

“Customer Focused, Customer First”: Newly Retired Market Manager Reflects on a Job Well Worked

Behind every successful mission is a head for business—and a passion for work that matters.

These attributes are what made Michael Sullivan a natural as Hutchinson’s defense and aerospace market manager, a position he held for 22 years before celebrating his retirement last month. His ongoing mission in that time? To grow these key segments and see them continually thrive.

“Over my tenure, the company’s revenue has increased by more than 500%,” Sullivan said. “According to Bob [Andersen, CEO], roughly 12% of that is a direct result of my work here. So it’s been successful, and I see it as a testament to what’s possible when people are supported, trusted and motivated to perform at their best.”

On Building Trust

A resident of Lincoln, RI, Sullivan joined Hutchinson with valuable experience in mechanical engineering and sales across the defense sector, having worked at General Dynamics Electric Boat, General Electric and Parker Hannifin. By land, sea or sky, he was well equipped to draw customers to Hutchinson and connect them to the right solutions.

“Over the years, there has been a huge need for defense contractors to find competent suppliers who understand where they’re coming from, their needs and requirements and restrictions,” Sullivan said. “As someone who previously worked in those industries, I was able to quickly ease their cultural concern about potentially moving forward with a new partner. Because I knew they were looking for not just buzzwords, but real responses.”

Illustrating the tangible impact that in-depth knowledge combined with solid customer rapport can have, Sullivan recalled a story from his early Hutchinson days involving a top-tier U.S. defense contractor. It began when he walked into a group meeting with a rep from the prominent company—to instant recognition between them.

“I sat down at the table, and a woman across from me was looking at me,” Sullivan said. “She said, ‘Hold on a second. Why are you in this room?’ We had a history of working together, when I was with a previous employer. She asked to speak privately and told me, ‘I’m here to tell your company that I’m going to replace you, to remove Hutchinson from this program.’ I said, ‘Tell me what I have to do.’ She said, ‘That’s what I wanted to hear.’ Today, this corporation is our number-one customer.”



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The More You Know

Second only to a staunch “customer-focused, customer-first, customer-face” philosophy, Sullivan said, a commitment to staying current is critical to success.

“Things are happening and you need to be aware of the changes, from boots on the ground to drones in the air,” he said. “You need to keep up with advances in technology and attack the areas sales-wise when the opportunities arise. And you need to know the company, and that was my job.”

It’s a job that now belongs to his successor, Neil Donovan, whom Sullivan himself had recruited to the company six years ago—and not in haste.

“Either I was in desperate need of somebody and didn’t care who I took, or I was careful to see who I took,” Sullivan said. “And I was careful. Donovan was an ex-Hutchinson/Barry Controls employee and we had a lot of common friends. We’d go to trade shows and I would talk to him. Bringing in someone with the same mindset and the same intent is very important. He’s told me, ‘I totally agree with you and all I’m going to do is keep following it.’ And he’s doing great.”

While he’ll miss the work he loves and “all who I worked with—that’s number one,” Sullivan said he looks forward to spending more time with family, including his newborn granddaughter and her big sister.

“I’ll be busy,” Sullivan said. “Happily busy. It’s all really good stuff.”



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