

Kara Snyder 0:00

Hello and welcome to the PodCAST, a podcast produced by the College of Applied Science and Technology at Illinois State University. I'm your host Kara Snyder and I serve as the assistant dean of marketing communications and constituent relations for the College. Each episode, we're sitting down with an alum of the College and today we have a chance to talk to Bobby Pillot. Bobby is an alum of the Department of Technology and currently serves as the Vice President of Service for North America E-mobility at ABB. Welcome, and thank you for being here.

Bobby Pillot 0:32

Thank you, as well, Kara, I appreciate it. This is a wonderful opportunity. I was excited when you reached out to me about this opportunity and just want to be able to have an open conversation, then you get to know me a little bit and others can as well.

Kara Snyder 0:46

Yeah, this is going to be fine. So let's start at the beginning. Why did you choose ISU?

Well, I was an athlete since the age of eight years old, and I came to ISU on a football scholarship. So I was blessed to receive a scholarship to play football at the next level. And after a couple of different schools that were on my list. I selected Illinois State because it felt right. And the people that I became friends with during my recruiting visits, I mean, it was just a wonderful feeling. It felt like this was the school that I needed to go to. And I made that decision and I don't look back.

Now, did you come in as a technology major? Or did you find your major while you were a student here?

Bobby Pillot 1:30

Well, I found the major upon entering Illinois State, my first major was business because of my older brother and when he went to school, but then I found out quickly that business was not what I wanted to pursue. I was more of a techie, in a sense, you know, I was very good with my hands, building things, breaking things to fix things. And so I did some research. And then I came across computer systems within the cast group. And that's what I did. And then I took that as my major. And then I had business as my minor at that point in time in which the combination of the two definitely helped.

Kara Snyder 2:07

Yeah, that sounds like a perfect fit. You know, it had to be so challenging. Balancing a major, A minor and being a student athlete, what was that like for you?

Bobby Pillot 2:19

A lot of time management, right? I mean, one, you have to be focused your first time going to school away from home. So the first year was very, very challenging. I mean, just learning how the overall time management works. You had practice, we had what was called study table, we

had workouts and then you look at from an educational standpoint, right? You have even though the class schedules are different from high school, it's still very challenging, with everything else that you had to go on. So my first year in college was a bit of a struggle to get adjusted. But after that, and with the assistance that we have from the athletic department, in regards to just you know, helping us adapt, things became a lot easier as we went forward.

Kara Snyder 3:01

Tell us about what you learned while you are on campus, balancing all of that I imagine you picked up a lot of time management skills and the ability to prioritize, how has that carried over into your career?

Bobby Pillot 3:15

Well, it carried over to my career exactly what you said. I mean, from a prioritization standpoint, being able to multitask multiple things at once. And when you think about the prioritization, it really lets you focus on what is important right now. And then you go down from a sequence standpoint on what's next, and what's next. And what's next. So, going into my professional career from those skills that I learned was very, very helpful for me, you know, just learning what to do, how to do how to focus, and then it helped propel me within my career.

Kara Snyder 3:47

What was that initial job search like for you? And what was your first job?

Bobby Pillot 3:53

Well, so we didn't have a lot of time, you know, with playing sports and things. But going into my senior year, I had an opportunity to engage into an internship with Sherwin Williams. So I wanted to go into their technical side of the business. But they had a pretty good process in place that if you were hired upon after your college graduation, they wanted all of their employees regardless of what department you worked in, to work in the store so that you can understand the customer side of things. So when I graduated December of 99, Sherwin Williams hired me, they relocated me to Springfield, Illinois, and I was an assistant store manager. And that was part of my internship as well was working in the store in Bloomington, which was a very great experience. I mean, learning to be around people understanding from a customer perspective. I learned a lot of valuable skills from that job, which also helps me today. Again, just being from a customer service perspective, it's just a valuable experience. So that's one of the things that we can talk about as we move on to this podcast.

Kara Snyder 4:58

I love that you got that hands on experience and that they were able to really tee that up for you and make it so that you were able to hit the ground running in that role. Walk us through take us from being in a Sherwin Williams store to now being the vice president of service for North America. That's an entire continent. So that's that career path.

