

the official e-newsletter for the decorative plumbing & hardware association

CONNECTIONS

Association News

The DPHA February 2017 Showroom Spotlight is on Pierce Hardware, by Phil Hotarek (Lutz Bath & Kitchen)



I recently had the privilege of speaking with Erin Bittner, from Pierce Hardware in Dallas, Texas, that began as a spotlight interview but ended up becoming an insightful discussion about our industry. I first met Erin at the DPHA Showcase in Nashville, TN in October of 2016 and found him to be very passionate about the decorative plumbing industry, which resonated in the round-table segment of the weekend. Personally, I learn the most when I engage in discussions that revolve around business ideas and strategies with colleagues. There is so much we can learn from each other, and implementing these talking points can become a catalyst in strengthening the value of our showrooms and businesses in the current market. I hope you all enjoy the interview as much as I did.

Erin Bittner is the C.O.O. of Pierce Hardware and JCR Distributors, which has Pierce showroom locations in Dallas and Fort Worth, Texas, and he has been in the DPH industry for the past 15 years.



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Phil Hotarek: What do you see as the biggest surprises about our industry?

Erin Bittner: The value and power of strong relationships, how complex product offerings are and how challenging product integration into the construction of the home really is. The necessity to employ a quality professional who has tremendous product knowledge and experience matters!

Phil: The most challenging aspect of our industry?

Erin: Keeping up with the constant change from manufacturers to reps. New price books, new displays, product discontinuations, price changes, etc., certainly make our jobs challenging, not to mention trying to utilize co-op funds to promote quality brands alongside our own branding efforts.

Phil: Any success stories you would like to share?

Erin: Our company was generously converted to an ESOP (employee owned), which had to be fronted by our former owner Mike McKenzie during the great recession. It's hard to convey the value of what Mike did for this company - he carried a large financial risk for the benefit of longtime employees. He saw value in their tenure and experience and had a vision for how well that value would translate into an employee owned entity. That's a huge success story!

Phil: If there is one thing you can sell, it's...?

Erin: If you're referring to a product, I would say The Galley Workstation. If you are talking about my experiences though, I believe it is the value of using a quality showroom. "We must be experts at communicating all that we do for our clients to ensure our full value is recognized... This is especially important when so many customers are using online tools for research and comparison. New competitors continue to drive prices down and try to steal our clients, so we need to continue to innovate, execute well and always learn more."

Phil: Have you registered for the DPHA Recognition Program yet?

Erin: Yes. All our new employees have been registered. The Recognition Program at first was found to be complex and confusing because employees thought that simply going through the quizzes was the recognition program itself. We are rediscovering how much the program, as well as DPHA, itself has to offer. I strongly encourage your showroom managers to reach out to the team at DPHA to review the tools available through the Association you can use immediately.

Phil: Have you completed any category tests?

Erin: The team has. I have a personal goal to finish 5 classes in 2017.

Phil: How have you benefited from participating in the Recognition Program, if at all?

Erin: In addition to helping our new employees get up to speed, participation in the program aids in the mental discipline of constantly learning, even if you are already fairly knowledgeable. Our team's knowledge and experience sets us apart, so continuing education is essential to our future. Just try to pass Jim Babbitt's 21 question sample quiz and you may be humbled on what all you could learn or re-learn.

Phil: Is that face-to-face or online training?

Erin: On-line and face-to-face. It depends on the subject or the quality of the online material.

Phil: What are some key factors that set you apart from other showrooms?

Erin: We closed down our historic showroom in a boutique shopping mall area (retail space, 1500 square feet of showroom space) and moved everyone to a new location next to Love Field in Dallas, a more industrial area that allowed us to create a much larger showroom (more than triple the previous size). People are now able to see both plumbing and hardware for the entire home. We are currently remodeling the Fort Worth showroom and we continue to invest in our employees as owners. The showroom is designed in such a way that the

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displays and decor can be frequently changed. We show exclusive brands and products you can only see at Pierce. But at the end of the day, the quality, tenure and knowledge of our team is what matters most.

