

NEWS RELEASE

Wilfrid Laurier
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WestJet CEO Passionate About People

*Clive Beddoe acknowledges employees as he receives
Laurier Outstanding Business Leader Award*

For Immediate Release

**September 26, 2002
83-02**

**Contact: Valerie Beyer
Marketing Manager
Laurier School of Business & Economics
(519) 884-0710 ext. 6054**

**or Jacqui Tam
Director, Public Affairs
Wilfrid Laurier University
(519) 884-0710 ext. 3786**

WATERLOO - "In the end it all comes back to one simple thing...the relationship we have with our people," commented Clive Beddoe, at an awards ceremony held in his honour on Wednesday, September 25, at Wilfrid Laurier University.

Beddoe, who is chairman, president, and CEO of WestJet Airlines Ltd. (WestJet), accepted Laurier's Outstanding Business Leader of the Year Award in Waterloo, saying that he was "deeply honoured". He humbly remarked that he was undeserving of such an honour and attributed WestJet's success to the employees who have helped build the company from the ground up.

When asked what defines his leadership style, Beddoe stated simply: "I don't know how I lead, I just do what comes naturally to me." But growing WestJet from a fleet of three Boeing 737 aircraft and 220 employees in 1996, to 32 aircraft and more than 2,700 employees in 2002, has taken more than good fortune. It is Beddoe's leadership, creativity, and passion for the business that has had a significant impact on the company and its direction.

Beddoe is known for empowering employees and fostering a culture where they are continuously rewarded. Offering a profit sharing program, and stock purchase program where workers can invest up to 20% of their salary and receive a 100% match by WestJet, are just two of the many ways in which employees are rewarded. According to Beddoe the programs give employees ownership. The important thing is "not the reward," said Beddoe, "it's the message that reward brings... it's the pride it produces."

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Why does Beddoe spend more effort focusing on employees than worrying about customers? “Our people are our most important asset,” remarked Beddoe, “if we look after them then they’ll look after our guests.” And his methods seem to work. With an average annual growth rate of 53% and 22 straight quarters of profitability, the company is continuing to hold its own in the increasingly competitive low-fare airline industry.

It’s all part of the “WestJet magic” which Bob Hamilton, Wilfrid Laurier University Board of Governors member and WestJet passenger, attributes to WestJet’s distinctiveness. While sitting in on a discussion with Beddoe and a group of Laurier MBA students, Hamilton described his experience flying with WestJet. “There’s a buzz, there’s magic in the air...it’s something different than you’ve ever seen.”

It’s the employees who create this welcoming and vibrant atmosphere. From a flight attendant who plays the flute to calm passengers, to Beddoe personally welcoming everyone when he flies on WestJet aircraft, staff focus on ensuring that customers have an enjoyable flight. “We want to be visibly different,” said Beddoe. “Flying is stressful...if you can de-stress that process you get people feeling more comfortable about flying.”

Given WestJet’s success, it is no surprise that people want to become part of this growing organization. WestJet received more than 67,000 applications for employment over the past year, hiring approximately 900 people.

Beddoe’s vision for the future of WestJet includes more planes, more people, and expansion to the United States within the next two years. He is proud of what the company has achieved in such a short timeframe and is confident that WestJet is here to stay. “There’s a new model on the block,” said Beddoe confidently “and fortunately it’s ours.”