Alison Dean (00:09):

TheoremOne is the leading innovation and engineering firm for the fortune 1000. We design, build and deliver enterprise-scale technology solutions and are very excited to present The Breakthrough podcast, an ongoing series, where we interview technology leaders to share their experiences and perspectives on what's next in tech.

Alison Dean (00:37):

Welcome to The Breakthrough. I'm Alison Dean, VP of operations at TheoremOne, and today we are talking with Omar Ghani, currently head of Strategic Sourcing at Reddit. I met Omar when he was leading indirect sourcing and procurement at Lyft, and fun fact, he has led over 600 negotiations and procurement reviews. Omar sent me this quote from Chris Voss. "Negotiate in their world. Persuasion is not about how bright or smooth or forceful you are. It's about the other party convincing themselves that the solution you want is their own idea. So don't beat them with logic or brute force. Ask them questions that open paths to your goals. It's not about you."

Alison Dean (01:20):

Hi Omar.

Omar Ghani (01:21):

Hey, Alison, it's really great to connect with you again.

Alison Dean (01:24):

I want to know why this quote resonates with you, and perhaps you can give us an example of when you really lived this quote.

Omar Ghani (01:31):

In the world of procurement, we're negotiating every day. And when you're negotiating every day, you're meeting with account executives, account directors, VP of sales, to the CEO about why their product is the best product and why they will be essentially offering you the best thing since sliced bread for your organization.

Omar Ghani (01:50):

And I think what you have to really remind yourself is that when you're in that negotiating room, you have a lot of expectations on getting the deal from your side, getting the best outcomes, the best numbers, how much money can you actually save against a budget, but you really, at the end of the day, you know that if you need something, you have to speak the same language as your counterpart. If you can speak the

same language as your counterpart, you can really get into the emotional side, finding out what motivates them to get something done.

Omar Ghani (02:20):

So while they may be trying to get the best commission possible, there might be some other thing behind it. There might be, "Hey, it's the end of the quarter. Hey, I'm actually just trying to get my bonus because I've got X, Y, Z coming up in my own life." How do you create a narrative that is actually going to get them to eventually say yes to what you want and position it that it's actually benefiting them? It takes a little bit of time to craft and understand, but it's something that's worked really well in my time doing negotiations.

Alison Dean (02:50):

Okay. I want you to break down what strategic sourcing means and why it's important to the operations of an organization.

Omar Ghani (02:59):

Yeah. Strategic sourcing is essentially the evaluation, selection, and execution of partnering with third-party services. Whether it's big turbines or complicated chemical properties, if you're running a plant, to simply buying software for your organization so that you can be running on Gmail. That's what procurement is. We are the folks that really find the best value and best quality for an organization.

Omar Ghani (03:28):

I think in a fast-evolving world, when you're running a business, there are two key things besides sales that generate your success. one is how fast you are in running your operations and making sure that your operations have no hiccups along the way. But then two, how do you really actually sustain gross margin at the end of the day? Everyone talks about sales and revenue, but net profit comes down to gross margin. And if you can keep your costs in a decent, respectable way, that's important. And that's really what I love about procurement, because we're the folks that are behind the scenes and the finance and supply chain world, really helping to make sure that P and L in our organization is as attractive as it can be when an earnings call happens.

Alison Dean (04:10):

I love that. I'd love for you to give us a snapshot of what led you to this work. I'd find it pretty miraculous if when you were a kid, you were saying, "I want to be all up in that strategic sourcing world." I'm so curious how all the cards fell.

Omar Ghani (04:24):

Well, I think like anyone that grows up, you tell it to a parent figure and it's like, "Oh, I'm just going to do what my dad does or my mom does." And I started my career journey like that. My dad was an

accountant. He built his career in corporate accounting and I was like, "Yeah, I'll do what he does. Numbers, math, I think I can do this." Come into my third course of accounting and I realized it was not for me. While I liked the principles of accounting, I like the operations about it, I just didn't like the aspect of number crunching and problem-solving in a puzzle format all day. I liked the nature of talking to folks. I liked the nature of understanding the problem and why, through collaboration and partnership, you can find solutions.