Phil: How do you compete with the surge in e-commerce sales?

Erin: We constantly promote and communicate the value of buying from a professional. Our actions must back up our words as well. We also use smart merchandising techniques to better convey the value of our authentic brands. We focus on making Pierce Hardware a destination for seeing the latest and greatest products in the world and creating the strongest relationship possible along the way.

Phil: In your opinion, what do we need to do as an industry to further education in decorative plumbing amongst the masses?

Erin: We need to formalize and scale the educational process so we can take people who have the right DNA to sell decorative products and put them through a system. We need to capture best practices from expert showrooms around the country and integrate them, and not limit to materials a manufacturer provides. A Rolls Royce may be the finest car made, but how you sell one every week is what really interests me! Having a formal program, yielding recognized credentials such as the ones architects, real estate agents and/or designers have validates the credibility of what showroom professionals are offering. It could also lead to other elements such as certain manufacturers selling only to accredited qualified showrooms. We live in a society where everything can be purchased online or is accessible through an app right at your fingertips. An experienced professional saves the consumer time and hassle in addition to providing unmatched support to the trade. Formalizing the education program may validate us as qualified professionals, providing a myriad of possibilities through recognition amongst manufacturers, reps, designers, and consumers.

Phil: And just for fun, what is one thing your coworkers don't know about you?

Erin: I played the tuba from 3rd grade all the way through high school. I am sure there is a "hot air" joke in there somewhere.

Phil: When your friends ask, "You sell toilets?" you say?

Erin: Yes, lots of them, we sell the coolest potties you've ever seen!

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How to Demonstrate Sales Confidence



High-performing decorative plumbing and hardware sales professionals appear confident. Posture, the way you walk, your body language and the spoken word all convey confidence or a lack thereof. In a recent article in *Inc.* magazine, Maria Takaba identified several phrases that all sales people should avoid because they "scream lack of confidence and make you appear weak."

The first phrase is "I hate to bother you." If you are returning a call or having to convey information that can't wait, the discomfort is not that you are bothering your customer or prospect. Rather, the discomfort comes from the information you have to convey. It may be that a product delivery has been delayed or an item arrived damaged. When you say "I hate to bother you," you lose all control of the conversation. A better option is to say "When you have a minute, I would like to discuss something with you."

The second phrase is "I'm sorry." You should certainly not avoid being accountable when a mistake is made or your information was not accurate, but how many people do you know that say "I'm sorry" repeatedly. Are they really sorry? If you have bad news to convey, a better alternative is to say, "I need to let you know of some bad news."

Successful sales people rarely tell others that they are worried. Expressing an opinion of a potential negative outcome eliminates the ability to come up with a solution because you are focusing on the problem. Instead of saying "I'm worried that the finish won't match," a better alternative would be "I have some concerns that the finish won't match. An option to avoid this problem is..."

Never use the word "just". It compromises what you might be thinking or the messages that you want to convey, such as -

- "I just need a minute of your time."
- "I just thought about a great alternative."
- "I just had an idea."

If you preface a thought with the words, "I believe/think/feel that" you are couching your message with an unnecessary qualifier and subsequently diminishing the importance of the thought. For instance, which statement is more powerful?

- I just feel that you should consider the steam unit for the master bath to create your own in-home spa.
- The steam unit for the master bath will create your own in-home spa.

Finally, avoid asking permission to make a request by prefacing a statement with the words, "If it's OK" or "would you mind." When you do so, your customer may say or think, "no it's not OK" or "yes I do mind". A more confident approach is to make a request by saying, "When you have a moment, let me show you this extraordinary shower system."

