

TRIBE OF MENTORS

PROMO  KITCHEN

Stories about sharing, helping, and growth



Who do we think we are?

PromoKitchen is an all-volunteer, 501c3 non-profit organization led by professionals in the \$24 billion dollar promotional products industry. Our story began in January 2011: a group of young promotional products professionals banded together to create a new voice for the industry. What started out as a casual email list has now blossomed into a blog that represents our myriad views and questions we have for the future of our industry. We called this PromoKitchen.

PromoKitchen represents a cross section of the industry: suppliers, distributors and service providers, men and women, salespeople and business owners, young and the young at heart.

We believe that best practice sharing is a good thing for an industry that is going through rapid change. We also believe in the power of community and how this industry can improve by establishing stronger connections between us all.

PromoKitchen has two mandates:

1. Education: We want to advance the industry through thought-provoking discussion on a variety of subjects (marketing, sales, technology, operations, productivity, creativity).
2. Mentorship: We want to make the industry better for newer entrants and the idea is to match young superstars with some seasoned members in PromoKitchen.

We don't have all of the answers (not even close), but we feel that by expressing our thoughts here we can help move the industry forward. PromoKitchen is about debate, differing opinions and pushing the limits by discussing new and cool trends.

To set the record straight, we represent an independent view with the goal of helping everyone progress. We are not here to promote or demote any other industry "group" or "association." PromoKitchen is an entirely volunteer force, all of the contributors are busy running their own businesses and do not profit from PromoKitchen. Our commitment to you is to provide rich stories of real entrepreneurship and to create a space for open dialogue. We see PromoKitchen evolving into a larger community of progressively minded industry leaders that have something important to say.

Thank you for joining the conversation.

We invite you to join us. [Here's how you can get involved](#) in PromoKitchen.

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Thanks!

Johanna Gottlieb

Type of PKer: **Distributor** Category for current position? **Managerial Level** I am (or was) a: **Mentor**

If you could go back in time and tell yourself one thing that would make a huge impact on how you work today, what would that be?

Slow down. Listen more and talk less.

Discuss the mentoring process. What it means to you. How has a mentor helped you with your life?

I have been so fortunate to have great mentors who are always there for me, personally and professionally.

I have had mentors who pushed me to advance in my career and helped me take the right steps.

Prediction: This industry in 10 years. Describe the promotional item industry landscape in 2028. What will we need to be teaching now that will make a difference?

Be swift and quick. respond carefully.

Our clients are getting more and more used to an amazon experience and we need to rise the same levels.

What is something you learned and how will you apply it going forward?

I have learned to talk less and listen more. I try to do this more and more.

Think about a time you were mentored without being asked. Perhaps it was a coach or in college or at your first job. Who played that 1st mentor role for you and what do you remember most about the experience?

My parents are both immigrants. They really showed me the value of hard work and perseverance.



Larry Cohen

Type of PKer: **Distributor** Category for current position? **Executive Director/Owner/Self-employed** I am (or was) a: **Mentor**

If you could go back in time and tell yourself one thing that would make a huge impact on how you work today, what would that be?

Find an organizational system that works for you and then find the commitment and dedication to work that system each day so that you can be the most productive when you're at work.

Discuss the mentoring process. What it means to you. How has a mentor helped you with your life?

One of my favorite things about this industry has been people's willingness to help and to share their experiences. Sometimes we take it for granted, but it is unique. I have had so many mentors who have taught me so many things and have also help me avoid many mistakes.

Early in my career I had a mentor who was such a great cheerleader. She pushed me and constantly encouraged me to pursue my passions and to strive to be better every day.

Prediction: This industry in 10 years. Describe the promotional item industry landscape in 2028. What will we need to be teaching now that will make a difference?

Given all the transparency in the world today, I think people need to be prepared to compete

with something other than price.

People are going to need to learn how to add value by being creative and providing solutions. I think that any business that focuses on just selling product will go the way of the dinosaur.

What is something you learned and how will you apply it going forward?

As I've gotten older, I've come to realize that no matter how articulate you are, people respect you most if you are an even better listener.

Think about a time you were mentored without being asked. Perhaps it was a coach or in college or at your first job. Who played that 1st mentor role for you and what do you remember most about the experience?

One of my early English teachers was a mentor who really pushed me by never accepting the easy answer.

I remember him well because even though he was tough he was also so encouraging.



Danny Rosin

Type of PKer: **Distributor** Category for current position? **Executive Director/Owner/Self-employed** I am (or was) a: **Mentor**

If you could go back in time and tell yourself one thing that would make a huge impact on how you work today, what would that be?

I would focus the business on specific industries that excited us where we could be the thought leaders, truly understanding our customer's marketplaces and challenges/opportunities.

Discuss the mentoring process. What it means to you. How has a mentor helped you with your life?

Being a mentor has shown me that the future is amazingly bright. Everyone is struggling in some manner and that the greatest gift is to be able to help someone in need.

I love Leonard Cohen's quote, "There is a crack in everything. That's how the light gets in."

Our job as mentors is to find the cracks and be the light.

Prediction: This industry in 10 years. Describe the promotional item industry landscape in 2028. What will we need to be teaching now that will make a difference?

The obvious answers will likely be around technology, predictive analysis, AI, etc. I think we will be teaching a generation currently tied to their devices (vices) how to be human,

how to interact and develop genuine in-person connections.

To remind them of the importance of nature.

We will crave the “old way” but not know how to get there.

What is something you learned and how will you apply it going forward?

I learned not to take myself so seriously. The concept of “*be you; let the world adjust*” has enabled me to find my people, even if at the expense of burning a bridge here or there. It has been worth it.

I will teach this to anyone who will listen.

Think about a time you were mentored without being asked. Perhaps it was a coach or in college or at your first job. Who played that 1st mentor role for you and what do you remember most about the experience?

Odie Kimball was my first boss after college. He ran a screenprinting shop he inherited because the owner left work one day and never came back.

Odie was a warmed-over flower child with a penchant for making and creating things. He espoused love and warmth to anyone in a huggable radius. He was not the best business person and maybe that was why we were a great team. I was, however, ambitious to a fault. He taught me to slow down and enjoy the ride. To develop deep, caring relationships with people and that in doing so, good things would follow.

As a salesperson on straight commission, you can imagine where my time was spent. At the time, in the yellow pages, prospecting. He taught me to spend more time with those helping me make money - the printers. And to learn the art of printing. He helped me become a better salesperson and more importantly, a better person.

Thank you Odie.



Marshall Atkinson

Type of PKer: **Chef** Category for current position? **Executive Director/Owner/Self-employed** I am (or was) a: **Mentor**

If you could go back in time and tell yourself one thing that would make a huge impact on how you work today, what would that be?

Stop and actively listen to people. Find out what makes them tick and where their challenges intersect how you can help them. There is always so much to learn about people if you simply take a minute to engage. That engagement is what drives more opportunities.

Discuss the mentoring process. What it means to you. How has a mentor helped you with your life?

Mentoring has been crucial for me over the years. I have a team of a few people that I've counted on in my life. Some are family. A few are friends. One or two are in my industry. It's great to be able to share the challenges and "what ifs" with people that will give you honest and thoughtful feedback. At certain times in my life, usually at the lowest ebb, someone reached out and grabbed my hand and pointed me in a new direction.

That's why I mentor. I want to be that hand for someone else.

Prediction: This industry in 10 years. Describe the promotional item industry landscape in 2028. What will we need to be teaching now that will make a difference?

The business landscape ten years from now will look vastly different. While we'll certainly

have more fantastic tools and technology to make things easier, at the end of the day it will still come down to people wanting to engage with people.

The learning now that needs to happen is how to build the keys to that. Know, Like, Trust, and Buy is the four corners of any sales process. Understanding how those basic concepts will fit into any new tool that people will use.

What is something you learned and how will you apply it going forward?

