

## EMPHASIZING TEAMWORK AND CUSTOMER SERVICE: ROBERT LEBLANC

By Mary Ann Gratton

Success in business – as in hockey – is all about developing the team. That's the view of **Robert LeBlanc** (MBA '92), a hockey fan as well as the general manager of Tivoli Software, a division of IBM.

Robert is responsible for the strategic direction and ongoing operations for the Tivoli software brand, acquired by IBM in 1996. Tivoli is a multi-billion-dollar company, employing 4,000 people worldwide. He has been with IBM since 1981, holding a number of increasingly senior management positions over the years.

Robert is credited with leading a turnaround at Tivoli, which he joined in June 2001. Tivoli had put some products on the market too quickly, and its software had developed a reputation for being hard to deploy and use. Described as a catalyst who stepped into a company in need of direction, LeBlanc immediately began striving to rebuild ties with frustrated IBM customers. In his first 60 days at the helm, he met with some 40 customers and worked to integrate the Tivoli brand more closely with IBM's family of products and worldwide reputation. Next, he helped the company focus on the core elements of the business: performance and availability, configuration and operations, storage and security.

The results are tangible, with Tivoli back in growth mode. Although the industry overall is in a down market, Tivoli has continued to show positive revenue growth through the first three quarters of 2002, and has improved its profitability.

Asked how he spearheaded this turnaround, LeBlanc's answer is simple. "I spent time with our customers and asked them how Tivoli fits into their business, how important we are to the running of their shop, what we are doing well, and what do we need to do better?"

The answers were fairly consistent, he said. "People felt that Tivoli needed to improve the quality of its products, and to communicate better with customers to understand their concerns. I started looking at how much time our executive team and our engineers spend with customers, and put it into our performance objectives. To develop the team, you have to be able to walk the talk – I was spending more time with customers, so others began to do this as well. And it paid off. If you solve a customer's problems, they are more than willing to spend money on you."

He describes his management style as 'adaptive'. "I'm a firm believer that you manage to the situation, and no one single management style can



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address all the different issues you encounter in any business. I view myself as a change agent, and I try to challenge myself and my team to develop to the next level, because

inherently, a better level of performance is always achievable."

Despite a tough economy with more competitors and increased pressure on pricing, Tivoli is benefiting from its strategies and its IBM connections. "Customers know that if they have implementation problems, IBM and the Tivoli team will be around to help them out. Many smaller companies have hit financial trouble, and customers don't want to bet their future on something that could disappear tomorrow."

LeBlanc studied in the part-time MBA program, focusing on management information systems while he continued to work at IBM. He also earned an undergraduate degree (BSc '81) from the University of Toronto with a major in computer science.

"The MBA program was great, but it was really tough," he says. "I met a lot of very smart people. The program helped me focus on business strategy and business issues, and on how technology can help a business achieve its strategic goals."

The Toronto native now lives in Connecticut, but spends half his time at Tivoli headquarters in Austin, Texas, one quarter of his time in IBM's New York office, and the rest of the time traveling, in North America and abroad. LeBlanc remains a Toronto Maple Leafs hockey fan – "so I'm as disappointed as the rest of you!" When he is not watching or playing hockey, he likes to golf and spend time with his wife, Cathy Owen LeBlanc, a BSc graduate of the U of T, whom he met in a first-year Calculus class. They have two daughters, Leanne, 14, and Laura, 12. **RM**