

# A Heart of Culture Success Story



## Awakening Workplace Happiness

Employee culture and engagement is a hot topic around the management table these days. According to Deloitte's 2014 Human Capital Trends research, 78% of business leaders rate retention and engagement as urgent and important, recognizing that creating a passionate, enthusiastic workforce can become a business's greatest competitive differentiators. And yet, understanding, building and retaining a great culture is a challenging task for any growing business.



### The company

Fibernetics is one of Canada's fastest growing technology firms and a Waterloo Region start up success story. Founded by entrepreneurs and best friends Jody Schnarr and John Stix, Fibernetics is dedicated to changing the way people communicate by offering telco functionality and pricing previously unseen in the Canadian market. The company has its own national infrastructure offering a range of voice and data services for residential customers through its Worldline brand, and to business customers through its NEWT business DSL, business internet and business phone services. Fibernetics also offers telecom wholesale services to third party providers internationally.

### The leaders

Fibernetics CEO, Jody Schnarr has more than 16 years of experience in the internet telephone industry, and has successfully led Fibernetics evolution to become a leading provider within the ever-evolving Canadian telecommunications landscape. The company's aggressive innovation strategy has set the tone, making Fibernetics one of the most sought-after employers in Waterloo Region's technology ecosystem.

Fibernetics President, John Stix is the creative genius behind Fibernetics' marketing strategies, which have generated double digit revenue growth year over year for the last decade. Over his career as an entrepreneur he has learned that it is not the money that matters, but the relationships and moments with one's team that drive you forward and create memories of a lifetime.

### The challenge

Fibernetics and its founders have been fortunate to experience fast growth and market success over the last 10+ years. The company now has thousands of residential and business customers across Canada, and an employee base of 220 people.

However about a year ago, then Chief Marketing Officer John Stix sensed a change in the mood and tone of the company. Things weren't getting done as efficiently as in the past. There were bottlenecks in productivity appearing where there were none before.

culture matters



culture matters



People weren't connecting in the same ways. It even became apparent the two founders were floundering a bit. Jody Schnarr realized that Fibernetics' future growth would come through a reconnection with company's entrepreneurial roots, and John had lost his passion for marketing – a creative role he had always relished in the past. "Frankly, it became apparent that Jody and I were both transitioning," says John. "And the business was reacting to that change."

John began channeling his creative energy into understanding how to scale the business to embrace the needs of 220 people, just as the company had done when it was just 20 employees. Hitting Google, he began a journey to better understand what makes a company amazing, what causes growth pains and what transforms a business into top performer. The answer that consistently came back to him was: company culture. And the more he read about creating a great culture, the more enthusiastic he became. Along the way, John rekindled his passion; realizing he had a new mission within Fibernetics to create a culture that would inspire the company's employees, drive creativity, and enable Fibernetics to break through to its next level of business growth.

Understanding that this was not a journey he would make alone, he began searching for consultants who specialize in organizational development and culture. It was through this process he discovered Jackie Lauer, a specialist in organizational development, whose Heart of Culture program focuses on creating high performance workplace cultures.

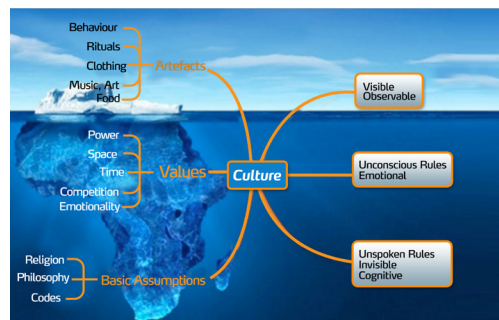
"I interviewed a number of consultants, and everyone sounded the same," admitted John. "Until I met Jackie. I was sitting back, waiting for the standard pitch, and yet within 10 minutes, she had me sitting up and paying attention. She was asking the right questions, saying the right things. And there was immediate chemistry. I knew I had found the right person to lead us in this discovery process."

## The answer

One of the first steps in that discovery was a outside retreat for the Fibernetics management team, where Jackie and the company's C-level executives began exploring the company's values and vision.

