

## The Upside-Down Pyramid

An Interview with Roger Woolsey, Owner and Chief Executive Officer, Million Air

**EDITORS' NOTE** In 1986, at the age of 19, Roger Woolsey began his first aircraft charter company, *Prestige Touring*. At that time, Woolsey was the youngest commercial pilot in the U.S., and still holds the title as the youngest Air Carrier Operator in U.S. history. *Prestige Touring* catered to rock & roll band tours, including Billy Joel, Sting, Grateful Dead, Stevie Nicks, U2, Peter Dinklage and others. In 1991, Woolsey founded his second company, *American Jet International*, with a focus on the air medical industry. After two years of operation, he secured the business of over 95 percent of all flying medical patients and "Organ Procurement Teams" from the world's largest medical center in Houston. In 1999, Woolsey acquired an FBO in Houston, Texas, which now places in the "US Top 10 FBOs" rankings, while job creation at the FBO increased over 400 percent, turnover decreased by 500 percent, and EBITDA increased over 800 percent. In 2002, Woolsey took over the Million Air brand. Woolsey attended the University of Arkansas and is an alumnus of the Harvard Executive Business School Program. He holds an Airline Transport Pilot's License with over 32,200 flight hours and is a certified aircraft mechanic with an A&P License.



Roger Woolsey

ways that set us apart. We introduced pilots' lounges, TVs, theater rooms, and replaced vending machines with complimentary drinks and coffee. We were the first to offer courtesy cars to our customers and the first to focus on service as a core element of our brand.

What truly distinguishes us is that we are the only FBO brand run by a team of aviators. We are consumers of our own product. Just yesterday, I flew myself to five different cities for meetings, four of which were at our competitors' FBOs. I am constantly in

the shoes of our customers, living their experience firsthand. Having aviators within the walls of Million Air is crucial for understanding our customers. This level of empathy and understanding, when executed properly and listened

to intently, transforms into a powerful service offering that truly resonates with our guests.

**How do you define Million Air's culture and values?**

It starts with a core belief: happy employees lead to happy experiences, which in turn create happy customers, and ultimately, happy investors. It's a continuous cycle, and it's central to who we are. We deeply value our employees and teammates, investing in their growth, acknowledging their sacrifices, and valuing their input.

Articulating these beliefs in a way that can be executed daily across a multi-city, multi-location network is a challenging task. However, through our relentless pursuit of excellence, we've managed to translate many of our values into actionable practices. For example, our Million Air Credo Card is a tiny piece of paper with our 20 Basics or core values of Million Air. Every employee

**COMPANY BRIEF** Million Air ([millionair.com](http://millionair.com)) is an award-winning network of luxury executive FBO terminals, spanning three continents. With 40 years in the industry, Million Air has been named Best Large FBO Chain for the past 13 years, delivering genuine care and exceptional service to aircraft owners, pilots, and their distinguished guests. Million Air prides itself on being aviators, dedicated to delivering exceptional service and creating a memorable experience for every customer. The company's commitment to excellence drives its leaders to continuously enhance the facilities, services, and team, ensuring Million Air remains at the forefront of the aviation industry.

**Will you highlight the history of Million Air and how the company has evolved?**

We've always been, almost accidentally, ahead in our thinking. Million Air was the first FBO to see itself as more than just a gas station at the airport. We identified issues and sought to fix them, leading us to innovate in



Million Air Houston



*Million Air White Plains*



carries this on them every day. It is a tangible expression of our company Mission and Vision. By consistently and authentically executing these principles, we've fostered a culture of accountability and excellence. This not only enhances the sense of family in the company, but also creates a world-class, winning team.

**Will you provide an overview of Million Air's services and capabilities?**

We offer three key facets of service. First, our private aircraft charter, which operates much like the "Uber of private jets." Second, our aircraft repair and maintenance services, akin to what a car dealership offers to keep vehicles in top condition. Lastly, and most significantly, our FBO network, which spans 36 distinguished airport properties. Through this network, we provide VIP terminal services, aircraft fueling, cleaning, maintenance, storage, valet, and city concierge services.

Connecting these services to our culture, we believe that when executed well, we not only reflect and enhance the stellar reputation of our VIP customers, but also create a powerful and welcoming first impression of the communities we serve. It's much like a fine dining experience – your first interaction with the door greeter, the design and decor, and the ambiance all contribute to the ultimate taste and experience of your meal. We strive to make every city where you land the place to be – exciting, fresh, and friendly. Our goal is that every landing not only drives more business in that city, but also extends your stay.

**What have been the keys to Million Air's strength and leadership, and how do you describe the Million Air difference?**

The true strength of Million Air's leadership lies in the concept of the Upside-Down

Pyramid, a principle we strive to embody every day. We believe that our frontline personnel – our aircraft fuelers, concierge professionals, customer service team, and others who interact directly with our clients – are at the heart of our service delivery. Because they have the most face time and meaningful interactions with our clients, their role is equally, if not more, important in shaping and executing our service than that of me, our CEO. That's why we celebrate and empower those who hold the keys to our success.

**Where do you see the greatest opportunities for growth for Million Air?**

Million Air operates in 36 North American markets and is the third-largest fixed base operator (FBO) chain in the world. However, with over 19,000 airports in the United States alone and estimates of more than 42,000 airports globally, the potential for expansion is vast. Our services and products are a fit for more than a quarter of these locations, highlighting the immense possibilities before us. Our only constraints are the speed at which we can maintain our quality standards and secure the necessary capital for growth.

**Will you discuss the expertise of Million Air's workforce?**

We don't just hire employees – we seek out highly talented and caring individuals and invite them to join our team on this journey to excellence. We aim to set the stage for our engaged teammates, allowing them to deliver the highest level of excellence through a choreographed display of showmanship, all while artfully creating an unparalleled travel experience. This approach is designed to add value through brand alliances and to enhance

the genuine relationships we share with our pilots, their distinguished passengers, and aircraft owners.

**How do you focus your efforts leading Million Air?**

My focus is centered on the vision that Million Air strives to be the premier, industry-leading aviation service provider worldwide. Like spokes on a wheel, I connect all other critical elements – systems, processes, people, economic landscapes, finance, marketing, sales, and production – to maintain the integrity of our wheel of progress. While each of these components is essential, the hub of it all is our unwavering commitment to the vision. Being premier doesn't necessarily mean being the biggest; it means occupying a special place of privilege in the hearts and minds of our customers and employees.

**What are your priorities for Million Air as you look to the future?**

For the future, we strive for continuous improvement to keep adding value to our customers. Our focus must remain on quality – how we maintain it, how we eliminate negativity, and how we ensure that all elements work in harmony. The priority is to stay centered on value creation, not in the typical Wall Street sense of ROI for investors, but in delivering what is truly meaningful and important to our customers. This means providing consistent excellence, surprising and delighting customers, and ensuring that our daily work is meaningful and valuable to our teammates. By doing so, we can see and feel our accomplishments every day and set ourselves on a path for meaningful growth, expanding sustainable success in the long term. ●