

VISTAGE

Member *Stories*

Jill Hesselroth, CEO
Intek Plastics
Minneapolis

At a glance

Role: CEO

Industry: Manufacturing

Employees: 220

Vistage chair: Rob Abele

Jill: "I honestly look at Vistage Chair Rob as a trusted friend and coach. I look forward to meeting him coming in once a month and speaking with or talking to him in addition to our peer group meetings."

One hundred percent employee engagement is a business performance metric that most CEOs only dream of. But for CEO Jill Hesselroth of Intek Plastics, the goal of 100 percent employee engagement gave way to reality. "That [engagement] meant every employee either suggested a new idea, participated in a Kaizen or continuous improvement event or continuous learning activity," she explains.

Before that record-breaking performance, employee engagement had never exceeded 70 percent. Jill attributes the high engagement scores to intentional leadership and increased communication at all levels of the 220-person firm. Jill and her leadership team get out of the office and on the manufacturing floor daily asking how are things going and what could be improved?



"It's time-consuming," she says, "but I think it's worth it."

Intek Plastics is a privately held company that engineers, extrudes and fabricates custom extrusions for midsize and large OEM firms. Its largest segment (80 percent) is in fenestration for door and window manufacturers. Jill says Intek's largest customers are Andersen Window, Marvin and Pella, however, the company has about 180 customers buying its tailored solutions.

A few other industry segments the company serves include refrigeration, lighting and retail. It even counts amongst its customers NHL and college hockey rinks. The firm designs and builds the plastic bumpers that join the rink board and glass. Intek was the first company to provide the plastic bumpers in any color. "Colleges think it's great to be able to have their school colors around the rink and it's safer for the players" explains Jill.

Intek distances itself from the competition by providing integrated and innovative engineering services and solutions for its client's challenges. "We partner with our customers to solve their problems," says Jill. She calls their approach a

true strategic partnership where customers seek Intek's manufacturing expertise as well as the company's engineering design and development ideas and solutions to tough problems.

Jill also employs a technical sales team she refers to as excellent "hunters," and fully integrated business partners, however, a lot of Intek's new business comes from new products or extensions of existing lines. Intek has customers on both coasts and in Mexico, however, the largest window and door manufacturers are in Minnesota, Wisconsin or Iowa for the \$50 million company.

Jill became Intek's CEO in 2015; prior to that she held various positions with St. Jude Medical, Andersen Corp., Gillette, Zimmer and Nortech Systems. Within a month of becoming CEO, Jill joined a Vistage group led by Chair Rob Abele after looking at three different options. "I thought it would take me six months to find the right fit within the group, but everyone welcomed me immediately."

Insights from Vistage Chair Rob Abele

From the beginning of her Vistage experience, Jill was impressed with, "How comfortable the peer group members were with each other, and how deeply some people would try to help someone else," she says. Her group meets monthly to hear a guest speaker and check in with other members. The focus of the conversations is both personal and professional. "Usually about four of us will have an issue they want help solving."

Shortly after Jill joined the company, she was asked to give a presentation to the shareholders. Her instinct was to give a straight, just-the-facts business presentation. But when her Vistage chair saw what she had planned, he quickly recommended another approach. Rob told her, "In

communicating with your shareholders, you need to tell them about you. You need to get personal. It's such a small group of shareholders, and they have a vested interest." Jill recalls, "That was difficult for me to do," but she revised it.

She didn't anticipate the results: More than half the shareholders said something akin to, "We're so glad that you told us about you, and not just about the things you wanted to do for the business." She says because of Rob's insight into how to approach the presentation to the shareholders she now has more than just a professional connection with them.

The Vistage Summit Connects

Like many CEOs in Vistage, Jill shares what she learns with her direct reports and invites them to presentations whenever it makes sense. Following the annual Vistage Summit in Minneapolis, for instance, Jill packed her team into a conference room to go through each of the day's presentations and critical takeaways. The positive response from her team was universal: "Wow, that was worthwhile for us to see." The topics ranged from strategic planning to executive development, to the economy—each inextricably linked to Intek's future course.

After two years of her Vistage experience, Jill shares, "I honestly look at Rob as a trusted friend and a coach. I look forward to meeting with him once a month and discussing new accomplishments and challenges, in addition to our peer group meetings. He's even taken the time to learn about the business and employees by walking the stock floor."

With at least three audacious goals on her list for 2017—an eight percent revenue increase, market segment diversification, and inculcating continu-

ous-learning into the company culture—Jill’s
bullish on what’s to come. She insists each goal
has a tactical plan with "turn-by-turn directions"
on how they'll achieve it. “I don't like to just
throw stuff out there without a plan.” **V**