

# minnesota BUSINESS

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INSPIRATION FOR GROWING COMPANIES

## CEOs to WATCH

Kurt Rakos  
Partner  
SkyWater Search Partners

### TOP 5 CEO TRAITS

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Real reason CHS bought naming rights. **44**



Apoorva Shah, COO of SAM HPRP, stands in for his elusive father, Sunil Shah

“She’s applying mathematics every day,” he explained. “She has to do a profit-and-loss statement, she’s learning about biology. She’s also seeing the payoff for getting up early and working, and the benefits of getting paid to do something she loves.”

That’s something her father is modeling for her. Busy with responsibilities at home and at work, Heinemann works long days and gets by on five hours sleep.

But he’s not complaining. “I have a life that I very much enjoy living,” he says.

#### A CATALYST FOR A FAMILY ENTERPRISE

## Sunil Shah

CEO, SAM HPRP

SUNIL SHAH DOES SOME of his best thinking in the company of his best friend — his sweet-tempered Lab mix Laddu, named after a popular dessert in his native India.

Shah, 55, walks her five miles a day, every day. “That’s when I come up with new ideas and

[BIZ BRIEFING]

### SAM HPRP

**INCEPTION:** 2002

**LEADERSHIP:** Mita Shah, owner; Sunil Shah, CEO; Apoorva Shah, COO

**EMPLOYEES:** 3 full time & variable contracted employees

**REVENUE:** Undisclosed

**DESCRIPTION:** SAM HPRP Chemicals is a multinational ingredient sourcing and distribution company that focuses on the following business sectors: animal feed & health, fertilizers, human nutrition and other botanical and organic supplements.

**WEB:** [samhprp.com](http://samhprp.com)

solve problems in a creative way,” he says. “I think the oxygen refreshes me and energizes me.”

Shah grew up in Mumbai, where air is thick, humid — and polluted. The purity of Minnesota’s atmosphere is just one element that natives may take for granted but a newcomer notices and appreciates.

Shah is CEO of Eden Prairie-based SAM HPRP, which imports and distributes more than 50 different chemicals, supplying ingredients for animal feed, fertilizer and human nutrition.

He founded the company in 2002 with a single client — Red Wing Shoes, which bought one container of chemicals used in tanning leather for military boots. Since then, the company has experienced growth of 10-12% annually; today SAM HPRP distributes close to 50 containers per month from its warehouses in St. Paul, Albert Lea and Milwaukee.

“The Upper Midwest has been very kind to us,” says Shah, who runs the business with his wife and adult son. “What impresses me most is how a handshake is valued here. We import materials and it can take weeks or months for them to arrive. The price can change in that time, but my customers honor their commitment to me even when it’s not on paper.”

Shah grew up working for the company his entrepreneurial father started; it provided specialized chemicals used by the paint industry. To better advance the family’s business, Shah came to North Dakota State University to earn his master’s degree in polymers and coatings. He went back to India, married and started a family. A few years later his wife Mita also came to NDSU with their only child to further her education in IT.

PHOTO BY EMILY J. DAVIS

After the family of three went back and forth between the continents for several years, they ultimately decided to settle permanently in the United States.

Their son Apoorva, now 28, a business graduate of the University of St. Thomas and the company's COO, was nine years old when the Shahs moved to Eden Prairie. He says their immigrant experience and appreciation for their adopted country is woven into the family business, right down to its name.

"Growing up, we always liked the Uncle Sam posters, that represented America to us," Apoorva Shah says. "We saw that we could take our first initials — of Sunil, Apoorva and Mita — to honor Uncle Sam and also show that we believe in our company by putting our own names out there."

The "HPRP" is a short form of the company's motto, "High Performance, Reasonable Price."

Apoorva began as his father's right-hand man. He was still in high school when the elder Shah traveled to meet with suppliers and customers. In an era before computers were the norm for remote updates, Sunil would telephone his son and instruct him on how to take care of tasks associated with the company.

"I was his backup when he was on the road so I grew up understanding the business," Apoorva explains. "Now we have different duties. My father's background is on the technical side and those genes did not get passed down to me. I'm good at strategy and direction and working with people."

The younger Shah believes the family is well-positioned for growth.

"My parents set up the business with good fundamentals. We've stayed lean; we're self-funded so we pay no interest on inventory. That allows us to pass savings on to our customers," he says. "Our competitors can buy ten times more product, but with their overhead they can't beat our pricing."

Currently, falling prices in the commodity market has impacted the company's sales and inventory; with corn and soybean values at rock bottom, SAM HPRP's agricultural customers are wary about making big purchases.

Sunil Shah is philosophical about the ups and downs of the market.

"You win some and you lose some, that's the nature of our business," he says. "We can win most of the time." 🐘

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