

# Cultivating The Leaders Of Today

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**Leadership means having conversations—sometimes tough ones—face to face with your business partners, even if it means (literally) going a few extra miles.**



Sometimes business travel can really get the best of you. A few weeks back, crammed onto a fully booked 737 and strong-armed into a \$13 internet connection, I watched my favorite baseball team get eliminated from the playoffs. Arriving in Las Vegas at midnight that night, battling fatigue and irritation, I was less than excited for the rapidly-approaching morning. If I were home right now, I thought as I checked into my hotel, I'd have been sleeping off this loss for three hours already.

Still, despite my baseball- and travel-related bad attitude, my interest was piqued as to the events that lie ahead. Celebrating 30 years in the business, Affiliated Distributors had been gracious enough to open its doors, and for the first time, select media were invited to its annual Industrial North American Meeting.

AD is an organization that provides independent distributors and manufacturers of construction and industrial products with support and resources that accelerate growth. The organization was established in 1981 to help independent distributors successfully compete with national chains. Today, it has grown to 450+ independently owned members.

So the next day, through dry desert-ravaged, sleep-deprived eyes, I turned my attention to AD CEO Bill Weisberg's post-lunch keynote. The speech, delivered in Weisberg's traditional charismatic style, focused on the theme of this year's AD event: "Lead. Connect. Grow." While Weisberg touched on the state of the industry, as well as the 30 years of progress AD has made from both a revenue-generation and a membership standpoint, he was careful to emphasize what he deemed the most critical element to this year's theme.

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"The first word is not *grow*," stressed Weisberg. "And it's not *connect*. It starts with *lead*."

Weisberg's emphasis on the leadership part of the equation served as a great and meaningful illustration as many in the audience, no doubt drowsy from travel and the full-fat desserts on the table of the convention room, risked succumbing to an early afternoon malaise. But Weisberg reminded them that he was speaking to an audience of leaders, and the group sat with rapt attention.

Leadership means heading out to Las Vegas on a Saturday and spending the next few days in back-to-back meetings with your suppliers. Leadership means having conversations—sometimes tough ones—face to face with your business partners, even if it means (literally) going a few extra miles.

Everyone always talks about cultivating the leaders of tomorrow. While the importance of this is clear, should we focus less on cultivating the leaders of today? Weisberg doesn't think so, and put it to the audience thusly: "If we're not seeing the kind of leadership we want, then we need to go out there and become the leaders we're looking for."

I'd invite you to read on in this month's issue as we tackle some hard topics like delinquent customers, and salary comparisons and job satisfaction. It's tough issues like these that need strong leadership to navigate, and if *Industrial Distribution* can play a small role in cultivating the leaders of today, we'd be honored. If there is any way we can do better, I hope you'll let me know.

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