What I've learned from both being a mentor and being a mentee is that the human engagement sets the course for a lot of your opportunities. Active listening plays a key role, but also just be willing to take risks and say yes. Even if the outcome isn't guaranteed.

Half the battle is usually just showing up. Are you there, in the moment? Engaged?

What can you contribute?

If you want to stand out, stay off of the sidelines.

Think about a time you were mentored without being asked. Perhaps it was a coach or in college or at your first job. Who played that 1st mentor role for you and what do you remember most about the experience?

My father was my first mentor. He was a fantastic man and the ultimate salesperson.

One of my first real business lessons came from a story

from his company. Dad worked for the Lincoln-Mercury automobile business for many years. He eventually left them and bought his own Lincoln-Mercury car dealership in Omaha, Nebraska.

In mid-December one year a guy came into his dealership and was looking at some models in the showroom. He was wearing work boots, overalls, and wasn't dressed like your typical luxury car buyer.

None of the salespeople would talk to him. They just stood around drinking coffee.

After about twenty minutes, the man left and went across the street to the Cadillac dealership. He bought two cars and paid in cash.

But on one condition.

The Cadillac sales manager had to call Dad and tell him what happened, and why he walked across the street.

Dad was furious and fired his sales manager on the spot.



I can still hear him talk about it to this day.

The lesson: talk to people and find out about them. Don't judge.

You never know.



Charity Gibson

Type of PKer: **Supplier & Service Provider** Current position? **Executive Director/Owner/Self-employed** I am (or was) a: **Mentor**

If you could go back in time and tell yourself one thing that would make a huge impact on how you work today, what would that be?

If I could go back and tell myself one thing that would make an impact on how I work today it would be, *“Asking for help when you don’t know the answer doesn’t make you look foolish. In fact, quite the opposite.”*

The only way we can learn is by admitting ignorance and seeking wisdom.

The sooner you say *“I don’t know, please teach me.”* the sooner you’ll be able to acquire the knowledge you need and move on to the next lesson.”

Discuss the mentoring process. What it means to you. How has a mentor helped you with your life?

The mentoring process is multi-faceted. There is the structured process where you are paired with a mentor and have set meetings in which you are intentional about setting goals and establish both a timeline and task list for accomplishing them.

And then, there are the moments of your life that get frozen in time and forever etched into your memory when a teacher, family member, colleague, stranger or friend happens to say or do something that flips a switch in your mind and it forever alters the way you think about a particular concept, system, or process from that moment on.

One of the most memorable mentor moments in my life occurred during a leadership seminar I attended during my freshman year of high school. To this day, I can't recall the man's name that was speaking, but I've held on to the simple advice he gave like it was the most precious diamond.

His words? *“Act as if.”*

He went on to describe what it means to act as if.

He stated that, *“...whether you are working the counter at McDonald's, answering the phones in an office, or something else, act as if you are the CEO. If there is an issue, handle it like the CEO would, treat other employees like the CEO would treat them, and value the clients like the CEO would value them. If you do these things, one day you won't have to act as if you are the CEO because you'll be the CEO. Until then, act as if.”*

Prediction: This industry in 10 years. Describe the promotional item industry landscape in 2028. What will we need to be teaching now that will make a difference?

Things that we can teach now that will make a difference are that the foundational values and principles that drive business are evergreen.

Take time to learn basic economic principles.

Understand supply and demand, as well what drives human behavior.

Once you learn what drives people to buy, and then create and implement proven systems and processes with persistence and consistency, you'll be unstoppable.

What is something you learned and how will you apply it going forward?

I've learned something different from each mentor I've had and through each experience I've had while mentoring others.

One of the most important lessons I've learned, however, has been that you can lead a horse to water, but you can't make it drink.

People have to want your help as much as you want to help them. Don't be discouraged by people who say they want to grow but then fail to take the assistance being offered.

They'll get there when they are good and ready. Until then, do what you promise you will do and set a good example.

The rest is up to them!

Think about a time you were mentored without being asked. Perhaps it was a coach or in college or at your first job. Who played that 1st mentor role for you and what do you remember most about the experience?

There are too many to list and I am not sure I could even remember the first.

However, the most influential mentor in my professional career has been Mark Graham.

From our first interaction, he has believed in me, encouraged me, provided countless opportunities for my to advance my career, and challenged me.

There is no way that I would be who and where I am today without Mark and his larger than life way of doing things.



Mark Graham

Type of PKer: **Distributor** Category for current position? **Executive Director/Owner/Self-employed** I am (or was) a: **Mentor**

If you could go back in time and tell yourself one thing that would make a huge impact on how you work today, what would that be?

Surround yourself with exceptional people from day one. I spent too many years in the early stages of my business trying to figure out myself.

This does not necessarily mean hiring people, it could be as simple as connecting with fellow business owners inside and outside the industry.

Discuss the mentoring process. What it means to you. How has a mentor helped you with your life?

I have loved being a mentor! I have been paired with almost 10 mentees since the inception of the program and every exchange has taught me a lot about how other people think about their business. Others' challenges also represent an opportunity to share experience on how I dealt with the same issues. I have definitely learned as much as my mentees during each mentor pairing.

Prediction: This industry in 10 years. Describe the promotional item industry landscape in 2028. What will we need to be teaching now that will make a difference?

The industry will be primarily split between transactional e-commerce companies (35%

of the industry) and agencies (55% of the industry) that offer value added experiences to their customers. The remaining 10% will be transactional/relationship sellers.

We need to be teaching creative selling, how to embrace technology so it enhances the customer experience and how to be curious about a client's business. If we can do that now, our industry will continue to add huge value to the buyer journey.

Think about a time you were mentored without being asked. Perhaps it was a coach or in college or at your first job. Who played that 1st mentor role for you and what do you remember most about the experience?

I was matched with a non industry mentor about 15 years ago. He was an ad agency executive and he worked with me for a few years. He had a big impact on my thinking and helped me think about my business in a bigger picture way.

I always remember him telling me *“Mark, the reason clients work with any great agency is that they are able to provide an opinion on their business.”*

That stuck with me as I was just selling products, not opinions, to my clients at the time.

That was a game changing moment for me.



Patrick Black

Type of PKer: **Distributor** Category for current position? **Executive Director/Owner/Self-employed** I am (or was) a: **Mentor**

If you could go back in time and tell yourself one thing that would make a huge impact on how you work today, what would that be?

Create daily lists. Due to my scattered nature, if I don't create a daily list of goals to accomplish, I will not be very productive because I'll get distracted by menial tasks.

Discuss the mentoring process. What it means to you. How has a mentor helped you with your life?

Regarding the promotional products industry, I was mentored without knowing I was being mentored. I got my entrepreneurial spirit from my Dad. When he was in the promotional products industry, he was a traditional distributor who focused on face-to-face sales. While that worked for him, I knew that wasn't the approach for me. He suggested for several years that I get involved in the industry. I resisted for a while because I didn't want to do face-to-face sales.

Due to his influence and seeing his willingness to try and fail with various techniques, he finally convinced me to get involved. I wanted to explore the e-commerce approach way back in 1999, while it was still a relatively new concept.

Now, because my domain has been established online for such a long time, it ranks very highly with thousands of keywords, generating online sales. I have my Dad to thank for

that because it's very difficult to break into e-commerce these days with so much online competition.

Prediction: This industry in 10 years. Describe the promotional item industry landscape in 2028. What will we need to be teaching now that will make a difference?

By 2028, there will continue to be growth in the industry with increasing market saturation of distributors and suppliers. Consumers have multiple sources now, so why should they buy from us?

We have to clearly define our value as a distributor or supplier.

Those who fail to offer more value will eventually become lost in the overabundance of competitors.

We need to teach people not only to identify their strengths but also how to promote those properly.

What is something you learned and how will you apply it going forward?

During a mentorship pairing, I was paired with someone brand new within the industry. My mentee had great insight into his own generation (which was a younger generation than me). I realized that it's important to reach each generation in a different way. For some, that may mean hand-written notes and for others, it means a Snapchat message.

