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DESERTJET


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Small Company, Huge Impact

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Denise Wilson, President and CEO of business aviation company Desert Jet, is notably accomplished. Twelve years ago, she founded Desert Jet, and since then, has seen booming returns on what started as a love for flying and aviation. In her teens, Denise worked summers with her mother at an engineering firm. Her mother was among the first female engineers for a subcontractor for Boeing who worked on many projects, including the B-2 Bomber. Denise began her journey into aviation working in the blueprint room and she was fascinated by the industry. She appreciated how all the pieces came together to form the world of aviation and its aircraft. After a trip to the Air and Space Museum in Seattle, Denise became interested in flying, so her mother purchased Microsoft Flight Simulator for their new home computer. Hours were spent learning the basics, and a few months later, while driving by Cable Airport, Denise noticed a sign offering demo flights for a mere \$25. She began to fly as a hobby 10 years later, became a professional pilot, and since then has spread her wings to include a continually growing company, one that receives accolades and boasts a wonderful team of executives and staff, while she enjoys the satisfaction of helping other entrepreneurs achieve their own dreams.

What inspired you to lean towards business aviation, as opposed to other aviation career options?

My first flying job, after becoming a flight instructor, was working for American Eagle. My fellow flight instructors only knew domestic airlines, so the world of corporate flying seemed kind of foreign at the time. No one in my circle knew much about business aviation, and I stumbled upon it mostly by accident after 9/11. I was furloughed from the airline where I was then employed, and I got a job flying a jet for a small company near the city where I lived. I loved it. It was such a different feeling, flying for someone with whom I had developed a relationship. I liked my previous flying jobs, but in this, there was no barrier between me and the passengers. I wanted to be able to make a direct impact on the people I flew.

How hard has it been as a woman in your position? What are some specific challenges that you've faced, if any?

I've actually been really fortunate in my career. By the time I got into flying, which was in 1997, so many women had helped pave the way for me to come into this business. At that time, five percent of pilots were women, and though now it's only six percent, we are working to help raise that number every day. Generally, I had it pretty easy. There have been slight road bumps, but nothing has really ever prevented me from achieving my goals, and the men in my life have always been very supportive.

Can you name a specific time in your career when you felt something big, something explosive, was about to happen? How did you react to that?

The entire time I have been at Desert Jet, I have felt that we are constantly exploding with amazing new things and it's been this way, nonstop for the last



twelve years. Being a pilot, as opposed to being an entrepreneur, is almost mellow, in a way. And to have your own business that is always moving forward to bigger things is exciting in a way that I had never thought before. I have an awesome executive team, but it has been a long path to get our company to a point where it is not completely reliant upon me for every decision. Now our executive team runs the day-to-day of the company. We are roughly at the halfway point in Desert Jet's growth trajectory, with many more exciting changes coming.

I read that you have spoken at leadership conferences pertaining to women in entrepreneurship, and that you play an active role in inspiring women to pursue careers in aviation. How do you empower



For five consecutive years, Desert Jet made Inc. Magazine's 500/5000 list as one of the fastest growing companies. In what ways has Desert Jet stayed ahead of the game?

Really, it has been through bringing the right people onboard. When we have the right team in place, nothing stops us. If we make a hiring mistake, it can really slow our growth. However, we really focus on picking the right people. The feedback from those who have utilized Desert Jet is almost always one of praise and satisfaction. They make note of how our team really works together to provide them with the best service. There are lots of airlines out there that hire for what's on paper, the résumé, the flight hours, etc., but at Desert Jet, if you have the right attitude and share the company's values, we can teach you anything you need to know to be a successful pilot at Desert Jet.

women in business specifically?

I'm an informal mentor to several women who run smaller businesses in aviation. In trying to spread our influence, Chris (Little), our Chief Marketing Officer, and I just pitched a proposal to Women in Aviation to have educational sessions at their annual conference directly geared toward women in entrepreneurship. We want to have a support system for women who are currently running their own aviation business, but also to show other people in various areas of aviation that the sky is literally the limit - that they CAN start their own business. I think making entrepreneurship visible to more women in the industry is important, and right now, there are very few women who head aviation businesses. I'd like to help raise those numbers. I really want to focus on women who aren't fulfilled in their current careers, and to show them that they can build a career that really fits their passions and interests.