"It wasn't nearly as easy as I thought," confesses John. "As entrepreneurs you just assume everyone gets it because you do. But it was really quite interesting to see there can be a real disconnect between what occurs and what people perceive. Through this exploratory session we uncovered that even at the most senior levels (founders and president at the time) there was a significant misalignment of our respective visions that we needed to get corrected in order to move forward."

In a subsequent visioning retreat, Jackie helped the team clarify and define Fibernetics' purpose and values. "It was crazy, we had papers all over the room where we were documenting our thoughts," says John. "But in the last few moments 'bam' it just came together, and we all just looked and said 'cool!'"

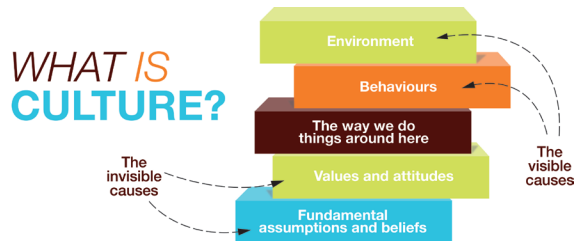


Fibernetics' new purpose quickly rolls off his tongue: "To deliver happiness and connections everyday by being awesome." He elaborates on the rationale behind the statement. "Even before we began exploring our culture, happiness was a key term for us, and just something we wanted to build into our company. Connections mean data, voice, connections with our customers, our suppliers and each other. And awesome means being as awesome as you can be today." In addition to

crafting a purpose for Fibernetics, the leaders also created the mantra 'I'm in!' to rally employees around the Cultural Revolution underway within the company.



To reinforce Fibernetics' culture building goals and stimulate widespread adoption, Jackie also introduced John and his management counterparts to Plasticity, a Waterloo tech startup with a mobile and web based solution that combines neuroscience and technology to teach employees how to build the psychological skills that characterize the happiest, highest performers, and create a highly engaged corporate culture. Fibernetics was one of Plasticity's earliest customer adopters, and is using the tool to measure employee happiness, and as a rudder to reinforce cultural direction.



### The outcome

While John's personal journey to understand the role and value strong culture could bring to Fibernetics is now about a year old, the company's new purpose, core values and mantra are still very new. The company's 220 employees are still getting their heads around what this means to them professionally and what it all means for Fibernetics going forward. Jackie continues to play a vital role, working hand in hand with John to guide and reinforce this cultural shift over the long term.

"Jackie helped us create an 'I'm in!' team with culture ambassadors who helped us launch the program with employees and who now support human resources in helping our employees live and breathe this change every day," says John.

*"Jackie has helped me reconnect with my values and purpose, and now I'm helping lead our business and our employees in their own cultural awakening."*



"She also has become a really important go-to person for me as I go through my own cultural awakening. She is open to even my most radical of thoughts. She is so artfully creative in the cultural world. She has confirmed my thinking and she has helped me when I couldn't figure it out."

Jackie also helped the founders to transition into new roles that are beneficial to the business and provide Jody and John with the personal fulfillment they have both been seeking. Jody is now at the helm of the newly created in-house business incubator service, Fibernetics Ventures, which will help cultivate new, innovative products and services that complement the Fibernetics' core business. John has assumed the role of President of Fibernetics, providing him with greater oversight to effect cultural change for the long term.

And one of John's first moves as President is to create the role of Human Culture Officer, appointing a senior level person to guide Fibernetics' culture in the right direction and help to percolate the company's value system out beyond the business' four walls to customers.

While it is all still early days for the team, the effect of Fibernetics' cultural awakening is already translating into positive business results. The company is experiencing an unprecedented year for revenues and its sales team is consistently breaking sales records.

Studies show, when employees love their work, they are more engaged and more productive. And yet, industry wide data shows that only one in three employees find their true purpose and are happy in their work.

"I have learned that even as a founder, I'm not immune to losing my purpose, which began affecting my own work and affected my company," John admits. "Jackie has helped me reconnect with my values and purpose, and now I'm helping lead our business and our employees in their own cultural awakening."

