



## Sustainability

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# Using Experience to Advance Life Professionally and Personally

**Andrew DeMeo '18, Associate, Client Services & Business Development, Impax Asset Management**

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Andrew DeMeo '18 (Environmental Conservation and Sustainability) won the 2017 [Social Venture Innovation Challenge](#). Taking his experience as a cooperative beekeeper, Andrew explained the importance of preserving the bee population. He proposed launching a residential hive program, where commercial customers could start a hive on their properties. Andrew's idea placed first, and he received \$5,000 in funding towards his startup business, Honey Do.

Recently, the Sustainability Institute caught up with him to hear more

about his experience, as well as how Andrew became involved in the sustainable investing sector.

**You were a winner in the 2017 SVIC, can you speak to your experience and the impact it had on you personally and on your career?**

Frankly, I could probably teach a course on all the ways the SVIC helped advance my career/ life. I struggled academically a fair amount in college and ended up winning SVIC just as I was graduating, so the idea that I could succeed in some other way was very validating to me at the time. It helped give me the confidence to try something new and kind of crazy—which I ended up doing when I took my idea to market and turned it into a real business.

Perhaps the biggest takeaway for me in participating in the SVIC was just how much other people are willing to help. Current competitors, former competitors, my coach and mentor Ian Grant at the UNH Entrepreneurship Center, the judges, and others beyond-- at every stage of my participation in SVIC, I had tons of people show generosity with their time and advice while genuinely trying to help me develop my idea to be the best it could be. The competition itself is great, but I often found myself thinking it was just an excuse to get passionate people together to think and work on cool stuff that makes the world better. If so, mission accomplished!

**Since your 2017 SVIC win, where has your career taken you?**

It has taken me to many wonderful places that I never imagined! Mere months after winning the SVIC and starting a

beekeeping business based on my idea, I was contacted out of the blue from a California TV producer who asked to come film me and the bees for a TV show he was making focused on



Andrew ran a bee-keeping business for several years

innovative entrepreneurs. I actually received this call from nowhere while in the Hannaford's parking lot in Dover.

I thought it was a scam, but low and behold a week later this guy and his camera crew came out to one of my apiaries. Along with him were the venture capital folks funding his project who—I kid you not—drove out there in a bedazzled Rolls Royce. I mean literally bedazzled. You can't make this stuff up.

This is just a micro example of the innumerable crazy things that began to happen to me after winning the SVIC and starting a business. Looking back, much of it seems surreal, but I think any entrepreneur would be able to give similar stories. When you have the opportunity to put yourself out there, do your best, and leave your comfort zone, the world can respond in strange and often fortunate ways. The SVIC was my gateway to many incredible learning experiences and, eventually, the career of my dreams.

For my “day job” right after college, I worked for a fantastic Boston based non-profit—Second Nature—which focuses on reducing emissions in the higher ed space. As part of my job at Second Nature, I attended a higher-ed sustainability conference in Washington state in 2019 (AASHE 2019). The opening speaker for the conference was possibly the greatest speaker I have ever seen. This young guy from Boston named Aaron Tanaka just gave this absolutely earth shattering speech about applying sustainability principles to economic systems / investing strategies and at that exact moment I knew I wanted to be in the impact/ sustainable investing sector. Naturally, I spent the next 3

days of the conference trying to find this dude so I could talk to him 1 on 1 and pick his brain for career advice—I legitimately spent probably 6-7 hours just wandering around hoping to run into him, but I couldn't find him anywhere and boarded my flight home feeling dejected and sad in my aisle seat. Then I heard a voice say “hey man, I think I've got the seat next to you” and I looked up and it was HIM. And that experience—which felt meant to be, of course-- really began my journey to where I am now, at Impax Asset Management in Portsmouth.

### **Can you speak about your role with Impax Asset Management and the 10th anniversary of the SVIC?**

Of course, though let me preface by saying I don't speak for the firm in any capacity and my views are not those of Impax.

Ever since learning about the value and impact of social entrepreneurship through the SVIC, I've wanted to help promote sustainability principles in the private sector and I cannot imagine a better place to do that than Impax. In my opinion they really are the world's premier asset manager when it comes to investing in companies that are leading the transition to a more sustainable economy. One could argue that an investment strategy is really a reflection of your worldview—where you see long term opportunities or liabilities in the global economy. To that end, Impax's approach is one that I find to be based in optimism—the idea that those leading on sustainability challenges today will be the winners of tomorrow. Doing my small part (CRM Management) to help a firm with such convictions succeed is really exciting and meaningful. And I really cannot say enough about how incredible the people at the firm are—it is such an honor to work here.

As for 10 years of SVIC, all I can say is wow, look how this thing has grown! My congratulations to all the program managers for the competition (Faina Bukher, Fiona Wilson, Jenn Andrews, Tom Kelly, too many others to name) and to all current and past participants. You have all helped show that the ideas and virtues of social entrepreneurship are

alive and well in our small, mighty, beautiful state, and the many ideas and passions birthed by the amazing opportunities of the SVIC make me proud to be from NH and to continue living here. Onward!!!

### **Do you have any advice for current competitors in the SVIC and for students looking for careers of impact?**

For current SVIC competitors: Have fun, listen to your advisors / coaches for the competition, think outside the box! The day of the finals for my SVIC, everyone else dressed formally for their presentation—my advisor suggested I wear a beekeeping suit during mine, and I thought he was crazy... but I did it, and ended up winning first place. Also, avoid using notecards if you can—know your material and speak from the heart. This will go a long way towards making your presentation better, and that matters a lot. In the final round, all of the ideas are good—your presentation can set you apart!

As for career advice—don't be cynical. Assume that most people you interact with in the professional world are nice and want to help you. I'm going to write that again—assume that most people in the professional world are nice and want to help you. Because it is generally true.

If you don't believe me, contact 10 strangers right now who you are interested in talking to and ask them for professional advice. You might be surprised what they say. Then do it with 100, and I guarantee you will find a job this way. Everything is human oriented at the end of the day, and I promise there is a career/ job out there that is exactly what you want, but you must be willing to take the initiative to get there. People WILL help you, but you have to take the first step!

If life or job searching during / after college feels like a big anxiety inducing black hole that you don't know how to tackle—don't panic! Reach out to alumni—any one of us would be happy to talk to you. We're all in this together. I mean this literally, anyone reading this is welcome to reach out to me on LinkedIn.

Stay positive, assume people are nice, don't be afraid to ask for help,

and good luck!

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