

STABILITY CONTROL

How trailblazing Webasto Americas CEO Brad Ring kick-started the automotive supplier's regional operations into high-gear, fueling a remarkable turnaround.

BY JOSH LEGASSICK

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Paralyzed by supply chain woes, Webasto Americas suffered a highly publicized failure producing roofs for the new Ford Bronco. That is, until incoming CEO Brad Ring took the wheel and blazed a new way forward.

Ring Leader

As CEO of Webasto Americas, Brad Ring's leadership has been instrumental in catalyzing the company's remarkable turnaround. His strategic vision and operational expertise have strengthened market positioning, fostering growth and resilience as the company celebrated 50 years in North America.

For over 120 years, Webasto has been a powerhouse in the automotive industry, driving innovation in roof systems, climate control, and EV batteries. But by 2023, its Americas division was in freefall. Profits were tanking. Supply chains were collapsing. Quality issues were mounting. Leadership was out of step. The division wasn't just struggling—it was on the brink. In a mobility industry evolving at breakneck speed, survival was far from guaranteed. Enter Brad Ring, a seasoned automotive executive with a reputation for executing high-stakes business turnarounds.

Appointed CEO of Webasto Americas in 2023, Mr. Ring faced a daunting task: rebuild trust, reinvigorate operations, and position the company for long-term success. Just one year later, his leadership has driven a remarkable turnaround, making Webasto Americas a case study in corporate reinvention.

The Crisis Facing Webasto Americas

When Mr. Ring took the helm, Webasto Americas was in trouble. The region's profitability had been eroding for years. Leadership had grown accustomed to missing financial targets, and cost inefficiencies were rampant. Millions were being wasted on unnecessary expenditures, and the division was burdened by a culture where failing to meet objectives was quietly accepted as the norm. Their financial position was unstable, and without immediate intervention, the long-term sustainability of the division was in question.

Webasto Americas had become a textbook case of a company paralyzed by its own inefficiencies. Supply chain

disruptions caused delays in delivering critical components, leading to a highly publicized failure in the production of Ford Bronco roofs. These disruptions stemmed from an overreliance on third-party vendors and a lack of internal controls, resulting in costly delays that damaged the company's reputation. Quality control issues plagued manufacturing plants, with products failing to meet rigorous automotive standards.

Additionally, an overreliance on external consultants indicated a deficiency in internal expertise, further exacerbating operational inefficiencies. These challenges eroded confidence among stakeholders, from employees to key clients.

Perhaps the most damaging issue was cultural stagnation. A siloed, individualistic mindset had taken root within the organization, with different functions focused solely on their own objectives rather than the company's overall success. Employees and management alike had lost sight of the bigger picture, instead prioritizing their individual departmental goals over collective success. The company had settled into a losing mentality, prioritizing effort over results, creating a work culture where inefficiencies were tolerated rather than addressed.

"We had become settled in on losing," Mr. Ring says. "It was okay to not meet our objectives. The deliverables weren't as important as making a good effort or working a lot."

Leading a Full-Throttle Transformation

With a clear-eyed assessment of Webasto Americas' problems, Mr. Ring set out to



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INSIGHT
BLOOD, SWEAT
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Back on Track

After an assessment of Webasto Americas' problems impacting production of the Ford Bronco modular roof units, Mr. Ring set out to turn things around. His strategy was built on four pillars: vision, operational excellence, cultural transformation, and innovation.

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Mr. Ring's first move was to change the company's mindset. He emphasized ownership and accountability at every level. Instead of simply inheriting a corporate-mandated budget, the leadership team was encouraged to challenge financial goals and offer realistic counterproposals.

This was a radical departure from the past, where budget targets were handed down with little room for debate.

"The region had been given budget targets with no respect for whether they were achievable," Mr. Ring said. "The attitude was, 'Of course we're not going to meet that. We never thought we could.' We had to change that conversation."

To do this, he established a more transparent and collaborative budgeting

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process, ensuring that targets were both ambitious and achievable. He also required the leadership team to take ownership of the financial performance of their respective departments, reinforcing a culture of accountability and results-driven execution.

Mr. Ring and his team wasted no time cutting unnecessary costs and improving efficiencies. The first step was eliminating excessive freight costs by restructuring logistics. By analyzing transportation inefficiencies, the company was able to significantly reduce unnecessary expenditures, improving profit margins. The reliance on expensive external consultants was also cut down, with internal teams being empowered to take on problem-solving responsibilities. This not only saved money but also fostered a sense of ownership and competence within the workforce.

