



Raymond A. Mason School of Business

WILLIAM & MARY

LEADERSHIP & BUSINESS PODCAST

EPISODE 98: MARCELO BARROS – COMING TO AMERICA

Ken White

From the College of William & Mary in Williamsburg, Virginia. This is Leadership & Business. The podcast that brings you the latest and best thinking from today's business leaders from across the world. We share the strategies, tactics, and information that can make you a more effective leader, communicator, and professional. I'm your host Ken White. Thanks for listening. Well, some young professionals living outside the United States today see the American MBA, the master's degree in Business Administration, as a pathway to a job and life in the US. Many of those international students enroll in full-time MBA programs. Where they quit their jobs, leave home, and study full-time on campus for two years. International students are important to US business schools. Among other things, they bring diversity, a global viewpoint, and tuition dollars to the business school. Depending on the full-time MBA program, international students make up a third to half the student body. But getting a job in the US can be a challenge for them. Marcelo Barros works with international students to help them find work in the US. He's a coach, consultant, and author of the international advantage get noticed get hired. He joins us on the podcast today to talk about how international students can find work after graduation. Here's our conversation with Marcelo Barros.

Ken White

Well, Marcelo, thank you for joining us. First of all, it's nice to see you. You and I worked together a few years ago. It's great to have you back again to campus.

Marcelo Barros

Thank you, Ken. I'm so excited. Beautiful day at the William & Mary campus November 28th just thrilled to be here.

Ken White

It's nice to have you here, and you just finished a couple of sessions with full-time MBA students who come to us from other countries, and they're labeled as international students. Many of those in United States MBA programs from around the world, and you deal with those types of students and help them get jobs. What do you see as the

landscape today for that that that international student who comes to the US and would like to work here? What's it looking like for you?

Marcelo Barros

It's a very difficult journey for these students. Ken, as you're probably aware, a lot of us are hearing the news. There is a lot of talk about making it more difficult than in previous years for companies to hire international workers. So it's always been a little bit of a battle for a US firm to bring a foreign worker on payroll, but now we see additional scrutiny from the White House and other agencies on the process that firms need to go through to hire international students. So definitely a tricky environment for our international students.

Ken White

What's the work visa situation like at this point?

Marcelo Barros

Well, the good news is that the typical visa that international students need the so-called H1B visa. The rules about this visa haven't really changed. So that is surprising news for a lot of people. But the rules are what they've been for many years, for the most part. But we have a climate of uncertainty and a climate of fear, and because of those two factors, companies are even more reluctant to consider international students because they fear that down the road, they could be under more scrutiny, and they need to be giving the government more paperwork about international hires, and no company likes that.

Ken White

If a company is they may be smaller and does not have any employees who are outside the country, what do they have to go through to hire an international applicant?

Marcelo Barros

Yeah, it's actually not that complicated of a process. Maybe it's no harder than filing for your taxes. That's the way I put it. But the reality is there's risk. There's risk because the demand for H1B visas today far exceeds supply. So if I'm an international worker and you hire me, Ken, to work at your firm, there may be a chance that you're going to lose me come H1B lottery time, and that's, of course, not a good situation for US employers.

Ken White

Right, now, oftentimes, what we'll hear from international students they'll see a company they really like. They'll meet somebody from the company, and the organization says. Unfortunately, we don't sponsor. What advice do you have for international students who hear that?

Marcelo Barros

Well, my advice is talk with companies that do sponsor. I think that's very critical. You have to align yourself with names that have proven to be historically friendly towards international students. And luckily, we're able to access those names. So it's not a secret to understand which firms have sponsored in the past. So when international students tell me hey Marcelo, we're hearing a lot of sorry, we don't sponsor. I sort of say you are knocking on the wrong door. You should be speaking with firms that do sponsor.

Ken White

Makes sense. Now and there has been success. I mean, you go around to top business schools all over the country our international students have had great success. So it's not all doom and gloom, but it's a lot of work, isn't it?

Marcelo Barros

It is a lot of work, but you're so right. As I'm talking to you here, I'm thinking of a couple of international MBA students from William & Mary from the Mason School of Business who found great jobs in the US. So the, success stories do exist. They are not rare. I think though international students underestimate the amount of readiness and work that's really needed for them to be successful. There is a limited number of firms that provide sponsorship. Therefore a lot of competition for those few jobs, so you really have to be a top applicant in order to win.

Ken White

And which you help students with all over the country is networking. And this is something that's quite unusual for some cultures. In America, as you say, it's often who you know, but for other cultures, networking is really something they've not experienced before.

Marcelo Barros

You know, so true, and when I first arrived in this country 24 years ago as an international student, I had a host family, and they were asking me about my plans after graduation. And I told them I think I would like to work in the US if possible. And that was the first time they told me. Marcelo, remember, in the US, it's who you know. It's not what you know. That was 23-24 years ago when I learned that from a local American family. And I've tried to instill in our international students the need for them to be proactive and create genuine relationships with individuals who could potentially refer them to jobs. Many of our international students are too academically focused. They are phenomenal students, but they worry so much about grades and GPAs. And they don't pay enough attention to that relationship part of the job search journey.

Ken White

But that's a cultural thing, right? That's just who they are.

Marcelo Barros

It is a cultural thing. They are wired to be focused on academics. That's what they've done all their lives. A US student, for example, is just much more used to working high school kids work at McDonald's or deliver newspapers, so the working culture the relationships are much more common for US students, in my opinion, compared to our international students.