Desert Jet has several core values, but one of them, Be Extraordinary Together, really stood out to me. What does that mean for you personally and how do you keep your team focused on the positive?

We took our entire team into a meeting, and we said, "Think about someone you work closely with, or within your department; what do you believe are the traits that make that person successful?" We made a long list of those traits from which we selected a few that were the most important to us. We transformed those into our core set of company values. When we hire someone, we have a sort of roadmap to show us if that person is really going to fit in with us and espouse what we are about at Desert Jet. We use our values as a foundation for everything



including hiring, firing, promotions, raises, and rewards. We have a peer contest between the team members of Desert Jet, and the winner receives the Awesome Award. These awards are given to people whom their peers see engaging in acts that directly reflect our company's values. The prize for winning is a \$1000 gift card. At the end of the year, the person who has received the most Awesome Awards earns a free trip including a companion, to anywhere in the world they would like to go.

What are the basic requirements for pilots, and how rigorous is the interview process? What are the most important qualities that Desert Jet looks for in applicants?

We are looking for good people who live our company values. Having a pilot with 700 hours or 7000 hours isn't as important to us as having the right person on the team. If we feel like you're going to be a great fit with us, we will train you to get you where you need to be. We aren't hiring the person on the paper; we are hiring the very essence of that person, their soul, really. We have a minimum number of flight hours that we require,

but we have hired people who didn't meet that requirement, just because we wanted to be a part of their growth and add them to our team because of who they are. If we have pilots with lower hours, we will put them in a simulator to ensure they have the flight skills, but we are looking for people who are quick learners and who are willing to broaden their horizons - those who have an open mind, can take feedback well, and express good CRM. CRM is a highly important aspect of flying, and although it is seen a lot in the commercial aviation world, it is not as prominent in the business aviation world. We are working to change that. Many candidates display poor CRM, and that is one of the most important qualities we look for in an applicant.

What excites you the most about Desert Jet's future? What accomplishment are you most proud of in your career?

I really love people's success, like when there is someone on our team who may feel that there is something they can't accomplish, or they hit a road block and start to give up, but in the end, they push through and are successful. That makes me really



proud. It shows that they can achieve what they set their mind to, and they have won a personal battle. I love watching our team do things that they never thought they could do. As to the future, we are still growing day by day. We are adding eight pilots to our team in the next six weeks, plus additional staff to help support the company as we continue to get bigger and face new challenges. We want to keep our team full of special people, but we also know we must be open to change as the company grows, and we always want to do things better than we did yesterday. I'm really proud that we have pulled together this diverse group of 50 or so people who are dedicated to the success of Desert Jet, because they recognize the impact that Desert Jet has had on them and their families in a personal way. It is a significant company and we continue to grow daily. We are an aviation company, yes – but we are about the people as well, and we just happen to be making great futures for ourselves and our families by flying airplanes. I couldn't be more proud of that.

Need more information? Here is a list of the requirements, perks, and advantages to working with Desert Jet:

The Desert Jet Advantage

Fast growth means opportunity!

CAPTAINS

- Industry leading salary
- Opportunity for advancement
- Seniority-based schedule
- Structured IOE program
- Pilot-instituted Safety Management System

CO-PILOTS

- Industry leading salary
- Immediate entry into a jet
- ATP and jet type rating provided at hire
- Fast upgrade
- Start logging PIC jet time on empty legs
- Fly 600+ hours a year

Our pilots enjoy the best benefits in the industry;

- Excellent company paid medical, dental and vision insurance
- Excellent 401K - 100% match up by the company, up to 6% of your salary
- Profit sharing
- Company paid vacation
- Sick and family medical leave
- Paid time off for volunteerism
- Accident and Critical Illness Insurance
- Use of company aircraft
- Company paid NBAA CAM certification
- Various bonus programs
- Free gym memberships

Minimum requirements for Pilot in Command include;

- Airline Transport Pilot Certificate
- 3000 hours total flight time
- FAA First Class Medical Certificate
- Excellent interpersonal, customer service and communication skills

Minimum requirements for Second in Command include;

- Commercial Certificate
- Airline Transport Pilot Requirements
- 1,000 hours total flight time
- FAA First Class Medical Certificate

<https://www.desertjet.com>



About the Author

Meredith Edwards - Meredith Edwards is an eleven-year flight attendant with Southwest Airlines. [Read More...](#)