Omar Ghani (05:05):

And so when I was in college, it really came down to like, "Well, do I want to do sales? I don't know if I like sales. I don't know if I like chasing after people, or I don't know if I want to be switching products and learning these sorts of things. I'd rather learn anything and everything besides one thing, which is sales." I actually went to a supply chain info session, luckily, that my alma mater had it and I fell in love with it immediately. I said, "This is my calling, because if I can learn anything and everything, I think this is the role that I want to do because I can quickly pivot, have conversations and find really tremendous ways to add value for partners and organizations."

Alison Dean (05:40):

Pretty cool. Okay. I want you to talk about your strategic sourcing process.

Omar Ghani (05:46):

We're still developing it on Reddit. It's a very exciting time in this organization. Currently, I'm in procurement and we're looking to hire a team of good sourcing professionals that are experts in operations and sourcing deals at the end of the day. But today, we really make sure that when deals go through that we have purchasing requests go into our system, we evaluate it, we decide if there's a reason for us to do an analysis in the marketplace. We decide if we need to do a single source negotiation. And then we decide what is the best way that we can serve the timeline for our stakeholders.

Omar Ghani (06:21):

Ultimately, that's what we're up against is making sure that we're not disrupting our stakeholders to achieve their goals for the organization, whether it be engineering, marketing campaigns, or buying software for security purposes. We want to make sure that we're not disrupting timelines at the end of the day.

Omar Ghani (06:37):

So it's really important, at least in Reddit's world, that we work very closely with finance teams, with budget owners of various teams, and understand what they're trying to accomplish on a quarterly basis. That way we're ahead of the game. We can start doing our due diligence and our homework. But in previous organizations that I've worked in, you have a defined budget, you place requests, you work with a

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sourcing partner to make sure that these requests are in place and that you're getting the best value in the market for the right timeline and quality standards that you expect to be deserved for any brand that is partnering with them.

Omar Ghani (07:07):

And so it's a really unique way because we build a process where we get to interface with so many teams, whether it's the stakeholder to legal, to IT, to the finance department, to making sure it's all signed off, to compliance. Procurement is the intersection of a lot of things to get things done, which is why I love being part of this process.

Alison Dean (07:28):

I think I'm so curious since I do a fair share of procurement at TheoremOne. Is there a part of you that misses the fact that once the deal is signed, you're not then actively part of the implementation process?

Omar Ghani (07:42):

Yeah. I mean, we can just call it FOMO if we want to. Especially if you're so invested. Let's say you're trying to do a TV media launch for a Super Bowl commercial, let's say. When the deal is done, I want to know how successful the commercial was, especially if the agency was working so hard on it. And I think with procurement, it's a fine dance because sometimes you can be involved with what happens afterward. And other times you can't.

Omar Ghani (08:07):

I would say the best sourcing and best procurement leaders have what we call stage seven in textbook terms of the procurement process, which is refine, improve, and debrief. Really have an annual business review and actually see the performance of the supplier and actually say like, "Well, what's working, what's not working. And should we part ways, should we make things better? How do we actually leverage these deals again." All of these sorts of things.

Omar Ghani (08:31):

So I think great supply chain leaders don't miss out on these things about what happens afterwards. We have a very special job because we do have to hand it off. And I think it's like anything in life. Like when the teacher has a favorite student. Well, the favorite student can't stay in that teacher's room and ask to go to the next grade and next thing. I think that's the same thing with procurement. It's like, you have to, at some point, learn to say, "Fine, and I'll come back in for an annual checkup." And I think that's a good thing.

Alison Dean (08:57):

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Okay. So was there a negotiation that led to one of the most impactful company transformations that you saw?

Omar Ghani (09:05):

For me, it was during my time at Lyft, in fact. And so my colleagues and I were working on a carbon offset RFP, which for those that don't know, Lyft actually buys carbon credits so that for every driver that's on the platform, there's a calculation for the emissions that's being emitted that we should buy opposite so that we can actually grow plants and trees in the communities that the rideshare our company operates. And so it's the best efforts that the rideshare has to stay carbon neutral and then that's their initiative.

Omar Ghani (09:36):

I think that was a very transformational project that the procurement team got to be involved in, because one, you're seeing and partnering with an agency where you're buying mega metric tons of carbon offsets. And the end result is that it's an amazing way for the company to do good in the community, but then more importantly, you see the culture of the organization live and breathe with the deals that you're working on.

