

# Former Student Profile



Master of  
Industrial Distribution  
COLLEGE OF ENGINEERING



**Kim Summers**

*Account Manager, Puffer-Sweiven*



**Cole Knuth**

*CRO, Pax8 UK  
VP of International, Pax8 INC.*



**Dean Jones**

*Chief Channel Development Officer, AFS*

---

## MID Paves the Way for Promotions and Growth

---

### Describe your career path prior to the MID and why you were drawn to the program:

**Dean:** My career began in transportation logistics before becoming the vice president of sales and channel development prior to my time in the MID. I was looking to continue my education and I knew A&M had a really good program from talking with other people that had taken courses. The decision made sense for me personally, financially and was flexible for my family.

**Cole:** I started my career as an outside sales rep in the electrical distribution industry before I became a branch manager at the age of 25. I was really young to take over a P&L and hadn't been fully trained in a lot of the areas, so I started exploring a graduate program and researching an MBA, but all roads led me back to A&M. I always had an incredible appreciation for the MID program, and it made sense for me to mature my understanding of the operational end and leadership skills I needed to progress beyond frontline or branch management.

**Kim:** Before the MID, I was an account manager selling field instrumentation equipment to engineering firms. Most people in my industry get their MBA, but I dove into researching the MID versus an MBA and decided it was more focused to my specific career. During my time in the MID, I was able to leverage people within my company to help me understand more and focus on our particular business.

### How did the MID program affect your career path?

**Dean:** Going through the MID showed I was willing to invest in myself and contributed to my promotion to the chief channel development officer coming out of the program. It was a big opportunity, and I can now relate what I learned to improve operations for my company. I work with C-suite folks day-to-day who are always worrying about savings, so the application of what I learned in the financial classes has a big impact on daily business.

**Cole:** During my time in the program, I jumped from my management position in the electrical field into the technology sector as a frontline sales rep because of what I was learning about business. The case studies we were working on and the preparation for the study abroad and global work got my mind working on new possibilities for my career. My capstone project ended up having a huge impact on my new company and after graduation, I took on my first management role there and have had six promotions since. The ROI of how I've been able to apply my knowledge has been huge.

**Kim:** About three months before I graduated, I moved into a new business unit where I sell more substantial, custom-engineered equipment. I have no doubt the MID program helped me elevate into that role more quickly.



## What knowledge were you able to implement as you went through the program?

**Dean:** I was able to quickly apply what I was learning about inventory stratification to build commonality with clients, understand and speak their language, and use that to grow and add additional value by helping them mitigate costs. Inventory management is a common problem, so helping customers sort their high-level items from their low-level items was really powerful.

During residency week, we also worked on human resource issues and how to work with people in development and training. The MID program knows how important the human side of the business is because everything runs around people. I took a lot from that class about leadership from the engagement and discussions with 60 people all from different backgrounds and career paths in the room.

**Cole:** In the program, I began to learn about the way that technology and physical products work together and about how businesses are evolving. This got my wheels turning and I worked with some of the people in my program to develop some exciting and crazy ideas about the future of distribution and supply chains that helped me take the leap of faith and expand my career into the technology and cloud distribution space.

**Kim:** The program pushed us to a next level of strategic thinking through class discussions on conversations boards and on campus with the professors and each other. We dug into how to approach situations and learned to question our assumptions. It's second nature for me now. I learned more and more about my business beyond my specific area of expertise.

## What parts of the MID program had the biggest impact on your work?

**Dean:** Going through the MID program gave me an opportunity to really look at the distribution side of the business, customer stratification, inventory management and how to mitigate costs. I took away a lot of knowledge about the cost of goods and financials that I apply to my actual business when I'm speaking with clients about how they can look at their returns, savings, and opportunities to reduce costs and improve profits.

**Cole:** The critical thinking skills I gained in the MID stretched the way I initially approached problems. I had a lot of success working inside a small sector that owns the vertical of what they sell, but not how they sell. I realized I was limiting my capabilities based on the way I interacted with my industry, and the MID

opened my mind to ask the right questions about the way products are made and consumed and how the supply chain works along that route.

