

Episode 42: Customer Relationships are the Engine on Which the JM Roofing Runs

Daniel Robbins: Here we are again for another episode of Above It All, a podcast dedicated to the roofing industry by Johns Manville. I am here today with someone from our services team, and not just anyone, but a Regional Service Manager. Zach [Carpenter], how you doing today, sir?

Zach Carpenter: I'm doing great. How are you?

Daniel Robbins: I'm doing well. So I wanted to have you on the podcast because I think it's of huge value to discuss, yeah, we have great products as Johns Manville, but I think a lot of customers really appreciate and we stand apart in a lot of ways through our services. And so, I kind of wanted to dive into that with you and kind of get your view on it and the value adds for customers and things like that. But before we kind of dive into more of it, can you tell us about your role as the Regional Service Manager at JM and also kind of what that, what the service team offers customers?

Zach Carpenter: Yeah, absolutely. So from a regional service side, I handle the Pacific region, so basically West Coast, you know, west of Colorado, for all states that fall in there. And from a high level service standpoint, I oversee customer service, account management, technical services, and in the case of the Pacific, we also have tapered design that falls into that service level. So from, kind of again, the high-level standpoint, account management from pricing, we've gotta make sure we stay competitive in the market, really working to get the right price into the right people's hands, who we want to do business with, who wants to partner with JM while also looking to see who else wants to grow with us. You know, growth is a big thing as we look into the future. How do we expand our partners? How do we expand our business? Pricing right now plays a big piece into that, compared to where supply chain constraints kind of was a different time, different mindset of what we needed to do to meet our customer's expectations and needs during that crazy time.

Daniel Robbins: No, that's really interesting. Tell me a little bit about that dynamic of services, kind of go into a little bit more of all the different kind of services that we're offering them through you and your team.

Zach Carpenter: Yeah, absolutely. So touched on the pricing quite a bit there. From an account specialist side, they're the frontline defense. They're talking to customers daily, they're fielding questions that come in from that outside world of what people need essentially. It's really driven. I talk to my team a lot of, not just here to take calls, not here just to kind of be the welcome mat, but you're here to, you're almost like a project manager but with a lot more of the service focus. So you are getting a POL in on that front end and you're really dialing it in to make sure, "Okay, what's the date that they need? Are we able to obtain that? Do we have the material ready?" So running through a long list of, "How do I service this customer the best case? Can I hit two days from now from a requested delivery date? Or what is that... What's the risk for JM at that same standpoint? Is it gonna cost more to do something? Are we gonna be able to service it on a level that we want to?" I mean, you could throw something in last minute, but is it gonna really have a quality? It's like putting something in the oven; are you gonna let it sit for the whole time or are we gonna have to try to speed it up and hope that it comes out better on that standpoint? So as we work through it, the customer account specialist side, they all are pushing that frontline forward. They're taking care of problems, fixes, materials. They're really running the show, kind of on a day-to-day to make sure those things for our customers are being handled. From a technical side, it's as technical as it sounds, between assembly letters, what options we might be able to provide a customer - very solution driven between those two groups in my opinion. But always constant conversations with customers, whether it's a distributor or a contractor, really finding the best way to make JM easier to do business with, and eliminate as many hurdles as possible, but while also keeping a balance for us. So it's definitely, I'll say a pendulum of back and forth a bit, but weighing out what our best options are in certain situations.

Daniel Robbins: That is really cool. It sounds like there's a lot of moving parts to that. I think one thing I wanted to ask that kind of popped up in my head as you were talking was, what's the touchpoint contact like? Like is the customer is getting to kind of have a good relationship and build a relationship with one service person?

Zach Carpenter: Yeah, you know, from my perspective, you probably have one point of contact in the outside world. That's your sales rep, right? You're calling your JM Sales Rep, if you're a contractor or distributor, that's your go-to person there. The philosophy would be, yes, on the inside team you're building relationships. I think we drive that home quite a bit, is knowing who your customer is goes a long way. When they can pick up the phone and they feel more comfortable that you're gonna have... Somebody's got their back on the inside, they can get through their day-to-day and they know that, "I'm [going to] call so and so and they're [going to] get me taken care of, or at least have a solution for me, point me in the right direction". I think that's what separates people from the good and the bad is breaking it down, pretty black and white there, but the good versus the bad. If somebody doesn't wanna answer the phone, isn't there for another person or just kind of moves them along a packing order, an assembly line. One order I've just done, I'm moving on. I don't need to talk to this this person. I think people take that home with them as somebody who understands them, right? Remembers the small intricacies about them.

