

Getting FIT

HOW TO BEAT YOUR COMPANY'S GROWING PAINS

BY MATT McCLELLAN

No matter how big her company gets, Micki Tubbs will always make the time to stop and say hello to her employees. She says that will be the case even when staying in touch becomes a challenge at FIT Technologies, as the IT company Tubbs co-founded with Michelle Tomallo in 1999 has grown to 189 employees and almost \$14 million in revenue.

"There are people who had more involvement with us on a daily basis, and the organization has kind of grown up around them," Tubbs says.

As president and CEO, Tubbs has kept her employees involved in FIT's vision while giving them the resources and opportunities to grow along with the company.

Smart Business spoke with Tubbs about how leaders need to change as their companies continue to grow.

Q. How has your management style changed as the company has grown?

When we were smaller, Michelle [Tomallo] and I could communicate almost everything out to our staff directly. That's more challenging when you have 180 employees.

You have to rely on the management team that is in place to communicate it in the same way that you would communicate it or at least make sure your employees are getting the same message.

In this organization, for many years, we wore all the hats. It's just over the last two or three years that we've brought in senior leadership that we're able not only to pass on some of the things we were doing but people

who could bring in their experiences and add them to ours.

It's not without its challenges. Everyone has a different filter of how they deliver messages or hear messages. Now it goes through a filter, where before it always came directly. We're constantly checking out the filters.

Q. How do you make sure your message is relayed correctly?

By having our ears to the ground, we'll quickly get a sense that people are hearing something differently than how it was intended.

So let's say it's something in regard to the work effort it's going to take to execute for one of our clients. How that message comes through to people, we'll quickly know how they heard it.

What we do then is circle back with our management team to better understand how that got delivered. Then we coach through the re-messaging of that.

Q. How do you keep employees involved as the company grows?

The biggest way is basically through our enthusiasm and by getting them involved in the process. Looking at some of the pain points we've had in the organization as we've grown, the staff wanted to put in a change control process. Then we had two teams that came together on their own initiative to put in a solid and state-of-the-art change control process for our customers.

When our employees see opportunities for improvement

not only in serving our customers but in how we operate, they're not afraid to step forward.

Q. How do you encourage your employees to bring ideas forward?

We basically encourage them to talk to their team and talk to their managers. That's something else that you learn along the way. It's hard to have 200 employees coming in and then you say, 'OK, just go ahead with that.' You have to figure out the



"Everyone has a different filter of how they deliver messages or hear messages."

right process so you're including all the right people at the table.

There is some systematic way to approach that. We're pretty good listeners, and when we

think someone has a good idea, we always encourage them. 'OK, that sounds good. Go back and meet with Fred and talk about getting that implemented in your area. See what he has to say about it.'

That way, they were heard, and you're teaching them how to approach problem solving and implementing in the workplace.

Q. How do you create those opportunities for your team?

We have a new director who has come in, and she is working to put career paths into place for the team. We also have formal education and training, so we offer a benefit to all of our staff for training related to their field of interest.

You have someone who started out as an account manager, and now they want to become a business analyst and move up to a senior business analyst. Or someone who comes in as a receptionist may want to move up to a stronger support role in the organization.

Initially, we had a lot of people learning along the way. But the larger our organization grew and the more staff we brought in from the outside, we were definitely looking for people who had already had that level of expertise or experience.

Then you work really hard to start developing some mentors within the organization so we can mentor people up. When you're small, you don't have that opportunity. You can't afford it, and there isn't time.

As we've grown over the last couple of years, we've tried to afford ourselves a little bit of both. <<

HOW TO REACH: FIT Technologies, (216) 583-0733 or www.fittechnologies.net