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Liesl Riddle:
Welcome to GWSB Proud, a podcast all about why are you proud of GWSB? My name is Liesl Riddle and I am the Associate Dean for Graduate Programs here at George Washington University School of Business. And I have the great pleasure of sitting down with GW alumni, faculty, staff and students to hear why they are GWSB Proud.

Well welcome to the podcast today. I am so fortunate to be joined by Andrew Seal, who is a Global MBA alum from the class of 2012, was it?

Andrew Seal:

2012, yeah.

Riddle:

It seems like it was yesterday, Andrew I can't believe that it's been actually that long, well welcome.

Seal:

Thank you, it’s great to be here.

Riddle:

Tell us a little bit about yourself right now Andrew, where are you working, where are you living, what's life like after GWSB?

Seal:

It does exist, in case you're still in business school, there is life after business school, so don't be worried. It's fantastic, you'll get there if you're in business school right now, I know it seems like a lot of work if you're a current student. I live in upstate New York, just south of the Adirondacks kind of, really just kind of between the Adirondacks and the Catskills. I work for GE, with my wife and dog, and I’m in the renewable energy business.

Riddle:

That is so fantastic, and it's so such a pleasure to see students like you that come into our program with hopes, and dreams, and aspirations, and interests, and then to spend time sort of co-crafting with you that future, and then to see where that lands. And now you're here giving back, we're so grateful that you've come in for the podcast today.

Seal:

Couldn't be happier to be here, thanks for inviting me Liesl.

Riddle:

So let's walk back to before you came to GW, you have kind of an interesting story I think, to kind of share about before business school. What was your life like, how did you start to think about business school in general as being that next step solution for you, and why GW?

Seal:

Sure, so I didn't have a plan to go to business school when I was an undergrad. I didn't have a plan to do what I ended up doing after undergrad. While I was an undergrad it was my sophomore year, September 11th happened, for me that was a pretty much a life-changing event. I think for folks in my generation that was like our Pearl Harbor kind of event, the way that you know, some of the previous generation had experienced that. It really changed the course of what I wanted to do, I felt like I had to do something, I went down to the recruiter's office, Marine Corps recruiter's office, shortly thereafter, enlisted in the Marine Corps. My parents insisted that I finish college, I did, so right after graduating college I enlisted in the Marine Corps and was in boot camp for 13 weeks in 2004. And then went to officer candidate school for 10 weeks in the same year. So 23 weeks of boot camp in one year, that was a lot of fun, and deployed three times in the Marine Corps. First deployment to Iraq in a combat role leading marines and combat in Iraq as a platoon commander. I was stationed in Ramadi, luckily was able to bring everyone home, we had some you know, we had some challenges. We fought the bad guys in Western Iraq, but I was lucky enough to bring everyone home alive.

Riddle:

Thank you for your service.

Seal:

My pleasure, was one of my proudest moments to be able to bring all those guys home. I deployed twice after that in expeditionary units, and I just made the determination that the Marine Corps is not going to be a lifelong career for me, like a lot of people do. But I definitely had that sense of duty and purpose that I think the Marine Corps really instills in you. But also, my September 11th experience really made me feel, and one of the pieces of advice I got from some of my mentors on the Marine Corps was, you know, when you leave the Marine Corps you go and do great things, but it's very easy to plateau in your career, if there's maybe not one other you know, distinguishing thing for you, and even just to get a leg up in the civilian world going to business school is a good idea. And I actually remembered I was talking to the admissions team, I think we were getting ready to deploy my second time because I think I had deferred a year. I think I was actually accepted and our deployment got extended, and I had to come like the following year, which was nice because I got a little time off from being in the Marine Corps before starting business school. So yeah you know, joining GW, and why GW for me was, it was multifaceted. I'm originally from this area, I grew up in Maryland, D.C. is kind of like a second home for me, and I'd been living and deploying out of California for several years, so I was really happy to come back to this area. But also at that time, and I would still say now, there's probably only maybe three or four cities in the United States that have a really great exposure potential for renewable energy, D.C. is among those. This was still, I would say during the period of time where folks were saying, “I don't know you know, is renewable energy going to happen, you know, what is this just some subsidy program from the government?” But I’m here to say, you know, this is a multi-billion dollar industry, I think there's going to be 10 to 12 gigawatts of just onshore wind installed this year, every major bank is involved in lending, and it's just been a wonderful career that GW helped set me up for.

Riddle:

Well that's wonderful to hear. I mean, you were a real leader, a real voice I think for the issues around our curricular development in issues related to energy. Can you talk a little bit about what some of your highlights were though when you were on campus, not just in terms of the curriculum and so on, but the people that you met, the things that you did, how did you spend your time in school?

