



Urban Evolution Podcast – Brandon Sampson

Bill Von Bank:

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Bill Von Bank:

Welcome to Urban Evolution. A podcast about harnessing creativity and innovation to transform communities. I'm your host Bill Von Bank. In Rochester, Minnesota. A boutique prosthetics and orthotics company has completely changed the business of limb restoration. Limb Lab has been described as the Apple store of prosthetics. And today we'll find out why with my guest Brandon Sampson, founder of Limb Lab. Brandon Sampson welcome to the Urban Evolution podcast.

Brandon Sampson:

Thank you for having me.

Bill Von Bank:

Limb Labs story started when you were seven years old on your family farm in Lyle, Minnesota. Can you share that story?

Brandon Sampson:

Sure. When I was a little guy, my daily routine was always helping my dad out on our local hog farm. And one day in the middle of winter, I came home and things changed for real that day. I got hurt in an accident between... Got my hand caught between a skid loader and a gate. And my dad instantly realized that this was not a good situation and ended up rushing me up to Austin, Minnesota to the hospital there. And they immediately took one look at that and sent me over to St. Mary's hospital in Rochester, Minnesota. And it's there that I spent the next couple of weeks having my hand reconstructed and put back together, it was my left hand.

Brandon Sampson:

And at the end of that two weeks, I started physical therapy for many months. And the great hand surgeon department and the physical therapy department at the Mayo Clinic really got my hand working again. And at the end of my session, my graduation advice from them was to perhaps start playing guitar or piano or something-



Bill Von Bank:

At seven years old?

Brandon Sampson:

Yeah. To keep my hands limber. And so my folks bought me a guitar and that really set me off on this journey of love of music.

Bill Von Bank:

How does that tie into Limb Lab?

Brandon Sampson:

Along with this musical love and getting my hand back together, I was also fascinated with the orthopedic aspect of it. And so that also got me intrigued and taking a lot of classes in high school. And eventually at Luther college in Decorah, Iowa. I majored in biology pre-med at the time. And I was also in music there and in athletics. And at some point in my junior year, my advisor pulled me aside and he said, "You remind me of this guy that makes artificial limbs. You should go check that career out." And so I did and I had had no idea a business like that would exist. But when I shadowed this company and saw them interact with people that needed prosthetic limbs and orthotic devices, it absolutely fascinated me. And I changed my major and then went on from Luther college to Century College in White Bear Lake, Minnesota. And received my degree in prosthetics. And then I did my residency and I was in the field, playing music on the weekends, making limbs during the day and that's really my life wrapped up in a nutshell.

Bill Von Bank:

You went into the industry and working for another company first, before you started Limb Lab, walk us through that journey.

Brandon Sampson:

Sure. So as a certified prosthetist to you... To become a certified prosthetist, it's four years of an undergrad in some science, two years of prosthetic orthotic training at a different school and then a two year residency. And so I did that residency at another company and then I became a certified prosthetist and stayed there for 15 years. Worked my way up from the very bottom to about as high as one could go. And it was at that point that I realized, life probably would have been fine just staying and being just one of the guys and sail off into the sunset. But my brain doesn't quite work like that. And I saw an opportunity within this field to sort of recreate it and to freshen it up and to create a business where one would take the stigma away from what it means to be an amputee and display, the actual act of making limbs on display. And so, ultimately I grew up with the company and I grew apart and started Limb Lab seven years ago with two other guys.

Bill Von Bank:



You've created a company and you took it 180 degrees from where you were at. You basically turned it upside down and took an industry that was really behind closed doors and you opened it up. And you created a front row seat to the limb making process. So talk us through that because your stores are described as the Apple store of prosthetics. We need to learn more about what that means.

Brandon Sampson:

Sure. Traditionally, and that's why I'd never heard of it when I was in college, I never knew a company was built around the need of people that were suffering from limb loss or limb difference. And so, I thought about how we could create a space that really showcased the great work that people in my profession do and create more of a collaborative, artistic, creative space. And the first thing we did was we just threw the rules out the window. Traditionally the shop, the place where we make limbs, is always in the back. It's buried in the back. It's a mess, it's dirty, it's filthy, just like anybody's home shop. And so, we thought, well the first thing we're going to do is we're going to put that right in the corner of one of the busiest streets in Rochester and put windows all around it and showcase what we do.

