

# Alex Armour

---

## Perseverance to Burn

In the quiet of early morning, as the summer sun inched its way above the horizon, Alex Armour and his grandfather prepared for another day of hard work. As their neighbors slept, the young man and the old man gassed up their mowers and then set off for the hills. The air, thick with fuel and heat, filled their lungs and cloaked their senses as the two worked for hours on end. By the day's close, after the lawns of their small town in Arkansas were manicured to perfection, Alex and his grandfather would take a quick rest before dawn compelled them to start all over again.

For a teenager like Alex, mowing lawns was tough, but the freedom associated with the pocket money he earned was enough incentive to take on the job every summer until he graduated from high school. Fortunately, manual labor was a choice as opposed to a way of life for Alex, a fact which drew an invisible line between himself and his grandfather. Prior to mowing lawns for a living, Alex's grandfather worked a backbreaking job on the railroad, a career ripe with physical hardships that far eclipsed those of landscaping. A father figure and moral anchor to his grandson, he urged Alex to diligently pursue an education so he could avoid the consequences of manual labor. "My grandfather would always say, 'Make sure you get into those books so you don't end up doing the work I have to do,'" Alex remembers.

Now the President and cofounder of Offspring Solutions, a technology consulting firm, Alex has exceeded his grandfather's expectations while continuing to defy the barriers of classism. He credits his ability to persevere, a characteristic he gleaned from his grandfather, as to why he's now so successful and how he was able to start his own business. "Whenever I decide that I want to get something done, it's going to get done, period," Alex affirms. "If I'm 100 percent sure

about anything in this universe, it's that I have perseverance to burn."

Offspring Solutions, now almost ten years old, is the product of Alex's desire to create something out of nothing and to bring innovative solutions to government and commercial customers. Originally founded with four employees, the team has now grown to 43 people and has expanded its offices to Virginia and Georgia. Alex credits the rapid development of Offspring Solutions to its group of experienced professionals dedicated to providing premier services in application modernization, data analytics, infrastructure modernization, and project management (PMO) services. From project and program management all the way to predictive analytics, Offspring Solutions has the capabilities to achieve its clients' organizational and business goals.

Currently, due to the company's specialization in analytics, Offspring Solutions primarily serves government agencies like the Department of Health and Human Services and the U.S. Department of Homeland Security. While the company could easily continue to focus its service on the government sector, Alex has grand plans for the future and for the expansion of Offspring Solutions. "I intend to generate half of our revenue from the federal sector and the other half from the commercial sector," he says. "The company just moved into new office spaces, and we're working quite hard to accelerate the growth of our commercial side."

While the expansion of Offspring Solutions will require a great deal of work, Alex is more than prepared to take on the job thanks to his tenacious and enterprising nature. Growing up in a modest small town in Arkansas, he always knew he would have to differentiate himself if he wished to reach great heights. "I leveraged the demanding



work of mowing lawns into being better at sports," he recalls. "Once I recognized that my work ethic was higher than most and that I was better than most of my peers athletically, I knew athletics could allow me the opportunity to move on from my small town environment."

Naturally talented at football, Alex was the number two running back in Arkansas his junior year of high school and helped lead his team to many victories, including a 1986 state championship game. "I'll never forget the first touchdown I scored as a running back," he muses. "It's amazing to me that, as a 43-year-old man, I can still remember that moment running down the field as a nine-year-old. Kids have those seminal moments that truly boost their self-confidence, and that was mine." As fate would have it, however, an ankle injury in high school cut his impressive career short. No longer the football star of his churchgoing and close-knit community, Alex went through a period of angst and confusion about his personal and professional future post-injury. The life altering experience, however, illustrated to him the value and necessity of a college education. While he credits sports as a confidence builder and an excellent crash course in leadership, he would no longer view athletics as a top priority. "Sports could be your way out, but it shouldn't be considered a primary way of life for the vast majority of athletes," he explains. "Today, it's still very difficult for me to operate at a high level when I know someone else is controlling my destiny." It's a lesson Alex also tries to impress on his young son, Amari, a budding football star. "Just this past week, Amari received the highest grade in his class on a fraction test, and it made me exceptionally proud," he remembers. "I said, 'This is worth 500 touchdowns.'"

