

# CONSCIOUS LEADERSHIP EMPOWERS CHANGE

*A new focus on employee happiness resulted in a cultural shakeup at Fibernetics that led to higher employee engagement—and accelerating sales growth*

**PROFILE** John Stix, President, Fibernetics Corporation



## AT A GLANCE

### SECTOR: ICT TELECOM

|                                |              |
|--------------------------------|--------------|
| IN BUSINESS SINCE              | 2003         |
| ANNUAL SALES (2015)            | \$45 million |
| NUMBER OF EMPLOYEES            | 200          |
| THREE-YEAR COMPANY GROWTH RATE | 98%          |

One day, John Stix woke up and didn't feel like going into work. This happens to many people, of course, but not often to entrepreneurs.

It was February 2014. Cambridge, Ontario-based Fibernetics Corporation, the company Stix co-founded in 2003 with his childhood friend Jody Schnarr, was profitable. But something seemed to be missing. "We loved it but felt disengaged," says Stix, President of Fibernetics. "I'd lost my passion for

the dream I helped create with my best friend." The company's growth rate had slowed, from 30% or more a year to single digits. Its employees seemed listless. "It wasn't just me," says Stix. "There was bickering in the office, people holding onto territory. Attrition was becoming a problem. We were no longer a cohesive team." Above all, he noticed, fewer and fewer people at Fibernetics seemed *happy*.

Terrifying as it seemed, Stix's epiphany ended up creating positive change at the company that put it on a renewed growth path and culminated in a partnership with a local technology company that has proven that happiness can be nurtured, measured and profitable.

Checking with his peers confirmed Stix's misgivings. Schnarr, the company's Chairman, CEO and technical guru, was also feeling disengaged and unmotivated. Some of the company's best customers said Fibernetics was no longer a pleasure to deal with. Searching for answers, Stix typed "unhappy at work" into Google. He read for hours about work environments, creativity and culture-focused companies. Soon after that, he found a 110-year-old book on yogic philosophy (or did it find him?) that spoke of the power of the heart, spirit and true joy. "It was my awakening," says Stix. "When I was reading the articles, my passion was no longer

marketing, sales and finance or looking at spreadsheets. It was the people."

With that, Stix began changing the focus and direction of Fibernetics. "I knew we were misaligned: none of our people would give the same elevator pitch about the company. So I started thinking of how to bring people together." Months later, he took his ideas to an offsite meeting of the company's leaders. They were defensive at first, but when he spoke of releasing people's individuality and creativity, resistance faded. By day's end, Fibernetics had new core values (involving Innovation, Accountability and Trust) and a head-turning corporate purpose: "To deliver happiness and connections every day by being awesome."

What is the connection between culture, happiness and business success? "When you find your true work self, that leads to passion," says Stix. "Passion leads to happiness, which leads to productivity, which leads to results."

Today, the Fibernetics culture nourishes individual lifestyles, creativity, wellness and spirituality. The head office has its own gym. Located metres away from the building is Lake Fibernetics, where employees can watch the ducks swim or go for a stroll around the lake. Work areas are painted in bright colours and sport big beach umbrellas. Employees work flexible hours and get their birthdays off, plus two paid days a

year to work for charities of their choice. Staff and managers are encouraged to socialize, for social's sake. Town hall meetings have given way to team huddles. "Silos have crumbled," says Stix. "We see smiles on people's faces again."

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**"Happiness doesn't mean being cheerful all the time. It is a way of thinking: taking the good with the bad and reframing negative energies as positive."**

Jennifer Moss, Co-Founder, Plasticity Labs



John Stix (right and below left), President, and Workplace Culture Warrior, Fibernetics Corporation

Fibernetics employees check the Plasticity app daily; can fill out a daily survey question, such as "What made work great today?"; browse profiles of fellow workers and follow them through a social feed; and engage in features such as micro-polls and exercises that build positive habits related to Plasticity's HERO Traits: Hope, Efficacy, Resilience and Optimism.

Jennifer Moss notes that happiness doesn't mean being cheerful all the time. It is a way of thinking: taking the good with the bad and reframing negative energies as positive.

Most of Plasticity's features are geared to individuals and remain confidential from management. However, the collective opinions and activities shared generate regular reports and provide readings on the work force's changing moods, thoughts and engagement that are useful to the Fibernetics leaders and their commitment to delivering happiness and connections every day by being awesome.

"The most important thing about the Plasticity app is that it allows your company's value system, purpose and culture to live somewhere that's visible," says Stix. "It allows people to connect to it any time, no matter where they are." Since Fibernetics started the culture initiative, sales growth has been in the double digits, customer "trouble" tickets are down by 25%, and employee complaints have fallen by 80%.

Now with 200 employees worldwide and blue-chip clients across Canada, Fibernetics has grown from a no-frills provider of dial-up Internet services to a high-tech purveyor of telecom services to both residential and business customers across Canada. The company's innovation energies have been revitalized. In addition, Schnarr now oversees a division called Fibernetics Ventures, which incubates local start-ups, some founded by Fibernetics employees. In a real-life example of happiness leading to results, one of the division's first investments was in Plasticity Labs.