Brandon Sampson:

The next thing we thought we would do is, the timing of that seven years ago was right about the time you started to see commercials and paralympic athletes proudly displaying their robotic looking limbs. And you could see a shift from people not wanting to hide the fact that they wore a prosthesis to putting it out there. And the crazy thing is that one out of every 200 people in the United States wears a prosthesis. And when I tell that to people they think that is impossible. But if you think about it, statistically it's accurate. You can Google it. But if you think about that in our community here in Rochester, Minnesota, one out every 200 people in this community need what we do. And so we created a place that felt like people may want to come and check out what's going on and create some curiosity-

Bill Von Bank:

And be part of the design process.

Brandon Sampson:

Yeah. And be part of the solution to their functional challenges. And that's the most rewarding thing really. It's by creating the space where people can feel like they can just come in off the street and they ask, "Can you help me?" And we say, "Well, what do you want to do?"

Bill Von Bank:

When you meet with somebody that comes in who wants your service, how does that process start?

Brandon Sampson:

Well, we are introduced to our clients in many ways. So an existing person in the community that wears a prosthesis who is maybe been living and doing their life and had prosthesis for years. That's one client of ours. They just come in off the street and they're curious. And they're like, "I can't really mow my



lawn up the ditch anymore, or I'm having pain here, or can you help me?" We also work directly with people that are newly amputees or in need of some sort of new orthotic device. And they consult with their physician. And a lot of times we're in that appointment too. So it's the physician, the prosthetist, the therapist with the patient at the center of it, listing their goals. And through a collaborative approach, the physician will write a prescription for what they need in terms of what components. And then it's our job to meet with that person, build the device, meet their goals, report back, and teach them how to use the device with therapy.

Bill Von Bank:

You're changing the industry. Talk a little bit about that process because you've worked in it for-

Brandon Sampson:

21 years.

Bill Von Bank:

Quite a few years, right? So the industry when you started was probably behind the closed doors, now you've changed the industry. Do you find that the industry is tending to shift towards your model?

Brandon Sampson:

Absolutely. When we created Limb Lab seven years ago, it was because we felt the change. We observed the trends. And when you come to that point and you have no rules and you have the freedom to create the space around what you see as a need, it's scary to change but it's easier to change than if you've been doing it a certain way for 25 years. Why fix it if it isn't broke? And so that was the big opportunity that we had. A fresh set of eyes, a fresh perspective and these entrepreneurial ideas of how to create a cutting edge space. But the biggest change I've seen as peoples, our client's willingness to participate in the design process and not like getting a wrench and doing anything or building it, but really listening to them and listing their five goals.

Brandon Sampson:

And it becomes really clear how we can help improve their life. And what that also does is it creates value for the thing that there'll be using every day of their life as a tool. And in the old days, I like to call them 21 years ago, when a person would have a prosthesis built, you'd get to the end of the session and you'd say, "Okay, you have to sign this paper so we can bill to your insurance. Would you like to know what it costs?" "Oh, no, no, no, no. I got great insurance. They'll take care of it." No one ever wanted to know but when we started Limb Lab, we started to see this trend of people coming in, looking for solutions to their functional challenges and wanting to be part of it, wanting to have some say in it, wanting to create value and wanting to know what it costs. Because they're going to be on the hook for a substantial portion of this, given their certain type of insurance coverage.

Bill Von Bank:

So how do you balance that?



Brandon Sampson:

You give them choices. There's lots of choices and waste and frameworks to work within even filling a prescription from their physician. We can lay out options for them if the ultimate goal is to have a prosthesis that accommodates uneven surfaces. Well within that, there's a range of devices from low cost to high cost that do a really good job of that we can help guide them to make the right choice for them. And we also work with many, at least six of the biggest prosthetic component manufacturers in the world where we allow people to test drive it. So the manufacturer will send us their size of type of foot and they get to walk on it for 30 days. Make a decision before they buy it. They can see for themselves the difference. Is it worth the extra money?

Bill Von Bank:

You started Limb Lab in 2013. Let's talk a little bit about how your business has grown and then your growth strategy moving forward. So we're in 2020 right now toward the end of 2020. Give us the look back if you will, and then we'll talk the look ahead.

Brandon Sampson:

Sure. When we started seven years ago, it was three of us. We had one location. We started our first location. Oddly enough in Mankato, Minnesota because we had a move in ready space prepared there. And we knew that we wanted to spend some time and build out one of the headquarters in downtown Rochester. So we started in Mankato it bought us about six months to do the build out. We opened Rochester shortly after that we opened La Crosse shortly after that we opened Minneapolis and then about six months after that we opened Lincoln, Nebraska. So we sit right now with Rochester, Minnesota, La Crosse, Wisconsin, Minneapolis, Minnesota, Mankato, Minnesota and Lincoln, Nebraska.

