

Speaker 1 00:00:05 Welcome to the Clear Impact Podcast brought to you by PGTI University. Thanks for joining us today. My name is Sherri Connor, and I am your host.

Speaker 2 00:00:19 Number one, just to a great amount of gratitude to the dealers. As they've had to work through a lot of the same challenges that we faced and they've had to endure some of the, some of those challenges or the output from some of those challenges over the past two years. And I think that the key thing for them is to realize that, you know, look, the group that was performing very well before COVID hit is still the same group that's here.

Speaker 1 00:00:42 We're kicking off the new year with our new Senior Vice President of Customer Strategy and Innovation, Bob Keller. He is certainly not new to our enterprise, but has a new role here at PGT Innovations. Bob and I talk about the resiliency of our dealers through recent challenges, along with some exciting improvements on the horizon. This conversation is full of laughter, hope and gratitude, which is a great way to begin 2022.

So on today's Clear Impact podcast, we have someone new. We have, actually, you're not new, we're sitting here today with Bob Keller, who is our Senior Vice President of Customer Strategy and Innovation. Hello, Sherri. Hi, welcome. Thank you. I'm so glad to have you here. You and I have just barely met, so this is exciting for me to get to know you a little bit. So tell us a little bit about yourself. Like where did you grow up? Where'd you go to school? Like some of that stuff?

Speaker 2 00:01:33 Sure. So, you know, it's, amazingly enough, it's a rather long story now, but I'll try and keep it brief. I grew up in Ohio. I was born and raised in Ohio. I never lived outside of the state of Ohio until after I graduated from Ohio state.

Speaker 1 00:01:46 Oh, you're one of the Ohio State.

Speaker 2 00:01:47 I'm one of the Ohio State people. Um, my wife and I both graduated from Ohio State. She used to row for Ohio State. So we are like true Ohio State fans. So, but, after I graduated from Ohio State in Mechanical Engineering, I kinda went off and, uh, I've had several different, amazing opportunities with a lot of different, amazing companies. Uh, over the last, gosh, I graduated in, I think it was 94. I think something like that. So I've been working in manufacturing companies for about 30 years in either engineering or supervision roles or in executive roles. Uh, I've done a couple of different stints in marketing and other things like that. But most of my time has been spent in manufacturing and engineering and operations leadership, both in the United States and globally. I've got to spend time in Mexico and I've got to spend quite a bit of time in China as well, which is always exciting to go see new cultures and see how different people run facilities in different countries. And so, it's been pretty awesome ride. Along the way, my wife and I've had two kids. I've got a daughter, Emma who's nine and a son Owen, who's 15, getting ready to drive next month, which is a little bit scary. It's a lot scary. Yeah, I bet. So we've been practiced on his driving, but uh, I know my wife and I've been married for 25 years and - congrats. I've been absolutely blessed with two wonderful children and, uh, you know, just doing really well.

Speaker 1 00:03:05 Nice. How long have you been here?

Speaker 2 00:03:07 I've been at PGT for a little over five and half years now. I started, I think it was in May of 16. Okay. We moved to Florida for the first time. What's amazing in my family, while I grew up in Ohio, while I was away from Ohio, they moved to Florida, and my sister and my parents all moved to

Florida. And so when I moved here five and a half years ago, though, that was the first opportunity that I've had to live in the same state as my family, since I graduated from college. So that was really exciting. And they've since moved here to Venice as well. So right now my family, my parents and my sister and I, we all live about a mile and a half apart from each other. So we went many years without being in the same state. Now we're all within a mile and a half. So it's really, really great to get the family back together.

Speaker 1 00:03:51 That's fabulous. What is your area of responsibility?

Speaker 2 00:03:55 So currently I'm responsible for mostly the market facing side of the business for, for the Southeast business unit. So I'm responsible for the sales team, the design engineering R and D efforts. You know, the customer care, customer support, field service, all of those type of functions that PGT University and all that kind of stuff rolls up under me right now. And it's really exciting. I've been involved with those activities over the five and a half years in various roles that I've had, but not as direct as this one is. So most of my time is in the last five and a half years has been spent on the operation side. And that's where my focus has been. But it's really exciting to get a view of the business in a little different way than what I have in the past.

Speaker 1 00:04:37 So you understand it a little bit more holistically.

Speaker 2 00:04:40 Absolutely. Uh, and I think it's, it's really neat, you know, so the recent changes that have happened in the organizational structure, it gives me this opportunity. It also gives a, you know, Brent an opportunity on the echo side as, as Brent has moved into that role and gives him some opportunity on the operations side. So we both can kind of round ourselves out a little bit more.

