

Keeping the World's Cargo SAFE

What began as a simple but innovative idea has grown into an international industry leader in quality, service, and new product development. Over the last 50 years, Cordstrap has developed the knowledge and expertise to provide cargo-securing systems tailored for customers' needs.

Images by John Roeland

Cordstrap began in 1965 with the development of a rayon strap, which was the ideal replacement for traditional steel cargo-strapping systems. Over the years, the company expanded out of its native city of Helmond, The Netherlands, to support more than 50 countries across the globe.

CEO of Cordstrap, Brad Tribble, notes that the strengths of the organisation are its rich history, innovative products, and team of experienced and highly engaged people. In Brad's eyes, Cordstrap's philosophy is centred on having a clear customer focus, a passionate organisation, and bringing out the best in its staff. *The CEO Magazine* caught up with Brad to look at the changes Cordstrap has gone through and the future that lies ahead for the company.

The CEO Magazine: Can you give our readers an overview of your professional background leading up to and including your current position?

Brad: Most of my career has been spent in two large consumer products companies: Sara Lee Corporation and Electrolux, where I had a number of senior roles in sales, marketing, business development and general management, with a strong focus on international. Although I am American by nationality, I have spent the last 22 years living in Europe and Asia in numerous countries—the Netherlands, Belgium, France, UK twice, Singapore twice, Thailand, and now back in the Netherlands. I was approached and joined Cordstrap in November 2012, so I've been in place for a year and a half now.

A few things attracted me to the company. First, Cordstrap is a 50-year-old business; not huge, but growing, with a lot of opportunity for future growth and development. Second, the international nature of Cordstrap is very interesting. We are a global leader in a niche segment with factories in four continents and sales companies in almost 30 countries, which made it very attractive and interesting for me given my international background.

Third, there is a very strong cultural fit with both the board and the shareholders of the company and myself. I really thrive in environments where I get to build things. I believe that enduring business franchises build strong organisations and strong brands. Our shareholders and board were very much >

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aligned in seeing the opportunity for the company and also in supporting a long-term view of building and strengthening Cordstrap's global leadership.

During your first year and a half with the organisation, what have been the main challenges you've had to face?

Cordstrap is a successful and growing company. For me, it was very much about taking the time to understand the business, the customers, and the market in a way where I felt absolutely sure that I could contribute to the long-term development of the business. When I looked at that, what I saw was a strong company, terrific opportunities in the market, and a lot of passionate, experienced people across the team, but also a significant need for change.

The change was not in terms of direction; our overall mission is very much in line with what it has always been, which is keeping the world's cargo safe, and making sure that we work together with our customers to provide the right solutions to meet and support their business needs. To get to the next phase of development, however, Cordstrap needed to do a couple of things.

It needed to professionalise the organisation, moving towards fact and insight-based decision-making, strengthening the quality of its management, and creating some new functions to enable us to get to the next level. A lot of what I've done is to bring focus. Cordstrap is a medium-sized company, but it's fairly complex in terms of its global footprint. Providing clarity and focus on where we want to grow, which products, and what we're going to do to achieve that growth, was really necessary.

Throughout your time with the business, what initiatives have you seen or implemented?

We've introduced and rolled out a change program that we call Cordstrap Next, and the tagline is



'securing our future with passion and focus'. It really is about building on the past success of this great company while bringing a more razor-sharp focus in terms of where we want to grow and develop, and how we execute. That program is the umbrella program for all of the change management initiatives within Cordstrap. Within that, we're focusing on three critical areas.

The first is optimisation and strengthening of our sales force. We have great products and we know from customer-satisfaction surveys that our customers like us and are satisfied by the products and services we provide, but we see a lot of opportunity to improve the productivity and effectiveness of our sales force worldwide.

The second pillar is innovation and new product development. Cordstrap has always been an innovative company that saw its mission as converting the logistics and transport market from traditional alternatives to better, safer, easier to apply, innovative products. To build on that past, we need to remain true to our innovative roots and strengthen our innovation and new product development funnel. That is a key



area of focus under the Cordstrap Next umbrella.

The third program is about driving global operational excellence. That is about making sure we have the highest quality products in the world, that our workers are able to work in the safest environment, and also making sure that we're continually taking costs out of our products so that we can add greater value to our customers.

Considering the scale of Cordstrap's network, how have you managed to unify the organisation?

I think there are a couple of dimensions to it. First is that we

focus very much on commonalities rather than differences. We believe that, while local countries and markets have certain differences and nuances, those are not an excuse to do something completely different. Using the 80/20 rule, we try to do things 80 per cent the same, and then we adapt and adopt for local market nuances. It's very much about driving simplification and consistency in whatever it is that we're trying to roll out globally.

The second way we do that is through increased communication and engagement. I'm a big believer in creating a sense of shared purpose across the entire organisation, to be clear on what it is we're trying to achieve, and also being clear on how our employees, in whatever country and whatever function they're in, can contribute to the group's success.

And third, I spend a lot of time on the road and a lot of face time with people. Modern technology can simplify and help with communication, but at the end of the day, you need to sit down with people, look them in the eye, and allow them to ask questions, to challenge things, and get to a fully aligned outcome. When I visit a country, I'll obviously meet all of the employees, do a business review, and I'll usually spend time in the field with a sales rep to see customers; there's no better way to stay in touch with the marketplace and also to identify opportunities for growth in terms of how we can serve our customers better.

What do you believe to be the key values at Cordstrap?

I think the key value would be passion for people and customers. Cordstrap was founded 50 years ago by a gentleman, Fred van Eck, who had a simple but powerful mission to convert customers from traditional cargo-securing alternatives such as steel into safer polyester products. That mission to convert is still present today and you see it across our global organisation. All of our employees have this incredible passion for our

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products, for our customers, and for the solutions and service that we provide.

Another key value is openness, honesty, and integrity. We're a Dutch international company; the Dutch are very open, international, and also can be very direct in their communication style, but in a positive way. We're also a very flat organisation; anyone can talk to anyone in the organisation. Whether it's positive messages or difficult messages, one of our core values is to have open and honest communication within a very flat structure.

How does the organisation collaborate with internal and external partners to drive innovation?

Innovation rarely takes place behind closed doors in a black box. The core of any innovation is meaningful and relevant customer insight, and to do that you need to be close to your customer. Collaboration is a fantastic way to build meaning and relevant innovation that responds to a real customer need. At Cordstrap, because we work directly with our customers to identify their needs and provide them with products and solutions that meet those needs, we're extremely well-positioned

to deploy a collaborative model around innovation. We can leverage those relationships, we're listening to our customers, and we can help identify common needs for customers and translate those into innovation opportunity areas.

What do you envision for the future of Cordstrap?

We are a healthy and fast-growing business. We are very positive about the future because we believe we have considerable growth opportunities within our core addressable market, which means we don't immediately need to seek adjacencies or go off in other areas. The future for Cordstrap is a continuation of the past, a continuation of our mission to convert the world's cargo securing better, safer, more effective solutions. It's a continuation of direct customer relationships, which provide tailored solutions to meet customer needs and help pave the way for future innovation. And it's about leadership. We believe very strongly in the need for safety in cargo securing, keeping the world's cargo safe, and making sure that the workers who are securing cargo or transporting cargo are safe. As a result, we believe Cordstrap is well-positioned to continue to lead the industry globally. ●

