



Embracing Change: Robert K. Callahan Future Leaders Award Recipient Chris Gumas

Chris Gumas exudes a passion and ambition that industry peers admire, and colleagues find inspiring. Like many in the PT/MC world, Chris “fell into his career” but has enjoyed nothing but reward and success since.

The year was 2008 and like so many others, Chris found himself without a job. Deciding to invest in himself, he headed to graduate school full-time to earn his M.B.A. With his past job experiences and a new degree, Chris explained, “I really learned a lot about what I *didn't* want coming out of graduate school.”

Chris landed in the PT/MC industry 11 years ago. He shared, “Two percent of us were born into it, and the other 98 percent of us stumble into it.” When looking for a place to advance his career, he also was looking for a great fit. “I found that Ruland was a place looking to grow and was specifically looking for people like me. When I met Bob Ruland, Bill Hewitson and Bobby Watkins (who became my bosses for different projects), I knew this was the place for me. I knew it right away; the industry was secondary. I thought, ‘I like those people. I want to work for them.’”

Currently, Chris is the director of marketing at Ruland Manufacturing Co., Inc. where he manages the company’s global distributor relationships, website, and day-to-day commercial operations. He appreciates the opportunities and transformations happening within the PT/MC industry. When he speaks about it, energy and excitement frame every word.

Chris spoke about the informal training he participated in to learn Ruland’s systems and how his company helps customers, but he emphasized the importance of learning from others.

“Find people in your organization who are willing to talk to you,” shared Chris. How much you get out of it correlates to the amount of effort you put into it. Those early days, for me, were so critical. I look back fondly on them because I had so many great experiences. During my first two years, I spent a lot of time with Bobby Watkins, our VP of sales. Being on the road with him was awesome because we were able to develop a personal relationship. I could ask him anything; he's so knowledgeable. All of that foundational groundwork really came from listening to Bobby, while he communicated with customers, and asking him questions.”

Chris's commitment to broadening his knowledge and experience extends beyond his company. His passion to become a better leader drove him to attend the PTDA Leadership Development Conference. It was there that he built a connection with Randy Disharoon of Regal Rexnord. While elevating his career and becoming a leader, Chris had some struggles and Randy provided valuable guidance. "Randy has been critical for me in my personal development and leadership growth," stated Chris.

"Today, my job is leadership, not marketing. I say that with some hesitation because it's a hard transition for me to make. Randy and Bill provided good insight, but I struggled with evolving from the marketing piece of it because I absolutely love marketing. I really enjoy getting my hands dirty, finding problems and fixing them, but I now have people who work for me that do it better. My job is to let go and allow the people who work for me the same freedoms that I had."

Chris does not shy away from finding solutions outside the box and trying new strategies. He recognizes that in order to grow—whether personally or professionally—organizations and individuals need to take risks and embrace challenges. From this, true leaders are born.

"The only way to change is to change," said Chris. If you continually talk about transforming, you will never actually do it, and your organization will never evolve. Begin to make adjustments and you will find that people are highly adaptable, even if they don't think they are. Part of leadership is building trust. When people see ideas working, it builds trust in your decision making."

Chris is honored to receive the inaugural Robert K. Callahan Award. He reminisces about the time he spoke to Bob, "He was so enthusiastic about how many young people there were at the event. I looked at him and said, 'There are not that many young people here.' He kind of gave me one of those looks that said, 'If you knew how many fewer young people were here not that long ago, you'd be shocked.' Being able to receive an award in Bob's name is a tremendous honor and it's also tremendously disappointing that he is gone. I would have loved to be able to tell him how much it actually means because I know he would have appreciated it."

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