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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'm so excited today to have Rachel Goldstein joining us today. She is the Senior Manager for Global Sustainability at Mars Incorporated, welcome to the show today.

Rachel Goldstein:

Thank you Liesl, it's great to be here.

Riddle:

It's great to have you back, since 2003 right? Global MBA of 2003. Let's kind of walk back in time a little bit, and kind of share with the listeners, where were you before 2003? Like I can hardly remember where I was last week, much less before 2003, what were you doing, what were you thinking, and why did you think about business school and GW specifically?

Goldstein:

Sure, so prior to coming to business school I spent 11 years in the insurance industry, working very specifically on industrial safety, workers comp, compensation insurance, but the safety part of environmental safety and health. And I started to really reflect on some of the conversations I had with my customers, right and so I worked on company safety plans, and when I started to talk with them about OSHA says you need to do XYZ to be safe, you had one conversation and people were like, “alright I'll do what I need to do to comply and that's that.” But if I had a conversation with them about other benefits, other business benefits of the safety program, lower insurance premiums, better quality off the line when people aren’t injured, you had an entirely different conversation right, and people really went got creative in their solutions, went above and beyond, because there was this bigger benefit besides checking a box. And so along those lines I started to get much more personally interested after a trip to the National Parks in climate change and environmental protection, and I started to think how do I actually create those same tools, or how do you do the business case for environmental protection. In the insurance industry I had a group of underwriters and other people that could help me recalculate numbers, but I didn't realize, I didn't have the tools necessarily to move into the environment and climate change space, and so I started thinking about what's the combined business degree with environmental protection, environmental management or policy, and the great thing GW had that concentration in the business school. That was a huge draw for me and there weren't many schools that had that in 2001.

Riddle:

So you came to GW, you met some folks, you took some classes, can you go back in time a little bit for us, were there particular people that stand out, particular events that stand out that really made your MBA program special?

Goldstein:

So I think certainly in the first year having been out of school for so many years I just, I immersed myself in the experience. I loved the classes, I loved being back in school having been an engineer and undergraduate, just getting sort of the policy perspectives and things I was you know, accounting and business perspectives, Enron was my first year of graduate school, so really actually taking the information and applying it to what was going on in the world. And I think also one of the really interesting things for my time there was what is now the Net Impact Chapter right, and so it was a group of environmental students in the business school and in policy and engineering, who had put together their own own group which ultimately became a Net Impact Chapter, and then we also hosted the next year GW, Georgetown, AU and Maryland co-hosted the Net Impact Conference. And so I really actually pulled in some of the other students from my class who were looking at either non-profit or entrepreneurialship concentrations, and then working with students in the other schools, we put together a couple hundred person conference without the benefit of a really professional team to do it, and really interesting and great experience to just connect with students all over the country who are trying to look at the triple bottom line while in business school.

Riddle:

Well it sounds very innovative, particularly for that time when all that was a little bit newer, I would say right, for industry?

Goldstein:

Yes, and I think because GW really was pioneering that, more than, there was a, World Resources Institute did a beyond gray pinstripes report about sustainability programs and business schools there weren't many, right. And GW always was at the top of that list in terms of just pushing the envelope, and having sustainability within the business school.

Riddle:

I think there are a couple different reasons why I think that's true, you know we used to be, way back when we have like this long history of being the School of Business and Public Management, and so there's always been, I think we've attracted a faculty that at some level primarily have some kind of intersection with policy, with the government sphere, in a tangential or holistic kind of way, and I think we're one of the few business schools, I think in our actual mission statement, is a commitment to educating leaders about the role of business and its interaction with both government and sort of citizen sector or non-profit/NGO kind of space. So I think in many ways we also, I think, attract students that have an interest in that because of also who we are. So you met some special friends, I know you were telling me that you're still in touch after all these years with friends that you were in school with that in ‘01, ‘02 and ‘03. Tell me more about that...

Goldstein:

There are still a few and you know, and actually, so I have one of my friends I'll give a shout out to Anu who is, who went to State Department, she is back in DC now, but actually some of my first travel to China for work also coincided with her first position in Beijing, so I got a chance to even visit with her internationally as well not too long after we got out of school. And some friends from my cohort, I got married not that long ago, and Anu and Tim Sheckler were both at the wedding, so it was quite nice.

Riddle:

Oh that's lovely, it's so great to see that GW community kind of lives on you know outside the classroom. Any particular faculty stand out for you, who is your favorite, what was your favorite subject maybe?

Goldstein:

I’m not sure I have a favorite per se, but certainly Dr. Mark Sterick as my faculty advisor. Again where having this environmental management policy concentration within the school was very influential, there were classes around strategy and policy that helped me think a little bit about my career choices, and you know, and what I wanted to do when I graduated from GW.

Riddle:

So after your GW sort of experience, where did you go next in your career, and why?

Goldstein:

So I think one of the interesting things is I came out of business school and I went to the government right, and most people you know, and originally actually when I talked about an environmental concentration everyone's like, “oh you want to go to the EPA, you want to go to the government and work in the EPA.” I was like, “no no, I don't want to be a regulator, I want to go into the world of business, this is why I'm here.” But interestingly enough I think there were a few things that got me to the government. One, the job market was very challenging, so 9/11 was actually our first semester of graduate school in 2001. The job market was probably not quite what we would have expected, but the reality is that I ended up in voluntary programs on climate change at EPA and because there wasn't a regulatory mandate you needed a business case for some of these projects, and actually the tools of business were really helpful in actually making that case. And the program I was in ended up being like this great little microcosm of why I went back to school. So I was there for eight years, we expanded internationally, and again you had to think through where things didn't have a regulatory mandate, how do you, how do you align and convince stakeholders that they need to be working on these projects, or moving in a certain direction, and showing the business case is one way to do that.

