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Fast Lane

John D. Sterling, Synch-Solutions

In perfect synch

How John D. Sterling nurtures his most important asset — his people — at Synch-Solutions **By John Nank**

For John D. Sterling, CEO of Synch-Solutions, being a leader that people want to follow starts with having integrity. Add to that constant and consistent communication, and Sterling has created a formula that he says keeps his employees engaged and eager to continue their careers at Synch-Solutions, a provider of management consulting and tech services.

“Our cultural development is consistent with communication,” Sterling says. “We want to make sure that our employees know that we care about them. We care about the work they do, we care about their quality of life, and we care about their families.”

With Synch-Solutions, posting annual revenue of approximately \$24 million, Sterling’s commitment to his staff seems to be paying off.

Smart Business spoke to Sterling about recruiting top talent, organizational DNA and why a leader’s fingerprints should be all over his or her organization.

Q: How would you describe your leadership style?

I would use the term ‘managed entrepreneurialism’ because as a small organization and especially a professional services firm, our assets are our people. We need to get the smartest, most talented people that we can attract, recruit and retain.

In attracting that talent, it’s usually very senior, very experienced talent. My style is to include those individuals in on decisions and make sure that I’m communicating my vision to my executive staff and being very cooperative from a communications perspective.

The benefit to the company is that we’ve created an environment where everyone feels that they are contributing, which they are. They also feel that they have a voice in some of the directional elements of the organization, so we get a lot of inclusion, and we get a lot of innovative ideas because not only do we have a diverse organization, out of that diversity comes very innovative ideas.

Q: How do employees react to that style?

When an employee knows that their idea will be

socialized, fully vetted and considered as one of the options for a solution or a strategic initiative, it puts them in a position of power. It also gives them the heads up that they need to be extremely responsible in performing their due diligence on whatever ideas or initiatives that they are going to propose or promote.

It does put the accountability on them, it empowers them, but they also know that because of this culture that they have to do their homework and come well prepared to present their ideas, the business cases for them, as



well as the return on investment. Because of those aforementioned items, our team is much more sophisticated in an entrepreneurial manner in terms of promoting their ideas.

Q: How do you recruit the brightest, most talented employees?

Today, highly skilled, highly qualified professionals want to know where an organization is headed, how we’re going to get there and what is going to be their individual contribution to that

journey.

It begins with a vision, and then through a strategy down to a connection point with the employee, from the vision and strategy to how do they impact the employee. I’ve been pretty successful in connecting those data points, and it’s extremely important to make that connection.

Q: Has it been difficult to maintain your culture during your growth?

We have put some foundational elements in place to maintain a healthy culture and work environment. That’s everything from our HR director, who keeps tabs on the diversity of our organization, through other HR initiatives to ensure that we do maintain a culture that is conducive to, and built around, teamwork and team-building.

Having said that, as we’ve grown, yes, it has been a little difficult to maintain the exact culture, but I don’t think we want to. Some of the culture needs to be constant, and some of the culture is going to be reflective of the individuals that we bring into leadership roles. It’s a hybrid.

As you grow, a part of your culture does change, but it’s the operational elements of your culture. The DNA of our culture is largely due to my leadership and the characteristics that I possess.

Within any corporation that you look at, from very large organizations to small ones, if the CEO is actively engaged, the organization is going to take on that personality. It is the responsibility of the CEO to set that direction and set that bar so that the rest of the employees know that it’s not business at all costs; there’s an integrity that has to be encouraged on an organization.

Integrity, honesty, hard work and having an entrepreneurial mindset are some of the things that we do. But it doesn’t matter what the company is; if that CEO is worth their weight in gold, they’re going to have their fingerprints on the organization’s DNA and culture, and that can be directly mapped back to the success or failure of that company’s ability to grow.

HOW TO REACH: Synch-Solutions, (312) 252-3700 or www.synch-solutions.com