



## INDUSTRY ADVICE FROM THE OG'S

The Random Threads Committee went straight to the source, the Pac-West Honorary Members, and asked these industry legends to share their best piece of advice for those currently in the fastener industry. Here's what they had to say.

### TIM JACKSON

- KISS (Keep It Simple Stupid) is the most important rule.
- Learning the fastener industry can be easy if you apply yourself. Read something every day like the Link magazine articles.
- You don't have to be an expert in fasteners. You need to know who the experts are and have a relationship with them.
- Always look to turn a negative into a positive. There is always something to gain from failing.
- You can't grow unless you fail.
- Sales isn't about the product; it's about people selling people.
- Trust in the numbers; they don't lie. Learn to understand the profit and loss statement; that's the heart of the business.
- I believe in training an employee in all aspects of the company. Cross training is the greatest example of understanding the business.
- Don't be afraid to make decisions. Even if they turn out to be wrong, you will have gained something from them.
- Be a team player. Build up others, and they will in return build you up.
- Network the industry. Ask the ownership or management to attend any and all related industry events.

### MARTIN CALFEE

You have to learn the business from the bottom up. If you try to run a business without knowing how everything works, you will probably fail.

You need three things to start a business:

1. a lawyer
2. an accountant
3. a banker.

Without #1 and #2, #3 will not talk to you!

Ask questions and learn. Do not assume you know what the customer wants and that you are on the same page.

### JOHN D. MARSHALL

#### 1. WHAT DO YOU WISH YOU KNEW WHEN YOU STARTED IN THE INDUSTRY?

Let me start with a little history. Keystone was started in 1946 by a man called James Watt who was a friend of my grandfather, John Marshall. My grandfather purchased the business in 1956 when Mr. Watt passed away. Keystone has been in the Marshall family ever since that time.

My grandfather passed away in 1972 shortly after my marriage. In October of 1972 I asked my two uncles, Gordon and Walter Marshall, if I could come to work at Keystone to learn something different. I had been working in the restaurant industry since 1969.

I really knew nothing of the fastener business at that time. My father did not work at Keystone. He worked in aerospace fasteners which are a whole different line than commercial fasteners, especially back in 1972.

Keystone sells only commercial fasteners. My first day on the job, the warehouse manager handed me an order to fill that had about 30 different line items on it. All were to be packed 100 per box, 1,000 per line item. At that time, and still to this day, we purchased items mostly in bulk and then did our own repacking. We did not have electronic scales back then, just the old counter-balance type of scale. Our inventory was sorted by head style, screw style (machine, sheet metal, wood screw etc.) and then material. So, if you needed a pan head machine screw steel zinc, they were down a certain row. Of course, I knew nothing of what any of these things meant and I was told to figure it out!

So, in answer to your question, training! I wish I had gotten some training on what my job was and how to do it. I did figure it out, but that first day was sure hard. The warehouse manager didn't like them bringing me in, so that didn't help.

Training, and continual training is very important. Second to that would be education in our industry. I cannot stress how important the various education classes are that the association puts together for our industry. Back in 1972 the Los Angeles Fastener Association was a pretty close-knit group of a few companies. We were not a part of that association until much later, so we missed out on some of the early training and education that was available to us.

#### 2. WHAT IS THE BEST PIECE OF ADVICE (GEM) YOU CAN GIVE AN EMPLOYEE OR SOMEONE IN THE INDUSTRY?

I would say to take advantage of any training and education classes that are available to you. So much has changed in our industry over the past fifty years. Commercial fasteners to many were just nuts and bolts. Now we need lot numbers, country of origin, material certs, conflict material certs, and more.

You need to be able to answer customer questions when they come up. You cannot do that without the education and training available in our industry. A college business degree may help you with business practices, but if you don't have fastener specific training you cannot answer your customers' questions.

Also, and this is a personal thing with me, be upfront and straightforward with your dealings in business. Don't lie. Be truthful. Don't promise what you cannot deliver. Your customers and your suppliers will respect you for that.

