



HFC's There's No Place Like Home Veteran Partnership and Giveaway

Sohel Gilani – Personal Essay

November 2017

My name is Sohel Gilani and I am a former Staff Sergeant of Marines. I am the father of three children and a husband. I currently work as the Operations Manager at Concrete Craft of Charlotte, NC. I cannot express how thankful I am for this opportunity to own a franchise business and it is my pleasure to provide background information about myself.

At the age of 16, my father passed away and left my mother, my 14-year-old brother and 4-year-old sister. Even though I remember going into the small business that my father owned learning every aspect of running a business at a young age, I quickly found that we were left with nothing. As an Indian American, heritage dictates that I now provide for my family, but heritage didn't have anything to do with my character. I took that challenge and made myself the sacrificial lamb of the family. I took on three jobs and continued to attend high school. As you can image, something had to give. I was a very good student growing up. However, after the death of my father, it became very difficult and I had to stop attending my senior year. Later, I obtained my General Education Degree from Virginia and decided I needed to find direction in my life.

On December 3, 2000, I enlisted in the United States Marine Corps as a Single Channel Communications Operator. It was the best decision I had ever made. During my time training, I was in my element and was meritoriously promoted to Lance Corporal above my peers. A pretty nice achievement at the time in a young career. As time went on, I was deployed to Kuwait, Iraq and Afghanistan. I was promoted above my peers and hand-selected for several duties, such as Administrative Liaison to the Office of Delay, Deferment, Exemption (DDE) and to work at the Pentagon for the Office of Legislative Affairs (OLA). In those roles, I learned that just being a Marine was not enough. That a balance of using and evolving skills were needed. In

these positions, a great deal of effort goes into taking care of your “customer.” At the DDE, I was liaising between former Marines within their Individual Ready Reserve (IRR) time and the Marine Corps DDE board. With the OLA, my customers were the constituents – Congressmen and Congresswomen. I found that I was a natural with dealing with the public and helping them come to a resolution to their conflicts with either office. I learned that I was able to manage and investigate a large number of cases that directly affected the outcome of peoples’ lives. At this point, in 2008, I had earned the rank of Staff Sergeant. In 2011, I was presented with the opportunity to switch my MOS to Signals Intelligence, 2621, and took the offer. As a senior leader of Marines, I found that humbling myself to be taught a new qualification came very easy. This experience allowed me to grow as a leader, mentor and guide to my Marines. In June 2015, I was medically retired from the Marine Corps and pursued the next chapter in my life as a Charlotte Police Trainee.

The Charlotte Police has a grueling admission process but nothing compared to the 6-month Para-Military style Training Academy. During my last three weeks at the Training Academy, I was unable to complete an exercise designed to blind your senses while you fight off an aggressor. Unfortunately, I learned about a medical condition that did not allow me to complete the academy. I was devastated. Without a job and with a family to support, I found myself in the similar situation as to when my father passed. I needed to step up and do what was needed for my family. That is when I found Concrete Craft.

I met Patrick Godfrey in March of 2016. The job interview was at a job site and I was hired on the spot. For the next couple of months, I worked as an installer. As the business grew, I was asked if I was interested in a position of Operations Manager, and the way it was presented to me was interesting. I was asked if I could be a person who would run this business as if it was my own; that if something happened to Patrick, the owner – such as an accident and was hospitalized for six months – could I take the challenge? With my life experience and qualities molded by the Marines, I felt the answer was an easy YES!

As the Operations Manager, I was responsible for every aspect of the business. I took to heart what was asked of me and spent countless hours trying to improve the business and do right by my employer, Patrick. I had a hand in the managing of daily operations, scheduling, payroll, human resources management, customer management and response, advertising, inventory management, resource management, professionalization of the organization, sales, and building relationships with vendors. My responsibilities extend to keeping track of the workload and proficiency of all types of jobs, to include overlays, stains, epoxies and continued work in the field. To be honest, even though my plate was full, if anything else was thrown my way, I would take it as my personal responsibility to get it done. I have earned the respect of my crew

members and customers alike and love what I contribute to the business. I have been very lucky to gain the experience, even when life threw lemons.

I was in a very precarious situation before I found Patrick and Concrete Craft. He took a chance on me. I had no experience in the industry, yet he trusted me that I could get the job done. During my first few months at Concrete Craft, Patrick helped my family and me in many ways. My dedication and loyalty to Patrick and to building a more successful Concrete Craft franchise comes from a place that puts others before myself. I understand that starting and running a business takes guts and perseverance, time and dedication. I am not naïve to the fact that starting a business is different than managing one that has been propped up. But I strongly encourage you to give me that chance, to give me the opportunity to put my proven efforts into a business that I can call my own. I truly appreciate this opportunity and absolutely believe that my business skills and first-hand experience with Concrete Craft would make me a perfect fit. I look forward to the opportunity.

Respectfully,
Sohel A. Gilani