Warehouse operations were another major area of focus. Closing external warehouses and optimizing inventory management ensured that the Webasto supply chain became more responsive and cost-effective. Implementing lean manufacturing principles across the company's plants helped streamline production, reducing waste and improving overall efficiency. The operational overhaul laid the foundation for a more disciplined and cost-conscious organization.

Mr. Ring understood that sustainable change required a shift in mindset. He focused on rebuilding trust, increasing collaboration, and fostering a culture of high performance. One of his key initiatives was reshaping executive leadership. Rather than prioritizing technical expertise alone, he sought leaders with energy, passion, and the ability to challenge conventional thinking.

"I look for people with the right energy, passion, and caring. Technical skills can be taught, but leadership qualities and mindset are much harder to change," Mr. Ring explained.

Another major shift was changing how the company measured success. Instead of

tracking effort and individual achievements, teams were now evaluated on their contributions to Webasto Americas' overall goals. Performance metrics were redefined to emphasize tangible results rather than subjective effort.

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Beyond internal changes, Webasto Americas needed to reassert its competitive edge in the marketplace. Under Mr. Ring's leadership, the company invested in automation and digitalization to improve production efficiency. New technology allowed for better tracking of manufacturing processes, ensuring quality control at every step.

Additionally, Webasto strengthened relationships with key OEM partners. By demonstrating its commitment to quality and efficiency, the company was able to rebuild trust and secure long-term contracts. Perhaps most significantly, Webasto positioned itself as a leader in EV battery systems, aligning itself with the future of mobility and ensuring its relevance in the evolving automotive landscape.

A Lesson in Leadership & Corporate Reinvention

Just one year after Mr. Ring took over, Webasto Americas has undergone a stunning transformation. Profitability has rebounded, with millions in cost savings reinvested into core business functions. Operational efficiency has improved significantly, with leaner and more responsive supply chain management ensuring smooth operations. Quality control has been restored, bringing stability to major production lines like the Ford Bronco program. These improvements have reinforced Webasto Americas' reputation as a reliable and innovative automotive supplier.

The culture of complacency has been replaced with a culture of accountability and pride. Employees at all levels have embraced the turnaround, actively



BIO: Brad Ring CEO, Webasto Americas

Brad Ring is the Chief Executive Officer and President of Webasto Americas, a role he assumed on May 1, 2023. Prior to joining Webasto, Mr. Ring served as President of North America at Forvia Clean Mobility and was General Manager at Midwest Products Finishing. Since joining Webasto, he has led the company through its 50th anniversary in North America, focusing on innovation and growth in areas such as lightweight design, automated driving, and electromobility. Mr. Ring holds a Bachelor of Science in Mechanical Engineering from Kettering University and a Master of Business Administration from the University of Toledo.



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contributing to process improvement initiatives. Webasto Americas is now being considered for industry awards, a testament to its renewed reputation and commitment to excellence.

"We're no longer just working hard—we're winning," he says. "We've moved from firefighting to building. That's the real shift."

A critical lesson from this transformation is that culture drives performance. Without a fundamental shift in company culture, operational changes alone will not create lasting success.

A company can implement the best processes and systems, but if employees are not aligned with the broader mission, those improvements will be short-lived.

Another key takeaway is the importance of accountability. Leaders must hold both themselves and their teams responsible for achieving real, measurable results. This means fostering an environment where commitments are taken seriously and setbacks are treated as opportunities for learning rather than excuses for failure.

"There are few decisive factors in the success or failure of a transformation," says Insigniam partner Guillaume Pajeot, who is familiar with Mr. Ring's impact at Webasto Americas. "One is how the leadership embodies the transformation. Mr. Ring has been exemplary for his

teams, and he has been relentless with himself and his direct team to honor the promise to produce a breakthrough turnaround with the Bronco program performance. His commitment to keep encouraging the teams made the difference on several occasions, and they never gave up against the setbacks encountered along the journey. Observing this was pretty remarkable."

Success also requires making tough decisions. Waiting too long to address critical issues can be fatal for an organization. Whether it's restructuring teams, cutting unnecessary costs, or making difficult personnel changes, decisive action is necessary to achieve a meaningful turnaround.

Finally, innovation must be paired with efficiency. While developing new technologies and capabilities is essential for long-term growth, a company cannot afford to innovate at the expense of financial stability. Webasto Americas' ability to balance its investment in innovation with strategic cost reductions was key to its resurgence.

"Caring about people doesn't mean avoiding hard choices," he says. "It means making the right ones."

As Webasto Americas looks to the future, one thing is clear: under Brad Ring's leadership, the company is no longer just surviving. It's thriving. **IQ**



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