Being mindful of the way our clients prefer to communicate is imperative to stay relevant

among the younger generations entering the marketplace.

Think about a time you were mentored without being asked. Perhaps it was a coach or in college or at your first job. Who played that 1st mentor role for you and what do you remember most about the experience?

I luckily grew up in a home with loving parents. My Dad was not pushy with mentoring me, but, through his example, I was influenced greatly (mentored). He was my first mentor without me knowing it at the time.

He wasn't afraid to try his hand at various business models until he succeeded. Often they failed, but if they did, he adjusted his approach and adapted.

I learned that failing is not bad, as long as you learn from the experience and adapt your approach.

Strive for continual improvement in all that you do, and you'll always be ahead of most of your competitors.



Russell Bird

Type of PKer: **Distributor** Category for current position? **Executive Director/Owner/Self-employed** I am (or was) a: **Mentor**

If you could go back in time and tell yourself one thing that would make a huge impact on how you work today, what would that be?

Always make sure to say thank you to everyone around you. A little bit of appreciation goes a long ways to helping you get your own job done better.

Discuss the mentoring process. What it means to you. How has a mentor helped you with your life?

I've tried scheduling calls with mentors/mentees, but the real magic has come out when we make impromptu phone calls after big wins or times of trouble. Being able to reach out or take a call curing moments of high impact I find to be the most valuable.

Prediction: This industry in 10 years. Describe the promotional item industry landscape in 2028. What will we need to be teaching now that will make a difference?

There are going to be a lot more “makers” selling to end users. I think that as distributors we need to find a way to make something to keep ourselves relevant.

What is something you learned and how will you apply it going forward?

Everyone has times of stress, it's really nice to be able to have someone to reach out to in

order to bounce your stress off of them and get feedback on how to react.

Think about a time you were mentored without being asked. Perhaps it was a coach or in college or at your first job. Who played that 1st mentor role for you and what do you remember most about the experience?

My first mentor and myself are still friends to this day, my entire life has been impacted by his willingness to give first.



Amber Duncan

Type of PKer: **Distributor** Category for current position? **Executive Director/Owner/Self-employed** I am (or was) a: **Mentee**

If you could go back in time and tell yourself one thing that would make a huge impact on how you work today, what would that be?

Be very cautious about how and with you, you spend your time with and on. Time management and personal/professional relationships make or break careers and career paths. Be aware of those factors.

Discuss the mentoring process. What it means to you. How has a mentor helped you with your life?

I have had mentors in so many aspects of my professional life, and simply the expertise of their successes and their words of guidance have been the most helpful in my life as a professional.

Prediction: This industry in 10 years. Describe the promotional item industry landscape in 2028. What will we need to be teaching now that will make a difference?

Network. Build relationships. Be personable. Be genuine in your intention regardless of personal or professional affiliations. Be purposeful in your work. Make a difference in what you do for your clients. Believe in their projects just as much they do.

What is something you learned and how will you apply it going forward?

Leadership. Be authentic. Be a real human being to the people around you.



Kristina Hublar

Type of PKer: **Supplier** Category for current position? **Staff Level** I am (or was) a: **Mentee**

If you could go back in time and tell yourself one thing that would make a huge impact on how you work today, what would that be?

Put yourself in your audience's shoes. Understand them before trying to sell to/market to them.

Discuss the mentoring process. What it means to you. How has a mentor helped you with your life?

A mentor is a great resource. Like a shortcut to knowledge

Prediction: This industry in 10 years. Describe the promotional item industry landscape in 2028. What will we need to be teaching now that will make a difference?

How to be unique and provide more service.

How to be more for customers than the Amazon and Walmart's in the industry.

How to be a consultant rather than a "stuff-getter."

What is something you learned and how will you apply it going forward?

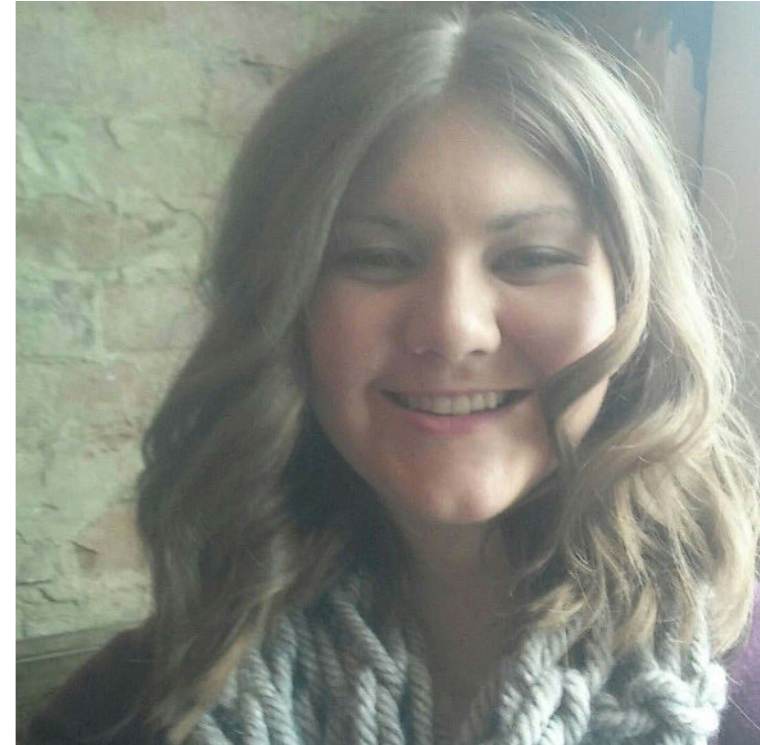
I learned more about my target audience (distributors) for marketing purposes.

Think about a time you were mentored without being asked. Perhaps it was a coach or in college or at your first job. Who played that 1st mentor role for you and what do you remember most about the experience?

A previous boss was a great mentor. To me, it was all about being supported and trusted.

Learning in a conducive environment.

I had big projects and taught myself how to do it, but having someone to review it all with and learn more about how to improve in a supportive environment.



Ben Baker

Type of PKer: **Lover of the medium, strategic branding consultant and storyteller of brands**

Category for current position? **Executive Director/Owner/Self-employed** I am (or was) a: **Mentor**

If you could go back in time and tell yourself one thing that would make a huge impact on how you work today, what would that be?

Understand that things take time. Brands and reputations are built through consistency and deliberate actions. If you try to rush either, people will see you as unauthentic and not perceive your value to them.

Discuss the mentoring process. What it means to you. How has a mentor helped you with your life?

Mentoring is something I have always sought out, both personally and professionally. The relationship does not have to be formal, it just needs to be built on mutual trust and understanding.

It is not about judgement, rather the ability to genuinely help others.

What has having a mentor meant to me?

It is a safe ear and advice that is non-judgemental, to the point and designed to help me get better. It is advice that is not sugar-coated or couched in a way to “be nice” but rather someone who I can trust to give me things straight and tell me when I am off base and

how to fix things.

Prediction: This industry in 10 years. Describe the promotional item industry landscape in 2028. What will we need to be teaching now that will make a difference?

We need to be teaching people how to stop being “stuff salespeople” and become people who understand brand, message, market, vision and value of the clients they wish to serve.

We need to teach them to think about campaigns and how promotional marketing dovetails with overall communication objectives and drives call to action.

We need to teach people how to become consultants and think and charge accordingly.

If all we are selling is stuff, we are commodity salespeople who give no value and will work for less and less as we move towards 2028 when Amazon and their ilk will control the majority of low cost, low volume orders in our industry.

What is something you learned and how will you apply it going forward?

I have learned that this is a people business and communication is key. If we make mistakes, don't hide from them. Own up to them and work with clients to resolve problems.

We all make mistakes, it is the people who help work through issues and develop long-term relationships that add real value to their clients.

Think about a time you were mentored without being asked. Perhaps it was a coach or in college or at your first job. Who played that 1st mentor role for you and what do you remember most about the experience?