Shortly after Alex's discontinuation from high school football, the calls from the military academies poured in—a windfall which brought him renewed hope. The academies offered an excellent education, an opportunity to serve the country, and the opportunity to play Division I football. This was a combination Alex couldn't resist. Never one to give up in the face of adversity or shy away from a new adventure, Alex decided to attend the U.S. Air Force Academy. The move not only cemented his desire to get serious about his future, but it also pleased his grandfather and mother, two people who had always championed the pursuit of a post-secondary education. His

post-high school plans also allowed him the opportunity to pursue business seriously, a desire he realized a few years after mowing lawns with his grandfather. "At the end of each day, my grandfather would give me my money and then I would think about how many lawns I could mow to make more," Alex says with a chuckle. "Under my picture in my high school yearbook it says, 'I'm going to own my own business. So, I just consider Offspring the logical unfolding of my life.'"

At the academy, Alex hunkered down and made a commitment to earn high marks in all of his classes—a promise which he quickly fulfilled. Even when an extremely arduous Physics course threatened to knock down his grade point average, he was able to avoid the threat due to hard work and persistence. "I decided I wasn't going to be one of those people who lost a letter grade after the Physics final, so I kicked it into high gear and worked really hard," he recalls. "Not only did I receive an A+ in that course, but I ended up as sixth in my class of 300. It was a lesson in doing what others are unwilling to do in order to separate yourself from the pack."

In Alex's fourth year in the Air Force, he decided to apply to the prestigious Air Force Institute of Technology, a decision motivated by his love for learning and his desire to improve his skills as a cost-analyst. As first lieutenant with an impressive military background to boot, he strongly believed he would be accepted into the institute. To his surprise and disappointment, however, one of his supervisors didn't support his matriculation into the program, and he was ultimately rejected. The loss reminded him of his days as a fallen football star and how much he hated to depend on other people to further his career and life. "The camaraderie within the military is something that I still miss," Alex says. "However, my attempt at an advanced career was thwarted, and I didn't think a 20-year military career was the right choice for me and my family."

Rising from the ashes once again and drawing on his extensive perseverance reserves, Alex secured an honorable discharge from the military and later a job with KMPG consulting, a success he credits to his past position as Chief of Financial Management Operations in the Air Force. Alex's wife, Aundrea, also worked at KMPG, an added bonus to an already sweet deal. At the company, he learned a lot about the importance of networking and how essential

connections are in the business world. KMPG is also where Alex discovered his passion for technology consulting, a flame which led him to move on to PeopleSoft, a technology consulting firm. After three and a half years at PeopleSoft, when Oracle took over the company's operations, he and three other colleagues decided to create Offspring Solutions. While two of those three colleagues no longer work with Offspring Solutions, the break-up of the original group taught Alex a valuable lesson about collaboration and partnerships. "The shared vision wasn't articulated well between the four of us," he explains. "Now I know that partners must be fully aligned in order to truly be successful. Otherwise, it can be a debacle."

Admittedly, there weren't a lot of stops between the military to the launch of Offspring Solutions, a feat Alex attributes to perseverance and an assuredness of his career goals. "I always tell my kids that the earlier you decide what you want to do and who you want to be, the better," he affirms. "There shouldn't be any doubt in your mind that you can get it done."

The "get it done" attitude is a large piece of Alex's leadership philosophy as President of Offspring Solutions. All about the bottom line and the satisfaction of his clients, he works very hard to instill an honest atmosphere and level playing field at his company. "I'm positive that I don't know everything, but I'm even more positive that you don't know everything," he jokes. "I never want to get into the 'who's smarter than who' scenario. Instead, let's be smarter together. You can't fight the human condition of those that want to be seen as right, even when wrong. So at the end of the day, you just have to rely on fact over opinion. I don't take on the pressures of having to be right all the time. I do take on the pressures of being a collaborative leader, which is not always an easy task." His dedication to avoid petty competition allows him to focus on what truly matters, which is creating new and innovative solutions for the company's clients. "Leaders that dictate from the top down were applauded in the past, but I tend to manage more collaboratively to maximize the talents of my team," Alex affirms. "I never enjoyed anyone dictating to me, so I don't dictate to others unless direction is needed. I am the compass."

