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# Buckman's Junai Maharaj on 'The Art of the Possible'

Since taking the helm about a year ago, Junai Maharaj has brought a new energy to the Memphis-based company. In this *P360* exclusive, he speaks about the 'customer-obsessed culture' driving Buckman 4.0.

JAN BOTTIGLIERI



Junai Maharaj, president and CEO of Buckman. "Our ability to make decisions is streamlined. I think that that agility needs to be leveraged to position us."

**It takes a bit** of scheduling to meet with Junai Maharaj for a few hours at Buckman's Memphis headquarters—but it's possible. Now that he has served as president and CEO for a full year, he's spending a bit more time in the office.

"I spent a lot of time in the first several months just traveling the world, meeting with customers," he says. "When I took over in May, I was in a weeklong meeting with our 'Global Leadership' Workgroup, spent four-and-a-half days in the office, then I got on a plane and came back two months later.

"I wanted to visit our customers around the world, and meet our associates, to hear about everything. What are the needs, what are the gaps, what are the opportunities, where are our challenges? I absolutely love spending time with our customers because that's where

you get the real feedback on where we're doing well and where we need to improve. It's so easy to sit in an office and lose sight of the reason for our existence: we exist because of our customers," he says.

Maharaj first joined Buckman in 2002 as a financial manager. By 2006, he was general manager of operations for the company's South Africa operations. He was serving as managing director of Buckman Europe, Middle East, and Africa in 2017, when he was tapped for the post of president/CEO. He replaced Steven B. Buckman, who retired after more than 16 years as leader of the company founded by his uncle. This makes Maharaj the first person outside of the Buckman family to helm the company in its 73-year history.

He says the most rewarding thing about those first few months of globetrotting was

how much feedback he was able to collect; it's a tribute to Buckman's culture of open communication. "We're known to be very strong in the paper industry, but I had incredibly positive feedback from other industries as well. We definitely have very committed people around the world. Coming into this position, I knew one-third of the Buckman world. Now I have a deeper understanding."

## 'WIDE-OPEN, INNOVATIVE' CULTURE

Buckman is already known for its culture—"The Buckman Way"—and Maharaj hopes to build upon that tradition. "We have the systems, we have the people, and we have the products, the chemistries," he says. "What's happening in 2018 is technology—Industry 4.0 represents all sorts of opportunities.



Buckman's global headquarters in Memphis, showing a reflection of its adjacent manufacturing facility.

“Today, we are steadily ramping up our pipeline of innovative chemistry. We know our customers are looking for visibility into their manufacturing processes. They want better process control, innovative chemistry, and cost reduction. Both Buckman and our customers also want to ensure a safe operation, with less of a negative environmental impact. So, how do we make sure we’re using technology to continue the strong success we’ve had over three generations of being a family-owned, family-led business, into that fourth generation? We call it Buckman 4.0.”

Customer needs are central; this concept extends beyond first-line sales representatives to include every employee. “It goes well beyond the chemical in the bin. We want to position ourselves as a trusted advisor to our customer,” he says. “Even our IT department—an area that is typically very internally focused—has a CFIT team (Customer-Facing IT) dedicated to developing IT solutions for the customer. In the paper industry, we do many cost-per-ton contracts; we have IT solutions that take care of that, specific to customer needs.”

This “customer-obsessed culture” is supported by robust channels of communication,

both formal and informal, that create a constant flow of information. “We have multiple platforms, multiple processes, to ensure we don’t miss anything,” says Maharaj. “Feedback can come through either individual associates around the world as simply as through an email, or it can come through our global workgroup structure. We have global teams that are structured around customers; around industries, like packaging or tissue; and even around some application technologies. So all of these platforms can be used to make requests—whether it is an IT solution that’s required, an applications solution, a corporate solution, or even a new product. Those processes run seamlessly,” he says.

“I like to call it the ‘bottom-up/top-down handshake.’ We get a lot of the ideas coming from associates in the field, or in operations. We have a Continuous Improvement Workgroup that looks for those ideas and captures them. Each operating company around the world also has its own work teams to gather ideas.”

Buckman is creating new platforms allowing customers to provide feedback directly via the web or smart technology. Customer Innovation Workshops and satisfaction

## Buckman at a Glance

- Privately held, global specialty chemical company with more than US\$630 million annual sales.
- Seven manufacturing facilities and operations in more than 90 countries; headquarters in Memphis, TN.
- More than 1,700 associates worldwide.
- Founded in 1945 by Dr. Stanley J. Buckman to mitigate microbial problems in the pulp and paper industry.
- Core industries served include tissue, packaging, pulp & paper, biofuels, metalworking, oil & gas, leather, and industrial water treatment and process chemistry.

surveys also provide a steady stream of data. “We even send our executives to meet customers where we’ve lost business, to truly understand and unpack the core reasons why. We see that as a huge opportunity,” Maharaj says.

Although committed to remaining privately owned, Buckman shares financial results with associates to foster transparency. This communication-centric culture helps keep the company agile. “We have direct access to our shareholders, we have a very engaged board, and we have a relatively flat

organizational structure. So our ability to make decisions is streamlined. I think that that agility needs to be leveraged to position us, to claim that space.”

Buckman’s management strategy is one of participative leadership, and the company invests heavily in leadership training for associates. This includes both leadership of others, as well as “self-leadership” and confidential coaching.

“To my mind, culture is made up of three things,” says Maharaj. “First, what are your values as an organization? We have the Seven Principles of Highly Effective Teamwork—that

is very much ingrained in how we work. It starts with 100 percent responsibility, through the seventh value of ‘focusing on results.’

“The second component of culture is ‘norms.’ What is acceptable in our day-to-day environment? We don’t allow things to go astray from our code of ethics—whether it’s something like respect for people around the world, or something more complex like regulatory compliance. And norms can vary from country to country, which adds a layer of complexity.