Bobby Pillot 5:21

Yes, yes, yes. So, I actually had interviewed with ABB during the same time that I had the internship with Sharon Williams, but they were not hiring at the time when I graduated. So of course, any college student wants to go and have a job right away, and you're in a good position if you have a job lined up prior to graduation. So when I moved to Springfield, Illinois, ABB reached back out, they had an office in Auburn Hills, Michigan, which is I grew up in Detroit. So it's about an hour north of Detroit. And they reengaged me again and said, Hey, are you still interested in, you know, interviewing again? So I said yes, and flew back home, had some time to spend with my mom at the time and went up to the Auburn Hills office. And, you know, within a couple of weeks, they called me back and said, basically asked me, Do you want to come home? I said, Absolutely. So I was hired with the ABB robotics group, as a field service engineer. So I was with Sherwin Williams for all of officially with Sherwin Williams for all of about four months. And then I put in my resignation to go and do what I wanted to do, which was beyond the technical side. And just so lucky to be on the robotic side, right. And at that time, Illinois State did not have a robotics lab. But they had it after I graduated. So it was a good combination, a good relationship that we've continued to build with Illinois State. And if you go into the cast department now within the robotics lab, all of their robots in there are ABB robots.

Kara Snyder 6:54

Yeah, that's a super cool space. I love bringing in people that haven't been to campus yet, and showing them that it's such a hands on experience for our students. So how many years have you been with ABB, then?

Bobby Pillot 7:07

In total... Well, this would be my 24th year. So just to give you a little bit of context, right? When I started as a field service engineer, I traveled across the US. And the first five years, I was on the road 90% of the time, and I was lucky to be home, you know, six, six or eight days a month, I had a max. And it was a lot of things going on in my life at the time, I had gotten married in 2000, when I took this job, and you can just imagine what I put my poor wife through at the time, but traveling 90% of the time, but it was something that I wanted to do, she supported me wholeheartedly. And it was a valuable, valuable experience, not only just from a customer service perspective, but being able to travel the world, being able to put yourself in a situation of different types of customers, different types of products, I mean, from a robotic standpoint, I always tell people that robotics, or some sort of technology, and that sense touches 94 95% of what we do day in day out, meaning the cars that you drive, the food that you eat, robotics touches anything that needs to be manufactured at a fast pace. So it was a very good space to be in, and a lot of a lot of good experiences there. So fast forward to where I'm at today, I got into management in 2006, I had timeframe went back and received my master's degree in Industrial Management, which helped enhance my business minor. And ever since 2006, I was in some form of management with increasing responsibility as the years went on. And in 2010, I was promoted from a field service manager to Director of US and Mexico for robotic service. And I did that for about seven years or so. And then I decided to make a change within ABB, I wanted to learn a different side of the business more on the front end side with sales, project management, and things of that nature. And that turned out to be in 2022, I had the opportunity to come to the role that I'm in now, which I took the role for the mobility side,

which is electric vehicle infrastructure or from a charging space. And just like when I entered into robotics, it was the sexy space at the time. And now we look at going on in the Eevee world. It's sexy space at the time. I mean, there's a lot of investments, a lot of companies are starting to manufacture produce electric vehicles, and that's going to be the next wave for the next five to 10 years. So I accepted that job as vice president of us at that time. And as of January this year, I accept that, I guess additional responsibility to take over North America.

Kara Snyder 9:53

That's a great story. And I'm curious because I feel like it can be rare to find someone who's been Well to one company for 24 years, tell us how you continually found new growth opportunities and continue to challenge yourself while being at the same company.