Seal:

So I probably spent too much time studying and focused on just everything career wise. I would say the one regret I have from GW, which is if you're gonna have one this is it, just not spending enough time socializing. But I will say that I did get to spend a fair amount of time socializing with a student organization that I was involved with, which is called the Energy Group, at the time. And I had a lot of great experiences with peers who were part of that, it was a very interested, passionate group of people, who were interested in all things renewable energy. And you were so kind to help guide and mentor me and my colleagues at the time to help us create some specialized course curriculum that were renewal energy focused. So when we could talk to an employer in that area and the company, and have like a very kind of, very professional, like on the same level of knowledge type conversation about current events in the industry, instead of being a, “I’m a student can I learn more about you?” You know, it just completely changed the conversation when we were able to have that industry relevant experience that you were so kind to help us bring here.

Riddle:

Well it was truly I think, as I remember, your real passion and advocacy, that said you know, you made the business case to me. I mean, you put your good MBA skills to work there by persuading me by saying, “look we really need to be taking this seriously and thinking about this deeply.” And I love opportunities like that for us to kind of think about what's coming next in our curriculum, and being able to bring students with an interest in, a passion like yours and others, and then bringing together some of our employers other people in our local community in. D.C. is a wonderful backyard to be able to pull leading thought experts on an emerging topic, and really do co-craft curricula. So it wouldn't have happened if it wouldn't have been for your advocacy, probably. And I think you were also, you and that leadership of that energy club, I think really was the thread that brought it all together, this sort of concert of actors. I remember we had that little focus group night remember, that we brought all those different, that little sort of the corporate kitchen cabinet together, and you and the energy club, and watching the students and those experts in the field kind of go back and forth, and kind of really etch out this is what we need to really be doing in our curriculum was an incredibly, I think, rewarding experience for me, very insightful. And I think that the curriculum really really benefited from it, and it's a model that I really do like to follow.

Seal:

Well I just got to say you know, in retrospect, I probably took for granted the fact that you guys had such a focus on students and the flexibility to say, “hey you know, this is something we'll entertain.” I think a lot of places don't really have that, it's like no you're in our business school, here's the hurdles you run over and then you cross the finish line, and then the next folks start the race. That was not my experience at all in a very good way, being here and being a part of that.

Riddle:

I'm really really glad to hear it. Let's talk a little bit about some of the people that you met when you were here, to think about some of your memories. Who were some of your favorite faculty that taught you in the classroom?

Seal:

You know, I really love learning from Bill Handorf, I think he's still here.

Riddle:

He is still here.

Seal:

You know, he did such a great job making finance like something that was learnable. I think a lot of people, myself included before that, thought that this is some kind of special mystical thing that only people who have certain life experience or skill sets can ever begin to learn. And I was shocked at how quickly he was able to bring somebody like me up to speed who had really no background besides balancing my checkbook and paying credit card bills. And you know, I just felt so confident in that area after having spent time with it. Just what a wonderful person, and just his ability to, I think, just lead by example of like what a great professor is. And he would come out to those events that we would have, fundraisers for local charities, and so he was, he is, and I'm just so glad that he's still here and the students get to spend time learning with him.

Riddle:

Absolutely absolutely, what about friends in the program, anybody want to give a shout out to, anybody you're still in touch with or wish you were still in touch with?

Seal:

Oh my gosh, Aaron Menkin, I got to give a big shout out. He was a big friend and mentor of mine, everybody who was in the energy group that I was with you know, just like I gotta thank so much. The time and effort that they put into putting the conference together that we had, the Business Response to Climate Change, twice, while I was here, you know. Just a wonderful group of people, that I would say a lot of them have really moved into some great jobs in the industry as well, so yeah. I don't spend as much time as I'd like still corresponding for those folks, but I'm looking forward to seeing them again soon.

Riddle:

Well that's great and we look forward to seeing them on campus again soon too. You had a very very creative class, I think that you were a part of and we did a lot of really, I think, interesting things together in the time that you all were here. So while you were here, what role did the Career Center kind of play in sort of your time on campus?

Seal:

So I think the Career Center really is what you make of it, you know, I, and I think there's a spectrum of where people are on the career search you know. I think a lot of time can and should be spent reflecting on “what is it then that I think I'd like to do, and what do I think that I'm good at, and what is an area that is like a big trend that's going to be around for a while that I can really make like a career out of it?” It's important to do that for yourself, and if you can't do that for yourself the Career Center can help you with that

Riddle:

Certainly.

Seal:

You know, some, you know, some folks are, I think a little disillusioned, like “oh my gosh now I'm back in school what do I want to do? I maybe had a thought, maybe it's changing?” That's okay you know, it's okay to be uncomfortable in your career search, and it's probably a good thing in some ways because it makes you question you know, what is it that you think you're good at, what is it that you think you can really do to make a difference, and you know, what does that combination look like? And I think the Career Center can help you focus more than anything, so, but if you're past that and you're at the point where, “hey you know, I think I know what I want to do, I'd like to find maybe some some of the leading companies in that field, could you maybe give me a recommendation, help me identify who are some of the alumni are, just give me some thoughts around these businesses in general?” And then even past that to say, “hey here are the three companies I really want to work for you know, I really want to get my resume ready for them, help me study for case competition type stuff or case interviewing,” and kind of everywhere in between. So I think the Career Center, again, is really what you make of it, and it really depends on kind of where are you in that journey from, I don't know what I want to do, to here's who I want to work for, just make it very clear that where you are on that journey I think and they'll help you along. And just go there, spend time with those folks.