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I remember when I first started and I overheard somebody talking about, "Hey, how are your kids doing?" And I was taken back a bit that, that it got into that deep of a conversation. But as over my time at JM, I've realized those are the things that really drive it home. I think, in a perfect world we'd love to have one account specialist, one service person always in a territory, working with that person. And in some cases it works out that way. But other times, we really, as an account specialist side of things, we really want them to grow and build. And sometimes you have to shift where you're at, you might start out and one territory and need to go to another one to see what a different perspective looks like and work through there. But the goal is always to give that customer focus there, have that customer focus in place. So, if I can make a good acquaintance in the California as an Account Specialist and I'm told that I gotta go to the Midwest, I'm gonna take the same mentality, the same tools that I, how I built those relationships out West, I'm gonna try to do that the same in the Midwest. And it's hard, not everybody's gonna be the same in Chicago as they are in Los Angeles, California, but there's always kind of a base layer you can work with. There's always a way you can try to get a foot in the door there and feel it out, right? There might be different perspectives from somebody here, but how do you kind of curtail to that, to work it out to where you still get to that same level as that relationship you had with somebody in Los Angeles.

Daniel Robbins: Right. Yeah. And I think there's this fact too that, we are really, we wanna do business with the right people. And you kind of talked about that earlier and that kind of alludes to this idea that we don't wanna take on just a bunch of customers, we wanna take on the right customers. And in that mix, I feel like there is room to have these really cool personal relationships with the customer. And they, and I do feel like that, like the way that you described, "Hey, how's your family doing?" Every time I've gotten to meet and spend time with our contractors, it just, it feels that way. And like they're in, it's kind of like that whole, they're not technically partners, but it's like family partnership kind of a thing. When we bring them on-board and we have that relationship with them through all the parts of our organization, right?

Zach Carpenter: Absolutely. I mean, you look at some people that have been at JM and it's a long history. I've talked to people who have been here 25, 30 years, and you see somebody with the same last name. Now a lot of names can be similar, so you wonder if they have family ties or not, but there are certain people that are there and it's the next generation coming in to work at JM. So it starts on the inside. And I would say you look at some of these guys and females as well that have been out there, they've worked in this industry, they've seen it. I think of people in Texas and other contractors that we do business with. Somebody started a business, they're passing it along to their kids. Like it's definitely has the family value that everybody's running with. And I think that's where it really drives it home, is that you can have that connection, and you understand it, you understand it from their perspective, you understand it on our side. Again, it's everybody sees it as a business, which it is. You can't forget that we're still running a business, but how do you make it more enjoyable? How do you take it to the next level, to keep that business going for as long as we've been in business?

Daniel Robbins: Totally. I think there's something cool to say about that too. And for our listeners, if you don't know, I would say the majority of roofing companies I've come across that are successful are, they are family-operated, family-owned, multi-generation, and it's just this personal thing to them and whoever they do business with, it's very personal. I find that to be, there's something very, it's like the heart and soul of America in a way, if you think about it.

Zach Carpenter: It's been around for a long time when you think about it. I remember when I first started, people were like, "Oh, you work in, you know, residential roofs?" I was like, "No, there's a different world out there of commercial roofs and, it, I mean, the bigger the buildings are, the more you're gonna see of it". Yeah, it's definitely a center point in our country and our history of the country.

Daniel Robbins: Yeah, it's cool. Well, we are out of time, but Zach, thank you so much for kind of enlightening us on the service angle for our customers. I think it's really, it seems very inclusive and it's no wonder to me why I've heard really great feedback on why people like doing business with JM, because I think overall we'd like to say we have better products and I think we do put a lot of love in that. But generally, I think all the manufacturers are gonna stand apart probably on their services the most.

Zach Carpenter: Absolutely. And like I said, as times are changing, the game is always changing. We have to adapt, stay flexible on there. What worked last year might not work this year and how do we stay ahead of the game, and stay that manufacturer of choice for our customers each day.

Daniel Robbins: Awesome. Well, that wraps [it] all up. Thanks everyone, and we'll catch you next time.