Omar Ghani (10:01):

And I think that was very impactful because it's a story about doing good, especially in a world where climate change is very real and so you have your part in it. But more importantly, it's a reflection about what employees feel about the company, it's a reflection about what shareholders feel about the company and things like that. So I think procurement is often a lot of the time, what is the bottom line? How does it impact my P and L? But other times it's very creative about how does it impact my brand's reputation? What does it mean to my consumers if I invest in the right things. And procurement does have a say in that matter.

Alison Dean (10:33):

Yeah, that's amazing. I didn't know that about Lyft. So well done. I wonder if Uber does that as well? What is the most crucial aspect of a company's IT strategy, and how does sourcing affect

Omar Ghani (10:44):

It depends on a company's life cycle, I would say. If you're scaling left and right, or up and down, you need to constantly buy more licenses. Whether it's Zoom, to Microsoft applications, to security infrastructure, especially in a world where hacks and breaches are happening, you need to have IT departments that are really running secure hardware and networking in a remote setting world.

Omar Ghani (11:06):

Where does procurement come into this domain? Actually quite a bit. We come into place about when is the right time for us to actually source the deal so that we can take benefits of the best discounts, whether it's end-of-year cycles, quarterly cycles. I think where we really help the IT team like any other department is like, "Let's sanity check what your assumptions are. Let's put that on paper and let's actually create a recommendation letter why we think what we're doing is the right thing for the company and from a dollars perspective."

Omar Ghani (11:35):

And the third thing that I think is really growing a lot more, and this is just so important for SaaS companies today, is what you're buying as software actually being utilized? There's a lot of really creative tools in the marketplace, whether it's productive, Zilo, G2, Crowd about assessing, "Hey, no ones been touching your Adobe license." So it's like, well, in my renewal ID procurement should say like, "Look, I have the information. We should not be renewing 500 licenses. We should only be renewing 200 licenses."

Omar Ghani (12:04):

These are questions to ask yourself. Other ways are really like, "Look, why do we have redundant tools?" I have Calendly, and then I have Chili Piper, then I have all these other scheduling tools. This is kind of ridiculous." You need to ask your company like, "Are you the company that's letting you do anything and everything, or should the IT team have a more centralized format?" And procurement actually can influence and actually get to a place and even drive a tremendous millions of dollars in savings in that journey.

Alison Dean (12:30):

I completely agree. When you were talking just now, one thing that came to mind so much about leveraging some of these SaaS management tools that are now out, is unless things are connected, your identity management solution, and you have visibility through that, things can get really halted. But then also based on the SaaS that you're using, if you are not opted in and paying for the correct enterprise account that will connect in to like Okta, for example, well then you're not having that visibility no matter what. So do you have to spend two and a half times the amount to get that level of visibility? I could hope that by having that additional spend, to have that connection, you're saying, "No, Allison, if I was in the mix, you would obviously be spending two and a half times the amount for that."

Omar Ghani (13:04):

No, this is an important question. And I think at the end of the day, it depends. My gut sense is if you're a publicly-traded company, if you have aspirations to be mature, sometimes it requires you to spend a little bit more to have the right level of control and visibility as a department. And that's sometimes more important.

Omar Ghani (13:25):

But if you're a startup and you are not prioritizing SSL authentication like Okta or Duo, whatever you may have, these are ultimately things that you need to ask and say like, "Look, I'm not going to prioritize on SaaS utilization because I trust my startup company because there are only 50 employees and more than half use it, then I'm okay with it." It's where you are in a company's maturity curve. It's not for everyone. But I think as you continue to mature and scale, you have to ask these questions.

Omar Ghani (14:01):

And so I would say that in a world where data is so vulnerable to being breached, it's better to overinvest. And it's funny that it's coming from a procurement person, but I think especially if you have aspirations to be public, or you are public, these are things that you need to work very closely with your security and IT team. And they should be the ones to say what types of licenses should even be approved in the company or not. I mean, it doesn't matter if procurement says yes. I mean, we help in the commercial aspects of due diligence, but there's a major security concern that we have to be mindful of that.