Bill Von Bank:

Three States?

Brandon Sampson:

Yeah three States. And we have 35 employees ranging from certified prosthetist, an orthotist, two prosthetic technicians, orthotic technicians, to administrative staff and billing specialists. And it's just really a great collection of folks. It's funny how you look at the employees of the business and you're so proud of them because they're just all great, caring people. And that is our only growth strategy. It's solving the people problem first. We're in the business of creating relationships with people, listening to them, finding out their needs and the personality of the people delivering the service is very important. It's the most important thing. And that's what we hire. I can tell within 30 seconds of interviewing someone if they have the personality that can do that thing. And we've been fortunate enough to find that. And that's our growth strategy going forward. It's to hire the people first and then build a Limb Lab around them, wherever it is. It doesn't matter.

Bill Von Bank:



If you look back to 2013 and the start of this company in your business plan for that, are you meeting your targets and have you had to change pivot?

Brandon Sampson:

When we started Limb Lab seven years ago and had this idea, right? You get so excited about the idea and you're like, "Oh, this is going to be wonderful." And your biggest fear is, if I do this is anyone going to show up? And so I thought to myself, okay if I can just manage to see or take care of two clients a month, that'd be fine. I can make this happen. I'll be able to probably put diapers on my newborn baby. I had a month old daughter at the time when I left my job of 15 years and struck out on this idea. And I did the math and like, "Okay, if I just can do that." Well, fast forward seven years, obviously it's growing.

Brandon Sampson:

And so thankful for that. I think the biggest thing that I credit to that is our attentiveness and the quality of the people doing the work. Because it is truly second to none. We've been able to assemble a team by choice. Not because of necessity, not because of trying to fill spaces but create collaborative environments. And when you're on the front side of that constantly growing with the very thing that makes a business successful as the first thing you hire, it's totally different than building a box store and then filling it full of employees and trying to teach them how to do it. It's just the backwards. Again it's opposite of that. And now my biggest fear is, okay, now all these people are coming. How do we take the same care in as we did in day one every day as we continue to grow?

Brandon Sampson:

And that's something that I've spent a lot of time with even when the pandemic started. Honestly it was how I spent those first two weeks, it felt like we started a business again. We felt like, "Oh no, is anybody going to show up?" Well, I made this list of what are the most important things that I can control. And that is when someone does walk in the door, that's my opportunity to completely focus on them and give them the best 30 minutes that I have to offer. And if I do that, the rest will take care of itself.

Bill Von Bank:

Let's talk a little bit more about the pandemic and in your business during the last several months of the pandemic. Like many, I'm assuming you had to pivot-

Brandon Sampson:

Yeah.

Bill Von Bank:

Tell us how.

Brandon Sampson:



The thing that came to mind was, okay, we have 35 employees. If no one comes in what are we going to do? So I pulled out my book of ideas that I keep in my desk that I never have time to get to. And a lot of those were a bit more policies and procedure, tightening up different types of administrative things that I knew we wanted to look at. But then there was very simple things like, "Okay. Well we have an opportunity where there's no one here for two weeks. Let's paint the place." So I bought everybody a paintbrush and taught them how to perfectly trim out the ceilings. Because I'm a bit particular when it comes to the detail work of things. And they laughed at me and we had a great time.

Brandon Sampson:

We freshened up all of our locations, and cleaned everything, and got it ready for when people felt safe enough to come back into our space. Put together all our safety protocols, got all of our PPE ordered ahead of time and really knew that we were an essential business. We're not an emergency business but people still need us. And so we've been consistently, I'd say busy during this time. Just in a different way. One of those ways was to try to get access to people to their physician. And we started working with Mayo clinic doing virtual appointments. It was a huge success. Several physicians around we're doing virtual appointments with our clients and we could be on a three-way call discussing what they needed. If it was just simply maintenance items, consumables is what we call them.

Brandon Sampson:

Things that people need a couple of times a year. They didn't have to go and travel to see their doctor. They could see them virtually after that appointment, I could walk downstairs, pull the items off the shelf and ship them to them and they'd have it the next day. Which was usually a week process. Week or two process.

Bill Von Bank:

So you've gained some efficiencies during the pandemic?

Brandon Sampson:

Absolutely. And I try to always look at the bright side of things. This is a technique and a service that towards the end of each year people have met their deductibles, and they call it last minute and they need these things. This'll be a great tool in order for them to get what they need without having to wait. If it's hard to get in to see somebody, hard to get in to see their physician in person, we can do it virtually and save everybody time and it's wonderful.