Speaker 1 00:04:59 I saw Brent this morning, actually

Speaker 2 00:05:00 He was in the office a day. It was, it was crazy. He was, he was dressed in all black. I was giving him a hard time. I'm like, you're either in mourning or it's Johnny Cash. One of the two. I don't know which,

Speaker 1 00:05:09 Uh, yeah. Isn't he supposed to be an all green now that he's at Eco?

Speaker 2 00:05:12 Well, either, either that it's either Eco or he's, he went to Baylor, so he's like huge Baylor fan and, you know, they just beat Oklahoma state. And so he's been really high on that victory, so, yeah.

Speaker 1 00:05:22 Okay. Well, it was good to see him. He gave me a hug. I had a blast in my podcast conversation with Brent a few months ago. Yeah. So you're new to the helm and this side of things at our enterprise. What would you like to see accomplished in these areas?

Speaker 2 00:05:36 Obviously we've been challenged significantly on the operation side since COVID hit, whether it's people challenges, whether it's material, supply chain challenges, whether it's getting assets to build enough product, all of those types of things have been such a significant challenge for us over the past, really, almost two years now about, you know, 18 months, 19 months. You know, first and foremost, I'm just excited to try and get ourselves back to some of the normal relationship conversations that we get to have and less focus on the operational challenges. You know, there's a lot of work that Eric and the team are doing on the operation side that I feel are going to be paying huge dividends for

us. Uh, we're starting to see some, um, some positives on the supply chain side. Uh, we've actually gotten equipment that has come in that allows us to increase our production a little bit.

Speaker 2 00:06:22 Uh, so all of those things have to come together. If you're missing one of those pieces, it's a struggle, but you know, I really see that stuff starting to play out here in the coming months. And so as that comes to fruition, you know, I really look forward to, again, just getting back to those relationship conversations and those conversations that are really about how do we build the brands, build a company, build our dealer network, build the dealers themselves, all of those things that, that we were doing so well. And then since COVID hit, it's really been a struggle for us all to keep up.

Speaker 1 00:06:51 Well, because it was a combination of things. So not only did COVID hit us with production challenges, but then the demand went through the roof. And so everything's "even-Steven" and then one drops, and one raises, it's really out of kilter,

Speaker 2 00:07:05 Right? It's been, it's been amazing. You know, the, this is the first time in the 30 years that I've been in manufacturing where there's been so many supply chains challenges, at the same time, there's just more demand than you could ever imagine. And it's frustrating, in that sense, but it's just been a crazy time. It'll be great as we continue to make that transition back to some of those more normal conversations that, you know, we, we have really all about building our company and building our dealer base and building those dealers and distributors that support us so well, you know, that's my first just exciting thing to try and get back to.

Speaker 1 00:07:38 Right. Well, and the supply chain, isn't just us...

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Right? Well, and supply chain. Isn't just us. It's everybody. I mean, I drove by the Kia dealership yesterday and it was like, the lot was empty. I was like, wow, there's no cars.

Speaker 2 00:08:10 Yeah, no cars. You know, we were, we were shopping at Walmart for, uh, some Christmas gifts for the, uh, the angel tree. And I was taking my kids through that, through the aisles and the toy aisles are half empty. It was crazy. Yeah. So I'm like, wow, I guess we should have come two weeks ago.

Speaker 1 00:08:26 It's on a boat somewhere. Right. It's somewhere. What new initiatives are you looking forward to for the dealers in 2022? Anything up your sleeve?

Speaker 2 00:08:34 Um, I think in 2022, it's probably going to be, as I mentioned that transition back to some normalcy, bringing that focus back to things like Lead Match and how do we, again, build both brands? You know, how do we drive leads in the business that help PGTI companies and brands, but also help the dealer base to go after the people that are interested in our products and are excited to, uh, to do these types of projects. Uh, you know, that's a key thing, you know, there, there are a lot of interesting things that we have going on in the R and D side, in the iLab with, with some new products, some of the products that we've been selling, like the pivot door and bi-fold doors. We'll be looking to transition those into production in a bigger way to be able to open them up to broader markets and provide them to more businesses and more people. And then, then we'll be looking to backfill some of

those things with some new things in the iLab. So, you know, those are more to come on that stuff, but that's a really interesting and exciting thing for us to be going after.

Speaker 1 00:09:28 I loved the conversation I have with Dean about Innovation. And actually we have a series mapped out for spring. I'm going to be recording a podcast series around innovation. So that's going to be really fun. I'm looking forward to that.

Speaker 2 00:09:40 That'd be great. I know Dean has a lot of stuff on his plate, so I'm sure he has plenty of material for a series.

Speaker 1 00:09:45 Oh yeah, no, we've mapped it out months ago. We just, haven't had a chance to record it.

