

# The future looks bright

One medical technology company introduces its first-ever employee incentive and returns with amazing results—new ideas on how to make the organization even better **BY JEANIE CASISON**

Jerry Mulholland is going nowhere. Nowhere to work but Viasys Healthcare, that is. Not that the senior sales consultant lacks options—he coolly nixed four job offers last year, pretty impressive considering that hiring freezes and a layoff frenzy still force many to linger in labor limbo.

So how did this medical technology company in

Conshohocken, Pa., manage to become an employer of choice in just its third year of operation? With a simple strategy: Develop and reward people performance accordingly. “At Viasys employees are given every opportunity to succeed. You can be enthusiastic and take the opportunity to another level or begrudge it and become a self-sever. I’ve been in this

business for 20 years and this is the first time I see light at the end of the tunnel,” Mulholland says.

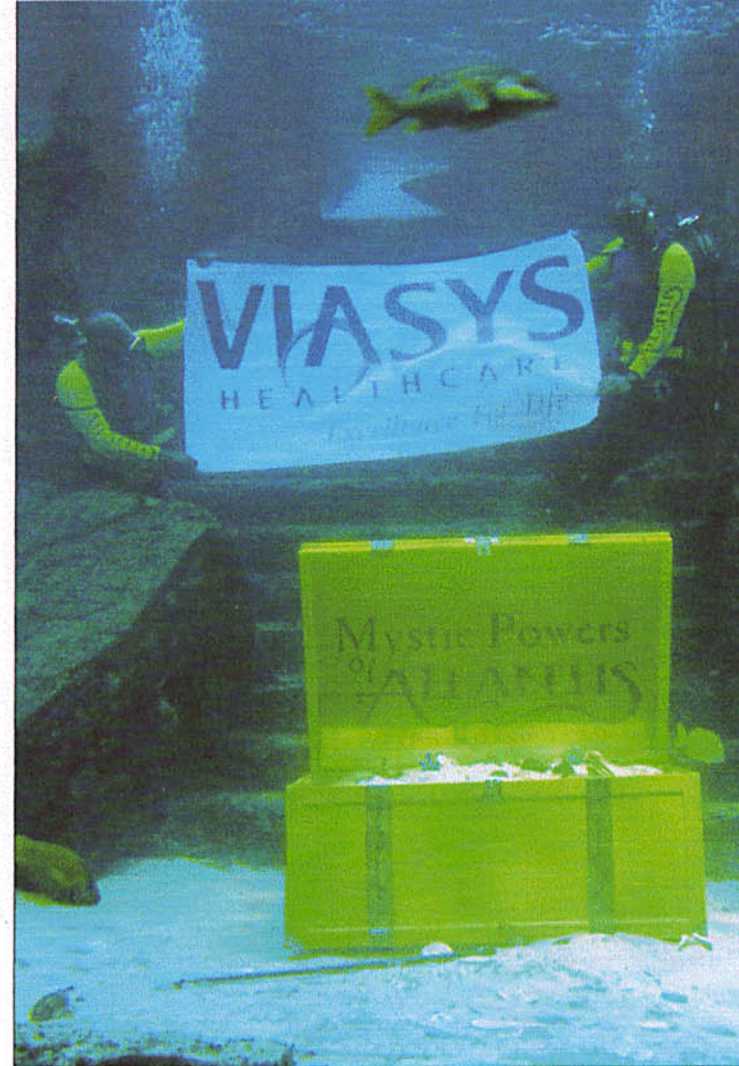
### New direction

Talent takes people far, and at Viasys the talent train begins with CEO/Chairman Randy Thurman. After helping the company go public on the New York Stock Exchange in 2001, he didn’t

stop at the ringing of the bell. At a national sales meeting a few months later, phase two became a reality with the announcement of the Viasys Chairman’s Club, the company’s first-ever recognition program that rewards employees for strong performance and a commitment to corporate values. “The individuals selected were the highest-performing individuals in our company for 2001. Qualifiers could be from sales, customer service or support, but their respective management teams nominated them as the highest performers for their business units, and an executive committee selects the best of this group,” Thurman says.

In order to ensure a superb inaugural incentive, Thurman turned to the expertise of Harith Wickrema, president of Harith Productions Ltd., a full-service event management company in Oreland, Pa.

Prior to the program, which took place at the Atlantis Resort & Casino in the Bahamas last September, qualifiers received a colorful FedEx box adorned with images of the famous pink property. Inside, a pocket directory and photos highlighting a “Mystic Powers” theme gave participants a sense of what was to come. Departure day soon arrived and a pilot’s personalized welcome to the group reinforced their achievement to other passengers. “The objective was to provide an experiential event that would reward, show



Underwater spectacle: Divers show a little recognition by unveiling the Viasys Healthcare banner during a pre-dinner event.

appreciation and motivate this brand new company. We took this opportunity to have the 36 attendees become ambassadors for the rest of the organization,” Wickrema says.

Experiential indeed. Throughout their four-night stay, the Viasys Chairman’s Club members and their guests found their senses stimulated from the start with a festive Bahamian welcome party followed by an awards dinner on the second evening that began with a lively cocktail reception. An underwater show incorporated a pair of swimmers unlocking a treasure chest in search of the mythic power crystals,

a symbol for the Viasys employees’ ability to excel. Later, a percussion procession led the precessional to their final destination, a ballroom completely decorated in a nature motif. The elements of earth, wind, fire and water continued throughout, with its incorporation in the entertaining musical numbers as well as the dinner presentation. At the end of the evening, Thurman gave each Viasys Chairman’s Club member a crystal eagle for their individual contributions to the organization.

### Star appeal

Singular experiences are what incentive programs are all about, and the final evening of the Viasys

program followed that formula when the group attended the Michael Jordan Celebrity Invitational Awards Dinner. (A few also participated in the morning golf tournament.) The star-studded affair gave them the chance to mingle with notable sports and entertainment personalities such as Jordan, Wayne Gretsky, Julius Erving and Stone Phillips. R & B vocalist Brian McKnight gave a soulful performance with fellow artists Beyonce Knowles from Destiny’s Child, NSYNC’s Chris Kirkpatrick and Jay-Z watching.

While hanging with famous faces is dandy, members of the Viasys Chairman’s Club were stars in their own right. “I’m a firm believer that the very best performers deserve this kind of recognition. Also, by having the very best people in one location, they can share suggestions on how to improve the company,” Thurman says. “This year we implemented several ideas recommended by individuals in the Chairman’s Club: a quality-management program, a corporate marketing strategy and various employee communication ideas.”

Months after the Bahamas experience Mulholland still can’t contain his enthusiasm. “Being part of the Chairman’s

## PROGRAM AT A GLANCE:

**INDUSTRY:** Medical technology

**COMPANY:** Viasys Healthcare

**PROGRAM TYPE:** Recognition

**STRATEGY AND EXECUTION:** Launched a first-time company-wide program that recognized employees for performance and demonstration of corporate values with a trip to the Bahamas.

**RESULTS:** The implementation of a quality management program, corporate marketing strategy and various employee communications as a result of suggestions from the 36-member Viasys Chairman’s Club.

Club doesn’t stop after receiving the crystal eagle. It doesn’t stop after the trip,” he says. “Once you’ve tasted the best, you don’t want to walk away from it. My wife, Annmarie, told me, ‘You better win next year.’”

With this kind of motivation, it looks like Viasys Healthcare is on its way. ■



Viasys Healthcare CEO Randy Thurman (left) looks on while Jerry Mulholland and Bill Ross (right) bask in the spotlight during a recent Chairman’s Club program in the Bahamas.