Executive MBA Alumni Career Perspectives

Working professionals pursue an Executive MBA (EMBA) for a variety of reasons. Some want to advance in their organization, some are looking to make a career change and some wish to start their own business. Below you will find testimonials from some of our alumni that describe how this degree helped them advance their careers as well as some advice and suggestions that can help you manage your career.

How has your EMBA helped you advance your career?

“Helped to establish a good understanding of how the core elements of a business fit together. Improved my ability to develop business strategies and manage an operation and P&L. Improved my knowledge in critical areas of finance, economics, operations (supporting optimization, demand/capacity balancing,) and statistics (supporting business analysis, process improvement, Lean Manufacturing, Six Sigma).”

Jeff Allen, VP Nuclear Turbine Services, NA, General Electric (EMBA 2004)

“The VCU EMBA gave me the confidence to have conversations that I was not previously able to have because I did not understand all areas of business. I was able to establish new relationships and stepped up to join boards, networked with a different group of people who provided me with new opportunities and eventually led to me starting my own business. I had a partner for the first six years and then felt comfortable in buying him out two years ago. Although I still am not an expert in accounting, finance and statistics, I have a general understanding of these areas, which enable me to run every aspect of my business and bring in the talents or others who do.”

Lori Jennings, President/Founder, JENNINGS ProSearch (EMBA 2006)

“After much consideration and soul searching, I decided to pursue a graduate degree in hopes of career advancement. I had extensive experience in my field, but the least tenure with the agency. I had two choices: grow or accept my station for the rest of my career. My experience with the EMBA program was empowering. I expanded my horizons, learned a completely new skillset and, most of all, I could apply these skills universally.”

Rusty Harrington, Manager, Planning and Environmental Section, Virginia Department of Aviation (EMBA 2009)

“My career was stagnated. My company viewed me with tremendous sales skills but no leadership skills. Gaining my MBA was the necessary stepping stone to demonstrate to both my company and myself that I was more than just a sales person. I was a business person. Even before my graduation, I was promoted to my first leadership position with this company. Since graduation, I have had significant promotions and currently lead a large global organization. I am 100% confident that without the MBA none of this would have been possible.”

Joe Keating, Senior Director, Light Industry, ChemTreat, Inc (Danaher Company) (EMBA 2011)
“I already had two masters degrees in Information Technology and Computer Sciences before I decided to pursue VCU’s Executive MBA Program. The EMBA program gave me some great real time experience and exposure in the future emerging markets. I learned about the organizational, communication and leadership skills which are a need for any upper level management or executive positions and helped me move to the next level in my career. I personally have gained a lot more respect from my peers, team members and management and their confidence in believing in me after going through such an elite program.”
Akhil Mathur, Client Solutions Leader, Genworth (EMBA 2014)

“The EMBA program at VCU gave me exposure and deeper appreciation for different aspects and realms within business operations. Like many students who took the EMBA route at VCU, I entered the program with varying levels of expertise (or lack thereof) within the different functional areas of business, based largely on prior career experience. The program really helped me supplement my skills within the areas that I did not have a lot of prior experience (e.g. finance and accounting) and also gave me a broader view of how to apply these skills beyond the industry I was working in at the time. All in all, I came out of the program with a well-rounded set of business skills which have opened up many new opportunities for career growth and advancement.”
Ross Higgins, Director of Laboratory Operations, OneOme, (EMBA 2015)

“When I interviewed for my current role I was up against candidates that were already located in the Baltimore/DC geography and that had good reputations and relationships with leaders at Medstar. However, my MBA was a distinct advantage in the interview because my hiring manager felt that it added skills and expertise that the other candidates did not possess. My MBA has contributed other advantages to my day to day performance. My communication, both verbally and written, was elevated by the program. My analytical skills, especially with Excel, are more advanced because of the program. Also, having an MBA gives you an edge in a corporate world where they are almost expected. If you don’t have one, you aren’t taken as seriously when it comes to career advancement.”
Roger Hart, Director, Strategic Sourcing, Medstar Health, Inc. (EMBA 2016)

“The EMBA program gave me the knowledge base to expand my operations to double the size it was prior to my attending the program. I have used all aspects of the program (operations management, accounting, finance, management, etc.) to make my business more streamlined and efficient. The lessons in employee management has allowed me to produce the most efficient and content employee pool I have had in the twelve years of operation of my business. The visit to South Africa, along with the lessons learned in the EMBA program, have allowed me also to grow the charitable organization I operate abroad.”
Joel Byrd, Owner/Director, Caring Family Home, LLC. (EMBA 2017)
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What advice do you have for current EMBA students that can help them manage their careers?