“Third is leadership. This starts with me and cascades through the leadership

structure. Are we behaving the way we expect our associates to behave? Our culture is much more important than a strategy or a marketing plan. I like the saying ‘culture eats strategy for breakfast.’ If you honestly recognize that, you’ll always be able to find the right thing to do.”

#### DATA TECH BENEFITS BOTH SIDES

Maharaj recalls the headlines Buckman was making in the 1990s for best practices on knowledge sharing. Today, he’s hoping to expand Buckman’s knowledge sharing capacity to include data and smart technology as well.

Buckman’s roots are in the pulp and paper industry, and the company remains committed to the sector. Buckman provides onsite associates for some industry customers; at one site, they’ve dedicated 28. Pulp, paper, and packaging customers all want deeper insight into their processes—not only to have stronger process control and greater efficiency, but to make their mills safer and more cost-effective, says Maharaj. A number of Buckman technologies address these concerns.

“We have a recovery boiler application, RBA, that allows our customers to run those boilers a lot more safely than typically would be the case,” he says. “It provides them with a lot of data that are turned into insight that can be then turned into meaningful actions.”

Buckman OnSite is a data-monitoring platform developed in-house. Customers have full access to the platform, which provides them with a lot of data on key trends—“to be able to highlight not only problems that have happened, but to give strong indications of problems that are about to happen. We can prevent problems, as opposed to just solving problems,” continues Maharaj. “Our Vybrant technologies help reduce bleach in pulping. We have other tools, like the Green Toolbox, which allows customers to measure their Return on Environment—that’s our definition of ROE. Not your traditional financial definition.”

The right chemistry, and the right people, used to be enough, he notes. Today, the data component is essential. “Think about the interrelationships on a board machine, or in a pulp mill. If someone makes an adjustment in one part of the process, it affects things downstream and upstream. In the past, a lot of that was handled by trial-and-error, or hypothesis. With smart technology, you

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take that uncertainty away, and you get to the heart of what's really going on. You can figure out the correlations in the data," he says.

Those data don't only help customers. "The other benefit is that Buckman is able to truly demonstrate we're adding value to our customers' processes. When we say our chemistry does 'X', we have the data to demonstrate that objectively."

### POSSIBILITY IN THE VUCA WORLD

The power of both data and culture come together in Buckman's biannual global engagement surveys. In 2016's survey, 94 percent of the company's 1,700 associates responded—an extremely high return. "We don't just get feedback; our employees take the time to offer ideas on how we can improve. That's another indicator of our continuous improvement culture and open door policy."

He refers to the leadership theory that we live in "the VUCA world"—an environment that is Volatile, Uncertain, Complex, and Ambiguous. For manufacturing industries, it's combined with a low-growth environment and shifts in the economies of China, the US, and Europe. "Most people would say that this VUCA world represents a new challenge," says Maharaj. "I believe it represents a significant opportunity. With the culture and people Buckman has, we're well positioned.




Buckman OnSite is a data-monitoring platform developed in-house. Customers have full access to the platform, which provides them with data on key trends to aid decision-making.

We all need to develop new technologies to be able to understand, to adapt, and to respond with agility and creativity. That's where the data come in. We need those data points, those flags, that tell us what's going on, to reduce the ambiguity to the extent that we can."

Maharaj explains that, as he works with other Buckman leaders and associates, he keeps returning to two important points. "One is 'the art of the possible.' We

need strong possibility thinking. I love to explore possibilities.

"The second part of the culture—and I believe this very strongly—is that we need to get out of our comfort zones. That is where the magic is happening. You've got to have the courage, the conviction, and the confidence. I'm here to support that, to provide our associates with the guidance and tools to go and make magic happen. That's how we will pioneer new solutions for our customers." 

## CCMI Acquisition Supports Data-Fueled Decisions

In September 2017, Buckman acquired CiDRA Chemical Management Inc. (CCMI), a leading supplier of highly differentiated process optimization and enhanced recovery solutions and services headquartered in Wallingford, CT. The deal gives Buckman a global, exclusive, and perpetual license to a family of CCMI's intellectual property, including patents for measuring entrained air in the paper, pulp, biorefining, bioprocessing, and ethanol industries.

The technology is non-intrusive, provides real-time continuous data, and requires no downtime to install. Most importantly, the data it provides enables manufacturers to reduce the amount of variability in certain aspects of their manufacturing process. "This technology is unmatched in the marketplace," says Buckman's Junai Maharaj. "The smart equipment allows us to gain insights into our customers' core processes. It's data, turned into insights, which we can turn into action. These actions include, for instance, being able to optimize our dosage—an example would be the defoamers in a pulp mill—which ultimately delivers more value to our customer. Plus, it provides deeper insights for our customers, so they can take actions to get better process control, improve their yields, and improve the quality of their products. It represents all sorts of possibilities, and I believe we have only started to scratch the surface."

In addition to the exclusive rights to offer the products to the paper, pulp, biorefining, bioprocessing, and ethanol industries, Buckman will be able to offer these solutions non-exclusively to the oil and gas, automotive, metalworking, and paint and coatings industries. Current CCMI employees will be integrated into Buckman's existing workforce. Sales of the entrained air technology will begin with customers in North America, with global sales to follow.

"Buckman is an organization that can rapidly expand the global reach of the innovative CiDRA solution via its worldwide footprint," says Kevin Didden, president and CEO of CiDRA. "We look forward to a long-term partnership. Buckman has the values, capabilities and leadership that CiDRA felt were critical to take the CiDRA solution to a global level."





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Global Headquarters at 1256 N. McLean Blvd., Memphis, TN 38108, USA

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