My father was absolutely my first mentor.

Take the time and make the effort to do it right.

Do what it takes to serve your clients and they will appreciate it and show you loyalty.

Communicate effectively and be professional.

Take the time to be interested in people, businesses and the families they have. People buy from people.



Jay Shaplin

Type of PKer: **Distributor** I am (or was) a: **Mentor**

If you could go back in time and tell yourself one thing that would make a huge impact on how you work today, what would that be?

Listen more, talk less

Discuss the mentoring process. What it means to you. How has a mentor helped you with your life?

I have more to give than I thought. I have more to learn than I thought.

Prediction: This industry in 10 years. Describe the promotional item industry landscape in 2028. What will we need to be teaching now that will make a difference?

Relationships matter.

What is something you learned and how will you apply it going forward?

Schedule and hold accountable.

Think about a time you were mentored without being asked. Perhaps it was a coach or in college or at your first job. Who played that 1st mentor role for you and what do you remember most about the experience?

Start at the bottom and learn up. Never forget you where there once.



Amanda Delaney

Type of PKer: **Supplier** Category for current position? **Managerial Level** I am (or was) a: **Mentor**

If you could go back in time and tell yourself one thing that would make a huge impact on how you work today, what would that be?

Don't be afraid to ask for help. This is something that took me a long time to do once I came into the outside supplier rep role, and it kicked me from behind way too many times.

The mentality that you have to do all and be all will only hurt you, and you grow so much both personally and professionally when you're able to be humble and ask for a hand when you need it.

Discuss the mentoring process. What it means to you. How has a mentor helped you with your life?

I haven't been doing it long, but it's been so rewarding. Having someone come to me for advice when I've spent my career looking up to other people for that same advice is very humbling, and being in a position where I feel like I can confidently truly help someone else in their career in this industry is very validating and rewarding. It's just so awesome to give back to someone else what has been so freely given to me and helped me in my career thus far.

Prediction: This industry in 10 years. Describe the promotional item industry landscape in 2028. What will we need to be teaching now that will make a difference?

It will without a doubt be different, more mergers, more acquisitions, but a lot of the same as well. New companies will be growing, and I think a lot of suppliers now that have remained on the smaller scale and haven't merged with other companies will be the big players in 10 years.

I think what we need to continue to teach now is adaptability, and have a growing focus on continued education so that we continue to teach those coming into the industry the importance of staying in the know with how the industry is constantly changing, again going back to constant adaptability being key.

What is something you learned and how will you apply it going forward?

The short time I've been a mentor, I've learned that it is important to slow down and focus on others, rather than getting so tied up in YOUR day to day, growing YOUR sales, focusing on YOUR company. That giving back in any way possible can really have a trickle down affect, and if we all do it just a little bit more, this industry will continue to move forward for the greater good.

Think about a time you were mentored without being asked. Perhaps it was a coach or in college or at your first job. Who played that 1st mentor role for you and what do you remember most about the experience?

My very first boss when I landed a job with a distributor through a temp agency played a huge part in where I am today.

At 19 years old and never having a job prior to this, instead of firing me for the many things

I should have been fired for, he turned all of those instances into learning opportunities. He truly taught me what work ethic is to the core, the importance of doing what you say you're going to do (personally and professionally), and how "*perception is reality*" why you never, ever burn bridges, and why you will never have another chance to make a good first impression.

I honestly wouldn't be where I am today in this industry if it weren't for the lessons I learned from him directly, working for him for the first seven years of my promo career.



Tim Brown

Type of PKer: **Service Provider** Category for current position? **Executive Director/Owner/Self-employed** I am (or was) a: **Mentor**

If you could go back in time and tell yourself one thing that would make a huge impact on how you work today, what would that be?

Don't be afraid to challenge the status quo and be a disruptor for good.

Discuss the mentoring process. What it means to you. How has a mentor helped you with your life?

I have been fortunate to have many people take me under their wing which has made a huge impact in my life personally and professionally.

Being a mentor for PromoKitchen allows me to help others the way I have been helped. I receive great joy from helping others see deeper within themselves and to help them gain confidence in their gifts and abilities.

Prediction: This industry in 10 years. Describe the promotional item industry landscape in 2028. What will we need to be teaching now that will make a difference?

I do not believe the traditional industry model will exist as it does now. Those just peddling product and chasing orders will be put out of business by technology and the ease of the internet.

I believe referrers like alpha and Prime will be more common and drastically change the

landscape. Distributors who continue to fixate on price/rebate concessions, and require more of “their” work to be done by suppliers will ultimately force suppliers to eliminate the need for distributors. Technology is making this possible.

What is something you learned and how will you apply it going forward?

This is painful to say but I believe it needs to be said for the overall betterment of our industry.

Our industry is part of the marketing and advertising industry. As such we are responsible for helping brands to market themselves. However, as an industry (not all but way too many on both sides of the fence) do not know how to market.

There...I said it.

The focus has to be on where our medium fits in the marketing mix and how our medium helps brands grow...how responsible companies can help protect brands and how our medium is welcomed by its targets. We have to get away from product focus and get to solution focus.

Otherwise, we will sit back and watch as the internet continues to take over as the more cost effective and simple “product” ordering option. Penetrating deeper than it already has. This has nothing to do with the technology and the internet.

These are part of the world we live in so people must learn to adapt by transitioning

themselves into professional marketers if they want to work in this this marketing industry.

Think about a time you were mentored without being asked. Perhaps it was a coach or in college or at your first job. Who played that 1st mentor role for you and what do you remember most about the experience?

While I was laid off due to downsizing, I fell into some consulting opportunities.

My first client began to take a sincere interest in my success.

He began to slowly interject solid business and networking advice.

He became an advocate for me and was a primary influencer in helping me to regain my confidence and to have the ability to tackle my fears.



Roger Burnett

Type of PKer: **Supplier** Category for current position? **Executive Director/Owner/Self-employed** I am (or was) a: **Mentor**

If you could go back in time and tell yourself one thing that would make a huge impact on how you work today, what would that be?

Find a way to marry what you do with what matters most to you. When your work is connected to the things you care most about, it stops looking like work.

Discuss the mentoring process. What it means to you. How has a mentor helped you with your life?

Knowing how to navigate all the things that will be thrown at you as your career grows and evolves is beyond the basic skill set of almost everyone. Having someone you can trust that may have been thru some of the things you're dealing with that you can ask real (and sometimes embarrassing).

Prediction: This industry in 10 years. Describe the promotional item industry landscape in 2028. What will we need to be teaching now that will make a difference?

Distributorships will compete directly with Suppliers for end-buyers orders. Our focus needs to stay lasered on the ways members of our industry can continue to provide value for buyers when competing with the factory direct.

What is something you learned and how will you apply it going forward?

Mentorship isn't as valuable if the mentor and mentee cannot establish and create a trust-based relationship. Insights are far more helpful when constructed in a way for the mentee to best understand and receive the message being delivered.

It's important to spend time getting to know your mentor or mentee on a personal level in the early stages of your discussion.

Don't jump to a fast conclusion about what your mentor/mentee engagement might do for you.

Think about a time you were mentored without being asked. Perhaps it was a coach or in college or at your first job. Who played that 1st mentor role for you and what do you remember most about the experience?

Bob Thompson was the General Sales Manager at my first professional sales job. He was an excellent teacher, a willing collaborator and had a great sense of humor.

His willingness to role-play situations with me proved that no matter what level of an Organization you reach, it's always important to be willing to break down your job to the most basic level and evaluate your performance with a coach you trust who can provide you insights on how to improve.



Today, that often feels like criticism, but when it's done for you by someone you trust, it gives you a chance to flatten the learning curve and accelerate your improvement.



Robert Fiveash

Type of PKer: **Distributor** Category for current position? **Executive Director/Owner/Self-employed** I am (or was) a: **Mentor**

If you could go back in time and tell yourself one thing that would make a huge impact on how you work today, what would that be?