Alison Dean (14:35):

Yeah. And actually I know that a few of the SaaS management companies that I spoke to, I think a lot of them are getting in the game of understanding the general brackets with which the various providers are charging. So you can go to them and say, "Does this sound right if I were to go to enterprise?" So that's super helpful, I think in general, just having a way to benchmark against what might other people be spending. Unless you can just call all your friends, "Hey Omar." Okay. How much are you a part of risk management when it comes to unreliable suppliers?

Omar Ghani (15:11):

That's a good question. So, I mean, I used to lead chairman operations during my time at Lyft and one, we made sure to implement a supplier risk onboarding profiles. Any time that we partnered with a supplier, we told them like, "We're only going to give you a PO once we actually do a PR and creditworthiness check on you. You better have good financials. You better not be on the front page of the Wall Street newspaper in the last couple of years. And if everything checks the box, then we made the decision to work with you." If it doesn't, then we tell our sourcing team, "Look, this is too risky. We should not be onboarding these people." So in past lives, I've always tried to be ahead of the curve

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Omar Ghani (15:49):

Now let's just say, we haven't done it today. You need to do the homework ASAP. And that's my take on this. It's like, do a full comprehensive audit of your suppliers, get a full report about which ones could be potentially questionable. Whether it's from a financial sense, a PR sense, or an ethical sense. These things

are more and more important today. And then you ask yourself like, "Look, just because something hasn't happened today with the hire doesn't mean that it could happen tomorrow."

Omar Ghani (16:14):

I mean, a simple example that I can give is the company SolarWinds. No one ever knew that they, as a security company, would be vulnerable to one of the worst security leaks in history. And so these are part of the things that we do as part of due diligence. You have to vet all of these things and make sure that your partners are not affected by it and things like that.

Omar Ghani (16:37):

Luckily, I haven't come across anything super ridiculous in the last few years. I think the most ridiculous example I ever had was back in my earlier years when I started procurement where a supplier kept billing us for private airline jets to go to their meetings. We did a full audit and they said, "Well, we have the right to bill you." He's like, "Yeah, but you're in full violation of our third-party expense policy. So you're in material breach, and we're doing a full termination of your contract. Even though it's a committed contract, you're in breach and you're arrogant, frankly."

Omar Ghani (17:08):

I think sometimes you just have to be a lot more direct. So to answer your question, my recommendation is always to do it ahead of time versus later. And then if not, do the audit and it's worth doing it, especially if you have the resources to do.

Alison Dean (17:21):

Yeah. And I wonder then, as it relates to how much procurement pairs with accounting and finance, what things do you need to put in place to ensure that the red flag will go up when something looks a little shady?

Omar Ghani (17:35):

one of the easiest ways for organizations to protect themselves is by implementing a procure-to-pay tool, like a PO system. In addition to that, you need to have invoice matching. Can you match an invoice against a purchase order? It's as simple as a two-way match. If your supplier is invoicing you against what was committed, what was budgeted, and what was assured, you're in good shape.

Omar Ghani (17:57):

But if a supplier is invoicing your 30% over your PO limit, it should raise a red flag. It should be like saying, "What happened from the supplier, or if it happened from an internal stakeholder where they didn't communicate their budget or they didn't communicate to their supplier. They told the supplier to do something that wasn't committed against a purchase order. So these are the things that are easy ways for

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you to raise that eyebrow and essentially say like, "Well, no, this is not acceptable and we need to do better next time."

Alison Dean (18:25):

one hundred percent. This is a question that I ask most of the people that come on the podcast. What does digital transformation mean to you?

Omar Ghani (18:35):

I think digital transformation is really anything that allows a transparent way of working in a more effective manner. We're recording this session, so if we're able to edit, review, optimize, make things better, that's really how I see the definition of what it means to operate in a digital world and digital tools.

Omar Ghani (18:59):

I think it's the same way that can be seen in procurement. So, how do we make contracts more visible? How do we detect when we need to be engaged in a renewal process ahead of time or in a certain cadence? How do we actually flag in our systems that things are right and not so right? And that's part of investing in the right tools and configurations that can make it happen. And automation is key. While automation is not necessarily digital, I think they're like siblings and cousins and on the same street. And I think that's something that's really important to do, especially in a world where you're being asked to operate quicker and quicker. So how do you find more automated techniques without having holes in the process or missing certain things that a human would do at the end of the day?