It prepared me for success, especially the study abroad program that widened the way I thought and interacted with international markets. It's one of the biggest reasons I am where I am today and gave me a foundation to successfully expand my current company into new global markets.

**Kim:** The strategic relationships class was very impactful. Since I'm in sales, I build and maintain relationships all day long. As I was going through that class, I could immediately apply what I was learning. It helped me move within the company toward selling a lot more profitable material.

## Describe your capstone project. What result did your capstone have on your working life?

**Dean:** My capstone was a mergers and acquisitions strategy to buy companies, leverage their current book of business, and upsell services we provide within that book. It broke down what we look for in the portfolio of purchasing to find opportunities for upsells as opposed to cutting out expenses, costs and reducing people. The model was to come in and evaluate each profile client and identify the opportunity for sales. During the program, I became heavily involved in an M&A opportunity and am now involved with the team and helping them do upsells and transitioning. If it weren't for my classes at A&M and my capstone project, I would probably not have this opportunity.

**Cole:** After switching companies in the middle of the program, I was able to align my capstone to my new company and it ended up having a huge impact on the business and shifted both how we looked at key performance indicators and how we prepared our go-to-market strategy and looked at the success criteria around it. It evolved into more than 20 different projects, building out a new sales structure, redefining revenue operations, and developing a globalization effort in untapped revenue streams. The capstone was the beginning of how we refined our data usage and understanding how it impacted our interactions with the market and where to invest.

**Kim:** My capstone was about obtaining buy-in and improving account managers' productivity through a CRM system which has directly related to our implementation of a CRM system within my business unit. My company has leveraged the knowledge I gained through my capstone. This year, I was asked to present on CRM to the whole company on where we are and where we're going at our sales meeting.



## What advice would you give a distribution professional wondering if the MID is worth the time and money?

**Dean:** The MID is great for someone in the middle of their career to go back and invest in themselves. The leadership, the teachers, and the other professionals involved in the program bring great insight and expertise to the financial, supply chain, and human resources sides of distribution. Each student is bringing personal experience and value to the program that you can transition into your own work life. You build a network with other students sharing industry experience in the discussions and case studies that tests your knowledge and skills.

**Cole:** Make sure your purpose for getting a higher education is the right one. If you do it just to add a diploma to your resume, it won't have nearly the impact that it could if you come in with an open mind. The MID helped me think bigger and understand a global view that changed my life. Before the MID, I was experiencing a lot of things that I didn't really understand and I was only successful because of my ambition, but the MID let me control the narrative and get ahead of my progression. It was a transformational, life-changing event that helped me shift the way that I worked.

**Kim:** When I first started the program, it had been 20 years between my undergrad and graduate degree and everything had changed. It was a culture shock. But I always advise new students to get through to midterms of your first semester and your time management will click in and you'll see that you can do it. Set those 21 months aside and make your commitment clear to your friends and family. You're going to get out what you put into the program. It's definitely worthwhile.

## What do you want to make sure people know about the MID program?

**Dean:** Not only does the MID teach about the industrial supply chain, it rounds you out with different professors that have industry backgrounds from sales, finance, HR and distribution. They bring it all together and welcome everyone to interject and bring their own personal experiences. They push the idea of learning from each other, and so they're always expanding on the curriculum based on experiences and knowledge and insight that people bring to the table.

Going through the program helped build some confidence in who I was and put a foundation in place to solidify my background. It's been big for my personal development and showed my company how committed I was to my professional growth.

**Cole:** I would tell any organization thinking about putting their people through it or any individual looking to shift their career aspirations that the MID is absolutely a game changer, especially with anything related to engineering. It shifts the way you perceive your job, the way the market works together and the way supply chains operate. It was a great investment for me.

**Kim:** It was eye-opening to learn more about how the global market works. Even though my customers are here, a lot of my projects are based outside the United States. The global studies part of the program was a catalyst to a lot of professional and personal growth.