Bobby Pillot 10:11

For me, it was just I knew what I wanted to do when I first hired in from day one that I wanted to be in management. And so I've always sought out opportunities that will provide me the skill set to be in that position. So every project that I had in the first five years helped propel me with learning critical skills, critical people skills, sitting down in customer meetings, face to face, understanding their challenges, understanding their needs and their requests, when things weren't going right, you know, how do you resolve those issues? And you know, one of the key things I learned in service is never to say no, and I know never is a tough word to swallow. But from a customer perspective, a customer just wants their product to work, if they pay 1000s of dollars and millions of dollars for a product or an asset, they want it to work. So instead of saying no, what I learned from a lot of the mentors and things that I had, and sitting back in some of these meetings early on, was not saying no, but understanding how can we say yes? Can we come to some sort of an agreement? Can we come to some sort of a middle ground? Because the customer again, you know, they're never wrong, that's a cliché that they use in the market, but how can we meet their expectations, and it doesn't need to be 100% all the time towards the customer. But finding a way to provide a solution that helps both parties. And that's the goal. So those are some of the other things that I've learned along that line.

Kara Snyder 11:38

So tell me, you said you moved into management in was it? 2006 2007? Okay. How would you describe your leadership style.

Bobby Pillot 11:50

So my leadership style is more like a coach, like a coach of a sports team. It's more so of really getting down to the level and understanding your employees, understanding your team, and then also understanding that you were in that situation before as well. So I kind of look at it from a twofold perspective. As an employee, you want people to hear you, you want people to understand your point of view. And when I got into management, I mean, I pretty much reversed that mindset and said, Okay, well, how can I be successful? How can I be different, and it's truly just understanding your team, from an individual standpoint of knowing what their strengths and weaknesses are, you make an assessment, and then you identify the areas of what from their strengths, how they can get stronger, and then look at the areas of where they

can improve upon, and then you help them get stronger in that sense. And then, again, from the mindset of being a coach, you have to collectively take all of that, and have them work together and find a way that they can work together with their strengths. And that's how you build a successful team. So from a management perspective, you know, I've learned to allow people the room to fail, because from failure, that's where you gain success, then you coach them, and you teach them through those moments of what they could have done differently. And it's worked out pretty well.

Kara Snyder 13:10

I'm thinking about our students that are either preparing for an internship or about to enter the job market. Do you have any recommendations for them on how they could be more coachable? You know, I think that could be something really key when you have a supervisor who's as invested as you are, how can a student come across as coachable and willing to learn,

Bobby Pillot 13:34

Really, you know, from a culture ability standpoint, it's basically having the mindset that you don't know at all, be vulnerable, be open to learn, be open to listen, it's not necessarily saying that you have to do again, follow the exact path. It's just like, you know, from a math test, we're taught a certain way. But as you gain that certain level of experience, you then you can find other ways to still get to the same answer. So it's really just being open and being true to yourself on the direction that you want to do and being again vulnerable to be able to listen. I mean, if you think that you know, at all, then you'll never learn at all. That's, that's the key thing for me.

Kara Snyder 14:12

That's great advice. I love that. So tell me, what is your favorite part of your job?

Bobby Pillot 14:18

Working with the people. I mean, I love solving problems. Combining business with the technology side, I learned that I was a natural people person, just the attitude that I have on how I approach day in and day out of my life of my personal life and professional life. It's just people I love just being positive.

Kara Snyder 14:41

And what would you say the most challenging thing about your job is?

Bobby Pillot 14:46

The people know it goes both ways. I mean, and I say the challenging part of it when you're working with people that is trying to meet the needs and the expectations. So again, going back to the time type of industry that I'm in, customers in our companies are spending millions and millions of dollars for products. And if the product does not perform based upon what we said it would do, that can cause an issue. If I'm spending money with you, I expect the product to work if the product breaks, I expect you to fix it right away ASAP. So dealing with people, it takes a certain skill, it takes a certain patience, calmness. And you know, you have to put yourself in a

mindset that is not your fault. And it's not your fault to the sense that, you know, if it's a product issue, this is something that you have to work through, you have to communicate with the customer. But all the customer is looking for is for you to resolve their issue. So how fast can you resolve their issue, and give them the product that they paid for? So it's the good side of people, and then it's the not so good side of people. But that's the challenges and the things of what I love. And that's why I love this space of being in service.

Kara Snyder 15:57

Great answer. Well, we are going to finish with the speed round just so we can get to know you a little bit better. So go with your first instinct on these questions. First one Salty or sweet.

