Citizen of the Industry

Give someone a chance: The industry gave Amanda Danner one, and she has built her career around giving that chance to others.

Amanda Danner always thought she would work for Knife River, the ready mixed concrete plant she often drove by in Stayton, Ore., near her small hometown. She just didn't know why.

She applied and was turned down. Five years later, she tried again. The position was for a scale and batch plant operator, but lacking any qualifications, she was offered a driving job instead … and she didn't even have a CDL.

The journey Amanda has traveled between that beginning and today is remarkable: from driver to mentor driver to trainer and now instructor at the Knife River Training Center in Albany, Ore. She is helping establish consistent training standards across operations in 15 states.

The balance sheet of believing in others

Amanda describes herself at the time as quiet and timid, and she was dealing with challenges outside work. When then-Ready Mix Field Representative Hollie Rathbun and Trucking Supervisor Harland Pope interviewed her, they saw something she couldn't yet see in herself. They advocated for her, even over other managers' objections.

Careers are sometimes created because an experienced person sees capability before the employee does. Amanda went on to become the driver that customers and contractors specifically requested. She built credibility with plant personnel, finishers, contractors and customers.

Because people leaned into Amanda early in her career, she now deliberately leans into the people she trains. That investment pays off with huge multiples.

Growth through mistakes

Early in her career, Amanda was working alone on an early Saturday morning at the dreaded Dunning-Kruger homeowner jobsite, the kind where the customer is certain they know everything about concrete. Two houses sat with a power pole between them. Despite her best effort, she bumped it.

She photographed the vehicle damage and sent the picture to her boss. She was sure she was about to be fired, but she wanted to finish the job and make things right with the homeowner. She was not fired. Instead, her boss helped her learn from it.

Then there was a winter jobsite where the customer assured her the ground conditions were sufficient to drive on. We all know a loaded mixer has the final vote. The result was a tow and all the collateral pain that comes with it. While ready mixed concrete is not forgiving, good companies can be. The best ones know that mistakes are invaluable: Own them, learn from them and become better.



Amanda Danner

Not for the weak

Days that start between 2 a.m. and 5 a.m. Midnight pours. Heavy trucks. Customers waiting. Concrete setting. Weather changing. Jobsite access that looks perfectly adequate until 70,000-plus pounds arrive. The people who thrive in this environment have patience, work ethic and something extra: the inclination to help somebody else.

Amanda walks the walk, proving that the frontline discipline of this industry is not simply toughness. It is helpfulness. She describes successful people as those willing to become a mentor driver, help the next person, answer the question someone is embarrassed to ask, or stay engaged long enough for circumstances to improve.

Her story drives home a homespun truth. Some industries say, "There are good jobs here." Our beloved industry has a far richer argument: "There are good people here, and we will all get better together."

Teaching the customer

The world of pain replete with late loads, slump, weather, traffic and frustrated customers tends to land at the driver's feet. Amanda's response is patience and explanation.

She describes her approach in example after example. Tell them what happened, and what is happening at the plant. Explain that the truck turned around as quickly as possible. Do not pretend everything is perfect, but let them know you are a straight shooter.

Her genius is recognizing that de-escalation starts with understanding that the angry person frequently does not know what it takes to manufacture, transport and place concrete.

What company values look like in real life

In 2020, the Beachie Creek Fire wreaked havoc on Oregon, devastating five communities. When her family home was destroyed, Knife River told her to go be with her family. No speeches. No slogans.

That kind of response leaves a mark on your heart, and Amanda will never forget it. In an ultra-competitive world to keep employees, she knows the best answer is pretty darn simple: People remember who gave them a hand when they needed it most.

Amanda delivered concrete to the Albany Training Center while it was being built. Today, she works there, helping to develop others who will give back and forge the culture going forward.

Why our industry shines

Amanda's journey is defined by three things: work ethic, because every job is hard; integrity, even when nobody is watching; and friendliness, because people deserve it. She started to tell me that this industry gave her a career, but then quickly corrected herself. It gave her a family. Our beloved industry gave her a chance, a career and a family.

Amanda's many vignettes quietly shouted out that advancement is not the primary measure of success. The more compelling reality is that every step upward increases our ability to help someone else.

Her closing words were simple and profound: "Give someone a chance."



Knife River Training Specialist Amanda Danner takes pride in her mixer.