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## Culture as a Core Competency

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leading well in an age of disruption.

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# Culture as a Core Competency

Midmark CEO Jon Wells on leading well in an age of disruption.

**In any business, people and culture are critical, said Jon Wells, president and CEO of Midmark. “I think Midmark is unique in that we consider culture one of our core competencies,” he said. “Culture enables us to unlock value, create new solutions through new ways of thinking that we otherwise wouldn’t be able to.”**

Never has that been more apparent than the last year-plus for the manufacturer, which their employees (known as teammates at Midmark) worked tirelessly through the pandemic to meet the needs of their healthcare customer base while establishing itself as a clinical environmental design company in a changing marketplace.

In a wide-ranging interview with *Repertoire* Publisher Scott Adams, Wells discussed Midmark’s COVID-19 response, how the organization leveraged its core values amid the pandemic, and how it is looking beyond to anticipate customer needs through a digital transformation.

**Scott Adams: This last year, really the last two years, have been tough for everybody. What’s the one thing that makes you most proud of your organization over that period of time?**

**Jon Wells:** I have to start with Midmark’s teammates. They are the most dedicated, innovative group of people I’ve ever worked with. This was on display during the challenges of the past year with COVID. Obviously, the pandemic has put an unprecedented amount of pressure on our healthcare customers. Our teammates and management team across all our locations really stepped up and made it a priority to be there for our customers, and offer any support needed.

We’re still not through it. We’re still working 24/7, late nights – we call it four-wheel drive. But I can tell you the great thing was that this didn’t go unnoticed by our healthcare customers. They trusted us and knew we had their back. A number of them have even expressed gratitude for us helping them through the pandemic. This is

across medical, dental, and animal health businesses. All three were impacted in different ways. It’s fantastic how our teammates responded.

**Adams: Throughout my career watching Midmark, I’ve noticed how your organization is seemingly always ahead of the curve on the manufacturing side. Talk a little bit about how Midmark has adapted in this changing marketplace. What are some of the changes you’ve made?**

**Wells:** The pace of change in healthcare was accelerating even before the pandemic. Our customers need us now more than ever to enhance the quality of care provided to their patients.

COVID has impacted the inventory space and the point of care. That’s challenged healthcare organizations and providers to think differently about these spaces in ways that are both effective and safe. And it put a spotlight on how important it is to share new ideas to help meet these existing and new challenges.

At Midmark, we are adapting by listening, responding, and doing everything we can to support them. At the same time, we’re thinking one, three, and five years down the road. The impact of COVID is no longer a variable that we think of separately. It’s really built into our day-to-day business. It’s built into our long-term planning.

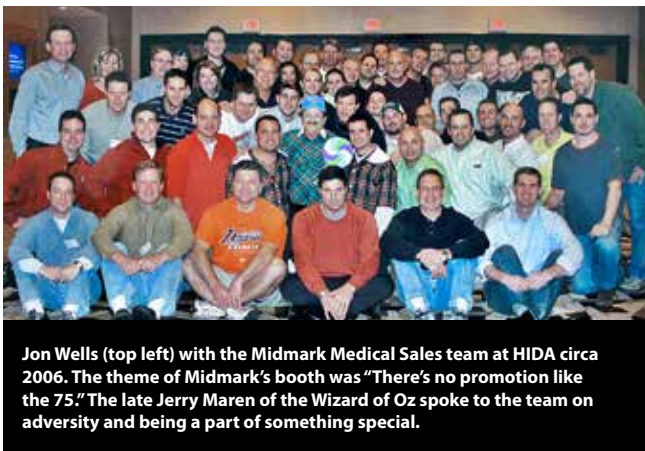
COVID has changed the business and changed Midmark in many ways, whether it’s working remotely or in the office. I’m sure *Repertoire* readers are experiencing those things as well. We’re adapting at the same pace, or maybe a little quicker, than our customers are to

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stay ahead of this. As healthcare systems are looking for empathetic approaches that bring workflows and technologies to engage with patients, we've accelerated our transformation into a clinical design company. We are the only clinical environmental design company to provide medical, dental, and animal health solutions that creates new, innovative caregiver experiences at the point of care.