Have the confidence to go for it and not hold back. It's time for YOU (yes, you) to lead, and if you don't step up, someone else will, and your opportunity will have passed. Even if you are too busy to do it, raise your hand. Don't you want to see what you're really capable of?

Discuss the mentoring process. What it means to you. How has a mentor helped you with your life?

You learn so much as a mentor and as a mentee. My father and business partner have been huge mentors to me. My father taught me (showed me, with his actions rather than his words) that honesty and integrity are not situational.

Unfortunately , many of our leaders today don't share that belief, and it worries me about how today's children are being taught about honesty and integrity.

My business partner Danny taught me (showed me, with his actions rather than his words) that proactive engagement with employees, colleagues, clients and others, when done authentically and not forced, can mean the world to them - and ultimately back to you.

If you're an introvert, socially lazy, or think how you interact (or importantly, don't interact)

with those you see day in and day out doesn't matter, you're mistaken. And sometimes it takes a mentor to show you that.

Prediction: This industry in 10 years. Describe the promotional item industry landscape in 2028. What will we need to be teaching now that will make a difference?

More customization, 1 piece orders, even faster production and delivery.

Traditional distributors will have to bring value beyond *"you like me, I'm honest, I know what I'm doing"* to stay relevant.

And traditional suppliers will have to bring value beyond *"you like us, we're honest, we know what we're doing"* to stay relevant.

Supply chains will tighten further, squeezing out any "extra" costs...and guess what? Some of the biggest buyers, especially those who see what we sell as commodities, see us as "extra" cost. We'll all likely have to fight harder for our share, and maybe see our share shrink, but if we can show clients value (as THEY define it, not us), we will have a loyal client base that's willing to pay us what we're worth. And that's pretty sweet!

But you better be as good as you think you are or your social media portrays you to be....

What is something you learned and how will you apply it going forward?

As a PK mentor, I have learned how valuable many of the mentees see the calls and

discussions we have. What may be an easy, low-calorie back and forth for the mentor, may be a series of significant light bulb moments for the new-in-the-industry mentee. Never shortchange your ability to make a difference.

Think about a time you were mentored without being asked. Perhaps it was a coach or in college or at your first job. Who played that 1st mentor role for you and what do you remember most about the experience?

I had an 8th grade teacher (who happened to be the head of the middle school) who saw an immature kid....with some talent. He sent some of my writings to my parents, unbeknownst to me, which they kept and showed me 20 years later.

Mr. Laws could have taught to all the students who knew exactly what they wanted in 8th grade, had their lives planned out and college choices locked in, did their homework religiously, paid attention 24/7 in class, etc.

But he was one of the last of a dying breed - teachers who saw talent and potential in those where it wasn't obvious, and helped them discover it. Immaturity hid what talents I may have had back then, and he helped give me the confidence to be proud of my (good) work and apply myself a bit more.



No one asked him to mentor me, he just did it. Thank you Mr. Laws.



Carson Ronchetto

Type of PKer: **Distributor** Category for current position? **Executive Director/Owner/Self-employed** I am (or was) a: **Mentee**

If you could go back in time and tell yourself one thing that would make a huge impact on how you work today, what would that be?

That I have more time than I think I do! In our business, it is easy to get caught up in the fast pace, demands, and fires that result in that ever-present too “busy” feeling. It is that feeling that prevented me from spending time on key development areas both personally and professionally. I

am now better prioritizing where I spend my time to see the greatest impact. I am also pushing myself to say “YES” to the right kinds of things and “NO” to the wrong ones.

The lesson is that it is important to push myself outside of what feels comfortable to say Yes to things that matter.

Discuss the mentoring process. What it means to you. How has a mentor helped you with your life?

My mentor has been so open and honest with me throughout the process. His willingness to share his successes and challenges so candidly really helped me to open up about growth-oriented opportunities as a leader and a business. Our mentorship pushed me to become more comfortable with being a newbie in this industry. He has helped me to gain confidence and better lead my team through change. Additionally, he has helped me to see that while challenges will continue to occur, how I respond to them is.

Prediction: This industry in 10 years. Describe the promotional item industry landscape in 2028. What will we need to be teaching now that will make a difference?

Let's start talking about how focusing and investing in design add measurable business value.

Being design focused has been a key differentiator for our company in a highly competitive promo space.

Buyers are becoming less interested in simply placing a logo on product and we are seeing a shift in focus on the user experience.



Lori Garrick

Type of PKer: **Supplier** Category for current position? **Administrative Level** I am (or was) a: **Mentee**

If you could go back in time and tell yourself one thing that would make a huge impact on how you work today, what would that be?

It's ok to not know how to do everything, especially right away. Use your resources and colleagues for help!

Discuss the mentoring process. What it means to you. How has a mentor helped you with your life?

I was really nervous to start with my mentor, Dan Edge. I'm on the marketing and product development side of things, not specifically sales focused. So I wasn't sure if this program was right for me. I am so happy I took the leap and signed up!

Dan has been great, we spend a lot of time talking about trade shows and new products. It's amazing to be able to bounce ideas off someone with so much industry knowledge.

Prediction: This industry in 10 years. Describe the promotional item industry landscape in 2028. What will we need to be teaching now that will make a difference?

Things are going to become even more digital. I think the promo industry still has a TON of growth potential in this area.

A lot of people want the Amazon shopping experience, but customer service will always be very important, so it's finding the balance between convenience and quality.

What is something you learned and how will you apply it going forward?

Our clients are our best resources went contemplating new products. Go to them, ask questions, get feedback. Most are very happy to help.

Think about a time you were mentored without being asked. Perhaps it was a coach or in college or at your first job. Who played that 1st mentor role for you and what do you remember most about the experience?

When I was in college I worked at a local grocery store. My boss did a great job unintentionally mentoring me. She was extremely easy to talk to. She had a calmness about her, that stayed even when having difficult conversations. She also really looked out for her staff, and had there best interest in heart.



Sam Kabert

Type of PKer: **Distributor** Category for current position? **Executive Director/Owner/Self-employed** I am (or was) a: **Mentee**

If you could go back in time and tell yourself one thing that would make a huge impact on how you work today, what would that be?

Patience. As fast as our industry can be and as urgent as something may seem; it's not. To have a clear mind and take a moment and step away to focus and get back to a level head is more important than acting quickly and making a decision with a clouded headspace.

Discuss the mentoring process. What it means to you. How has a mentor helped you with your life?

Mentors are invaluable. I believe that every day is an opportunity to learn something new and that even mentors need - well, mentors. My mentor has helped guide me with advice on projects as well as connected me with solutions that was able to close deals.

Prediction: This industry in 10 years. Describe the promotional item industry landscape in 2028. What will we need to be teaching now that will make a difference?

Always be looking ahead. I think Matthew McConaughey said it best in his Oscar acceptance speech; *"... I need something to look up to, another to look forward to, and another is someone to chase... My hero is always ten years away. I'm never going to be my hero. I'm not going to obtain that and that's fine with me because it keeps me with somebody to keep on chasing"*.

To me this means to always be aware of your surroundings and as much as it is important to be living in the moment you need to plan ahead. For our industry specifically, we will need to be thinking at a minimum of 10 years ahead to survive and more importantly thrive.

The successful businesses in our industry will add other marketing and advertising services to their offerings and marketing & advertising agencies outside of our industry will have added promotional products to their mix. The businesses within our industry that only sell products and offer the lowest price will be “dialing for dollars” in an economy where sales are done without even talking over the phone.

What is something you learned and how will you apply it going forward?

I learned this at a young age but it's to Pay it Forward. I help out as much as I can and give back in terms of my knowledge as much as I can. My why is to inspire and motivate others to do the things they never believed they can do. I'll always have this passion to help others in the form of mentorship.

Think about a time you were mentored without being asked. Perhaps it was a coach or in college or at your first job. Who played that 1st mentor role for you and what do you remember most about the experience?

