

A man of many interests

Doug Fieldhouse is nothing if not involved

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Most people know Doug Fieldhouse as the CEO who turned Vesta Corp. around.

But a select few also know him as an angel, an active investor in startups who gives even more generously of his time and advice than of his money.

Fieldhouse's reputation as an entrepreneur is built on Vesta, an unprofitable company with less than \$5 million in revenue he was asked to shut down almost 10 years ago.

Instead, Fieldhouse recognized that Vesta had a potentially profitable business in recharging long-distance phone cards with credit, while guaranteeing purchases against fraud.

Today, Vesta transacts more than \$1.3 billion worth of payments per year, and has moved beyond long-distance minutes and top-up of prepaid cell phone accounts to transact purchases of travel tickets, public-transportation payments and retail purchases, all via cell phone.

FAST FACTS

PRIOR TO joining Vesta in 1997, CEO Doug Fieldhouse spent 15 years leading businesses in the U.S., Europe and Asia.

IN 2008, HE was selected as a finalist in the Pacific Northwest Ernst & Young Entrepreneurs Awards.

The company, which anticipates 40 percent growth in transactions this year, also handles payments of property taxes, utilities bills and fees to municipal governments.

Vesta now employs more than 800 people in the Portland area. The rest of its more than 1,200 employees are located in several China offices, in Ireland, and in Florida.

While Fieldhouse is well known and admired for his work with Vesta, few realize that his mentoring of 15 CEOs of small companies could have an even bigger potential impact on Portland's economy than Vesta itself.

It's with that hope that Fieldhouse spends so much time with younger entrepreneurs. It's his way of giving back to his chosen hometown.

"Entrepreneurs are the keystone to developing communities," he said. "They create the jobs, they stimulate the economy and creativity. I live here, and I want my home to be as good and as successful as possible."

Fieldhouse says his investments in 15 small companies aren't large. But the CEOs who run them say the value of his advice is huge.

"For a young entrepreneur, it's like meeting with a rock star," said Josh Friedman, co-founder of Eleven Wireless Inc., which provides wireless-network management software and services to hotels.

"He runs a massive business, but he's accessible to entrepreneurs," said Friedman. "That's incredible."



Besides guiding Portland's Vesta Corp. from an unprofitable endeavor into a well-regarded company, CEO Doug Fieldhouse mentors more than a dozen entrepreneurs throughout the region.

Fieldhouse says he wants to save young CEOs from making the same mistakes he's made.

Some of his most important advice, he says, is about when to cut an unsuitable employee loose.

"If you talk to any successful CEO, they'll tell you they made mistakes in hiring and mistakes in not firing fast enough," Fieldhouse said. "As soon as I hear someone talking about their concerns about someone, I encourage them to deal with it quickly."

He understands very well why that's difficult.

"You're all friends in a smaller company, you're all sitting around together," he said.

Nevertheless, his own experience demonstrates that the right people are key to a company's success.

"I ended up turning over my management team a couple of times after I got here," Fieldhouse said.

Though 15 CEOs may sound like a lot of people to mentor, Fieldhouse says he's very selective about whom he works with.

"I'm always looking for entrepreneurs who want to make a difference, who want to try things others aren't trying," he said.

"It's very easy building a company with 10 employees and \$1 million in revenue, where everyone makes a living," he said. "It's really hard to build a company with \$100 million in revenue, that's doing something serious."

John Hayden, the founder and CEO of Versation Inc., has found Fieldhouse's advice tremendously valuable when it comes to another difficult decision: Choosing which of many possibilities to pursue.

"Doug's been able to pick the one thing that's most important and strategic to the business, and go right after that," said Hayden.

In Versation's case, that meant focusing Hayden's attention on English, Baby!, a social Web site for people learning English. This was Versation's original business, and the one that Fieldhouse felt had the most potential for growth.

Two years ago, Fieldhouse told Hayden to go to China to meet Vesta's business partners there.

"Two weeks later, I was in China," said Hayden. "We've never looked back."

The entrepreneurs mentored by Fieldhouse say they're amazed at how much time and energy he offers them, given that he runs such a huge business.

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Doug Fieldhouse
Vesta CEO

Fieldhouse says his relationships with younger entrepreneurs are more fun and more energizing than any hobby, "my break from running the big company."

It's his way of staying in touch with the vital energy that, for him, is core to a successful business.

"I never want to become the stuffed corporate shirt," he said.

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