Did You Know? Just Because You Missed the 2016 Annual Conference Doesn't Mean You Have to Miss the Content

Although we posted this notice in the November 18th, 2016 issue of *Connections*, after talking with many of our members over the past 3 or 4 weeks, this item bears repeating. So many DPHA members were thoroughly impressed with the quality of content presented at the 2016 Annual Conference, they wanted us to share the experience and knowledge with their coworkers. Now here's their chance. DPHA has posted the following videos on the DPHA web site:

- Donald Miller: *Mother Goose was Right*: How to Tell Compelling Stories that Earn the Trust of Your Clientele

- Jill Schiefelbein: Friends, Romans and Clients: Lend Me an Ear - *Listen More, Sell More*
- Kerry Singh: Delivering Exceptional Customer Service (Even on Mondays)



To view the videos, log on to the membership only side of www.dpha.net, click on the 2016 Conference Videos menu tab and then click on the link of

the video you wish to view. If you need your login information and/or the password for the videos, please email Jim Babbitt at jbabbitt@dpha.net.

What We Can Learn From Macy's



Macy's is struggling. The giant retailer that owns Macy's and Bloomingdales plans to shutter 100 underperforming stores, its 2016 sales fell by 4.8% and revenue predictions for 2017 call for more of the same. On the upside for Macy's is its online sales experienced double digit growth last year, but that's not where Macy's is focusing all of its attention. In its fourth quarter earnings call, company CEO Terry Lundgren pointed out that 90% of Macy's sales still take place in a brick and mortar store. The company's future, according to the CEO, is tied to improving in-store customer experience. Here are several of the changes that Macy's outlined to improve customer experiences.

- Macy's will expand its private label and exclusive brand offerings from fashion houses that include Tommy Hilfiger, Rachel Roy, Hugo Boss and Kipling and which currently represent 20% of apparel sales.
- Macy's private label brands such as Bar III represent another 20% of sales.

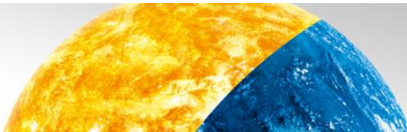
- The company will separate sale items from full priced items. Sale priced items will be displayed in a separate clearance section to avoid compromising the margins of regularly priced merchandise.
- The company wants to move away from excessive discounting that has caused Coach and Michael Kors to pull their handbags out of Macy's.
- Macy's plans to reinvest in higher-quality, more expensive products and reduce its footprint in product categories that are underperforming.
- Macy's plans to reformat stores in high net-worth demographics and partner with top-tier shopping center owners that could result in a hybrid department store that includes entertainment, dining and shopping experiences all within the store.

What are the lessons for decorative plumbing and hardware showrooms? Customers expect more. They want to feel good about their in-store experience. If you have sale merchandise, create a separate space in your showroom so it does not compromise full-price offerings. Less could be more. Evaluate the performance of each of your lines and product categories. Determine which ones are most profitable and emphasize those while reducing your footprint with products and categories that are underperforming.

Walk your showroom through your customer's lens. What do you see? What changes can you make to the physical environment that would improve the customer experience?

If You are Going to the 2017 ISH Fair, Make Sure Your Tour Includes DPHA Members

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If you are going to the ISH Fair, March 14-17, 2017 in Frankfurt, Germany, please make sure that your tour of the Messe Frankfurt includes the following DPHA members:

- Alape - Hall 4, Level 1, Booth G54
- Axent International - Hall 3, Level 0, Booth C61
- Cosmics - Hall 3, Level 1, Booth B02
- Crosswater Ltd. - Hall 3, Level 0, Booth D60
- Dornbracht - Hall 4, Level 1, Booth F99, G54
- Duravit - Hall 3, Level 1, Booth B99, C80
- Franke Water Systems - Hall 4, Level 1, E46
- Gessi - Hall 3, Level 1, Booth B20
- GRAFF - Hall 4, Level 1, E94
- Hansgrohe - Hall 2, Booth 02
- Keuco - Hall 3, Level 1, Booth A21
- KWC - Hall 4, Level 1, Booth E06
- Laufen - Hall 3, Level 1, Booth B51
- Lefroy Brooks - Hall 4, Level 1, Booth G52
- Mountain Plumbing Products (in McAlpine Booth) - Hall 4, Level 0, Booth D21
- Nikles - Hall 4, Level 1, Booth J70
- Palazanni - Hall 4, Level 1, Booth H95
- PomD'or - Hall 3, Level 1, Booth B02
- Steamist - Hall 4, Level 2, F04
- TOTO - Hall 4, Level 1, Booth H05, J45
- Victoria + Albert Baths - Hall 3, Level 0, Booth C86