Alison Dean (19:43):

So Trent Johnson, he is the SVP of corporate ventures at Cie. He was recently on the podcast, and he has this question for you, which is a bit relevant to what you just said.

Omar Ghani (19:52):

Sure.

Alison Dean (19:53):

Given robotic process automation, has that changed how organizations look at outsourcing?

Omar Ghani (19:59):

I very much think so. I mean, the answer is either you don't have to look at offshoring or you can do what I think most companies are doing today that are participating in RPA (robotic process automation) as a hybrid. So, I mean, let's say for example, you're offshoring tactical services and markets such as the Philippines, Mexico, India—markets that have known to be very successful in offshoring services. But in

today's global economy, these costs are now going up and up and it's also causing delays in processes because of different shifts. But if you can have an RPA bot that can detect patterns, that can detect a lack of need of human intervention, then why not take the risks to do it.

Omar Ghani (20:42):

I mean, the way what I call RPA is really machine learning, is using patterns, good coding, good configurations to streamline processes. And if that can really necessitate the need for less staff, then it's something to question.

Omar Ghani (20:58):

I think at the end of the day, in my opinion on the matter is, the way I see RPA today is no different than how I see autonomous vehicles today. If you could have a way to do a human intervention, where there is someone still just to do a comprehensive check on what the bot is doing for more escalation type of matters, then I think that's important. And I think what I love about this is that whether you are hiring more or whether you want to limit the number of hiring, this is just really ways to optimize your team, at the end of the day just so that your team is focusing on more strategic base, critical-thinking type of related work versus tactical things. And I think that's what I really challenge people when it comes to RPA.

Omar Ghani (21:37):

So I hope I answered his question, but I think, at the end of the day, right now, my answer is a bit of a hybrid. Eventually one day, it doesn't have to be.

Alison Dean (21:45):

Are you finding that you're bringing RPA into a lot of your conversations? So when there's different sourcing discussions that are happening, how frequently is RPA part of those discussions as an option to look into?

Omar Ghani (21:58):

Where Reddit is today, we have some work to do so we'll probably have conversations on RPA next year. But in terms of supply chain organizations, procurement organizations, or even the finance organizations for the matter. I think if you have a procurement supply chain for at least three to five years, you should start talking about RPA.

Omar Ghani (22:19):

And the reason why I say that is that there are various ways to address that. It's like, "Look, can we streamline the PO issuing process? Can we streamline the invoicing process? Can we streamline the onboarding and checks and balances that are to be registered so that they can be paid faster?"

Omar Ghani (22:36):

These are all things that really help maintain good relationships with internal and external partners. And I think it really helps the company's bottom line. So I gave my answer from an operation perspective, but what about from a strategic negotiation perspective?

Omar Ghani (22:49):

Well, if you can do good automation through a quick computerized bid where you just submit bids and then an RPA bot will actually potentially communicate when to bid, when the bid is closed, who's the awarded winner is, potentially automating it all the way to like, and now here's your contract that you need to return back to legal. These things can potentially happen. Have I done it? No, I've only done RPA through the more operations side of things, but I think there's a lot of opportunity in this space. And I can tell you that a lot of manufacturing companies are definitely talking about it and possibly implementing it already today.

Alison Dean (23:26):

Yeah. It's definitely something that I'm so curious about. Okay. So back to digital transformation. Is there a project that comes to mind for you that is most representative of digital transformation that you were a part of?

Omar Ghani (23:38):

I've done it three times in my career, but it's the digitization of contracts. So a contract life cycle management program about how do we now stop archiving our contracts or putting them in Dropbox accounts or G-drives. And actually, how do we streamline the process of contracts and auto-detect when it's coming for renewal, audit tag when certain terms are being breached. How do we auto-detect that this is a committed spend contract that is against a PO?

Omar Ghani (24:06):

So I think contract life cycle management has been a very relevant thing to digitize it as procurement professionals. I think other examples are actually putting contracts that have performance clauses. So if a contract is saying like, "We're going to generate this many users, or we're going to save you X number of dollars over the next few years." It's like, cool. Let's actually put it in a Dashboard like Tableau or Domo and actually see what you're doing is actually true. That way it's not verbal, or if it's not on page 28 of a contract that nobody checks, it's actually in a financial system that is measured against at the end of the day.