I was a sophomore at Chico State and asked the older dude in my frat (Sigma Chi) how he became the Monster Energy Drinks rep. I proceeded to ask him under what criteria would he pass on the rep position after he graduated.

The dude mentored me (groomed me) to take over the position.

From there the flood gates opened to several other rep jobs in college and I passed on the same mentorship to future young guns with a burning desire to succeed.



Beth Eaton

Type of PKer: **Distributor** Category for current position? **Executive Director/Owner/Self-employed** I am (or was) a: **Mentee**

If you could go back in time and tell yourself one thing that would make a huge impact on how you work today, what would that be?

Focusing on clients who provide avenues for growth, versus a focus on transactional clients who are “one and done”. Also, leveraging my time effectively by delegating to production coordinators so that I can focus on relationship building and continued business development.

Discuss the mentoring process. What it means to you. How has a mentor helped you with your life?

My mentor, Mitch Silver, was EXTREMELY helpful in coaching me about his company’s proprietary employee selection and testing process. This was extremely helpful as my first hire was not a good fit for my company and I needed to reengineer the process. Mitch as also very unselfish in sharing certain training tools and guidelines for new hires.

Prediction: This industry in 10 years. Describe the promotional item industry landscape in 2028. What will we need to be teaching now that will make a difference?

Consultative selling and truly listening to our client needs, rather than pushing the product of the week.

What is something you learned and how will you apply it going forward?

I learned about what to do when things go wrong with a client order.

Take responsibility, don't point fingers, resolve the situation to the client's satisfaction, and then determine after the order is resolved what type of client this is and attention and pricing going forward.

Think about a time you were mentored without being asked. Perhaps it was a coach or in college or at your first job. Who played that 1st mentor role for you and what do you remember most about the experience?

At my first job in financial services, I received great mentorship from an experienced credit analyst. I remember being very grateful for this individual sharing their wealth of knowledge and experience with no perceived return.



Andrea Weston

Type of PKer: **Distributor** Category for current position? **Managerial Level** I am (or was) a: **Mentor**

If you could go back in time and tell yourself one thing that would make a huge impact on how you work today, what would that be?

Make time for relationships in this industry. The relationships I've had for 15 years are invaluable. Not only do you cherish the friendship, but being able to call on someone in a time of need is very helpful and can save your world!

Discuss the mentoring process. What it means to you. How has a mentor helped you with your life?

I think being a mentor twice now has taught me how to be detailed, patient, understanding and to also rethink WHY I do something the way I do it. It's a very eye opening and self-reflective process.

Prediction: This industry in 10 years. Describe the promotional item industry landscape in 2028. What will we need to be teaching now that will make a difference?

10 years can bring a world of change. More online sales. Make ordering with you an easy button. Amazon-like customer service expectations with free everything and zero shipping. We need to take the reigns now and set our customers up with the mentality that having a promo concierge is much more valuable than any online company can offer them. However, broadening the way distributors sell promo has to happen. We must make that

an easy way to order, communicate and deliver information to our clients. Incredible ERP and CRM systems are going to be the future. Integration of technology and man!

What is something you learned and how will you apply it going forward?

I learned that our industry is more complicated than I remembered. Simplifying things for your client can be key. Also, don't short sell yourself. Lastly, I learned that educating your customers will vastly affect the way you process business with them.

Think about a time you were mentored without being asked. Perhaps it was a coach or in college or at your first job. Who played that 1st mentor role for you and what do you remember most about the experience?

I can think of a few people in this industry that mentored me, but my first boss was a driving factor of why I am still in this business. He was upbeat, funny, and his personality was infectious. He took me under his wing after he realized I had sales and creativity in my blood. It was natural for me.

Some of the lessons he taught me have stuck with me to this very day. I started as his customer service rep, moved to account manager and am now a Director.

His advice and time with me will stay with me for life!



Ben Bashary

Type of PKer: **Supplier** Category for current position? **Staff Level** I am (or was) a: **Mentor**

If you could go back in time and tell yourself one thing that would make a huge impact on how you work today, what would that be?

Factor in more time to relax and decompress (take a vacation day every once in a while for you to recharge).

Discuss the mentoring process. What it means to you. How has a mentor helped you with your life?

Being a mentor helped me learn and understand ideas I have not yet tried.

Think about a time you were mentored without being asked. Perhaps it was a coach or in college or at your first job. Who played that 1st mentor role for you and what do you remember most about the experience?

My brother. He opened my eyes that there is a lot to learn. No matter how much you've learned or how far you've gotten, it's all about improving yourself and learning more.



Jeff Solomon

Type of PKer: **Service Provider** Category for current position? **Executive Director/Owner/Self-employed** I am (or was) a: **Mentor**

If you could go back in time and tell yourself one thing that would make a huge impact on how you work today, what would that be?

Better time management. This is not easy for those of us with ADD, but it's important to stay focused.

Discuss the mentoring process. What it means to you. How has a mentor helped you with your life?

We never stop learning. Even as a “seasoned pro” (think old) I am still seeking out relationships with colleagues to get input on businesses situations. I NEED input on business and personal challenges. Sometimes it's about them just listening, and other times it's about getting their fresh perspective.

There is a value in building these types of relationships.

Prediction: This industry in 10 years. Describe the promotional item industry landscape in 2028. What will we need to be teaching now that will make a difference?

In 2028, the marketplace will be much different. I believe “The Disruptors” to the “traditional” supplier/distributor/end-user relationship of today will be the new model of doing business. The global marketplace will evolve. Online sourcing for the products we sell will continue to change how business is being done.

We have to stop doing the same type of product-driven marketing, slamming out specials without focusing on offering the real benefits of our marketing medium. I believe e-mail marketing will die. What will replace it? We will need to look at new ways to effectively reach the next generation via the NEW communication tools available...whatever those will be.

What is something you learned and how will you apply it going forward?

I learned the value of sharing what little knowledge I think I have with others. What seems like just common experiences to me, provides insight to someone else. Through years of being in the industry, I've learned a few things and it's a blessing to share that.

I've also learned about the perspectives someone new to the industry has. They can offer fresh insights that I don't see.

Think about a time you were mentored without being asked. Perhaps it was a coach or in college or at your first job. Who played that 1st mentor role for you and what do you remember most about the experience?

There have been many who have influenced my life, but Mark Shaffer and Amy Birkrant come to mind as I write this. As I got involved with running after having my ankle fused from an old motocross racing injury, some people encouraged me and pushed me to go out of my comfort zone. With Mark's encouragement, I participated in crazy events like this mud obstacle race. When I saw the hill we had to go up, I possibly would have quit. These two helped me through the obstacles, and I finished strong.

Amy was a special person who encouraged many. Not just in our fitness community, but as a pre-school teacher, kids loved her. Tragically, in January 2018, Amy, her 11-year-old son and 20-year-old daughter were shot to death by her husband, who then killed himself. To this day I tear up thinking of Amy, the impact she had on so many peoples lives, and the horrific end to this family.



Persevering when you want to give up is essential to success in life. The people along the journey who have encouraged me to keep going, and heard out my crazy business ideas have helped make me who I am.



Pablo Prah

Type of PKer: **Distributor** Category for current position? **Executive Director/Owner/Self-employed** I am (or was) a: **Mentee**

If you could go back in time and tell yourself one thing that would make a huge impact on how you work today, what would that be?

Hire a CSR since day one, it will make a huge impact in the development of your business.

Discuss the mentoring process. What it means to you. How has a mentor helped you with your life?

It has a special place in my heart because I couldn't believe someone was there to help me grow my business without asking anything in return and when you are starting your career in a different country with a different language its a HUGE thing to have a mentor, even better a mentor in your industry who knows and understand all your struggles and fights, because he was there before.

I had the opportunity to have Mr. Robert Fiveash as my mentor and what I can tell you it was awesome.

Prediction: This industry in 10 years. Describe the promotional item industry landscape in 2028. What will we need to be teaching now that will make a difference?

