

# RISING TO THE CHALLENGE



TWO MEN AND A TRUCK franchisee builds on company culture to grow his business

BY KRISTIN DI TOMMASO

If there's one thing that sealed the deal for prospective franchisee Cotie Drinkwater when he was considering investing in a TWO MEN AND A TRUCK Canada franchise, it was the people.

"The company culture was something I'd never seen before," he boasts. "I had never seen so many people so happy to be at work."

It was a big observation to make for someone who hadn't actually opened his TWO MEN AND A TRUCK location just yet. Still, it was enough encouragement for Drinkwater to know his future in franchising looked bright. Fast-forward nearly six years and the millennial franchisee is the proud owner of a TWO MEN AND A TRUCK franchise in St. Catharines, Ontario that serves the entire Niagara Region.

Now 30, Drinkwater was a self-proclaimed 'young' 25-year-old when he invested in the residential and commercial moving business. What he lacked in confidence, he made up for with his innate knack for entrepreneurship.

The business savvy Drinkwater was first introduced to the mechanics of franchising through Justin Prittie, the son of TWO MEN AND A TRUCK Canada CEO and President, John Prittie. A millennial franchisee himself, the younger Prittie opened his own TWO MEN AND A TRUCK franchise in late 2012 at the age of 22. Covering the Cambridge, Kitchener and Waterloo, Ontario regions, Prittie was operating his franchise for one year before Drinkwater opened his.

"I think after seeing me get started, Cotie saw the benefits of owning his own business," Prittie reflects.

The two had met only a few years prior playing hockey and Prittie says they quickly became close friends. It wasn't long before Drinkwater was visiting Prittie on the job, soon realizing franchising could also be a good fit for his personal and professional skills.

"You have a support system, a business plan and an established structure," Drinkwater says. "As long as you can execute, you should be able to make things happen."



Every TWO MEN AND A TRUCK vehicle carries a Mikey defibrillator on board; (R-L) Franchisees Justin Prittie (Cambridge, Kitchener and Waterloo) and Cotie Drinkwater (St. Catharines and Niagara Region) and their teams have been trained to save lives having learned CPR and how to use Mikeys. (Photo: Evan Eisenstadt)

On his end, Prittie knew his friend would be a good fit for the company.

“Cotie always has a positive attitude,” he says. “The glass is always full for him and he never shies away from a challenge.”

Truer words have never been spoken. Today, the Brantford, Ontario native is making TWO MEN AND A TRUCK a household name in a growing community, and proving to skeptics that age is just a number.

### Making a name for himself

Knowing the judgements he would face as a kid in his mid-twenties opening a business didn't deter Drinkwater from striving for success. If anything, it only fueled his work ethic. With the support of home office behind him, Drinkwater says he got the confidence he needed to learn about the company, invest, and work hard.

The learning part came easy for Drinkwater, in large part due to TWO MEN AND A TRUCK's comprehensive training process. Onboarding franchisees attend the company's international home office in Lansing, Michigan, where they are given practical and hands-on knowledge at Stick Man University. Drinkwater describes it as a crash course in business. Topics ranging from human resources to sales training are covered along with courses in how to safely navigate a residential and commercial space and how to efficiently pack a truck.

Typical of any young, first-time business owner, the nerves were present for Drinkwater when he opened his first TWO MEN AND A TRUCK franchise in the spring of 2013, smack dab in the middle of moving season.

“At first, I felt like I needed to prove myself,” he says. “I was surrounded by established franchisees who were 10 years my senior. I wanted to be taken seriously.”

As a millennial, proving that he belonged among the seasoned franchisees was one of the largest hurdles

Drinkwater faced. Couple this with a lack of general life skills, and Drinkwater's early years as a franchisee were unique in comparison to the average business owner who invests in a franchise later in life.

“You overcome challenges by working harder at them,” Drinkwater says. “You have to understand where your weaknesses are and work on them. For me personally, I didn't want to let anyone down. I wanted to persevere.”

And he did just that. Soon after opening, Drinkwater's location ran three consecutive years with the highest customer service rating, getting the attention of home office and his fellow franchise partners.

“I was really proud of him,” says Justin Prittie, who also worked hard to prove himself. In 2017, the franchisee finished second in sales for the Canadian network. “When Cotie and I first started, some of the older franchisees were skeptical because of our age. Now they more readily listen to our ideas.”

