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40 Under 40: Chris Wilson

Laura Ayo, Special to the Business Journal Published 4:02 a.m. ET Jan. 2, 2017



(Photo: Paul Efrid)

Chris Wilson, 37, Director of Sales - South Pacific and Canada, DeRoyal Industries Inc.

Chris Wilson's "culture shock" during his first visit to Asia didn't last long.

"From that point on, I just had a thirst for learning about different cultures and getting out and interacting and working with people from different countries," he said. "I like to understand how they conduct business and take that knowledge and build a bridge back to Knoxville."

His 17-year career at medical device manufacturer DeRoyal Industries Inc. has taken him to five continents, giving him plenty of opportunities to do just that.

"When I started in sales, my original territory was Asia," he said. "I was a sales rep for Japan, China, Korea, Australia and New Zealand."

He then promoted DeRoyal's catalog of what is now roughly 25,000 health care products to hospitals in the Middle East, Africa and Europe while maintaining the South Pacific market.

Since 2011, Wilson has focused on the South Pacific and Canada as the director of sales for those regions.

Wilson first came to work for DeRoyal in 1999, answering phones in the company's call center after leaving college. Soon after, his supervisor encouraged him to go back to school and get a degree - with DeRoyal's help - so he could advance within the company into sales and marketing roles.

Wilson heeded the advice and earned an organizational management degree from Tusculum College by working 40-hour weeks and attending night classes.

"I liked having the ability to control my own destiny based on how hard I was willing to work," he said.

Seven years and two promotions later, he went on to earn a master's of business administration from the University of Tennessee.

"As far as I know, I'm the only person who ever started at customer service and ended up in sales management," he said. "The company has really invested in me ... and I love going out and spreading the story of how this company started with (founder) Pete (DeBusk) having an idea and making something in his garage and selling it out of the back of his car and making the American dream come true."

It's a story that not only resonated with Wilson personally, but with clients across the globe.

"Our business is about six times what it was when I got involved," he said. "A lot of (that growth) has been because of educating my customer base on how I can help them sustain and develop their business."

Stevie Hayes, the company's operations manager for its international division, said Wilson, who has twice received the company's President's Club Award for being a top performing sales manager, is a team player who doesn't forget that DeRoyal's products improve the lives of the patients and doctors who use them.

"He's always looking at how he can bring DeRoyal and any community closer," Hayes said.

Education/Certifications: Bachelor's degree, organizational management, Tusculum College; Master's of Business Administration, University of Tennessee

Professional service and recognition: 2012 and 2014 recipient, President's Club Award

Community service: Supporter, United Way; supporter, American Cancer Society

What do you like to do in your free time?: Spend time with my three boys learning to throw boomerangs around, what we call "acorn wars," and camping

Family: Sons, Preston, Tyler and Logan

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