Customer Service, people have more choices now than ever before so I will take a wild guess that in 10 years is going to be even more difficult to differentiate yourself. So you

have to teach soft skills and great customer service to the new generation combined with the modern workplace.

What is something you learned and how will you apply it going forward?

That I don't have to know every single product we have in our industry, I was going crazy.

It is better to learn how to ask great questions, get involved with your client's events in a personal and honest way, develop a great friendship with everybody in the industry and be a sourcing machine.

Think about a time you were mentored without being asked. Perhaps it was a coach or in college or at your first job. Who played that 1st mentor role for you and what do you remember most about the experience?

I was raised only by my Mom and she was a great mentor.

She showed me how to treat people with respect and honesty, she always told me is better to build a great name for yourself than making a million dollars, a great name is yours forever.



Nancy Hoffman CAS

Type of PKer: **Distributor** Category for current position? **Executive Director/Owner/Self-employed** I am (or was) a: **Mentor**

If you could go back in time and tell yourself one thing that would make a huge impact on how you work today, what would that be?

Stay organized and focus on the prize!

Discuss the mentoring process. What it means to you. How has a mentor helped you with your life?

Its important to listen to what is really challenging for the mentee. Sometimes we want to talk and “fix” things but sometimes someone just needs to vent to put things into perspective.

Prediction: This industry in 10 years. Describe the promotional item industry landscape in 2028. What will we need to be teaching now that will make a difference?

Stay on top of government relations. (Tariffs)

Keep seeing customers in person even though so much is done by phone/email.

What is something you learned and how will you apply it going forward?

I keep going to out to see customers in person. Some of them are amazed- we have physical

products, so we need to present them and engage with people in person to get results.

I have helped many of my mentees with a “plan”. Slot time for mailings, time for going out for calls, etc. Its a lot of work, but it shows results every time.

Think about a time you were mentored without being asked. Perhaps it was a coach or in college or at your first job. Who played that 1st mentor role for you and what do you remember most about the experience?

I had many music mentors. They were amazing. Helped ground me into my career.



Tom Carpenter, MAS

Type of PKer: **Distributor** Category for current position? **Supplier** I am (or was) a: **Mentor**

If you could go back in time and tell yourself one thing that would make a huge impact on how you work today, what would that be?

The only constant we have in our industry is change.

Discuss the mentoring process. What it means to you. How has a mentor helped you with your life?

Mentoring is a process that raises all ships. For the mentor it is the opportunity to raise the level of professionalism in the new arrivals and step over mistakes that delay success.

For the Mentee, they are raised to higher levels of success that they didn't even know would be open to them.

For both it is the perfect exercise in listening actively to give and receive of the power of personal experience and charge it with the power of youthful enthusiasm and achieve more for all.

Prediction: This industry in 10 years. Describe the promotional item industry landscape in 2028. What will we need to be teaching now that will make a difference?

In 2028 the promotional products industry will be a viable interactive platform for

helping business to make and maintain tangible reliable bonds with their customers and connections that will strengthen the power of those companies' brands. What tools have been created to do that remain to be seen.

What is something you learned and how will you apply it going forward?

25 years ago when I started a mentor from a competitor supplier came to me at the Expo (Dallas at that time).

He saw me showing coffee mugs to distributors and pulled me aside and said the following: *“A cup of coffee is the international symbol of good will and offering a cup of coffee is the international gesture of good will. That’s why we will always have coffee mugs in this industry.”* My take away that I have never forgotten is that Why is more important than what.

Think about a time you were mentored without being asked. Perhaps it was a coach or in college or at your first job. Who played that 1st mentor role for you and what do you remember most about the experience?

See above.



Adam Chiotti

Type of PKer: **Distributor** Category for current position? **Executive Director/Owner/Self-employed** I am (or was) a: **Mentee**

If you could go back in time and tell yourself one thing that would make a huge impact on how you work today, what would that be?

Don't try to do it alone!

Discuss the mentoring process. What it means to you. How has a mentor helped you with your life?

The mentoring process has been extremely valuable. I have been given genuine advice that I will never forget in a time that was a crucial turning point in my life.

I legitimately admired how my mentor was willing to drop everything in his extremely busy schedule and be there for me with whatever question or doubt I had about my business.

Prediction: This industry in 10 years. Describe the promotional item industry landscape in 2028. What will we need to be teaching now that will make a difference?

People will always love the personal interaction, but the majority of the business will be done through the convenience of ordering online.

There will be dramatically fewer suppliers and distributors in the industry because of suppliers being bought out and with normal distributors not being able to compete with

the large distributors. In the end, the suppliers and distributors will probably combine and go directly to the customers.

What is something you learned and how will you apply it going forward?

To be more vulnerable because you can't do it alone so stop pretending you have it all figured out.

Think about a time you were mentored without being asked. Perhaps it was a coach or in college or at your first job. Who played that 1st mentor role for you and what do you remember most about the experience?

It probably was my youth pastor back in high school. I remember how genuine and authentic he was and how he truly cared more about others than himself.



Nancy Bong

Type of PKer: **Distributor** Category for current position? **Executive Director/Owner/Self-employed** I am (or was) a: **Mentee**

If you could go back in time and tell yourself one thing that would make a huge impact on how you work today, what would that be?

I don't know that there is any one thing. For instance...

- 1. Certainly, fewer vendors but you have to get to know them before deciding which ones are the best fit.**
- 2. Always check inventory.**
- 3. Look at proofs closer.**
- 4. Send a timely response to all emails whether you have an answer or not.**
- 5. Be yourself.**
- 6. Don't order every damn sample until you know they want to see it.**

Discuss the mentoring process. What it means to you. How has a mentor helped you with your life?

My mentor is great! He is there when I need him and he shares his experience regarding projects, vendors and clients. He also helps me see the bigger picture when needed, which

sometimes has nothing to do with products or vendors but more an outside perspective on decisions to be made.

Prediction: This industry in 10 years. Describe the promotional item industry landscape in 2028. What will we need to be teaching now that will make a difference?

Aw hell, I have no idea

What is something you learned and how will you apply it going forward?

Find a way to get to know your suppliers better, I'm not sure how yet but I know this is key.

Think about a time you were mentored without being asked. Perhaps it was a coach or in college or at your first job. Who played that 1st mentor role for you and what do you remember most about the experience?

My HR manager once told me that you have to earn respect not demand it. Humbling words that I still remember after 30 years.



Sam DeWeese

Type of PKer: **Distributor** Category for current position? **Executive Director/Owner/Self-employed** I am (or was) a: **Mentee**

If you could go back in time and tell yourself one thing that would make a huge impact on how you work today, what would that be?

Stay focused on the task at hand. Don't chase the rabbit. I was too often distracted when I came across something that I didn't understand that didn't necessarily pertain the current goal.

I would stress out and waste time trying to learn something that would eventually come with time and experience. I still have to practice focusing on avoiding this.

Discuss the mentoring process. What it means to you. How has a mentor helped you with your life?

My mentor contacted me and we began having weekly scheduled conversations right away. I consider her help invaluable to any success I've had since the start of our relationship. I'm still in awe of her dedication to help others for absolutely no other reason than kindness and empathy.

She has inspired me to "pay it forward."

Prediction: This industry in 10 years. Describe the promotional item industry landscape in 2028. What will we need to be teaching now that will make a difference?

10 years from now marketing will be even more important than it is now. An expert in promotional products will be key to the success of any business. Specifically, I believe video marketing will have an even bigger role in reaching companies that desire to grow and develop new long lasting relationships.

What is something you learned and how will you apply it going forward?

Marketing and technology are the driving forces to success in business. If you can stay ahead of the curve with each good things will happen. They closely and directly related given the efficacy of business connections through internet searches and social media.

Think about a time you were mentored without being asked. Perhaps it was a coach or in college or at your first job. Who played that 1st mentor role for you and what do you remember most about the experience?

I had a 9th Grade geometry teacher who made me realize from the start of class that she wasn't going to put up with any of my bull shit. It was tough going at first but thanks for her disciplin, wisdom, and leadership I went from the bottom the class ranks to eventually winning the teacher's award.

