CEO Josh Linkner Builds a Culture

of Creativity at ePrize

Josh Linkner, age 36, is the founder and CEO of

ePrize, LLC, located in Pleasant Ridge, Michigan. An

excerpt of his secrets for success follows:

At ePrize we work hard to create an atmosphere that

encourages creativity and empowers people to reach

personal greatness. Our culture is based on respect

and trust. We want to hear everyone’s ideas.

Our facility is another example. Because we pro-

duce interactive promotions, games, sweepstakes

and more for many of the world’s largest companies,

I want it to be a vibrant, fun, crazy place. We have

a 1 ,300-square-foot rooftop patio that seats 30, with

couches and coffee tables. I can’t understand how

companies ask their people to do creative work and

then stick them in cube farms.

I believe leaders are here to serve. Our job is to

empower others to reach personal greatness. My job

is to maximize the potential of our organization and

to make a difference. I am a life-long learner, and I

try to create a learning organization. The toughest

decisions are when we have a great person who is no

longer right for the company. I always want to put

the best interest of the company ahead of anything

personal.

I really want to continue to create an amazing

place for our team to work, a place that empowers

people to do extraordinary things. It all gets back to

our culture for me.

Like too many people, I’m a self-professed worka-

holic. I don’t always keep traditional ofﬁ ce hours and

work a lot from home and on the weekends. I aver-

age 60 to 7 0 hours per week. I like to see my kids in

the morning, and then I’m pretty focused and intense

from there on out.

I have an assistant who helps with scheduling and

keeping things moving at warp speed. I use a Black-

Berry and in my case it’s truly a “Crack-berry.” I re-

ceived about 350 e-mails per day and send about 1 50.

I can’t imagine an executive in the Digital Age who

doesn’t use e-mail.

I meet once a week with my core team and also

have weekly one-on-ones with key people. We hold

a full-company “huddle” once a month, when we rent an auditorium and bring everybody together.

We share our successes, take our challenges head-on

and have a great time. It really keeps us working in

lockstep. Meeting with people is the lifeblood of most

companies.

To keep up, I check out several web sites, including

Harvard Business Review, Yahoo!, Google, Click Z,

the “Wall Street Journal,” and Weather.com. And, of

course, I monitor ePrize.com and CaffeineNow.com.

In print, I read Harvard Business Review, Crain’s De-

troit Business, The Detroit News, and BusinessWeek. I

don’t read cover to cover, but I give them a good skim-

ming, at the least. I’m currently reading a book called

Mavericks at Work that talks about the importance of

being bold and taking risks.

During the day, I rarely go out for lunch, and only

do so for lunch meetings. I do pause during the day

to walk around, visit with people or play a few jazz

guitar riffs to loosen up.

I have a fully colored ofﬁ ce that is warm and invit-

ing. I keep a jazz guitar on hand to blow off steam and

ignite creativity. I have a gigantic computer screen

that people who visit always make fun of. And then,

about two weeks later, they tell me they bought one

for themselves.

No matter what’s going on, I’m always trying to

make sure I’m having fun, learning, and making a

difference.