wilson: Wow, you know there are a lot of key points where you'll have decisions you have to make along the way where sometimes it's easier to do the quick route that might be more profitable for the company, but rarely those short-term gains just aren't worth the long-term sacrifice of yourself and who you really are, so I'd say as long as you are always following your gut instincts and heart you are doing the right thing.

Click here to view Dr. Woody's full live-taped video interview with Denise Wilson:

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