



CEO

We Spoke to Alan Cohen of Kokomio



By Charlie Katz - August 12, 2021



As a part of our series called ‘Five Things I Wish Someone Told Me Before I Became A CEO’ we had the pleasure of interviewing Alan Cohen.

Born in Mexico City in 1986, Alan Cohen studied in an American School in Mexico City, and thereafter spent a year in Canada at a boarding school at the age of 15.

In college, Alan studied Architecture in Universidad Iberoamericana in Mexico City and spent 6 months in Sydney during that period improving his architecture studies. Having developed more than a dozen projects, from commercial buildings to residential / apartments, Alan also excelled at interior design. Later, Alan participated in developing “Peponne”, a restaurant concept in collaboration with his brother and sister. He was also instrumental in developing and designing a beverage manufacturing plant, as well as a cold pressed juice company in Mexico, Jus Lab. His latest venture is Kokomio, a U.S. — based line of coconut beverages. He is married and a father to 3 beautiful kids.

Thank you so much for joining us in this interview series! Before we dig in, our readers would like to get to know you a bit more. Can you tell us a bit about your “backstory”? What led you to this particular career path?

During my venture with my brother and sister, we identified a need to educate people in the U.S. about the benefits of eating for health. This is something that I have specific knowledge about, as my father and I, together, created Just Lab, a cold-pressed juice company, after working to find a better way to get more nutrients out of the foods we eat every day. Initially, we started producing juice for local restaurants — but the demand grew quickly locally at the restaurants. With the innovation of HPP, we were then able to extend shelf life, which led to a manufacturing plant, which we used to produce the product, and therefore offer one of the cleanest products available at the time to a wider audience throughout Mexico.

In this process, we also developed a coconut beverage from Acapulco coconuts — something that was special to me, because I really enjoyed this treat when I was young. At the same moment, we also saw the need to help growers and harvesters in Guerrero by creating more opportunities and helping them with better practices and wages. Moving forward with a dream and initiative, we created Kokomio as a sustainable company where we aim to take care of the people, the environment and the company.

Can you share one of the major challenges you encountered when first leading the company? What lesson did you learn from that?

There were a lot of challenges. I would say figuring out how the whole coconut industry works today was and still is one of my biggest challenges. We have found a lot of poor business practices in this industry — from corrupt brokers and officials, to bad practices, significant waste and very little support for this industry.

There is a lot of deceit out there, which today, unfortunately, has been converted into “truths.” As a result, breaking that barrier has been a challenge that we continuously learn from. For us this is awesome, because we get to change this beautiful industry. We are committed to create a business model that inspires future change, too. A business should not be profitable for one or a few people. It should build something that helps everyone and everywhere. Hopefully, by building this model, we can prove it to be successful for the people, the environment and the company. Then, and only then, this

model can become contagious — in other industries, as well. Seeing others follow this model would be amazing. That is where I personally would be satisfied.

What are some of the factors that you believe led to your eventual success?

Love, hard work, people and family support. I learned a lot from my father. I would go with him to his office when I was just 14 years old. He taught me to treat people with respect and to always grind and believe in myself and my dreams.

My success is not mine alone. This is the whole team's success. I do not do this alone. I may have had the initial vision, but getting together with people that share this vision and who are constantly supporting our mission on every level, from the growers, harvesters and the team in the manufacturing plant, to the entire U.S. This entire journey has been amazing and absolutely rewarding — and we are only beginning.

What are your “5 Things I Wish Someone Told Me Before I Became CEO”? Please share a story or example for each.

1. Prioritize. Being a CEO, you must attend a lot of meetings from Marketing and Sales to Logistics. It's important to set priorities. You can go crazy and get frustrated if you attempt to tackle everything at once.

2. You are not Superman. You must build a team around you that shares your vision and values. Doing everything alone is impossible and robs you of the experience of learning from those around you. I do say Superman because when I was young, I got a gift from a friend, a Superman doll, and that was the message.

3. Invest in yourself. This, I would say, is the most important tip. If you are not taking care of yourself and everything around you, you won't be well. Exercise, eat healthy, take your meditation. All of this helps me every day.

4. Share the love. Always make time to help other people. Any time someone asks for help, or advice, always listen and try to help.

5. Learn, Learn, Learn. Never stop learning. I studied architecture, and the only way for me to start in a new country with a new industry was through learning — and I keep at it all the time. Never be afraid

to ask questions. Be curious.

What advice would you give to your colleagues to help them to thrive and not “burn out”?

Focus. Not everything is at the same level of importance. There is a huge difference between how hard you work and how effective you work.

Stay in the present, and tackle things one at a time and always move forward. If you want to thrive, you really must enjoy the journey and do things for an end of itself instead of a means to an end.

None of us are able to achieve success without some help along the way. Is there a particular person who you are grateful towards who helped get you to where you are? Can you share a story?

My father, as I previously mentioned. I started working with him when I was just 14 years old. I remember when I first started going to his office with him after school two days a week. It wasn't long before he pulled me in a chair beside him and sat me down to listen.

Of course, being 14 years old, and with no iPhone or iPad to distract me, I found the experience to be boring at the time. So, one day I pleaded with my father to give me some real work, to let me do something — even if it was packing boxes or managing his systems, because what was the point of me not doing something?

He looked at me and said “What is the impact you want to make in this world? Do you want to be someone that just packs boxes, or manages my systems?” Looking up to him, of course, I replied “No, I want to build something amazing!” He then responded, “So, shut up and sit here, learn and listen, because this time for you will be more valuable than just working on a specific task.” And it was true, I watched and listened and learned.

What are some of the goals you still have and are working to accomplish, both personally and professionally?

My current goal is to build a unique business model with Kokomio, and to prove it to be effective, so that more companies can be created with similar values. In doing so, business then helps not only our pockets but the world's pockets, too. At my core, I believe in creating a better world for my children,

and to teach them the right and best way to do business. What comes in the future? Who knows. But I do see myself working to make the world a better place, all my life.

What do you hope to leave as your lasting legacy?

A better world. It's my hope that in this lifetime, I will get to see the beginning of this legacy, but if not, I sincerely hope that whatever I do in this life sincerely motivates other people to think on a different level — in a different way — where we not only think about ourselves, but of our world, overall. And in the process, take care of all our surroundings.

You are a person of great influence. If you could start a movement that would enhance people's lives in some way, what would it be? You never know what your idea can trigger!

I would not say it's a "movement", but rather a wish that all people would be happier in life. To enjoy your life, and the journey, without stress. I'd wish that more people would get out of their comfort zone, and in doing so, create "magic." Believe in yourselves.

Life is beautiful. Of course, in this life, there are always challenges — but they are only as hard as we make them. But, we can learn and grow from each one of our experiences, and in that vein, we always have a choice on how we get to view life, overall.

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