## BRUCE WHEELER

After being a part of the fastener industry spanning a 48-year career at Star Stainless Screw Co., I would strongly encourage people to form as many relationships as possible within the industry. The earlier in your career you begin to do this the better, but it is never too late to begin.

These relationships should be far reaching, including anyone who touches the fastener industry: your customers, suppliers, coworkers, associations, industry news media, and yes even your competitors. You are one person, but all these other people offer you a wealth of knowledge, information, and skill sets that you can really tap into and learn from.

As your relationships grow over time, you begin to develop a wealth of sought-after knowledge, and you begin to build a network of friends in the industry. This does not happen overnight, but it will build over time if you stay at it.

All of this is part of enhancing and growing your career. You want to network and build these relationships with everyone possible; don't just suck up to the big guns. I can't begin to tell you how many regular people in my career have ended up becoming the big guns as time marched on. I can also tell you how much it is remembered and respected when someone treats the average person with respect when they are a nobody and one day they turn into a somebody.

Our careers are built on our actions and abilities and some luck. People's opinions of you are formulated based on not one thing, but a culmination of your actions. The networking and relationships you forge will open doors for you over time; do not underestimate their value.

You should become a part of your local fastener organization, the national organization, participate in trade shows, attend various training/educational seminars being offered. Get and stay involved. The deeper you immerse yourself, the more recognized and knowledgeable you become in the industry.

When I first started in the fastener industry, I was young and aggressive. I was focused on growing a fastener company, Star Stainless Screw Co. I poured vast amounts of my time into growing Star. The years click by mighty fast and it's easy to get wrapped up in the business and lose track of what's really important, your family. I am now retired, and 50 years have passed since I began my career at Star. My advice is to work hard at finding a good balance between running a successful business and making time for your family. If you are a seriously driven person, this is not an easy feat, but work on it. When it's all said and done, you get to run the bases of life one time. Be sure you find that balance before it's too late.

## ANDY COHN

### 1. WHAT DID I WISH I KNEW WHEN I STARTED IN THE INDUSTRY?

It is a basic skill, but often no one speaks to this. Recently I was helping place some Afghan refugees with an employer who said he could hire three to four of them in his warehouse. I asked what I should look for in the young men I would send him to interview. English skills? Married or single? Living close by? His response was "Just send me guys who will show up!" That was his most important requirement.

And it was equally true in 1987 at Bay City Screw in the packaging department, and it is still true. That single thing weighs more than everything else! Without it you can't learn, and you can't succeed!

### 2. WHAT IS THE BEST PIECE OF ADVICE (GEM) YOU CAN GIVE AN EMPLOYEE OR SOMEONE IN THE INDUSTRY?

It's 70% the same answer! And if you can, look at the size of the company. If you want to be able to move up, then you belong at a ten-person company. I was the brightest light bulb in the packaging department so when they figured out they needed someone to start expediting their open B/Os from suppliers, I got the chance. If it was a 100-person entity, different rules!

Also, listen to what the customer is asking for. Usually it's crazy or not getable, but how you approach that and what information you can help them with goes a long way in the end. They aren't making this up; they think they have a real need for left-handed brass widgets (and if they want a million, they can have them).

They are not making the requirement up!

## BRUCE DARLING

I had the opportunity to be active in the fastener industry for 47 years. When I started in 1967, my knowledge of bolts and nuts was that of a farm boy that did limited maintenance on farm equipment. When getting started, usually there is little you do know. To be successful requires a quick learning process.

I also think it is important for your employer to provide you the opportunity to handle, touch, and get to know the fasteners you sell. I was fortunate that warehouse training preceded my transfer to the office environment. It's hard to buy, handle, or sell items you are unfamiliar with. Learn your product.

Fasteners are not easy to learn, because of the thousands of items involved. You likely know there is a bolt you need, but you generally don't know the same size can be a hex bolt, Grade 2 cap screw, Grade 5 cap screw, Grade 8 cap screw, or Grade 9 cap screw. They all look alike but are used for differing tasks. Seeing, touching, holding, discussing, and reading specifications about the items provides the knowledge you will need.

I wished I had known more about the unique features of each fastener that makes it the right one for the application.



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