

# 6 questions with...



Jack Grote, CPA  
Vanmark, Technical Sales Manager

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## What have you been up to since leaving the firm?

Woof, buckle up because it's been a bumpy ride, to say the least. The short version is: when I left GBQ last June, the plan was for me to move overseas to France in November '19 to take on a sales role with a French company our family business was acquiring at the time. Two weeks after I joined the Grote Company, however, that deal fell through. After some internal discussions, a role was found for me in one of Grote Co's subsidiaries, Vanmark, which sells equipment that processes a lot of the French fries and potato chips you eat. In this new sales role, I've relocated to the potato capital of the U.S.: Boise, ID. The longer version is best told over a beer or two.

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## What's life like living out west? And have you made it back to Ohio much?

2020's been one heck of a ride. I spent the first three months in Creston, Iowa—if you've never heard of it, it's essentially the setting of every John Mellancamp song ever made—to train at our facility there. My move out to Boise coincided (im) perfectly with the coronavirus shutdown, so I have a lot of exploring to do once things open back up. But it's beautiful here, so I've been doing plenty of hiking and biking to keep me sane. Haven't been back to Ohio really at all yet—Memorial Day weekend will be the first time I'm back to spend any significant amount of time back home.

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## How do you spend your time when you are not working?

Boise is a hidden gem: the city is bordered by foothills/mountains on its north side, arid desert-like terrain to the south, with a beautiful river running through it, so there's plenty of outdoorsy stuff to do. Also, I've been working on my culinary skills (ask my Instagram followers how my recent Shrimp n Grits looked). Other hobbies include golfing, collecting records, and reading. Pre-COVID, I spent a lot of my time nestled up to the bar with a cold beer, watching sports... hopefully I find myself doing that sometime soon. In the meantime, I've gone headfirst into a full-scale Survivor binge, starting from the beginning.

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## Do you still stay in touch with GBQ employees? (Not including your brother)

You know what they say about assumptions, Judd...

But yeah, obviously talk to Jay a lot whether I like it or not. I don't think it will surprise anyone, but my class (both those still with GBQ and those who have moved on) still talks to one another on the daily. The GBQrew stays strong.

It's been such a wild stretch in terms of not knowing what my next move was, where I'd end up, that I haven't gotten the chance to stay in touch as much as I'd like. Now that I'm finally settled, I'm hoping that will change - and as I get back into town, hopefully I can meet for coffees, lunches, drinks, etc. with any/all who are interested. At the very least, I'll try to crash a happy hour or two.

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**Tell us something you learned at GBQ that has helped you in your current role. Debits and credits don't exactly slice Idaho potatoes. There had to be a small learning curve to bring you up to speed on the expectations of your new role.**

Very much still at the bottom of that learning curve, looking up. This industry is extremely technical—most of the sales guys have engineering backgrounds, that's how complex some of this stuff is. Needless to say, the ability to B.S. (a la Tom Powers) that I honed at GBQ has come in handy.

In all seriousness, it really was great preparation to get that financial background. Understanding the costs involved with a project, understanding the margins we need to earn on a sale, being able to communicate to the customer the financial impacts of their decisions, things like that... all would be significantly harder if I hadn't started at GBQ. Oh, and the Excel skills: I was never an Excel guru at GBQ, but believe me, compared to the "older" folks in this industry, I look like a wizard. If Steve Boston walked into our conference room and started showing off, these people would think he was a god, like the natives when Christopher Columbus first landed over here.

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**What is your company doing during the Coronavirus pandemic? Give us some insight into something most accountants wouldn't think about affecting the food industry.**

It's been pretty interesting, actually. Vanmark's two largest segments are (1) potato chip manufacturers (like Frito, Utz, etc.) and (2) French fry processors (McCain, Lamb Weston, Simplot). With everybody staying home and self-isolating, the potato chip business has been booming, so that segment of our business is thriving. Meanwhile, the French fry side is a mixed bag: our customers that produce fries for retail (i.e., the frozen fries you find at Kroger) are running 100MPH and ordering blades, parts, etc. from us as a result. However, the customers that sell to restaurants are experiencing severe drops in demand since people haven't been eating out (one customer saw an 85% decrease in demand in March). A lot of them have completely shut down production facilities, furloughed a majority of their workforces, and have basically had to give away millions of pounds of potatoes since they don't have the storage space left to keep them.

The food industry is fascinating in that way: people always have to eat, so no matter what's going on, some segment of the industry is going to be doing well. In this case, it's anyone who's making food that people can eat at home. Then there's always going to be someone who's having troubles, like the restaurant suppliers in this case. And then there's the OEMs, like Vanmark, who serve both sides and can experience both the highs and the lows at the same time.