

BUSINESS PROFILE

John Fritts helps reconnect bosses to their employees and customers

BY EVAN WILLIAMS

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It can be hard for managers, administrators and CEOs to get the truth from their employees about how much satisfaction they get out of their work or how valued they feel. And often times, upper level managers are remote from customers. John Fritts can bridge that gap.

Fit and energetic at 55, Mr. Fritts left a 30-year career in retail and commercial banking, including as a founder of Florida Gulf Bank in Fort Myers, to start a new firm.

"I decided I wanted to venture out and do something different," he said. "It allows that entrepreneurial spirit to really come to the forefront. This business is mine. I can manage it and sell it exactly as I want to. It's a new venture, another chapter in one's life."

He started InSight Focus Group LLC, a consulting firm for medium to large-sized businesses, in April. As the sole employee and president of the business, Mr. Fritts acts as a third-party consultant between upper level management, employees and customers. He coordinates meetings with the various parties in an environment where each can talk confidentially and candidly. Management benefits by getting a detailed report on the meetings and analytical services if they wish. The feedback is based on in-person talks, not surveys, teleconferences or Google searches.

The new firm draws on Mr. Fritts'

experience as a banker, during which he discussed finance with a broad range of business owners. He hopes to attract just as diverse a group of industry to his new business, such as real estate, banks, hospitals, government agencies, retail stores, fitness centers, chain restaurants and others.

"I've spent my entire career interacting with clients," he said, "reading financial statements, talking with them about their business plans, so it all kind of ties together."

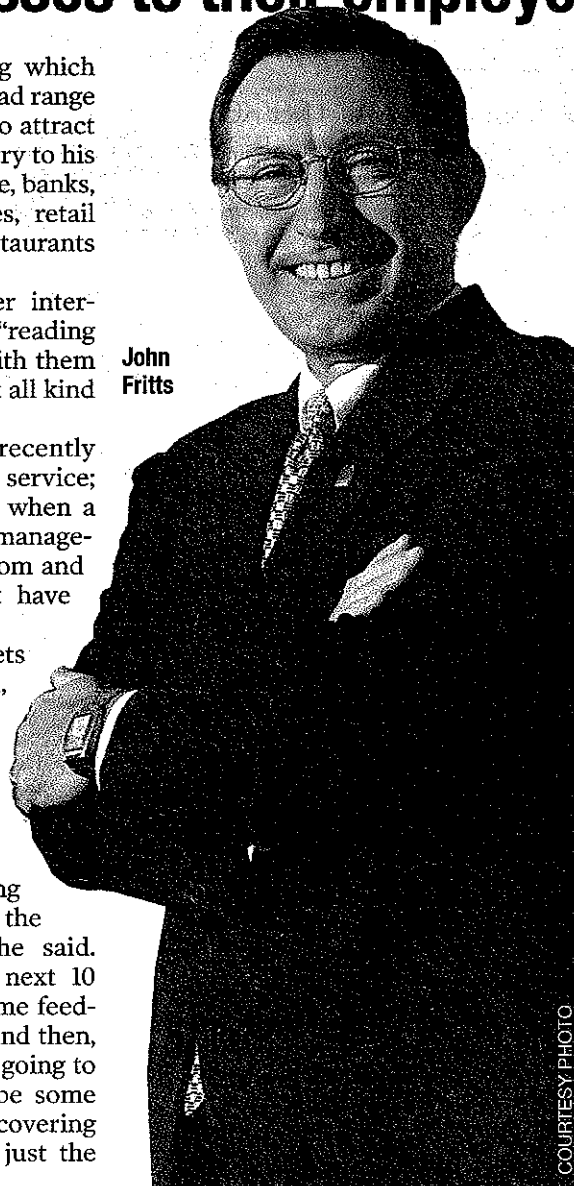
Any company that has recently expanded might call on his service; because often, he says, this is when a disconnect occurs between management and the ground level. "Mom and pop" business generally don't have this problem.

