



Profiles in Success: Chris Drew
Earning the Right to Lead a Legacy

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For Chris Drew, leadership did not begin with a title. It began on the factory floor.

Today, Drew serves as President and Chief Executive Officer of Burnham Holdings, Inc., a Lancaster-based holding company whose subsidiaries manufacture boilers and related HVAC products for residential, commercial, and industrial markets. Burnham's current leadership profile notes that Drew was appointed President and CEO in 2023 after previously serving as President and COO, and that he has been affiliated with the Burnham organization since 1989.

But the fuller story is not simply one of tenure, family history, or corporate advancement. It is the story of a leader who had to **earn credibility, learn the business from multiple angles, and discover that legacy is not something you inherit.** It is something you carry, protect, and improve.

Burnham's history reaches back nearly 175 years, beginning with a business rooted in greenhouses, horticulture, and early thermal innovation. In Drew's telling, the company evolved from helping people grow fruits and vegetables out of season to developing heating systems that eventually became central to its future. That history matters to him, but not because it gives him an easy claim to leadership. If anything, it created a higher bar.

Drew grew up aware that Burnham existed, but not immersed in its day-to-day operations. It was part of family conversation, part of the background, but not a preordained career path. His first meaningful exposure came during college, when he spent a summer in Lancaster working as a quality control inspector on the factory floor. He worked the early shift alongside union employees and saw firsthand how residential boilers were assembled. The experience grounded him. It gave him **respect for the people who build the products, and it gave him a practical understanding that would follow him** for decades.

That early lesson is part of what makes Drew's leadership relatable. He did not step into Burnham as the polished heir apparent. In fact, when he later joined the company full-time as a young inside sales representative in Boston, he quickly learned that being connected to the family did not make things easier.

Some people viewed him skeptically. Others wondered whether he had earned his place.

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Drew's response was simple: work hard, learn the business, and do what needed to be done.

Drew discovered that relationships were not built by scripts or titles. They were built by solving real problems. One story from his early career still captures his approach. A major customer had old inventory sitting idle and asked Drew whether he could help move it. It was not the glamorous part of sales, and it was not necessarily in anyone's job description. But Drew took the problem seriously, found a way to help, and earned trust in the process. **The result was not just a transaction.**

For emerging leaders, that story offers a simple but powerful lesson: credibility is built when you **help people when it is inconvenient, unclear, or outside the narrow definition** of your role.

Drew's career was not a straight line. He left Burnham more than once, earned his MBA, worked in strategic planning, spent time around startup and loyalty-program businesses, and broadened his perspective beyond boilers and manufacturing. Those experiences gave him a wider lens. They also helped clarify what kind of leader he wanted to be. He came to appreciate the **balance between entrepreneurial freedom and disciplined risk-taking**. He liked building, improving, and inventing. He also understood the importance of security, stewardship, and not putting an organization at unnecessary risk.

When Drew returned to Burnham to lead Thermal Solutions, he came back to a business he had helped create years earlier. He believed in product development as the lifeblood of the future. His instinct was to engineer a way forward: listen to customers, work with technical teams, develop better products, and create reasons for the market to choose Burnham beyond price alone.

To Drew, even a mature industry can be innovative if leaders are willing to ask better questions:

What makes this product different? How can it deliver more value? What problem are we solving that others are not?

That mindset helped him grow businesses, lead multiple divisions, and eventually move into broader corporate leadership. Along the way, he developed **a leadership philosophy rooted in practical exposure.**

A future CEO, he believes, should understand the shop floor, customer relationships, operations, product development, and the people who make the company work.



Leadership is not learned in one office or one function. It is built piece by piece.

Drew's path to CEO also required patience. He experienced disappointment; moments when he wondered whether his future at Burnham would unfold the way he hoped.

When he became CEO in 2023, he brought with him not only decades of experience, but also a sense of urgency. Under his leadership, Burnham has focused on modernization, operational excellence, reinvestment, and positioning the business for a changing energy and regulatory landscape.

Yet Drew is careful not to make the story only about himself. He speaks often in terms of the team. He understands that a company with hundreds of employees is more than an enterprise; it is a **community of families, careers, and responsibilities**. Burnham has been part of Lancaster's fabric for generations, and Drew sees leadership as stewardship of that legacy. The question is not simply how to preserve the past. It is how to honor the past by making the company stronger for the future.

Drew's success is not built on a single dramatic breakthrough. It is built on **accumulated lessons**: show up early, learn the product, respect the people doing the work, solve the customer's problem, take calculated risks, keep innovating, and do not confuse a leadership title with leadership itself.

In one of the most telling moments of his interview, Drew reflected on what his grandmother might think of his career today. His answer was humble and direct: he believed she would be proud. Proud not because he merely returned a family member to the business, but because he worked to leave his own mark — to evolve Burnham, innovate around its future, and make the company better than he found it.

For Chris Drew, that is the real measure of success. Not simply becoming CEO, but earning the right to lead. Not simply inheriting a legacy, but strengthening it. And not simply building a career, but building something others can believe in.

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