



Dave Williams

CEO, Fishbowl

by Brian Staker

Corporate life can be like family life: Family members might not always work in complete harmony, but by the end of the day, everyone usually can see that they share common goals. When David Williams came to Fishbowl five years ago, however, he found a family that was falling apart, losing money and facing an exodus of employees. He was brought in by the owner to help shut things down, but instead he was able to keep open the doors of the small Orem firm.

The software development firm's product, Fishbowl Inventory — inventory management software for use with QuickBooks — has become QuickBooks' most popular add-on. But when the Provo native arrived at Fishbowl, the six remaining employees of the floundering firm were barely hanging on, only kept going by faith in the company's future.

"They believed we could make it, so I did too," Williams recalls. He asked the owners to give him four weeks to see what could be done. He never looked back, and the owners haven't had to put another cent into the company.

Fishbowl has gone from \$112,000 in sales right before he got there in December 2003 to \$5.8 million so far in 2009. How did he inspire those at Fishbowl? "Everyone was talented, but really scattered, doing a little of everything," he says. "I told the programmer to program, and the rest of us would sell." Williams' son and second daughter were his first hires, because he wasn't willing to ask anyone else to work without being able to pay them at first. The company's ranks have since swelled to 64, and Williams inspires very little turnover.

Williams asks his department leaders probing questions, so that they will find innovative solutions and feel more ownership. The company creates a culture that treats people as "more than a resource" by involving families of employees in corporate-sponsored activities. Fishbowl's compensation plan includes a percentage of revenues in addition to their base wage. Attesting to his belief in reciprocity — giving back to the community — Williams closed the office on August 11 to help local Cherry Creek Elementary perform an inventory of its entire library.

His time as CEO of Franklin Canada and then Managing Director at Covey Leadership, and later as principle of the investment group at Geneva Steel putting together a revitalization plan to clean up the site when it was winding down gave him the experience of leading companies going through lean times as well as good. Now, Fishbowl is in the enviable position of keeping focused during a period of growth. "I don't believe in over-strategizing," he says of his management style. "At some point you have to execute."

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