Riddle:

Wow that's a really great story too about how you took that business knowledge and then applied it in a sector that often we don't think about in terms of using a business school background to make a difference, and really make an impact in government. So then why the switch from a government role now to a more private sector role?

Goldstein:

So I would say after about eight years I was starting to think a little bit about next steps and again the market for corporate sustainability jobs changed quite a bit right. So in 2003 they didn't really exist. They started to in 2006, 2007, but I really loved what I was doing at EPA and had no interest in moving. But I started to think a little bit about, think about it differently again, and now these jobs were both in consulting and in-house within companies. And I got connected to Mars because I worked with Mars on one of our first renewable energy projects when I was at EPA, so our Waco factory, Waco Texas factory had a landfill gas to energy project and that's the program I worked on at EPA. And so staying in touch and actually highlighting Mars on a panel at a future net impact conference that I organized around using landfill gas for voluntary corporate commitments, and so when they had a role that was open they reached out and asked if I was interested and so the timing was great. It brought me full circle back to why I went back to school was to get into the corporate sustainability world, so it's been a great experience and as you can see there's a career progression from the safety part of environmental safety and health, graduate school, EPA and corporate sustainability. So they've all sort of fed in this nice progression of really, and then now really looking at the power of business to solve some of the world's biggest challenges.

Riddle:

So we have a lot of students, I think that come to our programs saying, “I want to do something in the sustainability sphere, but I'm not really quite sure what that is.” It's not really a functional area of business, it's actually really something that's truly cross-functional. If you were to give advice, what advice could I share to our students from your perspective, with your experience, who are interested in really making a career and an impact in sustainability, that are just sort of starting out in business school?

Goldstein:

So I think there are, as you mentioned, it is cross-functional. So I think people can take some of the things that they really like, so I talked to some students this morning about, who are really interested in marketing. Right, there's a way to get into sustainability through marketing, there's a way to do it in finance, and I think those who had earlier career choices in sustainability didn't study, but ended up following a personal passion and taking the disciplines that they had within business with them and embedding sustainability into it right. And so when we think about how do we meet our sustainability goals, depending on where, which goals they are, so in sustainable sourcing we need our procurement teams to really engage with our suppliers for renewable energy in our factories, or energy efficiency and water reduction in the factories, we need the, what we call our supply community, to really engage for the packaging sustainability. Well we've got R&D, we have marketing and brands, we have the procurement teams who buy the materials, and so you have multiple pathways to get into sustainability in any business and you can sort of follow the personal interest and then marry that with your passions and sustainability.

Riddle:

That's really a very interesting, interesting idea. I think one of the things I also hear from students is, to get into sustainability, do you need to have, like you do an engineering background, do you need to have a science background? Is there a particular background that makes for a more natural profile for someone going into sustainability, or is it really much more creative than that?

Goldstein:

It can be much more creative, it is such a broad field right, and so when we think about you know there are people in real estate looking at how do we have green buildings. You know, obviously my sectors within the food sector, you have electronics looking at how do you minimize energy use but how do you actually care for the iphones and the computers that are no longer in use, and how do you dispose of them properly? So there are all sorts of different ways that you can incorporate sustainability. I do find that my science and engineering background certainly helps, but it is not necessary that you have to have that background to be involved in sustainability.

Riddle:

Well you were here for our very first meet and greet series here this morning where we invite students across all of our programs, MBA, specialized Master’s, graduate certificates, our faculty and our staff together, to just have some informal community time, but also to feature a spotlight alum like yourself. We were so fortunate to have you sort of kick off the series for us this year, what was that experience like?

Goldstein:

So it was really fun to be back here, and again, I think as I mentioned that you know, my last semester they were breaking ground on this building right, and so it's really nice to see you know, 15 years later how the building you know, that we have a great modern business school right. We have students who are excited to be here, I got a lot of questions from people doing the, you know, informal networking. Everyone's excited for their first week and first semester, and so I just really enjoy being able to hear what people are interested in. I've over the years been able to talk to some of the classes particularly for some of Dr. Sterick's classes, and it's just nice to get the fresh perspectives and what people are interested in doing.

Riddle:

Well that's fantastic, we were just so fortunate to have you come in to meet the students, but also come into the recording studio today. Tell me, if you had to look back on your entire GW experience, the name of this podcast is GWSB Proud, what's your GWSB Proud moment?

Goldstein:

I'm not sure I could just name just one, but I mentioned the Net Impact Conference, and I think really being able to work with a number of students, not just within my program, we had people from other programs at GW, and other schools, to come together to put together this conference that again highlighted where people were being entrepreneurial and interested in the social aspects of business – I think was great. And I really, the diversity of the students in my first year cohort, right, have as you mentioned that the mission of the school and we had people interested in nonprofits and entrepreneurial, I think gave a really rich experience to that first year. You know we worked hard together, and there were a lot of stressful days and around midterms and projects, but I think, I just really enjoyed the people that I was with so much that I made a great experience here.

Riddle:

Fantastic, well thank you so much for sharing some of your experience and expertise with us, and inspiring really the next generation of leaders.

Goldstein:

Alright, thank you very much for having me

[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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