

Fly by Night: Captain Bob Cecchi - May 2021

Council 79 Chairman and Block 9 Representative

Captain Chris Lee My guest today is Captain Bob Cecchi, who represents the Anchorage-based pilots as the Council 79 Chairman and Block 9 Representative. Thanks for coming.

Captain Bob Cecchi Hey, Chris. You're welcome. Thank you for having me.

Captain Chris Lee Talk a little bit about your background before you came to FedEx and what you've been doing since you've been at FedEx.

Captain Bob Cecchi Well, I was 20/25 in the left eye, so that kept me out of being able to fly in our military. So I did it the civilian route; flight instructed, chartered, that typical route. I flew night freight for a company out of South Florida and I would hear the Flying Tiger call sign and I would hear the Express call sign. I knew I wanted to fly for one of those. I went back to college to finish my four-year degree and I was able to get hired at FedEx on the ramp in August of 1988. Once there, I found out that if you met the qualifications, it was a guaranteed interview and I met them so I got it. I didn't make the cut the first time and they said since you're an employee you can come back in a year. The economy turned down and so I was flying for a commuter during the day and I was working the ramp in Seattle by night. I finally was able in August of '92 to move from the ramp to the back seat of a 727 based in Oakland, California. I was there until '95 ish. Right at that point, the Company closed the Los Angeles, Oakland, and Newark bases and I received a letter saying, you can go to Subic Bay in the Philippines, you can go to Anchorage, Alaska, or you can come to Memphis. And it took me about that amount of time, reading the letter to say, okay, I'm newly married, Subic is out, I want to go to Anchorage. And so I was in the second to last excess group in Oakland. I went to Zurich for my MD11 training at Swiss Air. I arrived there the day after Thanksgiving, had a week off at Christmas, went back, and on Valentine's Day, I was activated to Anchorage as an MD11 First Officer. I flew with some amazing old silver and purple guys. I learned a lot. I learned so much and I became a Captain on the MD11 in the summer of 2003.

Captain Chris Lee What can you tell the pilots about your previous union experience?

Captain Bob Cecchi I was the Second Officer Representative in Oakland under ALPA 1, it was Council 98.

Captain Chris Lee What made you want to get involved in volunteering at the union?

Captain Bob Cecchi Volunteerism was always instilled in me, I think, from a young age. My mom was a full-time, stay-at-home housewife. My dad was a postal clerk. We lived in the more economically challenged area of Seattle, racially balanced, ethnically balanced. I was about eight and my mom looked around and saw some of the poverty, the way people were living, and said this isn't right. She was from England. She wasn't American. She decided to, she founded a free food bank and free medical clinic, volunteer doctors and nurses and lab technicians and pharmacists and the whole bit. And she retired from that when she was 80. So I think that's where it must have come from or a large portion of it did.

Captain Chris Lee How do you see your role as a MEC representative?

Captain Bob Cecchi I represent in Anchorage, I really represent everyone in ALPA, but the people I directly represent are seniority number 50 to about 5100 in Anchorage. The full gamut, which is really great. You see the whole picture. One of the beauties of this representational system we inherited with the FPA merger is Memphis is represented from top all the way to the bottom. There's no inside click. Every group is represented. I just, and Todd and George, my compatriots in Anchorage, we just try to alleviate any concerns our constituents have. We try to engage them. We try to inform them. People have to be informed. People have to, you have to get involved. We are in negotiations now and this is a time that everyone needs to step up. If nothing else, be aware of the time frame we're in now. There will be times when people are too busy to do union work and that's fine. People have families. People have lives. At some point in one's career, I think it would be good to pay it back or pay it forward.

Captain Chris Lee You mentioned we're in contract negotiations now. Talk some about your role sitting at the table, interacting with the Officers, Negotiating Committee, and other union volunteers.