"The further management gets away from employees," he said, "it's just natural that you lose a little track of what's going on."

But CEOs have less reason to worry than they might think, Mr. Fritts said.

"Invariably what you're going to find is 75 to 80 percent of the feedback is very positive," he said. "That's very important. The next 10 percent, you're going to get some feedback that really makes sense. And then, candidly, the next 10 percent is going to pinch a little bit. I think maybe some people think of this as just uncovering a bunch of problems, but it's just the opposite of that."

John Fritts



COURTESY PHOTO

As an objective moderator between CEOs, employees and clients — some of whom will obviously get along better than others — Mr. Fritts may also draw on his more distant background as a middle school teacher. He grew up in Columbus, Ohio, and majored in business and education at Ohio University. After college, he moved to Daytona Beach. It was a place he was familiar with, after working summer jobs at a hotel there in his youth. He taught at a public middle school and coached basketball and soccer.

One summer he got a job at Sun Bank in Daytona. He had become friends with the marketing director after taking a group of schoolchildren to the bank to learn about the business.

"My job was to teach the employees about 'new things' called ATMs," he said. "Thirty years later, I was still a banker."

Mr. Fritts has lived with his wife Janet in Fort Myers for 20 years. They have two dachshund puppies and like to travel. They're planning trips to Napa Valley and Santa Fe this summer. In the coming years, Mr. Fritts plans to grow InSight Focus Group, possibly by adding some employees. The principles he'll work by are some of the same he practiced as a banker.

"It's really a less complicated business than people think," he said. "It's a people person's business. You treat people fair, with respect. You're candid and honest with them, and they're going to respect that." ■

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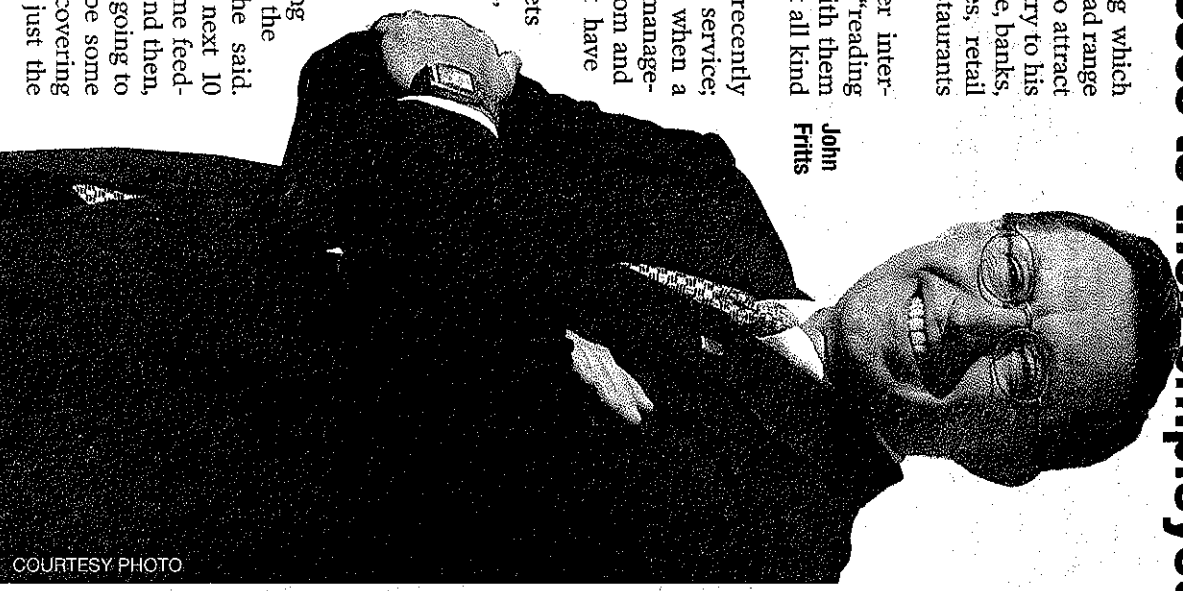
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