

My little brother Nico was my first-ever “business” partner. When I was 8, we built a lemonade stand using scrap wood and squeezed lemons from the tree in our backyard. When I say we, I mean me. Nico was more interested in watching cartoons while I asked people if they wanted lemonade. He had no interest in business.

My entrepreneurial spirit grew as I did, and Nico watched with increasing care. When I was 10, I cleaned cars, scrubbing seats while he sat under the fan inside. He’d watch from the living room, and occasionally, he’d come see what I was up to. Sometimes, I’d convince him to help me hose down a car.

At 13, I sold snacks to kids at school. I researched the margins of Doritos versus Coca-Cola to see which was more profitable. One night, Nico asked why cans of Coke were on the floor, so I explained my latest venture. A week later, he was selling leftover Halloween candy. Infinite margins! Why didn’t I think of that? The next day, I was copying him.

At 16, I founded a nonprofit, Oakland Student Service. We targeted high school students to volunteer, a business model designed to help teens engage in their community and create a habit of giving. When Nico told me there was a food drive at his school, and I told him my nonprofit was hosting the drive, he begged me to let him help. I told him that he could help by telling his friends to bring cans, and immediately, he was messaging every classmate he could.

My favorite part about my nonprofit is what it signified for my family. A one-generation turnaround from struggling immigrants to giving back. I’ve created these building blocks for my family, but the most important is Nico’s love for business. He’s hooked, and I’m teaching him all the lessons I taught myself: how to save, invest, and build something lasting. Nico can’t wait to take the nonprofit over. He reminds me every day he’s the future CEO. And every time he does, I can’t help but smile.