Captain Bob Cecchi My role is to obviously represent Anchorage and to work as smoothly with the Officers and the Negotiating Committee. And the Officers and the three Negotiating Committee members, in my opinion, are the six finest people I've ever seen since I've been active in the union in their positions at one time. I think they're hitting on all cylinders, both the Officers and the Negotiating Committee. My job is to give them input from the people I represent, and my job is to stand up to represent my people to them. I get quite a few phone calls from people saying, wouldn't it be great if we could have this? Wouldn't it be great if we can have that? So you can come through me or if you see something in the field that you need changed, [DART](#) is a great way to do it. If you're upset with the Company, fill out an Insite, copy it to a [DART](#). If you don't let us know, we're not going to know. And now that we are in negotiations, I have always hated that us and them. I like to say it's a marriage. We each have to decide what side of the family we want to come down on. There is no middle ground anymore. While we're in negotiations, your actions are going to speak louder than words. And I just hope that everyone that hears this gets behind their Block Rep, their brothers and sisters, and their union.

Captain Chris Lee As one of the longer-serving Block Reps we have at the table, how do you see the pilot's role during contract negotiations?

Captain Bob Cecchi The pilots' role is critical. Most pilots on the property here are retired, former, or current military in some form or another. The retired military pilots, the last direct order they took was when on their last day of service, they said, you are dismissed. And they saluted and they turned and walked away into civilian life. Your MEC Chairman or your block rep is not going to say to you, Chris, go take that hill. It doesn't work that way, can't work that way. The membership is going to drive how we end up. The MEC, the Block Reps are the tip of the spear. That tip is being pushed by the membership.

Captain Chris Lee And we have many pilots who have been hired here at FedEx who have maybe not been through a negotiations at all, much less one with FedEx.

Captain Bob Cecchi Which, if you think about it, is amazing. I mean, the progression that these pilots are going to have is absolutely insane. My new hire seniority number is 2265. I'm 385 now. That's one of those numbers you never forget, your new hire number. It took me twenty years to move a thousand numbers. The young man I'm flying with on this trip, he's been here four years. He's thirty-nine years old, Academy, Raptor pilot. I mean, top of

the class. He's going to have an amazing career here. The potential here is absolutely amazing.

Captain Chris Lee The Anchorage base is growing, can you talk to the pilots some about that?

Captain Bob Cecchi The Company's adding 777s to Anchorage. We're doubling in size. Right now, I think with the close of the bid, the numbers were 145-150 MD11 pilots and roughly the same 777 pilots. So it's a growing base and it's going to be one council. We'll still have the one vote and we'll still be representing the whole gamut, which is really cool.

Captain Chris Lee Typically, small-based domiciles are a pretty tight community.

Captain Bob Cecchi Yeah, we're a flying club. We like to call ourselves the Far North Flyers and we are a flying club. It's a base feel. We have functions together. We have picnics. We have gatherings at Christmastime. The Carmans have a party. The house fills up. Rose and Matt Colbern do the hospital runs. They're in charge of all that. They'll do the three big hospitals in the Anchorage area. It's a family. We look after each other, we call each other up. How you doing? All our calendars are open so we can see if they're in town. You know, it's wonderful.

Captain Chris Lee So I imagine as the base grows, you're going to want to protect that small community feeling.

Captain Bob Cecchi Absolutely. Yeah. It'll be the same. Just a little bit bigger. It will be the largest out base. It will be the gorilla of the out bases as far as I think they'll be 310 votes in Anchorage.

Captain Chris Lee Well, Bob, thanks so much for coming. Any final thoughts?

Captain Bob Cecchi Well, we live in a time of unease. Those of us in the international system, we're seeing the world through windows. When I was in Sydney, used to bid Sydney a lot and they would give me a room with a view of the heat riser and the office on the other side. Now, I get a view of the Opera House and the bridge and I ask them, please give me a room with a view of the heat riser and the dumpsters because I can't go there. These are tough times. Look after each other. It's very easy, actually, to get run down now. So take care of yourselves, whether you're flying domestically or flying internationally. And not only take care yourself, but take care of each other because no one else is going to do it. The Company is not going to do it. They are going to smile at you. They are going to thank us up one side and down the other. I am so tired of the platitudes. Show me. Don't just say it. Show me.

Captain Chris Lee Well, thanks, Bob, and thanks for listening, if you have any questions go to fdx.alpa.org and utilize the [DART link](#) and as always, be safe out there and we'll see you next time.