### **Adams: How have your core values at Midmark helped you adapt and overcome challenges in the last year or so?**

**Wells:** In any business, people and culture are critical. I think Midmark is unique in that we consider culture one of our core competencies. Culture enables us to unlock value, new solutions, and new ways of thinking that we otherwise wouldn't be able to.



Jon Wells (top left) with the Midmark Medical Sales team at HIDA circa 2006. The theme of Midmark's booth was "There's no promotion like the 75." The late Jerry Maren of the Wizard of Oz spoke to the team on adversity and being a part of something special.

People ask us, what's Midmark's culture like? I respond with this ... we care for each other, we care for our customers, and we care for our communities. When we care for each other, we encourage collaboration, the honest sharing of ideas, and feedback assessments. We're very honest with each other. We give unvarnished views with respect. And it leads to the best decisions.

We think of culture not just as an edict or grand PowerPoint. It's really all those decisions day in and day out that our teams make. It's how they respond to something positive, or a challenge. THAT'S your culture.

This carried us through the pandemic. We had a level of trust shared amongst our teammates and the company that allowed us to talk through these things. We shared good news as well as challenging news. We

were as transparent as we could possibly be, and empathetic. I feel it further strengthened our culture.

### **Adams: How do you as an organization stay in the forefront of what customers need despite the rapid change that's going on in our industry?**

**Wells:** First, you need to listen. Listen to your customers, understand their challenges, the concerns they have and offer any solutions and ideas that are not just innovative, but strategically fit what they need.

It sounds very simple, but a lot of companies fall into the trap of telling customers what they need or what they should do, and try to oversell some view of where they should go. And frankly, it's listening and responding to their needs. With this, the pull of the customer becomes very strong. This takes a deep understanding of the environments or equipment technologies and solutions that are used, and how they're experienced by the patients and providers on the front lines.

So, we take a lot of steps. We do a lot of design-thinking research, which is an empathetic approach and a user experience approach in everything we do.

In fact, we just hired a new director of design and human factors, and it's a new position for us. It will ensure that design and user experiences across the organization continue as we become more complex in multiple businesses. It's something that was built into all our work, but now we have a focused role that will lead us into the future.

### **Adams: I don't think there's ever been a time in the history of our industry calling on caregivers where listening is more important. Sometimes it's not even listening to what they need, but just listening to their frustrations and the things that they've gone through.**

**Wells:** Empathy and EQ are truly not just secondary requirements in execution. They're essential in executing. Part of winning in markets is being able to understand, and utilize, those soft skills and empathy wherever you can. People need to be listened to. They really do, especially in these times.

### **Adams: How are you forecasting and mapping out the future, not just the disruption in supply chain that affects Midmark products, but disruption in supply chain as a whole?**

The new Midmark Experience Center and Technology Center in Versailles, Ohio is the epicenter for Midmark's efforts to change how care is delivered, to enable a better care experience for both caregivers and patients.



**Wells:** That's a good question. We're fortunate to have some strong suppliers. That being said, through this whole process, it's not just our suppliers, it's their suppliers, and then their supplier's suppliers. I feel for our operations team, purchasing teams, supply chain teams who are pulling this all together and ensuring we're delivering products and staying in front of this.

It is unprecedented with not only the supply chain challenges, but also the spike in demand that has happened at the same time. But we're doing everything we possibly can. We search for supply, different parts and pieces ... we'll call it "raw materials" for some suppliers. We'll stop and search for a particular part for a supplier's supplier, something that we don't even source, but we have the ability to find things for them to ensure that we can keep these parts and pieces in our operations.

This is part of the culture – not accepting no. Let's dig in and see what we can do. And usually two or three days later, it's solved, and we're on to the next crisis. But this is across all three businesses and all our locations. I am hearing that it's probably going to get worse before it gets better, which is not the greatest news. But I'd say from Midmark's perspective, we're feeling confident in how we're managing this into the future.

