

The Herman Trend Alert

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The Ultimate Employee Incentive

Imagine an employee perk so fantastic that employees are buzzing about winning for months. That's what the new Virgin Galactic space flight represents. Currently priced at \$200,000 per person, the cost of a seat is certainly out of reach for most consumers and many corporations; however, Sir Richard Branson, the company's CEO and perhaps the entrepreneur of the century, expects to reduce the price to the level of a "luxury holiday." His goal is to "offer this experience at a price that (people) can afford."

Five minutes of weightlessness may not seem like much, but the "out-of-earth experience" as Branson calls it is, according to astronauts who have "been there" and "done that" is life-changing. The experience of weightlessness occurs for only five minutes of the trip, however that five minutes is apparently quite significant.

Virgin Galactic focuses on two major areas: safety of its passengers and crew and minimizing the effect of long-range transport on the environment. To address safety issues, the company will schedule more test flights than NASA has flown in the last 50 years. Branson is so convinced of the security of this form of travel that he and his family will be on one of the first flights.

The other issue is minimizing damage to the environment. Using lightweight, carbon composite materials, Virgin Galactic has built its own spacecraft as a prototype for Boeing and Airbus. By using very strong synthetic materials and high-efficiency biofuels, the company burns no fossil fuels and takes passengers farther than conventional systems---with reduced effect on the environment. Eventually, Branson says that Virgin Galactic will allow passengers to "pop across the planet in no time with virtually no impact on the environment." He sees transporting passengers and payloads from London to Sydney in half an hour. A space hotel is also planned.

Ready to sign up? Not so fast, first you'll need to spend three days learning what to expect and exercising to keep fit. Branson estimates that between 80 and 85 percent of would-be astronauts will physically qualify to travel. Space travel is the ultimate employee incentive.

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