The new **Tear Drop 9568** tub from [Americh](#) has an extravagant, clean, sleek, and modernistic design that features a combination of modern qualities. The Tear Drop is a part of the Americh drop-in collection and can be purchased with any system. The Tear Drop is also available in all Americh standard colors. Compliant with UL and cUL standards, other features include:



- Acrylic material
- Textured tub floor
- Self-leveled bathtub
- Pre-mounted controls
- Adjustable jet direction for whirlpool systems and adjustable jet flow for Airbath systems



[BLANCO](#) added five new SILGRANIT® colors to its IKON apron front kitchen sink. Already offered in anthracite, white and café brown, the **BLANCO IKON 30" Bowl** is also available in biscotti, truffle, metallic gray, cinder and biscuit. The BLANCO IKON 30" apron front single bowl features the rock hard durability of SILGRANIT and includes the following accessories which are sold separately: a bottom grid, floating grid and cutting board.

Today's contemporary kitchens typically showcase clean-lined cabinetry with minimal embellishment - letting the materials speak for themselves. That means the cabinetry hardware needs to make its mark through understatement. That's where [Hardware Resources™](#) new Alvar and Leyton collections of pulls by Jeffrey Alexander come in; their streamlined shapes and subtle finishes add just enough sparkle to draw attention to the cabinetry underneath.



- The **Alvar** family of contemporary pulls (pictured) delivers the softer side of accessorizing cabinetry with flat-panel doors. That's because each pull sports a gracefully clean curved profile in one of five trendy finishes: brushed oil-rubbed bronze, brushed pewter, satin nickel, polished nickel and polished chrome. This collection includes pulls in five lengths ranging from 3" to 192 mm center-to-center to suit different cabinetry styles and hardware-mounting locations.
- Each sleek, asymmetrical pull in the **Leyton** hardware family combines a flat top with gently curved feet to create a unique look that's perfect for contemporary or transitional kitchens. Consumers can choose from five of today's trendiest finishes (polished chrome, polished nickel, satin nickel, brushed pewter and brushed oil-rubbed bronze). The collection includes pulls in five lengths ranging from 96 mm to 224 mm center to center to suit different cabinetry styles and hardware-mounting locations.



The **4173 Palermo solid surface bathtub** by [Cheviot Products, Inc.](#) is a luxurious and versatile addition to home bathrooms, offering a bold, modern feel while providing the practicality that homeowners need in busy day-to-day life. The Palermo bathtub stands apart on seamlessly integrated legs and is crafted using the latest generation of composite resin materials, resulting in a strong and elegant rim profile. The Palermo bathtub is inherently harder and stronger than acrylic and impervious to creaking and flexing. Polished by hand to a glossy sheen, the Palermo is extremely durable and resistant to stains, bacteria and microbes - a helpful feature in home

bathrooms. The bathtub's composite resin construction helps keep water warmer for the longest possible time. The Palermo bathtub features an integrated overflow with matching drain cover and is cUPC approved. The Palermo has a white interior and exterior, making it easy to integrate with the bathroom's design, whether existing or part of a new renovation. The bathtub can be paired with a variety of tub fillers and faucets, easily coordinating with the existing hardware.

[Nantucket Sinks](#) announced several new additions to its line of kitchen sinks and lavatories. The **Cape Collection**

FCFS36-DB 36 x 20 fireclay apron front farm sink has a 10" drain board and a bowl dimension of 24" x 17.5"; the bowl is 9" deep and the apron height is 10".

Fireclay is a product that has been around for over 100 years. The fireclay sinks are fired at 2000 deg for over 20 hours, are easy to clean, and are resistant to scratching, staining, chipping and discoloring. This new model is in addition to the other 17 models, sizes, and colors of fireclay sinks.



Sincerely,

Jim Babbitt
Decorative Plumbing and Hardware Association (DPHA)
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