Speaker 2 00:09:49 Dean's great. He's, he's an awesome person to have on the team. He's a great, great resource for us.

Speaker 1 00:09:54 Well, Jack has given him a nickname. Jack Redden has given him the nickname Q

Speaker 2 00:09:59 Oh, nice. That's a good one. He has his own lab here and all that kind of stuff. So yeah, absolutely.

Speaker 1 00:10:03 So that's in the podcast that's going to air right before this one. So yeah. Dean doesn't know this yet. So we'll wrap this up. Is there anything else that you would like our dealers to know about you or about anything in general.

Speaker 2 00:10:18 You know, a couple of things, you know, I talked a little bit about what might be coming in 2022. I think long-term, you know, one of the exciting things that I hope to be able to talk with dealers about is, uh, how we can maybe work together on IT systems that better link them to us. Whether that's on the front end or on the back end with how they receive product and being more linked to our systems to help kind of improve the handoff of information, because that continues to be an opportunity both on the front side of the business and on the back end of the business. So that'll be something in 2022 that we'd like to at least begin conversations, to be able to say, Hey, what do you currently do? How do you run your business? What systems do you use?

And, and are you interested in this type of stuff so that we can start beginning to, uh, get a feel for how we could work with maybe an outside partner to build something, to help tie us together a little bit better so that we can improve in those, uh, that informational handoff. Right. Um, so that's, I mean, that's, I think one thing, I think the other thing is, you know, one just, uh, a great amount of gratitude to the dealers as they've had to work through a lot of the same challenges that we faced and they've had to endure some of the, some of those challenges or the output from some of those challenges over the past two years. And I think that the key thing for them is to realize that, you know, look, the group that was performing very well before COVID hit is still the same group that's here.

It's a very complex business. There's a lot of things happening when you're trying to build, you know, call it roughly 4,000 windows a day build to order. Uh, there's a lot of things that have to come together perfectly to make that happen. And it's been a big challenge and we really do appreciate their patience and through that. But know that that team that was successful before is still here, we're getting our hands around it. We're going to be there for the long haul and those strong relationships that we so desire are so important to us will still be something that we will continue to cultivate and continue to

drive forward with. And so we just really appreciate, or I really appreciate, uh, their patience during this period of time and the great conversations and back and forth that we've had. And I look forward to continuing those moving forward. And moving them again into a way that helps continue to build our companies instead of, uh, having to talk through just those supply chain challenges that we faced.

Speaker 1 00:12:26 Right. Well, and when you go through challenges together, it just strengthens those bonds and then they know, Hey, they're going to come through.

Speaker 2 00:12:34 Yeah. It's, it's going to be exciting. We will get there. And it'll be an exciting time when we do.

Speaker 1 00:12:39 I want to just throw something out because I heard this and I, I would love to know this about you. Somebody said something about race car driving.

Speaker 2 00:12:46 Yeah. Is that true? Yes. I do drive race cars. I actually, I have not had as much time to do it and, and my, my race car is actually broken right now. Uh, unfortunately I've only, I only got to do two races this year. Um, but yes, I've been racing cars for about, gosh, it's about 15 years of actual racing with a competition license. And, uh, I've been driving cars on a racetrack for probably close to 20 years now, maybe 18 to 20 years now.

Speaker 1 00:13:11 Okay. Well, this explains why you're nervous about your son getting his license.

Speaker 2 00:13:15 Yes, I am nervous because, uh, my son loves to go go-kart racing. Um, he and I actually, his birthday in January, we've already scheduled - we have big go-kart race scheduled for a celebrating his birthday and he's to the point now where I, I really have to try, um, I can't just drive around it. It is a hundred percent effort to make sure that I can still take him. But, uh, and so yes, I do get a little nervous because sometimes when he's driving, he forgets that's it's not a race, that it's, you know, the goal is to get there safely. Right. He's still, he's a little forceful on the pedals at times.

Speaker 1 00:13:48 Well, he's a typical 15-year-old boy. Yeah. Yeah. That's why their insurance is so high. Absolutely.

Speaker 2 00:13:52 10 foot tall and Bulletproof that's that's my son. Right. Nice,

Speaker 1 00:13:56 Awesome. Well, I'm so grateful that we had some time to chat today and I look forward to having you back.

Speaker 2 00:14:01 Yeah, thanks, Sherri. It was great to be on. I look forward to the next opportunity.

Speaker 1 00:14:06 PGTI University is the Customer Education Team for an entire family of brands. We began with the original EZBreeze porch enclosure line, then became PGT, America's leading brand of impact resistant windows and doors. We then added CGI, CGIC, WinDoor, Western Windows, New South Windows, Eco Windows and Doors, and our latest acquisition, Anlin Windows and Doors.

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