Bobby Pillot 16:07

Oh, sweet, which is dangerous. Now I try not to eat as much now but definitely sweet.

Kara Snyder 16:12

I suppose that's not a fair question during January, so I apologize! What is your favorite day of the week?

Bobby Pillot 16:21

Every day? And I say that again? Just going to the positivity of my mindset. My attitude is every day that I'm blessed to wake is a good day. And that's how I live my life.

Kara Snyder 16:31

I love that. Thank you for sharing. What is your go to easy dinner?

Bobby Pillot 16:36

Oh, when you say easy, I don't know if that's like a microwavable thing or something that you just go out and just cook but something quick for me is probably like blackened shrimp or blackened chicken, something that's pretty easy. And nowadays, I can put it into the air fryer and it's done in 10 minutes. Right?

Kara Snyder 16:52

That's why I love this question because I think easy is in the eye of the beholder. So I'm always curious what the sliding scale of easy means for others. What are you reading or listening to right now anything we should add to our lists?

Bobby Pillot 17:09

Well, I like all genres of music, anything that you know, detaches me from the day to day when I need to and something that's relaxing. But from a book perspective, the latest book that I just started to read last week, it's called Extreme Ownership, how US Navy SEALs lead and win, then it's pretty much about again from a motivational standpoint or directional is for an individual person to take ownership and accountability for all that they do rather it's good rather is not so good. taking ownership of that and learning how to make it to your advantage to solve a problem.

Kara Snyder 17:48

Oh, that sounds like a great recommendation. Thank you. How do you relax?

Bobby Pillot 17:54

Oh, that that is probably the toughest question. I honestly I believe I relaxed my body tells me that I need to relax. I'm always on the go. I'm always moving. I'm always doing something. Even when I'm home by sit down too long. I feel like it's a problem. So like when I am sitting down and you know, I doze off and I take naps on the weekend. That's that's pretty much how I I relaxed myself.

Kara Snyder 18:19

What is the best trip you've ever taken

Bobby Pillot 18:23

A trip to Disney or combination, it was actually a Disney cruise followed by being at Disney a few days after that. So I think overall, it was an eight day trip with my family. So my wife and my two sons. We did a Disney cruise for four days. And then we were on land at Disney or Disney World for four days. And that to me was by far one of the or still is the best trip that we've taken. And actually we go to Disney every two years.

Kara Snyder 18:52

There's no place like the bubble.

Bobby Pillot 18:54

Now there's no age limit at Disney. But we have a good time

Kara Snyder 18:58

That's the truth! And I ask everybody that comes on the podcast volunteers gondola or pub to cheese balls.

Bobby Pillot 19:06

Wow, that's that's so much of the easy question. I mean, gondola 110% off. I mean, just to the fact that you can raise that question right now makes me want to gondola and I'm a little far away as I'm traveling this week. But yeah, I'm gonna have to make a trip back to Bloomington and get me a gondola.

Kara Snyder 19:24

Well, we're always happy to have you. One last question for you. If you could give one piece of advice to a college student, what would you say?

Bobby Pillot 19:33

Again, going back to just being open and learning how to interact and communicate with people, regardless of what industry that you go into. If you have any aspirations to advance

within that company. You have to be able to communicate and work with people. I think people skills is probably the number one skill that any and every one needs to have, even from an engineering perspective, learn to work with people. That's the key piece of advice. So if you have a fear of working with people, the old trick standing in the mirror, you know, talking to yourself and then going out and just learning to be more social. I think a lot of advancement within companies is getting to know the people that you're around, even if it's an outside setting, going to a restaurant, going to a bar, learning to talk business from that standpoint, because everything is not always done in a conference room, but just learning to be around people. And that's where you advance people. So if you're not a people person, you're probably not going to go far in life. That's my opinion. But I've seen it the most successful CEOs, they understand and work with people.

Kara Snyder 20:46

Great advice. Thank you. And thanks again for being here. That was Bobby Pillot, the vice president of service for North America mobility at ABB. Join us next time on the PodCAST for more stories from our CAST alumni.