Riddle:

You're recruited into GE’s Leadership Program right out of your time with us, tell us a little bit about that?

Seal:

So it was called the Renewable Energy Leadership Program. They've rebranded it but it's essentially still the same thing, it's like an executive training program that a lot of, kind of, Fortune 500 Companies have. The model is similar to what many folks may have seen if you've been in the kind of corporate area before, where you'll go and do two years as a you know, your characterized essentially as a rotational person, and in my specific instance you did four, six month rotations, sometimes they'll be three, eight month rotations. And they'll put you in different functions. So I spent time on our services business, you know, helping asset owners improve the reliability and performance of their assets. Then I moved into a supply chain role, helping do a lot of lean and six sigma on our supply chain. I helped start up a manufacturing center in Canada as well as Brazil, then I moved into a sales role, it's technically a commercial role, but it's really kind of like a technical selling type role, it's a very consultative sales process in the industry I'm in. And then I was in a projects and services role, which is really about execution, getting large industrial scale equipment moved all over the world and put into the ground, and ultimately I came back into, and one of the roles I fell in love with was this, essentially this technical sales role which I've been in for I guess really it's been for the past five years. And I worked with some of our biggest customers in the world, in that I spent a lot of time in Chicago. I'm in Canada with some frequency, and you know, I have an occasional trip to Europe, Asia, but yeah usually in the northern regions where I tend to be.

Riddle:

It's such an exciting sort of story arc, right. You took us from where you were thinking about coming back to business school, transitioning out of service into more civilian life in the role of business school, in that selecting GW because it's sort of in the center of it all really in the kind of industry that you really wanted to work in. And then really being a leader among your student class to help co-craft and put together a curriculum that really set you on this platform for this just incredible accomplishment…

Seal:

You’re making me blush…[all laugh]

Riddle:

...and what I think is really special about everything that you've done, is that you've now taken the time out to travel from home all the way back to campus, and share your knowledge, and your expertise, and your time with our new incoming Global MBA class. You remember doing round tables before when you were here right?

Seal:

You know, when you're at GE you age in dog years, so I think it's been you know, it's been almost 40 years since I've been at GW, in GE years. But yeah I do remember coming to campus and not really knowing which way is north because as anyone knows who's spending any time here, the grid system is patchy and especially in Northwest, so yeah you know, I'm happy to be here. It's amazing what you can do with your phone and your computer, just to be able to kind of do it and anything anywhere, so you know, I've got my phone in my pockets, on vibrate, but you know, I'm still technically on the clock. But yeah, I'm glad to be here and to help however I can.

Riddle:

Well we are really very fortunate I think, there are several students in this class interested in GE, interested in renewables, so it's I think you're going to have a really rich conversation in our discussion roundtable event tonight. So kind of looking back at this incredible story, if you were to pick sort of one moment, your GWSB Proud moment, what would it be?

Seal:

So there's a lot to choose from, I'll choose one that many people may have not known about while I was here, but one of the things that's really cool about being in business school in D.C. at GW is you've got so many things that you could potentially spend your time doing. And one of the things I did through the Net Impact Club was I could serve on a board of a local non-profit. It's called D.C. Greenworks, I think they're still around, and they help train people to mostly do green roof installation throughout D.C., which is a huge deal because when there’s a storm, water runoff, it puts an unfortunate amount of pollution into the river, and there's a large amount of cost when you pave surfaces in cities. And when you make your roof a green roof, and you do it at scale essentially you reduce the storm water discharge from the city, so they're a wonderful non-profit. They had an architect who was kind of the the person who was in charge, and they had a wonderful group of board members that really kind of represented every aspect of D.C. and sustainability in general, and I had the pleasure to serve on the board for I think was about six to nine months, and we made a project out of it in my marketing class, and it was a great opportunity to you know, combine school and something I was doing outside school. And my student colleagues helped put this marketing plan together for D.C. Greenworks, and we were able to actually deliver something that was meaningful to this organization, so that was a fun, you know, example of what I think was special about being here, and I was proud to serve on that board.

Riddle:

Well what a great story, we are really, we are GWSB Proud because of students and alumni like you, thank you for everything that you've contributed to the school and thank you for spending time with us today.

Seal:

Of course, thanks Liesl.

[Music]

Riddle:

That's all for this episode. Thanks for listening today. Shout out for music credit to Plantain Papi, also known as Michael Ferrier, GW class of 2020. See you next time to learn more ways we are GWSB Proud.

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