



Gerald Grinstein

2026 Pathfinder Award Recipient in the Operations Category

The Museum of Flight's Annual Pathfinder Awards honor individuals with ties to the Pacific Northwest who have made significant contributions to the development of the aerospace industry. Pathfinder Award recipients are selected by The Museum of Flight, the Pacific Northwest Section of the American Institute of Aeronautics and Astronautics and representatives of other aviation and aerospace organizations and companies throughout the Northwest.



Gerald Grinstein's leadership story is, at its heart, a reminder that the strength of any organization begins with the people who carry the team forward. Facing the company's potential collapse in 2004, Grinstein, then-new CEO of Delta Air Lines, chose a path many executives do not: placing people first. He proved that company success is achieved through

empathy, leading by example and keeping people at the center of every decision. He built a culture that redefined Delta, saving it from bankruptcy. That company culture continues to exist today.

When Seattle-born Grinstein inherited the leadership of Delta, his deep sense of responsibility toward the employees and their families informed his framework for rebuilding the company. His belief that executives earned respect by actions, not title, recognized that a company's everyday workers were vital to its success.

He worked alongside them cleaning planes. He walked the hangar floors, visited crew lounges, and listened to employees as he considered the difficult decisions he'd need to make to save the airline. When he asked employees

to take pay cuts, he also cut his own pay. This humility helped fuel the grassroots "Keep Delta My Delta" movement—one of the most visible employee-led company support campaigns in airline history.

Perhaps the clearest example of keeping people first was when Grinstein redirected his stock grant, awarded for his role in Delta's recovery, to establish the Delta Care and Scholarship Fund, which has provided more than \$31 million in assistance to Delta employees and their families and ensures that compassion and service remain central to the airline's identity. By valuing people as the center of an airline's success, Jerry Grinstein demonstrates the steady, principled leadership, and vision that make him an aviation Pathfinder.