



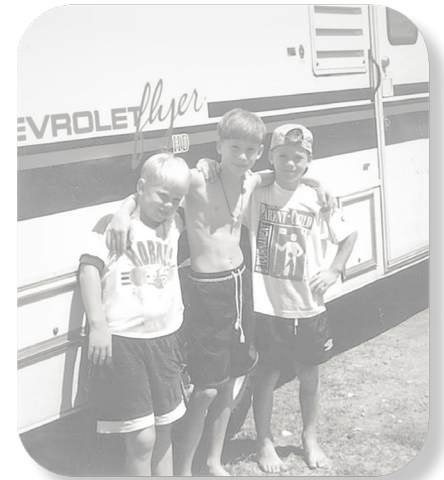
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Driven to Succeed

By Emmy Lou J. Burchette

Douglas Boteler serves as chief executive officer of National OnDemand, a nationwide communication and utility infrastructure service provider delivering construction and last mile solutions to the fiber, wireless, energy and technology sectors.

Douglas Boteler



As I talked with New Republic Partners' client Douglas Boteler, I was struck by the way his life story has all the elements of a screenplay for a great Hollywood movie: An all-American small-town boy with smarts, ambition and a tolerance for risk, follows his heart, works hard, starts a company, builds a national business, marries his sweetheart and is living his dream.

Good things do happen to good people.

Dry red clay spews from dirt bikes flying across a rough Alamance County field on a steamy July afternoon in 1994. Nine-year-old Douglas, and his younger brothers, Wade and Simon, race to the finish, all three laughing as they cross the make-shift line signaling the end of the course. Competitors and risk-takers at heart, the three relished the wild and bumpy ride.

On that day the competition was fielded with dirt bikes; across the years, they have waged friendly battles on water skis, golf courses, basketball courts and ski slopes.

Brothers. Best friends. Life-long comrades.

Douglas Boteler says those bonds continue today. "My brothers and I grew up as best friends and sports fanatics, raised by a loving mother and father in the small town of Mebane where life was good. We were certainly blessed."

Today, Douglas plays in a bigger field as chief executive officer of National OnDemand, a nationwide communication and utility infrastructure service provider delivering construction and last mile solutions to the fiber, wireless, energy and technology sectors.

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A Course Correction

Boteler began his career to fill time and earn money while he figured out what he really wanted to do. An excellent student in high school, he headed to college to pursue pre-med with the thought of becoming a neurosurgeon. After nearly two years, he decided to pursue a different route and returned home to rethink his career.

“My parents were fine — although not thrilled — with my decision to go a different career route, but they required me to get a job while I took that time,” recalls Boteler. “That turned out to be just the right nudge I needed to move forward.”

A temporary job as a cable service installer turned into an idea for making the installation process better for both clients and employees.

“I thought we could make the installation process more efficient, and at the same time improve the way employees were treated,” said Boteler. The combination of those two factors became the platform for a business he formed in 2005 — D&J Cable Contractors, Inc. — initially specializing in last mile cable installations.

Douglas’ brother, Wade, wasn’t surprised by Douglas’ pursuit of building a telecommunications company. “He has always enjoyed making things work, and he is the hardest working individual I have ever known. When we were kids, he was the one who hooked up a television, a Nintendo and a VCR in our family’s mini-van — and that was well before the time when electronics and screens were common in vehicles.

“Douglas has always been entrepreneurial. He started a lawn care company with a neighbor’s kid when he was 12 or 13. Our dad let them use his equipment, and Douglas and his friend drove that mower house to house. Douglas was always thinking of ways to take that little business to the next level,” recalls Wade.

When Douglas started D&J Cable, Wade was all-in and came on board as an employee. A bit later his youngest brother Simon began working for the firm. Seven years

in, his father became an investor and joined as the chief financial officer.

Douglas recalls those early years as a life spent working seven days a week. “I enjoyed the work, and it was all consuming. Over the first four years I was very hands-on in every aspect of our business. I was literally out in the field during the day and back in the office in the evenings. By the fifth year I was able to hire more people so I could implement a corporate structure to sustain the business. During every step of those first years in business I was learning as I was building the company. That learning curve continues today.”

The firm pursued a lot of short-term contract work for several years. Boteler landed the company’s first long-term prime contract in 2009, which became a springboard for expansion of equipment, employees and geographic market coverage.

Two Chance Meetings

That same year, Boteler decided to help sponsor an industry golf tournament as part of the company’s efforts to promote the business in the telecommunications industry. He also entered the tournament as a player, with his brothers and father as partners in his foursome.