Independence and self-preservation are important values to Alex, not only as a leader, but as a father. Paving his way to success with his own

hands, he hopes his children will also discover and then relentlessly pursue their own passions at an early age. In particular, Alex's daughter, Ayanna, is someone he tries to motivate despite his own fatherly reservations. A talented singer, she has a distinct and unparalleled love for music and the arts. "I don't have experience in that area, but I don't want to stand in the way," Alex explains. "I'm going to allow her to do whatever she wants to do."

Aundrea, like her husband, also shares the philosophy that all goals and passions should be doggedly pursued until they reach fruition. In fact, she was instrumental to her husband's decision to start his own business. As a strong businesswoman in her own right, complete with an MBA, she was able to assist her husband with operational and financial considerations during the inception of Offspring Solutions. "Aundrea never discouraged me or gave me push back about creating my own business because she understands who I am," Alex avows. "She has been the main stability in my life, and one of the primary reasons for Offspring's current success."

Besides tirelessly supporting one another, Alex and his family have a long history of supporting their local community through SeeBeyond, a foundation he started to help cultivate the lives of disadvantaged young people. "We set up chess classes at our local schools and instituted debate instruction for younger kids," Alex explains. "Our goal is to create opportunities for leadership—opportunities I didn't necessarily have at my school." SeeBeyond is one of Alex's many passions, and he hopes to dedicate his time to the foundation after his career comes to a close and the curtain falls on that particular stage of his life.

To an outsider, managing a foundation like SeeBeyond might appear daunting in the midst of leading a rapidly growing business, but motivating young people to chase after their dreams comes naturally to Alex. With many seasons of wisdom to dispel to grade school students in search of inspiration, his message is clearly sincere. "Be sure to focus on what you really care about, and the money will come," Alex affirms. "There's already so much uncertainty out there, so you might as well do what you love." In addition to passion, he urges young people to put in 110 percent, no matter where their talents or hopes fall. Similarly to his grandfather, he is

confident in his belief that hard work and perseverance will pay off in every situation, but he also warns young students to be smart about their career decisions. “Don’t be negligent about what the financial rewards will be,” he says. “Understand that there are financial consequences to every passion.”

While those hazy summer days of mowing lawns are now long gone, Alex still holds the memories of his grandfather and his words of wisdom close to his heart. In his desk drawer at work, one can find his grandfather’s birth certificate and railroad card—quiet reminders of his family’s journey. While Alex’s grandfather lacked a formal education, he was smart enough to know that the future of his grandson wasn’t attached to the history that limited his own. To him, watching the success of his grandson was like bearing witness to a rare comet—a force burning through space at incredible speeds that not many people can say they were lucky enough to experience. “After seeing me graduate from college, my grandfather considered himself a true success,” Alex remembers. “He was very proud of what I had accomplished and would literally say, ‘Alex, you did alright for yourself.’” Having done

more than alright, Alex’s life has been about creating things—athletic victories, jobs, a business, opportunity, family, hope—that weren’t there before. And even after all this, like a comet that passes Earth and continues along a determined trajectory, he still has perseverance left to burn.

© March 2014 Gordon J. Bernhardt. All rights reserved. Reprinted by permission.

— By **Gordon J. Bernhardt, CPA, PFS, CFP®, AIF®**

*About Gordon J. Bernhardt*

*President and founder of Bernhardt Wealth Management and author of Profiles in Success: Inspiration from Executive Leaders in the Washington D.C. Area, Gordon provides financial planning and wealth management services to affluent individuals, families and business-owners throughout the Washington, DC area. Since establishing his firm in 1994, he and his team have been focused on providing high-quality service and independent financial advice to help clients make informed decisions about their money. For more information, visit [www.BernhardtWealth.com](http://www.BernhardtWealth.com) and [Gordon’s Blog](#).*

