



Humble Beginnings

My name is Aman Mann and I am the CEO and Co-Founder of Procurify, a Vancouver startup on a mission to help innovative companies change the world through technology.

There are always perceptions and assumptions about the path that a CEO took to get to where they are and the person they've become throughout their journey. I wanted to write about my journey publicly to help remove any perceptions people have about what it takes to become a CEO and replace that perception with a story that helps everybody see that you can do whatever you set your mind to.

I am the middle child in a family of four. I was born and raised in Abbotsford, BC, which was named the homicide capital of Canada in 2009 due to its high gang presence. From that fact alone, you can already get a sense of the paths that are paved for young men growing up there. My childhood was not easy. Not only did my family not come from much, I was bullied, faced racism, and struggled with dyslexia and health problems. I grew up with a father who told his children not to chase happiness at work. He often brought his own work stress and anger home with him. In his mind, chasing money was the way to happiness. Every minute wasted on laughter or a break was a dollar not earned.

My father's philosophy could have set the foundation for how I perceived work, but I resisted. Through my childhood experiences I knew that love, compassion, and kindness always had a fighting chance and that focusing on material things would never drive true happiness. I attribute the compassion to a selfless mother who endured physical and mental abuse for decades while never allowing her children to harm others. She taught us kindness was the only way to live.

During high school I knew that I had to continuously grow and learn on my own, which meant putting myself in front of opportunities and new experiences, even if it was uncomfortable. I kept myself busy learning new things and tried to put myself out there whether it was selling random things at school, ripping apart computers, collecting seemingly valuable but random Star Wars memorabilia, or working any angle to earn a dollar.

After high school, I sold everything I had and went backpacking in my early twenties. This was my "call to the wild". Backpacking gave me a sense of freedom and purposeful isolation that forced me to learn more about myself. I'm forever grateful for this experience and I encourage all young people to consider doing the same thing.

How Do I Take Over Your Job?

After I returned, I started working in sales for a Chinese manufacturer to set up their local distribution presence in North America. I wanted to learn more about supply chain, global trade, and operations and knew this was a great way to get my foot in the door. Even though I was a young twenty something, I managed to get through the doors of massive trade shows by growing a goatee to look older and more experienced. Eventually I made it to China to help with manufacturing quality issues. However, I ultimately chose to leave because my personal values of caring for the company's staff in underprivileged areas of the country did not align with its leadership. So, I left. Looking back, I'm proud that I helped build one of the top distributors in Canada and the USA, where I was able to reduce quality defects by 40%.

After that I kicked off a new career at Ocean Spray where I started at the very bottom again. Even though the daily work grind was rough, I knew it was the place for me. I was always interested in production and operations, and Ocean Spray was my chance to work my way up and solve problems in a fast paced environment. I worked around the clock and finally ended up in a manager role running the daily operations of the entire plant. One day I bluntly asked my General Manager "how do I take over your job?" He advised me to partner my passion for operations with an education, and so I applied to BCIT.

Something Out Of Nothing

I knew enrolling in BCIT's Operations Management program was exactly what I needed (even though the 2-hour commute both ways was hell!) I was excited to learn from forward-thinking instructors who had helped create a lot of the operations management theories used today. And that's exactly what I got.

During my final year at BCIT my now co-founders (Ken Loi and Eugene Dong) and I ended up getting grouped together on a school practicum for a cluster of manufacturing companies. The goal of the project was to create operational processes to increase efficiency and effectiveness. We discovered that how companies managed money was ad-hoc and bottlenecked many opportunities that resulted in consequences of broken processes, which often led to layoffs.

The solution we created ended up working for the organization. We even witnessed the production speed up and they were able to hire more people because of it. Even though our instructors thought we were out of our minds, one of them encouraged us to pitch our idea at an industry event where we ended up with our first paying customer (even though I tried a magic trick on stage that failed and kept a friend under a table on stage for an hour - thankfully, they saw past that!)



This was our defining moment. We realized we could really build something out of nothing. We knew we could use technology to transform a traditional operations process. Businesses were simply not innovating and leveraging new technologies in a sustainable way. Not only was the amount of paper used in the back office shocking, we also saw an opportunity to unite people, processes, and systems and create motivating environments that could decrease layoffs. Our first paying client was getting real value out of what we had built, and we knew we were on the right track. My co-founders worked their day jobs for a while, but eventually quit. I ended up living off my credit card and sleeping in our \$300/month office. We all turned down opportunities in our field of study, and decided to dedicate our lives to start the journey of Procurify.

The Take-Away

Throughout my childhood, youth, and career, I've learned how to think harder and make better decisions. The more experienced I became, the better I was at using intuition to guide and predict things along the way. The more you put yourself out there and jump into the unknown, the more you're able to make better predictions and grow as a person. Every scary and difficult thing you go through builds you up. As you take more risks and go through more failures, you become more powerful and less afraid, only because you know what it's like to fail. That's what real growth is. The best leaders have failed the most because they put themselves out there.

Putting in the effort is part of that process of continuous learning. So don't forget that putting yourself out there partnered with hard work is what will get you to where you want to go. I do not have the traditional background or education that most CEOs or entrepreneurs possess. But I am proud of where I am today because I chose to never give up after failing countless times. I learned from those failures and worked hard to fight forward.

Advice to those looking to follow their dreams:

Do not be afraid of struggle. In time it forges steel. To those who have experienced poverty, abuse, bullying, or any kind of suffering, know that this is your superpower. It may not seem like it at the time, but your resilience is an advantage. Life is full of ups and downs and going after your dreams won't always be easy. But when you're overcome with negative thoughts and feelings of not being good enough, remember all the times when you have pushed through and never gave up. Look where it got you and the person you became. Believe in you that believes in a dream. Dreams change the world. Dreams fight to come true, so don't stop dreaming. Remember you are as powerful as you want to believe you are. You do not need to have the answers right now. Just keep moving forward, one day at a time. And one day, those negative thoughts will be in your rear view mirror, where they will stay.



I will leave with one of my favorite quotes from Phil Knight (founder of Nike): "The world is made up of crazy ideas. In 1962, I told myself, let everyone else call your idea crazy. Just keep going. Don't stop. Don't even think about stopping until you get there and don't give much thought to where there is, whatever comes just don't stop. That's the precocious urgent advice. The only advice that ever really mattered, that should ever really be told."

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