At the tournament, Boteler met Tim Standafer, owner of an underground utility construction company. Standafer’s firm had been a consistent winner of the tournament in prior years. But the Boteler foursome took the prize their first year, creating a bit of a buzz among the field of contestants, and luckily beginning a friendship between Tim and Douglas that led to bigger things.

Over the next several years, the two companies enjoyed the competition at the tournament, with each firm taking home the winning title about every other year. In the third year, Boteler and Standafer competed in a shoot-out, with the two celebrating together afterwards. That celebration forged a meaningful business relationship.

Beyond the tournament, Boteler and Standafer became close friends and colleagues. Standafer, the senior of the two, was impressed by Boteler’s drive, tenacity and work ethic. “I watched from afar as Douglas grew his company, dealt with setbacks and came out stronger each time. He became a student of the industry and created his own formalized study of business, absorbed the material and put what he learned into practice.”

As Boteler considered expanding D&J Cable, he approached Standafer about acquiring his firm which was of similar size. Turns out, Standafer was considering a growth strategy as well and the two began to explore the merits of combining forces. They hit a stumbling block when their respective business advisors both proposed a majority ownership position. But the two owners believed in the merits of a true 50-50 merger.

“Our shared vision was aligned, and we trusted each other,” said Boteler. The two went against their advisors’ advice, shook hands and agreed to merge as equals. “That was one of the best decisions of my professional career,” recalled Boteler.

As an outcome of the merger, the two men created National OnDemand. The partnership was a good one — each of the leaders brought different strengths to the executive suite and the companies complemented one another in terms of skill sets and market coverage. They set their sights on building a national business.

A parallel chance encounter led to a second significant change in Boteler’s life story.

Roll back the story a few years. Twenty-nine-year-old Douglas was busy as ever with D&J Cable. He had established a corporate office and was able to build a little time for recreation into his weekends. His passion for water skiing and jet skis led him to rent a weekend house for the summer of 2015 on Lake Norman, a large recreational lake near Charlotte.

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As a young bachelor, Douglas frequented the Blue Parrot, a small restaurant located on the lake. While there one evening, good friends introduced him to another friend of theirs, Ashley. That meeting blossomed into a friendship which also included Ashley's ten-year-old daughter Makayla. Friendship turned to much more, and Ashley and Douglas became engaged the following year. Twelve months later, just several months after the creation of National OnDemand, the two tied the knot.

A Growth Curve

Over the next four years, National OnDemand grew organically and through the acquisition of 15 other businesses. Boteler and Standafer knew continued growth and stability would require significant expansion.

"We knew larger companies prefer to do business with larger vendors. We had to expand to gain long-term security in the industry," said Boteler. "Tim and I initiated a search for the right partner who would understand both the cultural and strategic aspects of our company."

In 2021 the company closed on a private equity deal, providing the company with the infusion of resources they needed for continued growth. Both Boteler and Standafer remain significant shareholders and leaders of the firm, working together with their new investment partner to chart the company's path forward.

Reflecting on their success to date, Standafer is quick to credit Boteler. "He is the most driven and ambitious person I know, with an insatiable appetite for success. More impressive is the tremendous success he has had at his age without it negatively impacting his professional or personal life. Something in there drives him to no end. He is never satisfied, and nowhere near what he expects to accomplish in this world. I'm fortunate to have him as a business partner."

When asked what's next on the horizon for their company, both Boteler and Standafer have the same answer: "The sky's the limit."

Standafer views Boteler as the architect of their business strategy, while he focuses more on execution. "We make good partners. Douglas has the vision for the future of our business. Together we are building something special."

A Full House, A Full Life

While growing National OnDemand, Douglas and Ashley were also expanding their family. Son Liam joined the family in 2019 and daughter Amelia in early 2023.

Now a family of five, Boteler and his wife are busy helping their eldest daughter prepare for college at Appalachian State University, while also tending to the needs of an active toddler and newborn baby.

Boteler has adjusted his work schedule again to accommodate this new phase in his life. His early mornings are spent helping with the kids. Then he heads to the office for a full day of meetings and calls or visits to one of their project sites. After that, his time is devoted to family.

As if he didn't have enough on his plate, Boteler recently earned his helicopter pilot's license — not an easy feat. To the question of why he pursued that goal, Boteler simply explains it as something he always wanted to do. "I thought it would be fun; my father was a pilot and I believed it might be helpful to me in the future."

As to his outlook on life, Boteler measures his success in human terms.

"I'm so grateful to have a wonderful wife and children. I live within walking distance of my brothers and we are raising children who are around the same age. I love what I do. I work with great business partners and have a talented team.

"I'm a very fortunate man."



Photo credit: Ken Beebe.