Omar Ghani (24:42):

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I think a lot of companies are doing this so well today. I mean, I'll give a shout out to my old employer, TripActions, where they're doing a phenomenal job being so transparent and digitally informing their travel clients about what their NPS score is, digitizing the onboarding experience of your passport, to booking your ticket, to even paying hotels that virtually now through virtual credit cards. I think these things are super important in a digital world. Whether you're a product manager to a procurement leader, you need to start thinking about this.

Alison Dean (25:13):

Yes. The contract digitization project. Was that the biggest one that you feel like you've been part of? Or is there another project that you would crown as being the biggest project that you've undertaken?

Omar Ghani (25:25):

I don't know if I have an answer on the biggest, but I think the one that I had the most fun was actually deploying virtual credit card solutions. I think that was so fun for me because it was a new concept just three years ago. Where if it's a $500 or $1000 PO, you shouldn't be giving a supplier 90 days to pay them. Especially if they're small Ma and Pa companies that are just trying to operate their business, and you're a large corporate brand.

Omar Ghani (25:53):

So ways to tell suppliers that like, "Hey, we'd love to partner with you. By the way, we can actually pay you in 24 hours. But instead of a check, will you take a virtual credit card payment?" So as soon as the services are rendered, we just punch it in and we push it out to the system and they can get paid immediately.

Omar Ghani (26:09):

So that was something that I had a lot of fun with because it really opened the door for flexibility for so many regional offices. It really opened the door for managers to feel more empowered about how they wanted to do engagements with their own team members, to even team outings. Because instead of telling someone I need to apply for a credit card, then I have to reconcile expense reports. Now it's like, "Oh, everything is automated. Here's a virtual part. It's all going to be reconciled and closed because it was against an approved budget. We're good to go." I had a lot of fun because I think this is something that is now actively challenging the way that procurement and AP professionals can engage with suppliers. So instead of your typical ACH process or physical mail by check, there's a new method of payment. And I think it's the new-age way of doing things.

Omar Ghani (26:59):

The best example that I can give is, if you're having dinner with a group of friends, you're not going to tell your friend, "BRB, I'm going to give you a check in 25 days in the mail." It's like, "No, I'm going to Venmo

you right now because we're going to split the bill." So I think this is something that I'm surprised that it took this long for corporations to develop this concept on virtual payment solutions. And it's something that I've been really lucky to be a part of and actually started changing.

Alison Dean (27:25):

Who did you partner with or who was leading the effort, or were you leading that project?

Omar Ghani (27:30):

I was leading that project, yeah.

Alison Dean (27:31):

Okay. And how many people were you working with?

Omar Ghani (27:33):

It was my staff that was really partnering with hundreds and hundreds of suppliers. I must've been close to 800 different suppliers over the course of the year, so they helped make it happen. And I think ultimately at the end of the day, there are ways that it really improves the relationships with your stakeholders because you're essentially solving ways for them to stay and have good relationships. But they're third-party partners. And if he can create the solutions, that's very important at the end of the day.

Alison Dean (27:58):

Yeah. Totally agree. Okay. Given the velocity that technology changes, what recent projects have you learned the newest things? And what might those new learnings be?

Omar Ghani (28:09):

In the last six months, I've been involved in a lot more finance-related projects in terms of what it takes for a company to be a lot more mature, to look at public readiness initiatives, to SaaS compliance and things like that. So that's been what I've been learning. So not super much into the technology side, but I think the most recent technology enhancement project that I did was actually last year. And that was around SaaS management, looking at systems that can actually optimize and understand SaaS utilization, and now even challenge IT teams and budget holders. "Why are you spending so much? Look at your department, they're not even using a tool," is really eye-opening. And I think that was one of the cool things that I got to do last year.

Omar Ghani (28:54):

I think at the same time this year, I'm also taking a look at how you use humans with technology at the same time. So looking at accelerated modes of negotiating. So if you can partner with folks that are really

good negotiators in the world of IT and SaaS, you should be looking at them and about how they can ingest and use benchmark technology to find the best savings outcomes for you.

