

You Don't Know What You Can Do: Life and Career Lessons with Kevin Chastain



Our customers are some of the hardest-working, most resourceful people in the world. We're constantly amazed by some of the stories we hear from fleet managers, construction managers, and others in

the construction and heavy equipment industries. We'd like to share one of those stories here – to provide some inspiration and a few applicable lessons for life and work from Kevin Chastain, Director of Service and Solutions at BOMAG Americas, Inc.

A chance decision sparks an unexpected career

When Kevin finished high school, he signed on with the U.S. Navy as a Machinist Mate Nuclear Power. There, he spent six years before serving our country, completing his degree while deployed, and developing professional and technical skills before choosing to move into the private sector. Little did he know, just months after September 11, 2001 – as he was considering reenlisting – he would be lying in an empty lot, holding his severed foot, and dragging himself to his truck.

Upon graduating from high school, Kevin had the opportunity to go to college – or join the Navy. When asked about going into nuclear power, Kevin said, "It never occurred to me until the recruiter mentioned it. I thought I'd be in aviation. My dad was in the Navy. He was an aircraft mechanic in the Vietnam War. So, I thought I'd go that route." Before he knew it, though, Kevin was boarding a submarine to begin his career in the U.S. Navy as a Machinist Mate Nuclear Power.

In the Navy, he volunteered to serve on a submarine rather than a surface ship. Discussing this decision, Kevin joked, "I guess I was too dumb not to volunteer to serve on a sub." He went on to say, though, "It was one of

the best decisions I ever made. Looking back on it, I gained more diverse skills because, on a submarine, there's such limited space that you can't stuff thousands of people in it to perform all functions. As a result, I got to be a jack-of-all-trades. I got training and experience on things I never would have gotten to do in any other situation."

After his six years in service, in 1997, it was time for Kevin to make another life-changing decision – to continue in the military or reenter the private sector. Over the next four years, Kevin would apply the life skills and technical skills he gained in the military in the heavy equipment industry. Then, in 2001, two things would change his life forever.



A horrific accident changes Kevin's life forever

Like so many Americans, September 11, 2001 was a traumatic and unforgettable day for Kevin. With his experience in the Navy, he wanted to find a way to help in the best way possible. From the day of the attack to a fateful morning in December, he worked with recruiters and administrative staff to attempt to re-enlist and serve once more.

Then, on December 10, 2001, Kevin was working alone on a piece of heavy equipment. He remembers that it was late in the evening, after dark. He was bleeding the fuel system on the

machine to replace the fuel injector, turning the engine over to build pressure. What Kevin didn't know at the time was that the customer had previously tried to fix the equipment to avoid labor costs. As a result, the customer had left the machine in a condition where a switch to drop a hydraulic-coupled bucket was left on.

As Kevin performed his work, he had no indication that anything was wrong – until the bucket dropped. The next thing he knew, he was on the ground. The bucket had grazed his head, barely avoiding a potentially fatal injury. But, while it had missed crushing his head or breaking his neck, it had not missed his leg. As Kevin found himself on the ground and began to assess the situation, he realized that his body was on one side of the bucket, and his foot was on the other – hanging from tendons and partially severed muscles.

At that time, Kevin didn't have a cell phone in his pocket. If he was going to save his foot – and potentially his life – he needed to get back to his truck to call for help. As pain began to set in, he dug under the bucket to free his foot. He then grabbed hold of the foot – still in his boot – and applied pressure to lessen the pain as he moved to safety.

Kevin managed to crawl to his truck, holding his boot with his nearly severed foot in it. He called for help, gave the 911 operator directions to the site, and EMTs eventually arrived to administer aid and get him to the hospital.

In recovery from the accident, Kevin knew that his plans to reenlist were gone. Instead of letting the accident define him, though, he kept moving forward. His foot had been nearly completely severed, but Kevin didn't let that stop him. A few years after several surgeries and seemingly countless hours of rehabilitation and physical therapy, "I decided I wanted to lose some weight – so I just started running." Before long, he was running 10K and half-marathon races.

From Navy Nuclear Power to a nearly amputated foot to running half-marathons, Kevin's life and

career have been anything but "normal". Through these experiences, he's learned a few lessons that he shared with us.



"You make your own luck"

"I was once asked in an interview, 'Do you consider yourself lucky, or do you consider yourself good?'" Kevin told us, "Well, I consider I make my own luck." Kevin could easily have taken an easier route out of high school than boarding a nuclear submarine. When our country was attacked on 9/11, he could've continued his civilian life instead of attempting to move back into the military to serve. When a catastrophic accident left him lying alone in a lot, he could've given up right there. When he found that the metal in his foot wouldn't allow him to return to duty, he could have fallen into despair. Instead, he continued to inspire his family and everyone around him by running half-marathons.

"If I had my way," Kevin said, "I would spend time with young people who don't know what they can do. I want them to know this. Sure, you be in the right place at the right time, but when you find yourself in that place, over and over again, you're putting yourself there. You're creating your luck. You can become whatever you want to – as long as you're willing to do the work to get there. Hard work will overcome any negative thing that you have weighing you down."