Gaining trust from his fellow franchise partners wasn't the only thing Drinkwater set out to accomplish. The franchisee can feel good knowing he has made his family proud too.

Drinkwater is North American Mohawk, part of the Bear Clan from the Six Nations of the Grand River. Located on the Ohsweken Reserve in Ontario, the Six Nations of the Grand River is the largest First Nations reserve in Canada by population, and the second largest reserve by size. With an extensive family history, Drinkwater's Indigenous background plays an important role in his life and he is happy he can bring some pride back to his family.

“My indigenous heritage has taught me to dig deep, work hard and not give up as a business person, husband or father,” Drinkwater says. “I know I would not be in business without the financial, inspirational and emotional support of my family. They have always showed

confidence in my ability to run my business and are committed to my success.”

## Opportunity for growth

Drinkwater realized early on in his tenure as a franchisee that his skills would best be suited working behind the scenes to hire staff and grow the business. With over 20 employees currently on his team, including an office manager, moving manager, and movers on-site directly serving customers, the franchisee says his role has evolved drastically compared to when he first opened.

While he may have been more involved in conducting actual moves in his first year, Drinkwater now ensures all pieces of his business are operating efficiently. As such, part of his job responsibilities focus heavily on the marketing aspect of the business.

And in a Niagara Region community where TWO MEN AND A TRUCK is competing against established moving companies with loyal customers, Drinkwater is using his millennial mindset to implement strategic marketing initiatives.

“We’re moving to a fast-paced, tech world,” he explains. “Everybody wants instant knowledge, so we have to come up at the top on search pages, we have to get good reviews, and we have to be interactive with potential customers online.”

The hard work behind his online initiatives has paid off. Over the last year, TWO MEN AND A TRUCK’s St. Catharines location has grown dramatically. Still, there’s no time for a vacation just yet.

“There’s still tons of growth in this territory,” Drinkwater says. “We can double or triple our sales growth in St. Catharines alone. For the company as a whole, I see us growing into a household name. We’re going to be the McDonald’s of the moving industry!”

## Movers Who Care

As he heads into his sixth year as a franchisee, Drinkwater says the company’s culture is still one of the best in the franchising industry.

“They promote a culture that encourages you to reach out to anyone, franchisees included,” he explains. “I’m pretty friendly with all of the Canadian franchise partners and I talk to many of them every month. It would be unwise for me not to. Communication opens doors and creates new business connections.”

Justin Prittie can back up his friend’s statement without hesitation.

“I’m always happy to help him, and he’s always happy to help me,” he says. “We have a relationship where we can bounce ideas off of each other and share our honest opinions.”

TWO MEN AND A TRUCK’s “Movers Who Care” slogan doesn’t just apply to franchisee relationships and



Cotie Drinkwater, Two Men And A Truck franchisee, St. Catharines and Niagara Region. (Photo: Evan Eisenstadt)

on-site job responsibilities either. The Canadian network encourages franchisees to give back to their local communities in some capacity. In 2012, TWO MEN AND A TRUCK partnered with The Mikey Network.

As one of the MIKEY Network initiatives, every TWO MEN AND A TRUCK moving vehicle across Canada carries a MIKEY ON BOARD defibrillator. Franchisees, drivers and movers are all trained to use the defibrillator to help save a life. The MIKEY Network has placed 2,383 defibrillators and trained over 12,000 people across Canada in defibrillation and CPR. To date, 40 lives have been saved.

Looking to the future, Drinkwater is enthusiastic about helping the brand grow across the country. And as a millennial in the business, he has lots of time to do just that.

“Time is on my side,” he says. “Investing in a franchise at a young age means you have time to learn, time to keep re-investing, and time to figure things out.”

Still, being young doesn’t mean you have all the answers. For millennials interested in opening a franchise, the one piece of advice Drinkwater can give is simple: listen.

“Don’t ever think you’re doing something perfect, Drinkwater warns. “There’s always something better you can do to grow your business, so listen to the people around you.” 🍁

## TWO MEN AND A TRUCK STATS

Franchise units in Canada: 25, U.S.: 381

Corporate units in Canada: 4, U.S.: 2

Franchise fee: \$50K-\$85K

Investment required: \$178K-\$339K

Training: 2 weeks

Available territories: British Columbia, Alberta, Ontario, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia

In business since: 2005

Franchising since: 2005

CFA member since: 2004

