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Q&A with Bert Inch, CEO of TransPak

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Bert Inch, CEO of TransPak since 2007, joined the company in 1985 after earning his bachelor's degree in political economics from UC Berkeley. In his 40 years with the company, he has worked on all aspects of operations, from sales and customer service to production and quality control. Under Bert's guidance, TransPak developed an experienced leadership team that has enabled the company to focus on its key industries. Bert's mantra: develop strong relationships, exceed customer expectations, anticipate problems before they arise, and foster a culture of excellence to achieve exceptional outcomes. These efforts have helped TransPak build an award-winning workplace culture, including recognition as a Great Place to Work, earning the trust and recognition of employees and communities across its global operations.

For people still learning about TransPak, can you talk about the diverse industries you serve?

Our main industries include semiconductors, healthcare and medical equipment, data centers and servers, and aerospace and defense. But over the years, there have also been memorable special missions. We once shipped a NASCAR race car. That was great fun. We've also handled packaging and logistics for drones and fragile, high-value medical equipment, including sophisticated laboratory systems that require specialized handling and delivery directly to healthcare facilities.

Whatever the mission, we work in partnership with each customer to engineer and tailor packaging and logistics solutions that provide the utmost protection for each product.

In doing so, we have become known for our expertise in handling fragile, high-value items, particularly in high-tech. These close relationships with our customers, whom I view as partners, are key to meeting their precise needs for each shipment across the aerospace and defense, semiconductors, healthcare, data infrastructure, and cloud/telecom industries.

TransPak was founded in 1952, at the dawn of the region's electronics industry. When your parents purchased the company, you had a front-row seat to the evolution of Silicon Valley. Can you talk about that?

When my parents purchased TransPak in 1969, I was 8 years old. At the time, Silicon Valley was undergoing a transformation from orchards into the technology capital of the world. I joined the company in 1985. Lockheed and Intel were the dominant employers in the region at that time. Ultimately, the semiconductor industry became a driving force in Silicon Valley, attracting a number of large manufacturing companies. The technology environment was robust. We were enjoying steady growth when I became CEO in 2007, the same year that we opened for business in Shanghai, China. Soon we were well into a wild ride toward expansion.

There has to be a good backstory to hiring Jim DiMatteo, the Navy pilot with over 7,000 flight hours. How did that come about?

Jim actually went to college with me at UC Berkeley. He was the super-smart guy, focused primarily on engineering. I was your classic student majoring in politics and economics, so I took a lot of different classes. Just as I had followed in my dad's footsteps in private industry, Jim followed his dad by going into the Navy. By then, we had developed a strong friendship. His dad was a fighter pilot in Europe in World War II, and I had earned my pilot's license before Jim left for Navy flight school. So, I took him on his first flight. Now I always joke with Jim, saying I got him interested in aviation. I like to tell him, "If it weren't for me…" Jim now heads TransPak's aerospace and defense segment.

Being based in San Jose puts TransPak at the center of the semiconductor and AI infrastructure boom. Can you talk about serving both Bay Area clients along with those that have expanded globally?

Being close to our customers matters because meeting their needs is how our company started and continues to thrive. So, our home base remains a core part of TransPak, and we're not leaving Silicon Valley. Over time, a number of our Silicon Valley clients have expanded into international markets. As these partners expanded, we had a unique opportunity to continue helping them meet their packaging and logistics needs overseas. We seized on that.

Customers understandably don't like to have a lot of vendors if they can avoid it. So, the more services we can provide as our customers expand, the more value we can create for them. As they grow, we grow.

Today, we operate in 80 locations across 15 countries. We just recently opened a new facility in Thailand. Our global expansion has brought the number of our teammates to more than 4,800 worldwide, and TransPak's international teams are positioned to readily respond to customer needs across Asia, including China, Taiwan, South Korea, Japan, and Malaysia.

But to circle back, a lot of key decision-makers are in Silicon Valley. This remains our headquarters. And we're not going anywhere.

Meeting technology, aerospace, medical, and other specialty needs requires consistency and collaboration. How do you ensure that you exceed expectations for your customers?

We work in partnership with our customers to design and engineer packaging solutions that provide the utmost protection for all products, including sensitive, high-value equipment. Our engineering team is key to this process. We don't just design packaging; we test and validate it to see how our solutions will perform under real-world conditions.

Our test lab in Hayward, California, is an important part of that commitment. We use specialized equipment to evaluate packaging designs and materials, and we're continuing to expand our testing capabilities to accommodate new technologies and increasingly complex customer requirements.

We work hand-in-hand with our customers. And we continually look for ways to improve. In short, we engineer the package and test its performance. As our customers' needs evolve, so do our capabilities.

Can you talk about the culture inside your organization? How do you motivate and engage workers at every level?

A lot of it comes down to communication and fostering a climate of mutual support. We view our employees first and foremost as teammates. And our teammates have been heavily involved in establishing our culture. So, you might say it's a homegrown effort, not a top-down edict.

Though it may seem a bit corny, we believe in the basics of the Golden Rule — treat others as you want to be treated. I like to point to our company tenets: Show respect and kindness, always. Hire for attitude. Train for aptitude. We build each other up, always. Your word is your bond.

Of course, we also encourage our teammates to stay curious, fast, flexible, adaptable, and spontaneous.

What's the next significant challenge facing TransPak? Do tariffs play a role?

I think a significant challenge right now is making sure that we're keeping pace with growing demand, while operating efficiently and consistently. That means identifying high-demand areas and ensuring that we are positioning our operations in the most strategic locations and making sure we have the right capabilities and resources in place to serve our customers.

Our global footprint plays an important role in that. Having operations close to our customers allows us to reduce unnecessary transportation, improve responsiveness, and adapt quickly as market conditions change.

You asked about tariffs. Tariffs are definitely another challenge, especially given their impact on the cost of materials like lumber and plywood, as well as stainless steel and aluminum, all among the materials used in packaging. Of course, this is not an issue unique to TransPak.

What's the most memorable lesson you've learned in your years at TransPak? And who are your mentors?

On the lesson front, I've learned that a scotoma — a visual blind spot — is a good metaphor for blindly embracing a concept that may or may not be true. The lesson: Keep an open mind. Don't be locked onto an idea or perception. Clarity can come from recognizing what you might not be seeing.

On the mentorship front: I've been fortunate to have several very strong mentors: my mom, my wife, and her father. My wife and I met in high school, so we've been together for 47 years. She's very organized. She keeps me on track. I always tell her that she has saved my life.

What would you tell other business leaders?

It's fairly simple: Consider any endeavor in life. If someone cares deeply about it, then it's worth investing the time and energy to achieve an exceptional outcome. That holds true for businesses of virtually any size.

The most promising way forward is through workplace cooperation, mutual support, and respect. Fostering an upbeat, supportive culture across the company is key. For teammates, the reward is a creative work environment that is both satisfying and fun. For business, it's a strong foundation for success.