



## Scott Burleson, Senior Vice President

*Scott Burleson is the newest member of our team. He's had career stops with Converse, John Deere, Strategyn and Actuant Corporation before coming home to The AIM Institute. He's a self-described new product development work who makes a fine addition to our team. We sat down with Scott to ask him a few questions.*

**Take AIM:** You describe yourself as a “new product development work.” What does this really mean?

**Scott:** Depending on the definition you use, I'm either very boring or I have studied new product development beyond the point of usefulness! With each of my job assignments, I have enjoyed finding the top thought-leaders in that field. When I was a manufacturing engineer, I read about Deming. When I was in sales, I read Brian Tracy's work. When I entered the product development and innovation world, I found that it was just a bigger field – more authors, more topics, more stuff to know.

**Take AIM:** Is this a labor of love, or is it more about excelling in your career?

**Scott:** Both. I told you I was boring! My dad once told me that self-education is ultimately more valuable than formal education. That was the best professional advice I ever received. The unexpected result was that the more you learn, the more fun that you have, but also the more you realize how little that you know.

**Take AIM:** In a product development application, when did you first put this into practice?

**Scott:** As a product manager for John Deere's compact tractor segment, I had the immense responsibility for leading the strategic marketing for new compact tractor products. A tractor is a complex machine which is used in more contexts than any other offering that I am aware of. From mowing, to transporting mulch, to digging holes. From rocky, steep terrain to fine lawns. From the heat of Arizona to the cold of Montana. It's a machine used by homeowners but also professional landscapers. In European markets, tractors are even driven on the highways! For this challenge, I always began with lots of research and spent many hours in the field interviewing customers. Based on what I would learn, I sold the vision to leadership and then worked alongside the engineers and designers to bring the new products to life.

***Take AIM: What happened next? How does the story end?***

**Scott:** There were many stories! Yes, we did have success as I believe that every new product from our team was successful in increasing both market share and profitability. The most successful was the [John Deere 1-Family](#) in which sales doubled and margins increased. While the marketing work we did supplied the DNA for a big win, the execution was the difference. The overall project manager, EJ Smith, and the technical lead, John Kuhn, as well as a hundred other people I could name get the credit for making it happen. I reflect on that as one of the most fun and productive times of my life.

***Take AIM: When you transitioned into the B2B world, how well did those skills transfer?***

**Scott:** When I began with Actuant, I naively believed that VoC was pretty much the same whether you were in the B2B or B2C world. However, I quickly realized that I was mistaken – and that I had a huge knowledge gap for understanding the special issues for B2B. After extensive research, I found Dan Adam’s book, *New Product Blueprinting*. This book was critical for me to quickly get up to speed. It’s truly a unique resource to understand VoC and new product development for B2B.

***Take AIM: What’s your best tip for executing New Product Blueprinting well?***

**Scott:** Don’t worry about being the perfect moderator, the perfect note taker, or the perfect anything. Just get out there and have fun. The skills will come with experience. Take the pressure off and enjoy the ride along the learning curve. Your customers will appreciate the effort you are making to understand their problems. Have fun with it! For a full bio on Scott (and others at AIM), please see the [AIM Team](#) section on our website.