**Adams: How important is it to collaborate with your customer when you're working with them on their biggest problems and solving it through medical device technology?**

**Wells:** Well, certainly listening to your customers is number one. Listen to their challenges, listen to their goals and then provide solutions. Becoming a trusted partner is key.

You have to earn that. It's not something you just say, "I'm listening and here's a solution." You have to be a trusted partner over a period of time. That collaborative approach does take time. It takes a concerted effort, but that collaboration is how we're delivering seamless solutions that improve care.

Back to the trusted partner piece, we think of ourselves as an external asset for a lot of our customers, where they can trust that we're going to pull this through for them just like an internal asset would.

And if we can help them improve that patient caregiver experience, improve that quality of care, they're going to come back to us time and time again, because that better-designed experience is truly what they're moving forward to deliver.

You're not designing a new exam room, or a new procedure room, or a new dental office every day. You're doing that once every five, seven, or 10 years. So, providers want to know what's the latest in layouts and configurations and types of equipment to make modifications. For instance, now they're asking about what's the latest in infection prevention. We don't do it a few times a week – we do it 10 to hundreds of times per week. We see it across the industry, truly what's happening in these buying habits, and then what works and what doesn't. We advise and help them through these challenges. So, collaboration is key. It's listening and becoming that trusted partner.

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**Adams: I want to switch the conversation back to you a little bit. How do you continue to grow and develop as a leader?**

**Wells:** In the CEO role, one thing you learn is you have to be aware of the fact that you're not all knowing. Be honest with yourself that you don't have all the answers and that's OK. You need to have a strong work ethic, and a high level of dedication, confidence, and abilities. Really, I think what goes back to this winning attitude is a burning desire to build something. You must listen and have a thirst for knowledge.



HIDA Washington Summit 2016  
L to R: Sean McNally, Cardinal Health; Larry Lollis, Grove Medical; U.S. Senator Tim Scott; Brad Connett, Henry Schein; Jon Wells, Midmark

So, I'm learning. This is seven to eight months in now. I'm finding that success means surrounding myself with talented teams and talented executives that make great decisions day in and day out, setting their own goals, setting goals of the team, and aligning strategy. I'm very fortunate. We have an incredible team here at Midmark, and I see my job as empowering them and helping them execute, and really supporting them. Part of it is that I feel like I'm working for them. I say that with all respect because they're moving a lot of these things forward and winning in the marketplace. And I'm very fortunate.

**Adams: I got to know you at some of the organizations where you volunteered your time. How important is it to you to give back to the industry?**

**Wells:** Today, I'm on the board of the Health Industry Distributors Association's education foundation. I'm a former board member for the Healthcare Manufacturers Management Council (HMMC), and was president of HMMC for a while, and have held roles on several industry trade councils. This is about learning and staying engaged. Giving back and caring for communities – just like I spoke about our culture – these things are all intertwined.

Before I came to Midmark, I started in architecture. That degree has helped me so much in my roles at Midmark, especially in my current CEO role, because that architectural background brings clarity and focus to how we design better healthcare experiences, and building this out, and sharing across industries. So being engaged with industry associations is very important for me and for Midmark. **REP**

### Mentors

Jon Wells has a long list of people he considers leadership mentors. Internally at Midmark, there is Dick Moorman, Joe Rothstein, Don Kitzmiller, Anne Eiting Klamar, and John Baumann more recently. "All of them have had a significant impact on my leadership style."

Industry staples such as Rob Saron, Cindy Juhas, Gary Corless,

Brad Connett and Joan Eliasek are individuals Wells said he's looked up to during his entire career. "There are so many who have given me breaks, showed me the way through a difficult decision, and challenged me when I needed to be challenged."

Wells credits his father with instilling in him a mentality that you can't

expect someone to buy your product or give you a dollar – you have to earn it.

"I've always carried that with me," Wells said. "Everything I do and everything Midmark does is about earning that. And we earn it. It takes work. You have to be obsessed with your customers, be with them in their execution and then build trust."