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MANAGEMENT TODAY

The Corner Office

## Power to the People

**IEA President and CEO**  
**James Kettinger** tapped into employees' intellect and made the company a better place to work.



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&



*"You can still have fun at work and be successful."  
-James Kettinger, president and CEO*

# Power to *the People*

IEA PRESIDENT AND CEO JAMES KETTINGER TAPS INTO EMPLOYEES' INTELLECT TO MAKE THE COMPANY A BETTER PLACE TO WORK.

> IEA INC.

BY CHRIS OLVERA

**When you're a big fan of a sports team**, you might actually use the term "we" when you talk with your friends or co-workers about that particular team. You might even say to your boss, "We have to win this weekend to make the playoffs," or call your friend after a big game to scream, "We won!" You might purchase hats, clothing, bobblehead dolls, flags or anything with that team's logo on it. Simply put, you want to share your enthusiasm for your team with anybody who will listen.

President and CEO Jim Kettinger of Wisconsin-based IEA brings that same team spirit and enthusiasm into the workplace, where employees are not just sideline fans – they're already members of the team. If passion for a team can inspire people to put a foam block of cheese on their head or paint their faces in team colors, that passion should be able to get them to give some different management techniques a try. >

**PROFILE**

IEA Inc.

[www.iearad.com](http://www.iearad.com)

2009 Revenues: \$100 million

Headquarters: Kenosha, Wis.

Product: Cooling systems for heavy equipment

// IEA President and CEO James A. Kettinger brings his team enthusiasm to the workplace.





// IEA employees have the power to make decisions that improve their jobs and employee morale.

“You can still have fun at work and be successful,” Kettinger quips.

### **Life Values**

“When I was growing up, my father, Earl, was a factory worker and later in life, a housepainter,” Kettinger says. “He’s a very bright guy. He frequently told me, ‘Don’t forget about the guys on the floor,’ and I didn’t. He was my role model and instilled in me respect for others and the need to treat each person right.”

Kettinger took those core human values he learned from his father and applied them to his management concepts and principles. He believes everyone has an inherent desire to win. By working to

achieve challenging – yet realistic – goals, IEA employees have reaped the benefits of those concepts.

“We have great employees, and we are winning together,” Kettinger adds.

His plan involves getting all of the employees to think like business owners who are each responsible for IEA’s success. Each month, Kettinger meets with employees to talk with and teach them winning business concepts and empower those staff members to make their own decisions.

“We’re focused on managing each employee to his or her strength,” Kettinger notes. “Just because you didn’t pursue a higher education doesn’t mean you don’t

“I SAW PEOPLE DO A HORRIBLE JOB OF MANAGING, TOO OFTEN, MANAGERS ARE GREATER OBSTACLES THAN LEADERS.”

have an intellectual capacity. Here at IEA, we just have to release that intellect and tap into it.”

Another of Kettinger’s concepts is that production employees know the

functions of their respective work area better than anyone else.

Consequently, Kettinger and IEA give employees the power to make changes and corrections to the processes, which will make those processes more efficient and effective.

More often than not, these actions have resulted in less waste for the company. With this in place, employees don't have to wait for management to tell them a problem exists; they just address that problem and handle it themselves, Kettinger says. IEA rewards its employees through quarterly and year-end bonuses based on efficiency improvements and other value-creation metrics.

**The Kettinger Files**

Kettinger began his professional career with eight years as a CPA with Price Waterhouse. He next held various vice president and CFO roles, but didn't always agree with his employers' programs.

"Earlier in my career, I saw people do a horrible job of managing," he explains. "Too often, managers are greater obstacles than leaders."

At that time, Kettinger then decided to go off on his own as a consultant.

"Consulting was more financially and intellectually rewarding," Kettinger says. "I was able to take my corporate experience and financial savvy to smaller companies and serve in the role of their CFO

or CEO. I gave them advice on day-to-day management as well as on acquisitions and strategic planning."

In his eight years as a consultant, Kettinger says he acted more like a coach to several of his clients and helped them increase the value of their companies.

One of those consulting clients was IEA. After working with the company for four years and getting to know its processes and owners, he was given an offer to come aboard full time.

"I had been providing advice for four years. The owners suggested that instead I just become CEO and implement my own advice. It was the ultimate 'put up or shut up' challenge," Kettinger jokes. •mt

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