Omar Ghani (29:17):

Some of those examples are startup companies, such as Vendr, V-E-N-D-R. Or their competitor called Tropic. I think they're doing some really interesting things in this space because they're mostly human-related talent, but they're using technology at the same time to get really great benchmarks and really great ways to help accelerate the negotiation process. Which I think most procurement people have not seen that yet because we always think about, "Well, we're going to look at operations, or engineers are going to optimize." But strategic sourcing professionals, they've never optimized their negotiation process unless it's their own deadline. So I think this is something that's really cool and I'm keeping an active eye on it.

Alison Dean (29:56):

Yeah. Okay. So let's pivot to talk a little bit about leadership. What are the biggest lessons that you've learned from being a leader in the technology realm?

Omar Ghani (30:06):

Yeah, it's a lot, but I think what's helped me so much is that I love giving monthly reports. I know it sounds very operational, but chief leaders love seeing a dashboard and they say, "This is what my department is doing, and I'm going to summarize this in a one page slide for you."

Omar Ghani (30:25):

We're achieving optimization by issuing POs at a 2X faster rate because we did X, Y, Z initiatives. We saved the company X number of millions of dollars and here are the big hitters that we did and how we did it. We realized that we received a complaint on this type of matter, here's our process to make sure that we hold ourselves accountable going forward. Showing and keeping it as easy to read as possible has helped me so well in my career. And I think it's a really great way for you to also ask yourself at the end of the month or at the end of the week about like, "Did I actually achieve?" Because I think in procurement, you're running at a hundred miles an hour and you're possibly doing well over a hundred negotiations a year. That's a lot, I mean, you're averaging two to three negotiations a week.

Omar Ghani (31:10):

And so how do you actually measure that? Sometimes it's not about your cost savings. Sometimes it's about, "What did I do to help my business stand up at the end of the day?" And I think those things are super important. So to really summarize it, I think it's really showing and being okay with showing your leaders in a very easy way about what your department is and what it's achieving. And sometimes they'll respond to you and say, "This is amazing." Other times there'll be like, "You're doing your job, great work.

And we're going to revisit when things get a little bit more complicated the next month." What I also have humorously learned in Silicon Valley is the word TLDR helps a lot. If you can try to keep it as short and concise as possible, that helps. And that goes a long way.

Alison Dean (31:52):

Yeah. What do you want your direct reports to remember you for?

Omar Ghani (31:56):

He is a good human being. Did I help the staff member achieve the next pinnacle of what they wanted to do with their career? So if you're coming in as an analyst, can I groom you to be an exceptional analyst, to think about being a senior position and a manager one day and have the skills for it? But more so that there is a striking balance between your mental health, and your work health, and your personal health. I mean, these things are so important and I take that stuff very seriously.

Omar Ghani (32:23):

So I like to be the manager that is remembered as someone that is very sharp and thorough about how to strive for excellence in the role. But as much as we work hard, we play hard. So I want to be the person that always rewards people for taking time off. I want to be the person that goes around the office and is like, "Tell me about your family and I'll tell you what I did over the weekend," and things like that. So those things are really important to me and I want to celebrate even personal life accomplishments. And I think that's really important to do.

Alison Dean (32:50):

I agree with you. What is the most important lesson or lessons that you've learned from your mentors?

Omar Ghani (32:55):

Something that's helped me was when I was nominated to take another role that I may have not wanted. But I think my mentors were so great because they said that, "We know that you're doing really well in this role. But if you take on this role, which is not your subject matter expertise, you will likely become a leader one day in the future, because in order for you to become a successful leader, you can't just do one thing perfectly. You have to do probably six to 12 different things and understand them well enough to become a leader. And you don't have to be the best at it. You just have to be good enough."

Omar Ghani (33:30):

And I think that's something that really helped me because there were times where I pivoted to other roles, but I was like, "I'm good at it, but I don't feel like I'm that A-plus standard that I used to be." And that's okay. I mean, that's part of the career. As long as you're actually creating different experiences for yourself,

I think that's super important. And that's why I achieved a lot of things through my mentors because they were so supportive and encouraging me to do more than what I thought I could do.

Alison Dean (33:58):

What projects are you especially interested in as you continue on in your career?

