Everyone Has a Part to Play

How teamwork, empathy and an instinct for understanding where people fit shaped Marc Albero's approach to leading PAC Strapping Products

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When Marc Albero joined PAC Strapping Products in August 2019, he inherited a company with a history that long preceded him.

The company had been built decades earlier by two men who met while commuting by train into Philadelphia. They began by making buckles and seals, expanded into strapping and eventually built the business Marc was recruited to lead after its sale.

By the time he arrived, one founder had retired and the other was preparing to leave. The management team he stepped into was experienced, with years of institutional memory. One person sitting in his first management meeting had been the very first employee hired after the founders.

Marc could have arrived determined to remake the company around himself. Instead, he focused first on understanding the team already there.

Nine people attended that first management meeting. Seven remain with PAC today, while another employee who worked beneath one of the original managers has since moved into a larger role.

Marc credits much of that continuity to listening, engagement and empathy.

Those instincts did not begin in a corner office.

The Glue Player

Marc grew up in Wilmington, Delaware, the younger of two boys. His older brother was an accomplished athlete and three-time captain across three sports at the high school Marc later attended.

Marc followed him into athletics, but not always in the way the coaches may have expected.

He played football and competed in track and field, throwing shot put and discus. During the off seasons, he served as a team manager for basketball, wrestling and volleyball. It kept him connected to his friends, gave him continued access to the weight room and gave him a way to contribute.

He operated clocks, kept statistics, filled water bottles and did whatever else the team needed.

> *"I was not the best player when I was on a team, but I was always the most enthusiastic."*

He cheered for other players, made sure the first string got the repetitions they needed in practice and stayed invested through wins and losses.

Marc has a word for the role he tended to play:

Glue.

He wasn't always the person at the center of the action. He was often the person paying attention to what the team needed and finding a way to contribute.

Years later, the same instinct would show up in the way he leads.

Playing to People's Strengths

One of Marc's most formative experiences took place far from a football field.

Around seventh or eighth grade, a close friend's father, who worked in neurology at A.I. duPont Hospital, helped connect the two boys with a summer camp serving young people with cerebral palsy, muscular dystrophy and spina bifida.

Marc began as a volunteer.

He remembers adaptive sports, art and swimming, but what stayed with him most was spending time with young people his own age whose circumstances could be very different from his own.

They still wanted many of the same things he did.

They wanted to participate. To have fun. To belong.

Marc found that he genuinely enjoyed giving his time to other people. After his first summer, the camp invited him to become a junior counselor—earlier than was typical, according to Marc. Within two years, he had become a senior counselor and was helping newer volunteers learn the work.

His commitment to service continued at Penn State, where he participated in the university's Dance Marathon throughout all four years of college. He spent three of those years as a dancer–awake and on his feet for 48 hours–including his senior year, when he participated alongside his future wife through their fraternity and sorority fundraising group. He has remained a supporter ever since.

Looking back, Marc considers the summer camp and Dance Marathon two of three volunteer experiences that have stayed with him and fueled his desire to give back. The third, his involvement with the Philadelphia Eagles Autism Challenge, would become especially meaningful years later.

Across those experiences, Marc developed an appreciation for the importance of understanding and connecting with people. It's a perspective that continues to shape how he leads.

> "If you're gonna be a good leader, you have to be able to have empathy. You have to be able to listen. You have to be able to meet people where they are."

That idea also shapes how he thinks about employee growth. Not every good employee wants—or needs—the same path.

Some people may have the ambition and ability to move through several levels of responsibility. Others may not, and may not want to.

Marc's goal is not to push every employee toward the same definition of advancement. It is to understand what people do well and help them become the best they can be where they are capable of contributing.

Some of those instincts came from his parents, too.

Marc's mother was a registered nurse. His father began in public accounting, later became a CFO and eventually started a CPA practice with Marc's older brother. Marc believes much of his empathy came from his mother and much of his mathematical orientation from his father. From both, he absorbed a strong work ethic.

Marc took those influences in a different direction. He became an engineer.

Seeing the Whole Field

Although trained as an engineer, Marc recognized early that his ability to connect with people could be just as valuable as his technical knowledge. His fundraising experiences helped him recognize that strength.

Over more than 23 years with another company, Marc put those abilities to work as his career expanded into sales, marketing, business

development, manufacturing operations and information technology.

By the time PAC's parent organization recruited him, Marc had seen a business from a lot of angles. PAC was also preparing for an enterprise resource planning transition, and Marc had already participated in multiple ERP implementations.

> "When you're running a business, you have to know how all aspects of the business interact. What they do. Why they do. How they do."

On the morning of the interview, a question had landed on Marc's desk from the customer service team. They were performing a function that didn't seem to belong with them. Marc agreed.

But the work still had to happen.

His job was to understand where it belonged and make sure it reached the department best equipped to handle it.

Employees working in one part of a company may have little reason to understand the mechanics of every other part. Marc's role is to see how those pieces connect.

A few months after he arrived, COVID-19 disrupted workplaces across the country. Much of PAC's work could not simply stop. The company determined that two of the three areas in which it operated fell within Pennsylvania's essential categories, and PAC remained open.

Employees who could work remotely were sent home. Manufacturing, shipping and service personnel still needed to be physically present. PAC provided protective equipment and worked through the operational challenges as they emerged.

There was no established playbook.

When Marc talks about those decisions, he comes back to one thing:

> *"The most important thing is making sure that they were comfortable doing what they had to do."*

The company still had obligations to meet.

Its people were not an afterthought to those obligations.

Different Strengths, Same Team

Marc encountered some of the same lessons at home.

He and his wife have two children. Marc describes his daughter as fiercely independent. A numbers guy himself, he tried to get her excited about math.

It didn't work.

Eventually, he had to recognize something simple: his path did not have to become hers.

Parenting his son, who is autistic, gave Marc another perspective. It deepened his awareness of differences in individual abilities and the importance of not judging someone without understanding what they may be navigating.

That understanding also gave new meaning to his longstanding commitment to service.

Since the Eagles Autism Challenge began nearly 10 years ago, Marc and his family have participated and fundraised every year. According to Marc, fewer than 50 people have maintained that commitment for even eight years. Through his involvement, he has been responsible for raising more than $100,000 for the Eagles Autism Foundation.

For Marc, the commitment is personal. It also reflects something he learned long before becoming a parent: everyone has different abilities, circumstances and ways of contributing.

When Marc talks about teams, he reaches again for a sports analogy.

There is one quarterback on the field. One middle linebacker. Everyone cannot occupy the same position, nor should they.

What matters is understanding what each person does well.

> "Everybody's got a part to play."

Today, Marc works from what he calls a beautiful corner office at PAC.

He also notices that some employees are still hesitant to knock on the door.

Marc maintains an open-door policy, but declaring a door open does not automatically erase the distance people may feel between themselves and the person running the company.

So PAC creates other ways for employees to connect. During the summer, the company holds PAC Appreciation Day on the front lawn, where employees hear an update on the business and spend time together over food and ice cream trucks. Around the holidays, employees gather off-site for breakfast, another business update, door prizes and time away from the normal rhythms of work.

None of it is especially elaborate.

That may be part of the point.

For Marc, leadership keeps coming back to the people around him: what they can do, what they need and where they fit.

He learned early that contributing to a team didn't require being its star. Years later, when he inherited a company whose history long preceded his arrival, his instinct was much the same.

Listen first. Understand the team. Help people succeed where they can contribute most.

The positions have changed.

The instinct has not.

Everyone has a part to play.