The hero and the mentor: Justin Pate's journey in the wrapping industry



In the storytelling framework of the "hero's journey," the protagonist follows a meandering path marked by trials and opportunities. They're often aided by a mentor who imparts the skills, knowledge and wisdom needed to successfully complete the journey.



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Justin Pate, The Wrap Institute (TWI)

The story of Justin Pate's career in the vinyl wrapping industry is about being both a hero and a mentor.

After all, this is a man who made a name for himself during the industry's infancy, and in the world's most challenging media market. But he's also someone who embraced the opportunity to become a source of skills, knowledge and wisdom for those wanting to follow their own vehicle wrapping path. Justin has been an important partner to Avery Dennison during our own journey in the industry. We're pleased to help tell his story.

Finding a path in vinyl wrapping

Justin's career journey has certainly been filled with both trials and opportunities. He earned a degree from Willamette University in, appropriately, mythology and symbolism. He then considered a career in academia and had a chance to play in the National Football League. But Justin walked away from both fields, realizing neither was a true passion.

Instead, he moved across the country to New York City. After several years of exploring the city, at age 24, Justin befriended a neighbor who introduced him to vinyl wrapping. He worked for him for about a year, learning the ropes. However, after repeated frustrations working for his neighbor-employer, Justin left the business. He thought he'd left behind vinyl for good.

But after a short time away from the industry, Justin had a calling, literally and figuratively. He was hired out of the blue to solo-freelance a vehicle wrap. The experience would set him on the path he's traveled for the last three decades.

"As fate would have it, someone just called me up and asked if I wanted to wrap a car," Justin says. "I said, 'Ok, just this one time.' But it was the first time I wrapped something by myself, and I really fell in love with what I was doing. I realized at that moment just how cool this industry could be."

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From "just this one time" to one of the country's premier vinyl installers

Working out of his two-door Honda Civic, Justin devoted the next decade to building his freelance vinyl wrapping career in New York City. He describes the period as an intense grind, referencing the 10,000-hour rule popularized by the author Malcom Gladwell. But he came out of that grind as one of the industry's premier installers.

There was a lot of commercial work — plenty of flat walls and buildings — including iconic Big Apple locales such as the Guggenheim and FAO Schwarz. He also worked in the hip-hop world, doing promotional vehicles and tour buses. And he wrapped about 2,000 cars during that decade, including 350 in a single year!

"I loved being able to finish a car in a day, walk away with good money, and be both physically and mentally challenged by the work," Justin says. "It worked for me on multiple levels: physical, mental and emotional. The clients always had a big smile on their face, so it was very gratifying."

A move to Europe and an aha moment

By 2007, Justin had married and moved to his wife's home country of the Netherlands, where he sought to continue his career. There, he faced another challenge that would help define his journey in the industry.

"In the US back then, the approach was to wrap 'clean and fast,' often at the expense of quality. But the European style was slow and methodical, and more focused on the highest possible quality. So I had to teach myself that approach. It was very hard at first. Yet, it was the best thing that happened to me as it made me a hybrid installer — someone who could work fast and deliver the high quality."

It was around that time that Justin produced his first training material, a video published on DVD. He also began to be invited by companies such as Avery Dennison — which, at the time, was starting to grow its vehicle wrapping portfolio — to teach in-person workshops. His hybrid approach became the hallmark of his teaching style.

Given the keys by Avery Dennison

The volume of workshops grew. Then, in 2010, Justin was "given the keys" by Avery Dennison. The company asked him to build out a **comprehensive commercial wrap training program** based on his real-world experience. The partnership continues to this day.

From freelance trainer to industry mentor

The opportunity provided by the Avery Dennison partnership also helped spark another important inflection point in Justin's career.

In 2014, he launched **The Wrap Institute (TWI)** and devoted himself more fully to industry leadership and education. He stepped away from wrapping as his day job — though over the years he's taken on select, high-profile projects, such as a vehicle for the Champion Porsche dealership in Miami.

Justin describes TWI as an online, brand-neutral, subscription-based educational platform. He stresses that it's "more than just Netflix for the wrap industry." TWI is a production house for technical and promotional content that has worked with more than 100 companies. Today, the platform houses more than 4,000 videos, plus podcasts, collections, live courses and a community board. It also has a major presence at industry trade shows.

Scaling the training program

The past decade has seen Justin and Avery Dennison working to scale the company's training program. The industry has evolved as well, with more young film installers turning to the program as the first step on their professional journey.

"In the early days, a lot of the people taking our classes had at least some wrapping experience," says Justin. "But we started to notice a shift after the pandemic, with most of our students having never even picked up a squeegee before. So those classes became very basic. We then added the advanced classes to go deeper on fleet and business."



Justin recommended additional trainers to the commercial and color change fold, including Charlie Trujillo and John Duever. The Avery Dennison training team brought those trainers onboard and these classes now work with approximately 1,000 students per year. Workshops blend the technical skills of film installation with guidance for wrapping with ultimate efficiency. Advanced classes help seasoned installers deepen their skillsets, network and gain essential business advice.

Training opportunities also include the Avery Dennison Certified Wrap Installer (CWI) designation. Those who pass this challenging exam earn the right to brand as a CWI, get lead generation opportunities and gain admittance into a "club" of the country's elite film installers.

Showing the way to the next generation of installers

It's difficult to overstate Justin Pate's role in the evolution of the vehicle wrapping film installation over the past three decades. The fact that the industry today has such a strong focus on quality and professionalism is, in no small part, due to Justin's influence.

Hero's journey stories show us what's possible when we put aside doubt and take on challenges armed with knowledge and skills. And as the next generation of vehicle wrappers embarks on their own paths in the vehicle wrapping industry, they can credit Justin for helping show them the way.

To learn more about Justin Pate and The Wrap Institute, visit **wrapinstitute.com**

Avery Dennison training classes are offered nationwide. For more information visit **graphics.averydennison.com/training**

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