Omar Ghani (34:05):

Oh boy, I don't know how much I can talk about that. But I think, if I can summarize it in the best way, it's like, "How did I help keep the gross margin of Reddit as competitive as possible? What was my influence in that space? In addition to that, how did I help Reddit be in the same caliber as a Fortune 500 company, and as young of a company as it is today, and it's so rapidly evolving." Knowing that I now have a role where I sit at the table to really help drive a lot of these outcomes in my specific department, I think it's super, super exciting. And I think that's the part where I'm just so pumped about it that I'm operating on a greenfield. It's an open greenfield where I get to build something from the ground up. I think that's just what excites me the most right now.

Alison Dean (34:48):

Are you having a lot of conversations with each of the department heads about some deficiencies or things that they want to change to see where you overlap?

Omar Ghani (34:57):

Yeah. I mean, I wouldn't call them deficiencies. I would simply call them like, "Hey, what's our next frontier? How do we actually get to the standard that we need to, because we're no longer operating as a 300 person company. We're now a thousand-person company. How do we actually right size your department? And how do I help you achieve that right sizing to get us there?" And you're right. That's what I've been involved in and actually having a lot of conversations about that.

Alison Dean (35:19):

Yeah. I can only imagine. How do you see Reddit progressing in the next few years? I guess, based on the time that you've been there so far, is there anything that's pretty apparent to you in the Reddit journey that you're imagining?

Omar Ghani (35:31):

In general, if we're even looking at the last year, last couple of years, especially in a pandemic-related world. I mean, social connections, it's needed more and more. And in Reddit's case, Reddit does a phenomenal job of bringing unique and fun communities together. We all saw it in the news this year on Wall Street about all the things that Reddit users did to influence the marketplace, as simple as, "Hey, there's a hurricane happening in Florida. How do I get the best supplies to do something?" And it's not

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necessarily the news outlets to do that because they just cause panic, but it's actually forums and boards that actually say like, "No, you need to go to the 76 gas station because they have eight cartons of milk left."

Omar Ghani (36:09):

And I think that's something that I see Reddit continuing to grow and grow. I see it continuing to have a stake on a global level, especially with internationalization, with more global countries joining the platform and things like that. So I think it's a really exciting time. I think it's just the world of social as we know it. Social is everything and it's going to continue being that way. And I think that's just part of the digital age. So I think platforms like Reddit definitely are a part of that.

Alison Dean (36:36):

Okay. I have a couple more questions before I sadly depart from you. What future innovations are you excited about? And that could be personal things that you're excited to see, but also things professionally that you're looking forward to.

Omar Ghani (36:50):

Yeah. I'm looking forward to having a beautiful electric car that can go over 500 miles on a tank. That would be amazing. But I think in terms of my specific role, topics of sustainability always really excite me. So I mean, we need to start talking about how we're actually spending funds on hosting and cloud infrastructure. Well, that's a lot of energy. Is that being done in a sustainable format? And how do we measure against that? How do we actually measure building efficiency, especially in a world where it's remote?

Omar Ghani (37:21):

I don't think that folks should go to the office five times a week anymore. Whether if it's a fully remote company to a hybrid structure where you go to the office a couple of times a week, how do we actually really evolve and start reporting metrics about, "Well, we're saving X number of dollars because we're no longer running the AC or the electricity, or we're not putting as much consumption on waste because in Silicon Valley we just do catered food and food waste all the time." If we can limit all of these things, I think there's something that's really exciting to be said here. And I think operations teams definitely should have a part in that.

Alison Dean (37:57):

I agree. Okay. Can you talk about a breakthrough that you've had recently?

Omar Ghani (38:02):

Yeah. So Reddit is, as you know, it's growing a lot and I'm somewhat new to the organization with new CFO, new finance leaders, you're trying to come up with new ways of working styles with your executives and things like that. So I had a really great breakthrough because you're trying to develop a certain cadence with a CFO or with a CEO, and you're realizing your old ways of interacting with other chief officers is not working at this one.

Omar Ghani (38:29):

So I had a really great breakthrough recently in how I provide updates to my CFO and that way of working actually generated a really great recognition and shout-out from the broader department. So I was really thankful for that and I just hope the relationship continues to grow well. So it's been fun and I call it trial and error and that's just the way that things are sometimes.

Alison Dean (38:50):

Amen to that. Well, I thank you, Omar. That was a fun discussion. I could talk about sourcing, I think, for too many hours it would require too much of your time.

Omar Ghani (38:59):

Well, we'll definitely have to chat some more in the future.

Alison Dean (39:02):

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