

Meet Justin Lipsky, Founder at First Link

Jim Ries: Hello, and welcome to Java with Jim. I'm Jim Reis, Director of Business Development at Offit Kurman. Joined here today with Justin Lipsky, founder at First Link. Justin, how are you?

Justin Lipsky: Hey, Jim. How you doing today?

Jim Ries: Doing great. So Justin, tell us about First Link. What do you do there, and what makes your company different from other companies in the same industry?

Justin Lipsky: Yeah. So First Link, We provide supply chain and procurement services. and so essentially what we do, we have teams and relationships in countries mainly in Asia like China, Vietnam, India, some in Southeast Asia as well. And what we do is we help companies here to procure from vetted manufacturers in those areas.

And a little bit that makes us a bit unique compared to others in the field. Compared to other, sourcing companies, which there are many of, for sure, a lot of what we do is in the material procurement space. So we're working directly with, in many cases, [00:01:00] the users of materials.

So if you think of, like construction and building materials to textiles, hotel linens and things like that. And we are usually working with the installers or the people that are using these materials that have been buying from US suppliers that are maybe going through a few links in the supply chain to get those originally from overseas.

And we essentially help them go direct to cut out a number of other rings in those supply chains to reduce costs by going direct to manufacturers.

Jim Ries: Well, I'm sure you're plenty busy 'cause there's certainly lots of confusion regarding supply chain and procurement with issues that we've had over the past couple years, including the most recent, which are the tariff issues.

So I'm sure you're really busy. Justin, when it comes to First Link, what are you most proud of?

Justin Lipsky: Yeah. I think if I'll be allowed to be a little, maybe less humble than I normally would, since you're asking what we're proud of. I think what we have done a very good job of is keeping an open mind to the [00:02:00] resources, sort of relationships, and types of deals that we can make happen for serving customers.

A lot of what we do in this field is there's always a mix of, discretion and caution when you're evaluating suppliers. You're trying to put things together. At the same time- It's finding ways to bring these resources to these clients to serve their needs. And I think we have been very good at keeping an open mind to developing these relationships, resources, and it has allowed us to work on a number of very interesting deals that I maybe never really would have thought I could do.

But just as one example that's been fun lately is we're working on sourcing medical equipment for a clinic in Africa. And there was a number of things that came together for that, both on the customer side, the resources side, how we were finding the right manufacturers for that.

And I think some things that have come across the table that other people may have said, "Not our area, we can't do," and just by having an open mind to, again, it's a lot of relational work and bringing the right [00:03:00] resources to play that's allowed us to work on projects like that, which are really exciting.

Jim Ries: Projects with a lot of moving parts, let's call that.

Justin Lipsky: Yes, for sure.

Jim Ries: So what do the next six months look like for you and First Link?

Justin Lipsky: Yeah. So we're perhaps a relatively young company. We're about in year two right now. And so we are moving into, in a few different industries that we work in, some more regular supply, managing some private labels in cases, some cases for clients.

And so those are things that we're looking to bring online and kind of get going which will be in the next six months. And that's for us, exciting because that is I think, representative of the growth that we wanna do, where again, we are managing regular supply chain for clients, across different product SKUs different supplier bases, in some cases even different countries for the same client, streamlining their procurement process, helping them save on costs, and that's ultimately the vision that I have for what we are trying to do here.

So we're moving into that with some clients, and again, that's something that I'm excited about for over the next six months. [00:04:00]

Jim Ries: Nice. Sounds great.

Justin Lipsky: Yeah.

Jim Ries: All right, so here's the fun question. Justin, what do most people watching this video not know about you?

Justin Lipsky: So I was trying to think of something.

I will say, so when I started my career so I'm thir- 35 now, so about what's this, 10, 15 years ago, I was doing something completely unrelated to business, trade, that kind of a thing. I was doing a lot of sort of cross-cultural nonprofit work. I myself spent some years living in China, and when I came back here I was working on everything from translation and interpreting to language education, language immersion, summer camp programs, that kind of a stuff.

And I now... This is somewhat of a plug also for a nonprofit, but I work with the-- Baltimore has a, we have a sister city relationship with Xiamen, and on that program we send Baltimore

students over to China for language and cultural exchanges. And so that's something I'm very passionate about and spend a lot of time on.

And I think, travel [00:05:00] and seeing other cultures and just getting out there in the world is something that has brought a lot of benefit to my life and I think something that, in general we could all use a little bit of more of. So that's something that I, outside of work spend a lot of my time on and am very passionate about.

Jim Ries: Agree, and congrats for being involved in such a wonderful cause. Certainly benefits a lot of people. And you're right we all can get out there and learn about and live in some other cultures to the extent that we can do that. Yeah, Justin, great to be with you today.

Appreciate your time. Thanks for sharing so much information about First Link and I hope to see you soon.

Justin Lipsky: Yeah. Thank you. Likewise. This was great.

Jim Ries: You bet. See ya.

Justin Lipsky: Bye.

Jim Ries: Bye.