

## **Customer Productivity and Profit Drive Innovation for Porter Pipe and Supply**

Nick Porter's light-bulb moment came when he heard longtime distribution consultant Dirk Beveridge address the 2016 American Supply Association's Young Executives Spring Forum in Memphis, TN. During his presentation, "Sales Innovation: Disrupting the Status Quo for Profitable Growth," Beveridge spotlighted a feed and farm supply company with a unique mission: "We won't ask for your business, unless we can help improve your business." That mission, Beveridge stated, "has been the foundation for industry-leading organic growth and positioning of its sales team as trusted advisors."

The role of trusted advisor resonated with Porter. He is the chief operating officer of family owned and operated Porter Pipe and Supply, one of the Midwest's leading industrial pipe, valve and fitting wholesalers. Rather than competing on commodity pricing, as is common in the industry, Porter Pipe and Supply differentiates itself on the value the company provides.

"Dirk's message helped us repackage how we communicate our value," Porter said.

The value that Porter gained from the Young Executives Forum convinced him to learn more. That fall he attended Beveridge's UnleashWD, the only innovation summit for distributors. This two-day conference curates world-class speakers from outside distribution and provides the perspective shift necessary to help distributors create sustainable, relevant and profitable futures.

When the summit ended, Porter had developed a personal UnleashWD manifesto – "Be Clear On Your Why" – that he brought back to his company. "My purpose is to help make as many dreams come true as I possibly can," Porter said. "The more people this business can gainfully employ, the more impact this company, those employees and I can have on the world around us. The more opportunity and value we can provide, the more I can chase my goal of making dreams come true."

Porter's desire to provide opportunity and value also extends to his customers. As a distributor buying and reselling products, Porter Pipe and Supply needs to be innovative in the ways it creates value for customers. One way is by communicating with customers on a deeper level than most competitors.

"We partner with our customers, understand how they're doing business, understand their challenges and the specific projects they're working on," Porter said. "Then we look for ways to make their work safer and faster. Whenever we can help a contractor bring in a job under the bid man-hours, the customer makes more money and that makes the customer want to do business with us again."

A construction contractor makes or loses money not in the buying of the pipe, valves and fittings but in the installation in the field, according to Porter. “That’s where we make an impact,” he said.

One of Porter’s customers had won a major project bid to build a 40-story high rise but had fallen behind in the work timeline. Although the contractor could have added more laborers to the job, doing so would have exceeded the budget. Instead, Porter Pipe and Supply provided material handling equipment, including boom cranes and custom-made carts, to move materials more efficiently around the job site. As a result, in a four-month period alone, the contractor saved 150 man hours.

“That’s \$15,000 in productivity and profit that we’ve helped contribute to that project,” Porter said.

Porter believes his company can increase productivity and profit for other customers in the field through the use of technology, an innovative idea he gained from the UnleashWD summit.

Since most field contacts don’t know when materials will arrive at the construction site, Porter Pipe and Supply is beta testing with two key customers a proprietary automated messaging system. The system sends a text message or an email to the customer’s field contact, providing an estimated time of arrival for materials. Once the delivery is made, the field contact receives an electronic message with a link to the full material order list and even photos of the materials on site after delivery.

“This platform is also allowing us to capture delivery statistics and to craft metrics around delivery performance,” Porter said. “That’s going to be something we build into our value proposition to communicate to our customers our accuracy rate for hitting delivery promise times and how often we’re on time. We’ll be able to offer a level of communication far beyond what the industry standard is.”

Porter will be back at UnleashWD in 2017, anticipating more light-bulb moments. Those will come from Dirk Beveridge and an array of summit speakers, providing a perspective shift and abundant ideas that Porter can bring home to his third-generation family business.

“It’s a fantastic event,” he said. “I recommend it to those looking to grow their businesses and to those that like to think outside the box.”

Find this feature at the UnleashWD website: <http://unleashwd.com/profiles/nick-porter/>