The Business That Raised Me

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I was in second grade when my family moved to Coimbatore. Our business had already been running for a few years by then, but my first real memory of it is the renovation of our sourcing office. I remember walking in and seeing the walls come alive with creative designs made out of cloth. I didn't understand what the company did back then, but I knew it was something colourful, something different, and something that belonged to us.

Our company, CAUSA LLC, sources knitwear for brands in the US. We work with factories in Tiruppur to make golf polos, t-shirts, quarter zips and women's tops. My father, Ganesh Kumar, founded it in 2010, and I am the second generation of our family in the business. Sourcing from Tiruppur means working to tight seasonal deadlines for US buyers, and carrying much of the cost until the goods reach them.

Growing up, words like GSM, lab dips, tech packs, sample swatches, trims, bulk production and shipment dates were just part of everyday conversation at home. While other kids talked about cartoons, I was hearing about polos, quarter zips and whether an order would ship on time. I didn't realise it then, but I was learning the language of an industry before I even knew I was interested in it.

It really clicked when I was about 15. My dad took me to a factory in Tiruppur, and for the first time I saw clothing being manufactured on a massive scale. Hundreds of people, machines running nonstop, fabric turning into finished garments right in front of me. I had always been interested in clothes, but seeing where they actually come from changed how I looked at them. That day I understood the industry our business belonged to, and how fascinating it really is.

A lot of what I know about business, I didn't learn in a classroom. I learnt it at the dinner table. Conversations at home covered money, conflict, hiring, patience, choosing partners and how an international business works.

One lesson my dad always repeats is that you should only get involved in businesses that do not harm other people. For him, the ethical side of business is non-negotiable. He often quotes the Tamil saying that a single tree does not make a grove ('Thani maram thoppu aagaadhu'). A business is only as strong as its team, and building a loyal team means treating your workers with fair pay and respect. That idea has stayed with me more than any textbook definition of leadership.

Five years ago, while we were away on a family trip, our shipping warehouse flooded. All our goods were damaged, and the company took a heavy loss. My dad took a hands-on approach. He handled the crisis personally, calling our customers himself to keep them informed and working directly with our vendors on what to do next. It took a real mental toll, but there was no panic.

That taught me something I don't think I could have learnt any other way: in business, staying steady in a crisis matters as much as the plan itself.

The biggest advantage has been developing a business mindset early. It helped me plan my career and even choose my courses based on what the business needs.

As I've grown older, my dad has opened up business decisions for discussion, and my opinions are taken seriously. I've disagreed with some decisions, and even then, my views were always considered before anything was finalised.

I used to think taking over a business meant one big day when you're handed the keys. Now I see it happening slowly, in conversations like these. Being allowed to share my views now, long before any of these decisions are mine to make, is how I'm learning to make better ones.

There is a weight that comes with all this. As the successor, living up to the family name is a big responsibility, and the fear of failure feels much greater. I always carry the feeling that I can't let my family down.

At the same time, I've never felt forced into this path. My family has always been open to whatever I wanted to do, and nobody pressured me to lead the business. I chose it myself, and I think that freedom is one of the most underrated advantages of a family business.

If I could change one thing, it would be our payment terms. On a seasonal order, CAUSA carries the costs until the customer receives the shipment, so any problem along the way is our loss, as the flood showed. Slowly changing these terms would reduce that risk.

What I would never change is our small, close-knit team of merchandisers. They are deeply committed, and the team can move wherever it's needed. During the lockdown, when the city office was too risky, the whole team worked from our farm. That flexibility is one of CAUSA's biggest strengths.

Being born into a family business is a privilege very few people get, and I've always acknowledged that. It gives you the freedom to explore different options before you commit to one. It also gives you a foundation to learn from your mistakes and take considered risks, along with the duty to protect what the family has built.

I didn't just grow up around a business. In many ways, the business helped raise me. Now it is my turn to help it grow.