Bill Von Bank:

This doesn't go away?

Brandon Sampson:

No. This is something that it's been around forever, not forever but three years or whatever. You've heard of virtual appointments but no one was really forced to do it. Once people were forced to do it, they're like, "Wow, this is pretty slick. You pulled up on your phone, get your business taken care of and



15 minutes and get your thing the next day." So that has been a really neat outcome of pivoting during this time.

Bill Von Bank:

Part of your DNA obviously is entrepreneurship. Rochester, Minnesota sees a lot of entrepreneurship happened because of Mayo clinic, because of IBM. And I just want you to talk a little bit about how you see that emerging even more. So you always hear about it on the coast but in the middle of the country Rochester, Minnesota, can hold up pretty well. And there's a recent example I read in a newspaper article about your partnership with an IBM engineer and the need for him to have better quality of life as he's just going about his day. Can you bring some color to that story?

Brandon Sampson:

Absolutely. In general my view on entrepreneurialism is, I'm very positive about it. I love it. I love seeing people go out and dream about something that they're passionate about, and they have an idea, and they try to bring it to life. And I share that. That's what keeps me going every day. I love the sense of creating something that did not exist before. And that's it. Whether it's a song, whether it's relationships or whether it's this perfect prosthetic limb. That is what I dream about. I literally dream about that at night. And I come into the next day at work and I have the idea how I'm going to build this thing and everybody laughs at me. Or if I'm getting stuck in something, they're like, "Hey, just go home and dream about it and come tell us in the morning." But it's true.

Brandon Sampson:

It's like in my brain constantly, like I can't stop it. And it's so happened that this gentleman worked at IBM for many, many years. He's retired now. He was in packaging and processes and systems and purchasing different things all over the world. And he found himself in a situation where he had non-healing wounds on his feet. And despite the very best efforts of the products that were available to him to help him heal, he was presented with this notion of kind of a last-ditch effort would be to cast his feet completely in plaster cast, lock them up and not be weight bearing. And this was during the fall where he needed to get out and rake leaves.

Bill Von Bank:

Be active.

Brandon Sampson:

Yeah. And so, he sat down in his garage and he came up with this concept of. He thought about okay, how would you pack a moving truck? Well, you put things in the front end and you pack it as tight as you can. And then any bit of movement, any tolerance, you fill in with blankets or soft material. You remove the tolerance from it to protect the things in it over a long stretch. So he took that approach to his feet and in his off the shelf, walking boots, he created a device that would remove the tolerance. And within two and a half, three weeks, he went back. He chose not to do the cast. He said, "I just got to go think



about it." So he went and thought about it, dreamt about it. And he came up with this idea. He went back to the doctor and his feet were healed and they couldn't believe it.

Bill Von Bank:

And then he comes to you?

Brandon Sampson:

And then his physician said, "You need to go talk to Brandon over at Limb Lab and see if there's anything here." So I met with Gary and I looked at this thing and there's a picture of it in the paper. It's a black duct taped foamy tolerance to remover. But you just laugh at it when you see it right away. And you're like, "Why is this work?" But we started looking at the properties of it and I don't want to bore you or get into it too deeply. But there were a lot of interesting things that he stumbled upon here that made me rethink how we're traditionally doing custom foot orthotics. We could incorporate some of these ideas. And we started doing patent searches and we talked to our attorneys and there's nothing like it. So from that conversation we created three patents.

Bill Von Bank:

And this was in the fall of 2020?

Brandon Sampson:

We received our patents in the fall of 2020. It started 18 months before that.

Bill Von Bank:

Oh, I see. Okay.

Brandon Sampson:

Well, it's been a long haul.

Bill Von Bank:

Long journeys.

Brandon Sampson:

Take time Bill.

Bill Von Bank:

Sure. I get it.

Brandon Sampson:



But yeah. So I've been working with him for about a year and a half behind the scenes, quietly and developing different prototypes. And now we have three different types of products and one is for extreme wound care healing, like immediate stuff that would be applied in the hospital. The next one is to keep those wounds healed within normal shoe wear, that's called the Morthotic. The one in the hospitals called the Foot Pak. Then we have the Morthotic, which is more than just an average orthotic bill. And then-

Bill Von Bank:

Clever.

