

Gordon Bethune

Author & Former Chairman and CEO of Continental Airlines

In the airline industry, few names inspire as much awe, admiration, and accolades as Gordon Bethune. At Continental Airlines, Bethune spearheaded one of the most dramatic corporate turnarounds in United States history. When he joined the troubled carrier as president and COO in 1994, Continental consistently ranked last in every measurable performance metric, including on-time performance, customer complaints, and mishandled baggage. He became CEO nine months later and was elected chairman of the board of directors in 1996. When he finished working his magic at Continental, the airline stood at the top of the heap, ranked by *Fortune* magazine as the No. 1 “Most Admired Global Airline.” He retired in 2004. Exclusively represented by [Leading Authorities speakers bureau](#), Gordon Bethune speaks from a lifetime of experience and success in one of the world’s most complex businesses. He impresses audience with his unique brand of witty humor and management wisdom, on topics ranging from customer service, employee relations, and motivation, and he explains how “happiness” at every level is the unspoken key to success.

First In Flight. Bethune’s herculean effort to rescue Continental Airlines from its seemingly-irreversible nosedive is chronicled in his best-selling business novel named, *From Worst to First*. His prose, like his personality, was described by *Bloomberg Businessweek* as “refreshingly straightforward,” and his “plain-spoken management style” comes through in every page. *The Washington Post Book World* asked “why everyone doesn’t run a business as preached by the chief executive of Continental Airlines?”

Bethune never fails to recognize the hard work of Continental’s employees. As a result of his dedication to employee and customer happiness, Continental thrived under his leadership, winning more awards for customer satisfaction from J.D. Power and Associates than any other airline in the world. *Bloomberg Businessweek* named Bethune one of the “Top 25 Global Managers” in 1996 and 1997, and he was ranked among the 50 best CEOs in America by *Worth* magazine from 1999 to 2001. During his tenure, Continental’s stock price also rose from \$2 to over \$50 per share.

An Aviation Hall-Of-Famer. Bethune’s accolades are too numerous to count. He has been honored by dozens of organizations, ranging from the Wings Club—a distinction he shares with the likes of Neil Armstrong and President George H.W. Bush—to the Smithsonian Institution’s National Air and Space Museum, where he was named a Laureate in Aviation. He has been involved in every level of the aviation world, from vice president and general manager of the Boeing Commercial Airline Group’s Renton Division, to VP and GM for engineering and maintenance for Braniff and Western Airlines, to serving as an aircraft maintenance officer for the US Navy. He is also a licensed commercial pilot and airframe and power plant mechanic. It is this deep knowledge of every level of the airline industry, from CEO to mechanic, that allowed Gordon Bethune to pilot Continental Airlines’ remarkable recovery, and it is his willingness and eagerness to share his story that makes him an invaluable asset to the business community.

Bethune currently serves as a contributor at CNBC and is on the boards of several major corporations like Prudential, Sprint, and Honeywell.