Boeing Chairman Phil Condit Earns Doctorate from Science University of Tokyo

When Boeing Chairman and Chief Executive Officer Phil Condit decided to pursue a doctoral degree in engineering, he chose to make it a nontraditional, international effort.

Recently, that decision paid off: Condit received his degree from the Science University of Tokyo and became the first foreign candidate at the University for a doctorate of engineering through the "Paper Doctorate System." The system, which is used in Japan and Europe, was designed for professionals who have made a significant impact in their area of expertise, and it recognizes their work in the form of published papers and speeches.

"I thought learning in Japan, where the culture is so different and our business ties are so strong, presented a unique opportunity," Condit said. "The idea of lifelong learning is important to me - for myself and for every person in Boeing," he added.

Condit's pursuit of the doctorate degree began in 1990, when Condit was general manager of the Boeing 777 Division. Condit was approached with the idea by Dr. James Seferis, director of Polymeric Composites Laboratory, University of Washington, who was intrigued with opening this Paper Doctorate System to others outside Japan.

Over the next five years, Condit compiled a 342-page thesis entitled "Technology Applications in the Design of Commercial Aircraft: From Materials and Processes to Manufacturing and Operations."

Because the thesis was an extremely broad and multidisciplinary look at the aerospace industry, a special screening committee was formed comprising professors from different disciplines and specialists from outside the University. In all, nine experts participated in reviewing not only the breadth of Condit's thesis, but also the depth of his technical knowledge.

This process culminated with a thesis defense before the nine-member academic committee in January 1997. In keeping with his nontraditional approach to earning the doctorate, Condit chose to also defend his thesis publicly in Japan. Before undergoing these examinations, Condit took part in a customary ritual of Japanese students looking for success on their exams by praying at the Narita Shrine near Tokyo. More than 100 people were in the audience for the public defense of his thesis, including leaders from Japanese industry. Questions focused on a broad range of topics - from composite materials and noise control management to airport infrastructure and management philosophy. Those attending said Condit's efforts were well received.

In late September, Condit returned to Japan to receive his doctorate in a formal ceremony.

In addition to his newly earned doctorate, Condit has a bachelor of science degree in mechanical engineering from the University of California at Berkeley; a master's degree in aeronautical engineering from Princeton; a master's degree in management from Massachusetts Institute of Technology; and an honorary doctorate from Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute.

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