# Q&A with Ankit Sehgal of Swiftdrain

August 21, 2020

Ankit Sehgal graduated from Tulane’s A.B. Freeman School of Business in 2008 with a degree in Finance. He has a passion for business, infrastructure planning and drainage design. He credits attending Tulane during Hurricane Katrina and graduating during the 2008 Financial Crisis, with pushing him to develop the resiliency that helped him start his own business, Swiftdrain.



## Tell us about your time as a student at Tulane. What was your favorite class and why?

I had a great time at Tulane, like most people do. I may not have been the most studious student in the traditional sense, and that’s part of what makes our experience so unique; the intangible takeaways were priceless. I’m able to draw from experiences and make lasting meaningful relationships which guide me every day. If I had to choose, my favorite class at Tulane was Management Communication. We live in a business world where some expect a high degree of

communication etiquette and some prefer to keep it more casual. That being said, those that expect proper business communication appreciate it that much more. Those that prefer to keep it more casual, appreciate someone who knows how to turn it on and turn it off effortlessly. To be able to effectively get one's point across via email, memo or phone conversation is a valuable skill to have. To be able to solve intellectual challenges with someone with a high degree of professionalism and then go out for a beer afterwards is a good skill to have.

## Tell us about your latest business venture. Why is this an innovative idea?

I started Swiftdrain about 3 years ago. We manufacture and distribute specialized drainage products for different applications like driveways, breweries, parking lots and sometimes airport runways. I like to think that we are taking a fresh approach to an antiquated and mispriced industry. We started off as a trench drain materials supplier that leveraged technology and are slowly growing into a technology company that supplies trench drain materials. We focus on the customer buying process, and make it easy for folks to find what they are looking for at the right price. By implementing things like landing pages with heat maps, we can study consumer buying behavior. There is so much data available. By turning data into usable information we are getting better at predicting shifts in the consumer thought process and can anticipate possible questions based on a pattern of events. By using present day re-marketing techniques, we get the right message out at the right time; timing is important.

## What was one thing you learned while at Tulane that helped make your newest venture possible?

I learned how to make meaningful relationships that last, and that everything takes time.

## You graduated during the Financial Crisis 2008. What can you share with students graduating now, in the midst of a global pandemic?

I left Tulane in 2008 with a concentration in finance, at the height of market uncertainty. This is a time reminiscent of that: some disruption, a bit of uncertainty and a lot of unforeseen supply chain implications. There is still a lot of opportunity for the students entering this market, a lot of unknowns, and a lot of fragmented, mispriced markets with low barriers to entry. From what I have seen so far, larger companies aren't as agile in adapting to swift changes in market conditions. The thing I want students to remember is that anything is possible, it just takes time. Now more than ever has the world slowed down to a dynamic pace where a startup can thrive.

## What is the most important attribute you look for when hiring?

Resilience - I want people who keep pushing. Talent is important. Work ethic is important. But failure and difficult circumstances may be the most important. If I notice a candidate that has taken a year off or graduated at 25, it will peak my interest. If I notice success after a mishap, I'm impressed.

## What was your biggest take away from your time at the Freeman School?

The network. I am always in awe of how much everyone wants to help each other out, and even more so how we understand balance. Learning how to balance professional relationships in an increasingly professionally friendly environment is a good skill to have. We seem to have a good grasp on how to effortlessly weave in and out of work mode. When you go to a place like Freeman, you see that anything is possible. You see familiar faces making their mark on entire industries ranging from fashion to sports and everything in between.

## Can you share one last piece of advice?

When I started this company, I was delivering drainage supplies for people's driveways myself - you do what you have to do. With time, we started getting calls for more notable commercial projects like Shipyard Brewing, UPS and Planet Fitness. With even more time, that turned into calls from folks working for the Department of

Defense, a trench drain for the weapons storage facility at Warren Airforce Base in Wyoming and one of the largest projects in terms of linear footage this year for the Louisiana Port Authority, over 800 feet right in our backyard. We went from my parents' garage to being subcontracted to the United States Airforce in 3 years.

We often underestimate how much we can do over a long period of time and overestimate how much we can do in a short period of time. Work on something every day for six months and see what happens. Work on something every day for 3 years, with managed expectations, and you will be pleasantly surprised. Time is what you make it. You win or you learn. Master yourself and your thoughts and everything will fall into place.

***Interview and blog post by Ryan Baker (BSM '20, Lepage Center Fellow, Lepage Strategic Adviser)***