

## John Ratliff



John Ratliff founded Appletree Answers in 1995 in his two-bedroom apartment in Wilmington, Del., as a traditional telephone answering service. He grew the company through a series of acquisitions to 24 US-based locations and 650 employees when it was sold to a strategic buyer in June, 2012. By that point, it had evolved into a high-end customer service contact center that employed tools such as phone, email and chat response.

Passionate about strategy, Ratliff used the methodologies of the Rockefeller Habits to reduce turnover at the company from the industry average of 110% to around 18% in the four years between 2008 and 2012. One key initiative was the company's Dream On initiative, a "Make-A-Wish-Foundation" style program for employees in need.



Appletree's high retention rate allowed the company to manage its exponential growth while driving tremendous EBITDA and revenue gains. In one sign of its employees' enthusiasm, the company won the We ♥ Our Workplace Video Contest, run by the prestigious Great Place to Work Institute, in 2012. Ultimately it was Appletree's focus on employee engagement that drove its valuation on exit.

Ratliff is now CEO of GazellesPRO, the inner circle of Gazelles companies, as well as managing director of STS Capital Partners, an international mergers and acquisitions firm. He is also active in Virgin Unite, Richard Branson's charitable foundation focused on improving the employee experience. In that capacity, he is involved with its initiative on people and innovation.

Ratliff now speaks frequently with companies of all sizes to diagnose problems in their employee retention and morale and to drive improvements. He also brings expertise in using a business's operating system to leverage the effectiveness of the management team.

Ratliff has a BSBA in Marketing and Finance from the University of Delaware. He lives in Wilmington, Del., with his wife Lynne and their three young children. In his free time, he flies his TBM 850 single-engine turbo prop plane. He can be reached at [jratliff@gazelles.com](mailto:jratliff@gazelles.com).