Brandon Sampson:

I feel like I'm on QVC. And then the third one is something that actually that he and his wife came up with. Because his wife saw him working on all of this stuff and she's like, "I have the same problem in my fancy shoes." And he's like, "Really?" and she brings out this giant box of stuff that she bought from Walmart. Every foot orthotic thingy in the world. And he's like, "Where did this come from?" He had no idea she'd bought hundreds of dollars worth of stuff. And so the two of them together and I sat down and we came up with the women's four dimensional foot orthotic off the shelf called the Flex-i-sizer. And that's something that can be trimmed for women's shoes to stop their feet from sliding forward, wearing high heels. And it has been wonderful.

Bill Von Bank:

So these are all in market now?

Brandon Sampson:

The Foot Pak and the Morthotic, we make those now and we're talking with some different manufacturers on... I don't have the time. I wish I did sit in my basement and crank these things out every night and then come to work with another 1,000 ready to be sold but we're going to have to probably have some help.

Bill Von Bank:

Pretty exciting stuff. So let's talk about your growth strategy then. Because you've grown over seven years, you're in three States, any new opportunities or new locations?

Brandon Sampson:

Yeah. So again, going back to solving the people problem first, I don't know if we've ever advertised for an open position. What seems to happen is you do enough good work, you treat people well within the organization and then word spreads. And then all of a sudden we get this call from a clinician somewhere else that says, "I really like what you're doing. I would like to come meet you guys and see if we could do something here." So we had a gentleman reach out to us from Scottsdale Arizona. And so we will be opening a Scottsdale location on December 1st.



Bill Von Bank:
Of 2020?

Brandon Sampson:
Of 2020.

Bill Von Bank:
Congratulations.

Brandon Sampson:
Thank you.

Bill Von Bank:

I want to go back to when you were seven years old because now we've been talking a lot about Limb Lab and the passion that you have for helping people in that space. Now, at the same time you're learning an instrument. And over the past 20 years you've been fronting a band called Six Mile Grove. Let's learn a little bit more about Brandon Sampson, the musician. Tell us about that.

Brandon Sampson:

Sure. Well, I just absolutely love music. And 21 years ago, we started a band. There's four of us back then. My little brother was a drummer. It's still playing with me and another kid from Lyle, Minnesota, a bass player from Austin, Minnesota and then about 10 years ago we added a steel guitar player. And so the five of us now have been playing music together, touring all over the place. We've done it all. And we decided at one point that we just wanted to be the best band of dads with day jobs that we could be. And so we write original Americana tunes. We have seven records out. When I was doing a radio interview a few months ago the host asked me, "What's the secret to your success of staying together so long?" And I said, "Well, it's actually not much success at all is the secret." Just enough good things have happened to us along the way that kept us on the edge of wanting to create new stuff.

Brandon Sampson:

Lots of my friends have had hit songs and whatever and they're like, "It's so great when you're..." Before you get something that someone wants to hear because they want to hear what you're going to do next. But once you get a hit song, all they want to hear is that song and they don't care about what you're going to do next. So they're like, "So just try not to write any hit songs just write them almost good enough." And so, I take that advice and when I come up with a really good song, I just kind of make it a little less good. So it doesn't hit the airwaves too hard and I'm joking. But I try just to write and do the stuff that we love.

Bill Von Bank:



I'm curious, does your business and... The business of Limb Lab and the entertainment of being a musician, do they play off of each other? Do they help each other?

Brandon Sampson:

They do. I used to... It's so it's so odd to look back at how things have evolved and how I used to like compartmentalize things and segment things out. But recently, I have a family too and I have three kids and a lovely wife and a dog and two cats, who are now my favorite. And it's all just part of this flow. And I look at it totally different than I did even five years ago. Where I don't have to separate it. It's just a creative process. Having a family, figuring out the chaos at home is creative. Coming to work, building a business is creative. Writing music is creative, and it's just really satisfying to not feel like one takes from the other instead that one feeds the other like you mentioned. And it's really true.

Bill Von Bank:

One final question. What inspires you?

Brandon Sampson:

Seeing people create and being part of that process. And at the end of the day, if there's something that is now here that wasn't here before or the world's just a little bit better, or someone's a little more happy, or my kids appreciate me a little more. I think that's what drives me and inspires me to do what I do.

Bill Von Bank:

Brandon Sampson, it will be great to experience what you create next. Thanks for joining us on Urban Evolution. And I think a great way to end this podcast would be just a bit of a sound of your band.

Brandon Sampson:

Oh, great.

Bill Von Bank:

Six Mile Grove. Thanks again and have a great 2021.

Brandon Sampson:

Thank you very much. Really enjoyed it.

Bill Von Bank:

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Bill Von Bank:



(Singing).