

## January 2014 WIL Highlights: Jim Geiger

Cbeyond recognition:

- Five- time Recipient of the U.S. President's Volunteer Service Award (2013, 2012, 2011, 2010, 2007)
- 2013 Open Hand Community Spirit Award
- 2012 Forbes list of America's 100 Most Trustworthy Companies
- 2012 Metro Atlanta's Top 100 Workplaces (AJC)
- 2012 ESGR Patriot Award
- Recipient of Points of Light's 2012 Corporate Engagement Award of Excellence



Over 50 attendees from some of Atlanta's top organizations were present for the kick-off seminar of the 2014 WIL seminar series. Jim Geiger, founder, chairman, president and chief executive officer of Cbeyond was the guest speaker. His presentation was entitled "Principles of a Positive Culture: Care, Act, Lead and Learn." Among Jim's many personal accomplishments and recognition is the 2013 Turknett Leadership Character Award in the CEO – Large Company category. Susan Hitchcock introduced Jim using excerpts from his nomination for this prestigious award. One quote that came directly from Jim states that "Integrity is non-negotiable, and as a leader, you better model the leader you expect."

Jim, a self-described "reluctant speaker" and not one to often talk on the subject of "leadership," began by giving a lot of credit for who he is to his mother. "There are other strong women in my life," he said, "including my sisters and my wife of almost 30 years – as well as outstanding women at Cbeyond, leaders like Carrie Wheeler, our COO."

He went on to say that these women - and those in the Women in Technology organization - convinced him that his passions and lifestyle had *everything* to do with what leadership really is.

Jim's isn't very interested in formal titles either, and he seems to prefer the description of himself as a husband, a proud father of a son and a daughter, a mentor to other entrepreneurs, a philanthropist, and a community leader.

Having started Cbeyond in 1999 with about 15 employees, Jim took it public in 2005. Since then, the company has grown to over 50,000 customers and nearly \$500M in revenue with a presence in 14 markets around the country. Most importantly, regarding the company's progress, it's clear that Jim hasn't wavered in maintaining the founding principles of Cbeyond - especially its values-based culture. He's also very proud of having grown the company based on customer referrals.

During his presentation, Jim shared a simple description of the principles that help guide his company's culture, also known as the *Cbeyond Character*. The *Cbeyond Character* statement reads as follows:

- Care relentlessly.
- Act graciously.
- Lead courageously.
- Learn continuously.

Jim elaborated: "The character of our people makes us Cbeyond. We make this simple promise to each other, to our customers and our communities".

Other interesting insights and beliefs Jim shared with the group include the following:

1. "Your company will have a culture – make it intentional."
2. "It's a choice whether you live your life looking backwards, or – you *can rip out the rearview mirror* and move forward."
3. "Bring the weather" – meaning people will read your company outlook from your facial expressions, so if you're looking glum or pessimistic versus positive, employees will assume the worst.
4. "As you expand your world through work and service, your capacity expands as well."
5. "Avoid a culture of blame."
6. "Intellectual curiosity" – one of the many qualities he admires and looks for in people he hires.
7. His desire to build a company with smart people he likes.
8. His use of an "anvil" to describe the foundation of the Cbeyond culture. People that are hired and are successful bend to the anvil not the other way around.
9. Employees elect to join the existing culture, embrace it and perhaps add to it. Many employees are long-term which suggests they like it there.
10. Having worked for several large, more hierarchical companies, Jim knew that wasn't for him. But he did admire the culture that Mindspring (which later became EarthLink) had and patterned Cbeyond somewhat on MindSpring.

Five broad principles Jim shared:

- Integrity and listening
  - Do What You Said You'd Do
  - View Things Objectively, Not Personally
  - Admit Mistakes and Ask For Help
  - Listen to Your Customers and Your Employees and Do What They Tell You to Do
  - Appreciate Intellectual Curiosity and Reward Gutsy, Confident Input

- Relationships
  - Hire for “Fit”
  - Focus on Achievement, Not Status -- Stamp out Bureaucracy and politics!
  - Speak in Partnership Language
  - ***Benchmark Against Others and Compete Against Yourself - The World is a Place of Abundance ... no one has to lose for you to win***
- Trust and partnership
  - Assume Positive Intent
  - Trust Dangerously
  - Encourage Vulnerability
  - See What You Don’t Like And Stamp It Out
  - Act As An Advocate For Peers, Team And Company
- Shared vision and shared goals
  - Create shared values - Declare the Dream
  - Establish metrics of success, measure your business
  - Make decisions with transparency
  - Paint the Picture, Tell the Story
    - Passion is contagious!
    - Celebrate success
  - Match Incentives to foster collaboration
- Service
  - Engaged employees are more interesting and more valuable
  - Promote “Citizenship” versus “Tax Payer” attitude
  - Encourage “Passion-Led” behavior
  - It’s Good for Our People and it’s Good for our Business

Jim concluded his remarks with “10 rules for happiness at work”:

1. Work with people you like.
2. If you’re waiting for your employer to change something at work, which will finally enable you to like your job, quit!
3. Act like an owner! And you will be.
4. Question everything, learn from everyone!
5. Share...your talents and your passion.
6. Be present. You can pretend to care, but you can’t pretend to be there.
7. God, Allah, Buddah ... have one!
8. Seek clarity in decision making.
9. Benchmark against others, compete against yourself.
10. You must be a better person to be a better leader.