I'll never forget her and the influence she had on me.



Parmveer Khangura

Type of PKer: **Service Provider** Category for current position? **Staff Level** I am (or was) a: **Mentee**

If you could go back in time and tell yourself one thing that would make a huge impact on how you work today, what would that be?

Promo industry is a tough industry to get a hang of, especially as there's a clash between old school thinking, and realizing you have to adapt for the 21st century.

Don't beat yourself up, practice patience, ask thought provoking questions that gets the prospect talking.

Discuss the mentoring process. What it means to you. How has a mentor helped you with your life?

My mentor really helped me realize the power behind our software's tight knit community, and how that plays into the idea of a connected workflow for distributors in strengthening their relationship both with vendors and clients.

Prediction: This industry in 10 years. Describe the promotional item industry landscape in 2028. What will we need to be teaching now that will make a difference?

Speed and efficiency.

The current generation that requires instant gratification and even more instant results are going to be the next generation of clients. Bracing for that generational shift now

would be really key, without ever losing the importance of that personal touch that comes with a phone call or personalized email, as the next gen is already accustomed to texting.

Also bracing for the Amazons and Alibaba's of the world, because there will be a lot more outlets like them in 10 years, trying to take away the slice of the pie from promo distributors.

What is something you learned and how will you apply it going forward?

Keeping in mind that we're not a one size fits all solution. We're equally looking for a distributor (or supplier) who's going to fit our mold and fit as we're hoping that our services will allow them to save time and money, allowing them to re-gain control over the order management chaos.

Anyone stuck in their ways can be challenged, but they're probably not a good fit. Time management and stressing the importance of non-selling related activities/components of our software were really key realizations from my PK chats.

Think about a time you were mentored without being asked. Perhaps it was a coach or in college or at your first job. Who played that 1st mentor role for you and what do you remember most about the experience?

I can't recall haha sorry! I've always had older family members share their wisdom with me growing up.

First person who comes to mind is my grandfather on my mum's side. He was equally stoic and loving. He didn't necessarily mentor me, which is why I'm so thankful that a program like PK exists even, but he always led by example, sometimes without having to

say a thing but instead exemplifying with actions.

He was someone I always aspired to make proud, and I hope I continue to do so.



Gloria Lafont

Type of PKer: **Service Provider** Category for current position? **Managerial Level** I am (or was) a: **Mentor**

If you could go back in time and tell yourself one thing that would make a huge impact on how you work today, what would that be?

Create a vision for your business, set yearly goals and break them down into quarterly/monthly/weekly activities.

Discuss the mentoring process. What it means to you. How has a mentor helped you with your life?

My process - I start with a conversation about the mentee's challenges and what he/she is looking to gain from the mentorship. I then discuss goals, and where he/she is right now, what's needed to close the gap, and from there, together we create an action plan.

What it means to me - First off, I like to help others succeed, and mentoring has always been a part of my business career. Likewise, there has always been someone to teach me when I needed it throughout my journey, and mentoring is my way to pay it forward, sharing the knowledge I have gained.

Mentoring helps me stay fresh and current, as I always learn from my mentees.

Prediction: This industry in 10 years. Describe the promotional item industry landscape in 2028. What will we need to be teaching now that will make a difference?

In 10 years:

- **Solo, product-focused, unaffiliated distributors have disappeared.**
- **Big ecom distributors, with a large variety of products offerings, dominate the industry**
- **More suppliers are selling direct, after deciding to get away from the small, needy, distributors.**
- **Specialized distributors will thrive, in a large variety of niches.**

What is something you learned and how will you apply it going forward?

In 30 + years in business, there are many things I have learned, it's hard to think of just one, I'm still learning.

But if I had to choose one, it would be to be open-minded and stay nimble so you can adapt to change, because it is unavoidable.

Think about a time you were mentored without being asked. Perhaps it was a coach or in college or at your first job. Who played that 1st mentor role for you and what do you remember most about the experience?

My 1st mentor was a New York cab driver.



He was my landlord when I first moved to the US. He owned a couple of Taxi Cars he rented out to others.

He mentored me, without neither of us knowing it, in how to get acquainted with my new life, and how to navigate the rules of the business game.



Jessica Ibsen

Type of PKer: **Distributor** Category for current position? **Managerial Level** I am (or was) a: **Mentor**

If you could go back in time and tell yourself one thing that would make a huge impact on how you work today, what would that be?

Don't get stressed over all the moving parts. Prioritize, manage expectations, and don't be afraid to designate tasks to someone else instead of trying to do everything.

Discuss the mentoring process. What it means to you. How has a mentor helped you with your life?

My mentor was my first employer in the promotional industry. He helped me to learn graphic design and juggle everything from sales and marketing to project management and order process.

Prediction: This industry in 10 years. Describe the promotional item industry landscape in 2028. What will we need to be teaching now that will make a difference?

It will be more automated and online. Less in-person client meetings. Fewer paper catalogs. What makes promos so successful is that it is a sensory tactile marketing product and the movement online seems counterproductive to the very reason to use promos.

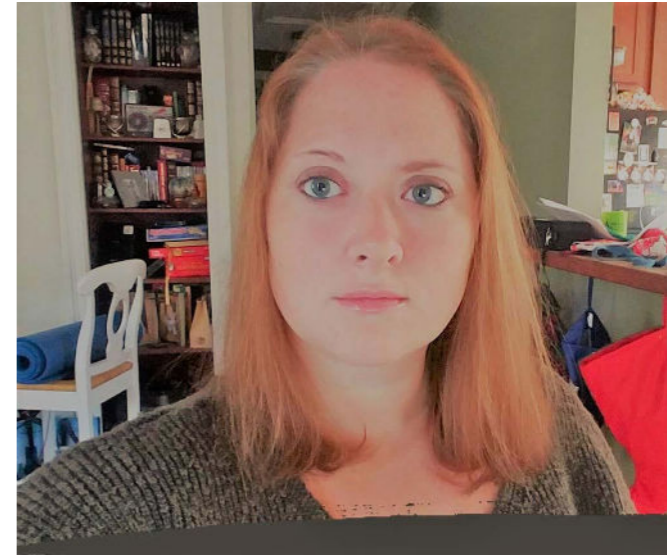
We will need to teach the newer generation that personalizing the sales call and being as engaging as the promos we sell will be a big benefit to gaining lifelong client accounts.

What is something you learned and how will you apply it going forward?

I learned that even the mentee can teach the mentor a thing or two. We all gain something to learn from each other's successes and failures.

Think about a time you were mentored without being asked. Perhaps it was a coach or in college or at your first job. Who played that 1st mentor role for you and what do you remember most about the experience?

My grandfather was my original mentor. He guided me and taught me that hard work and patience were keys to a successful and happy life. He was a farmer.



Brian Jolin

Type of PKer: **Distributor** Category for current position? **Executive Director/Owner/Self-employed** I am (or was) a: **Mentor**

If you could go back in time and tell yourself one thing that would make a huge impact on how you work today, what would that be?

Focus on long term clients not transactions

Discuss the mentoring process. What it means to you. How has a mentor helped you with your life?

Having had many great mentors in my professional and personal life has helped me focus on how to best invest my time and energy.

Prediction: This industry in 10 years. Describe the promotional item industry landscape in 2028. What will we need to be teaching now that will make a difference?

Clients will mainly purchase based on convenience or relationship. If you are a distributor that can provide both you will be successful. It will be the same for suppliers, especially if you are not offering a unique item(s).

What is something you learned and how will you apply it going forward?

That is good to share knowledge freely, that the PromoKitchen community is not made up of your competitors, but like-minded folks on the same journey of enlightenment.



Thank you for downloading and enjoying a few testimonials from our mentees and mentors at PromoKitchen. There are many more successful stories from our pairings that aren't told here.

To find out how a mentee / mentor relationship can change your business life, [please click here.](#)

Thanks!