“Graduate degree is not a guarantee of advancement. Application and results will carry the day in well run companies. Ensure you’re focused first and foremost on the position you have now and delivering results, including building strong teams/organizations to ensure progress is sustainable and you’re contributing to the broad interests of the company. Be sure you know your current mission and measures of success. Learn as much as you can in your current position and expand your knowledge in other domains which are related to your current position or career interests. Do not focus on the next position you want. You will be distracted from the prior recommendations. If you pay attention to the recommendations I made, you will not need to focus on your next position. Your next position will find you, as long as you’re ready. Then, repeat...and repeat and repeat.”
Jeff Allen, VP Nuclear Services, NA, General Electric (EMBA 2004)

“Step outside your comfort zone and look for areas where you can grow in your career whether it be inside or outside your current organization. Having an MBA does not guarantee you an instant promotion, but it should give you a new perspective and equip you with knowledge/curiosity/confidence/leadership skills that people will notice. When this happens, new opportunities will present themselves to you. Be ready to step up and go for it when they do.”
Lori Jennings, President/Founder, JENNINGS ProSearch (EMBA 2006)

“Bloom where you are planted. If that does not work, take control of your destiny. If that does not work, just work hard and keep your mind open to opportunities.”
Rusty Harrington, Manager, Planning and Environmental Section, Virginia Department of Aviation (EMBA 2009)

“Take advantage of every opportunity to network with other students, professors, professional organizations, both while in the program and upon graduation. Seek out students that are not in your area of expertise to gain different exposure. Take advantage of as many social activities as possible with other students. Create a network with fellow students upon graduation.”
Joe Keating, Senior Director, Light Industry, ChemTreat (Danaher Company) (EMBA 2011)

“Don’t expect a Return on Investment (ROI) as soon as you finish your graduate program, but instead see what you can learn, gain the practical knowledge the program provides, the real time examples and start building your network. Ultimately have the self-confidence to look ahead into the leadership roles and stay positive and motivated to move ahead and advance your career. Nobody else can do that for you; it is all about YOU!”
Akhil Mathur, Client Solutions Leader, Genworth (EMBA 2014)
“My advice to current business students is to keep an open mind throughout the program. At some point you may find yourself in a course, wondering how the content is even remotely applicable to anything in your current career path. All I can say is that you will be surprised. Don’t be surprised in 2-3 years when some little nugget that you unknowingly picked up in the program comes in handy in a business meeting or during an interview. Mastering the course content is much different from understanding or appreciating different ways to apply it, across different industries or business settings. Keep an open mind and you’ll get the benefits of both.”

Ross Higgins, Director of Laboratory Operations, OneOme, (EMBA 2015)

“You may be whatever you resolve to be”. Those words are engraved over the main entrance arch to barracks at my undergraduate alma mater, VMI. They are just as true today as when Thomas Jackson spoke them back in the 1850s. Personal willpower is an amazing force that most people do not tap into as much as they could. The refusal to quit, the refusal to accept anything less than what you are most desiring, will get you to places you can only dream of.

Roger Hart, Director, Strategic Sourcing, Medstar Health, Inc. (EMBA 2016)

“Embrace everything presented to you in the lectures and study abroad. You may feel at the time the information may not apply to you but eventually you will use it or find a way to incorporate it into your current career. Use your knowledge of business practices to make yourself unique in your field.”

Joel Byrd, Owner/Director, Caring Family Home, LLC. (EMBA 2017)

“Identify people who have the job you want (or think you want) or who have jobs that contain attributes that you find appealing. This can be someone with your current employer or someplace else. Invite them to coffee or ask for an informational interview. Make it clear that there is no implied obligation on their part. Express interest in learning more about their role, what makes them successful in their role, and what relevant skills and experience they think the role requires. Ask about the career path that led to their current position. I have yet to meet anyone who didn’t like to talk about themselves or was unwilling to provide guidance to someone who asked for it. In fact, you may be surprised at just how willing people are to share their story with you. If the conversation goes well, maybe it leads to a mentorship opportunity. Or maybe the person knows of someone who is hiring for a similar role, or maybe the person is looking to fill a role on his or her team. In either case, you’ll end the conversation a bit smarter about what it takes to do the job and you may have even made a positive impression on someone who can help you get there!”

Joel Yaffe, Executive Consultant, Cognitive Process Services, IBM (EMBA 2017)