

My 3Ps of packaging with a veteran's advice: Be ready to pivot and accept change



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Roughly 30 years ago I entered university as a naïve, open-minded, scared freshman. It was a time well before cell phones, the internet, social media, and high-definition big-screen television sets. I was far from home and preparing to enter packaging, a male-dominated field. Pulp and Paper was a demanding major that taught me the 3Ps of packaging: Patience, Practicality, and Persistence. Since then, I have designed and implemented count-

less projects (many of which I was told would never work, let alone break even from a cost perspective), identified and implemented projects that saved millions of dollars, worked with vendors internationally, tutored at the high school and elementary school levels, and received several AmeriStar Awards bestowed by the Institute of Packaging Professionals.

However, my greatest accomplishments have been being Mrs. Burcham for close to 19 years and "Mom" for more than 15 years. During this time, the 3Ps have been present. Packaging has taught me to continually listen and learn. It has taught me patience, acceptance, appreciation, and compassion in all my professional and personal roles.

Being a packaging professional will drive you crazy, it will generate sleepless nights, it will give you wonderful tangibles and the knowledge you safely transported precious products. There is nothing greater than being with your child in a store when he or she tells someone, "Isn't this neat what my mom helped make?"

As a packaging professional, you are the conduit between other functions (in the office and at home). You are tasked with helping your organization communicate, grow, and complete projects. You must be patient when dealing with other functions, and you must accept things you cannot change. Often, changes are made mid-stream. Instead of judging and getting upset, it is best to accept, ask questions, and keep

moving. You must be practical in what you do and what you decide to linger on. You must also appreciate what other functions do for a living while being compassionate for those downstream of your part of the process.

Frequently, the folks you deal with do not control all aspects of a project, and they too are subjected to the same roller coaster of changes. Also, you must be aware that what you do dramatically affects others. However, this does not mean you don't persevere when you know you are correct. You just must know what your audience needs. You must persist and gather the information necessary to get your project completed. Your audience may want numbers to verify your claims and beliefs, your audience may want conceptual and then working samples,

your audience may want testing, and your audience might just want you to be strong and calm with your answers. Sometimes, projects go from concept to conclusion in a few weeks, and sometimes they drag on for what feels like years. Again, the 3Ps are integral parts of packaging projects.

It is amazing that the key traits a thorough

packaging professional needs in business also translate to personal life as well. We are in constant flux as packaging professionals, and

that holds true in other aspects of life. Packaging has taught me to pivot and accept change, sometimes grudgingly, but in the long run to accept and move on. Most notably, I have

learned to listen and accept that which I cannot control; to find peace within chaos, and to welcome change and indecision. It has made me stronger and more resolute. Through all the trials and tribulations, packaging has taught me that I can and will persevere.

May the 3Ps of packaging help you persevere and prosper. **PW**

PATIENCE

PRACTICALITY

PERSISTENCE

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