Ken White

So one of the things you, well, many of the things I think you share with MBAs and STEM students and graduate schools across the country is set up the informational interview, and that works for domestic students and international students as well. Can you tell for someone who's not familiar what's the informational interview and how does a young person go about creating one?

Marcelo Barros

I think the informational interview is an opportunity available to all of us. It's an opportunity for us to learn from people who have jobs that we think are interesting roles that perhaps we are excited about pursuing as well, and we all know that most folks they are excited to talk about their lives. They like to talk about what it is that they do. So an informational interview is a chance to collect some data about a particular job, a particular industry. It's a way for a job seeker to become informed. It's a way for you to know do I really fit in that job. Is that the right position for me? Do I have the skills that the employer is looking for? So it's data gathering, in my opinion.

Ken White

But I want a job. And is this still a good tactic? I assume the person knows I want a job when I'm asking them for the informational interview, but your strategy is learn so much first and not necessarily give me the job correct.

Marcelo Barros

Yes. I usually say, Ken. I tell students. If you ask for a job, you get advice. If you ask for advice, you'll get a job. So I think that when you approach people with this desire to learn. When you're immensely curious about what they do and who they are. When you ask thought-provoking questions, these start really appreciating you. And then oftentimes they say, Ken, I think you would be a great fit for my team, or I know somebody at this company who I think you would be terrific for them. So I think folks have the opposite reaction when you call them, and you say I'm looking for a job. Do you have an

opportunity at your firm? They may not know you too well. They don't have a connection with you. So it's a little too aggressive too fast. We have to build a connection with people when and when we do that correctly. Often times they proactively offer job leads to all of us.

Ken White

We'll continue our conversation with Marcelo Barros in just a minute. Leadership & Business is brought to you by the Center for Corporate Education at the College of William & Mary's Raymond A. Mason School of Business. The Center for Corporate Education helps companies and organizations from all over the world by creating and delivering customized business and leadership development programs taught by William & Mary's world-class business school faculty. If your organization is looking to get to the next level, contact the Center for Corporate Education to discuss how we can create and deliver a program that specifically fits your needs and gets results. For more information, visit our website at wmleadership.com. Now back to our conversation with Marcelo Barros.

Ken White

Even when I think of the domestic student raised in the US who happens to be an introvert trying to arrange an informational interview, it gets them out of their comfort zone. I can imagine it's ten times for the international student. So how do they go about arranging an informational interview?

Marcelo Barros

I think our international students are very puzzled by the idea that in this country, we're free to contact anybody. It doesn't matter if this person is the CEO of a firm. It's a very egalitarian type of culture, and it's a luxury that the United States provide us, and we have great tools available today that make it pretty easy for us to identify professionals. Again who have jobs and careers that we like, so we all have the opportunity to contact anybody in the United States as long as we're genuine. As long as we're professional, we're respectful, it's very okay, and I encourage folks to really take the opportunity. You never know you may get a response back. Sure I would love to talk to you. It happens a lot, but we must take the initiative.

Ken White

And I notice I've heard you mentioned the students in the past. And just because it's the CEO, don't write that person off. Not many people ask the CEO to connect.

Marcelo Barros

It is so true. That's one of the barriers we pose. We see a job title, and it says CEO, and as a student, as an MBA, I'm thinking, wow, why is he going to take a minute? Well, you

should email that person again if you're interested in that CEO's firm. If you're interested in his life journey, don't let that title keep you from reaching out to that person and exactly what you said. That individual probably does not get that many requests in the first place, so he or she may really enjoy hearing from a student.

Ken White

How does the applicant get people to want to talk with them on an informational interview?

Marcelo Barros

What we talked about this morning with the international students was we must when we approach individuals, we must make it precisely clear why it is that that person is the only person on earth that is ready to help us. So when you approach somebody, you need to be able to say, Ken, I've decided to contact you because and I need to answer that question in a way that really makes you feel, wow, this person really knows my background. This person just didn't spend two seconds on my LinkedIn profile. This person really understands what it is that I do and wants to talk to me. And when you do that in a very genuine way, people feel that your outreach to them was very professional, very genuine, and they are more apt to say yes.

Ken White

Yeah, it's impressive, right? You did your homework.

Marcelo Barros

You did your homework.

Ken White

Yeah, no doubt. You also talked a little bit today. I thought this was real interesting about vulnerability in this whole process. Can you share that with us?

Marcelo Barros

Yes. So you attended the session this morning here at the Mason School of Business, and I really focus on the concept that it's okay not to have all the answers. It's more than appropriate to really be very frank with people and say I've been looking for a job. I think I've been doing everything correctly, but the reality is I'm not getting any interviews. So when you put the cards on the table with people, when you're very frank and honest with them, they are much more willing to troubleshoot your situation with much more precision and care. The opposite happens when you approach people in a guarded way with this notion that you have to impress those we talked to. When networking, we're trying to build relationships, and the best way to build relationships is through honesty. And if

you're being if you're having difficulties getting a job, whether you are an international student or a domestic student, you must disclose that to people. You also though for vulnerability to work. This is what we discussed today with the students that we talked to. You must demonstrate value and that you have done your homework. So the equation of being competent but vulnerable they seem very counterintuitive, but they can coexist.

Ken White

Interesting. Now, as you go around all over the country and talk with students, what are some of the common questions you hear from them or some of the hurdles they're experiencing that are quite common?

Marcelo Barros

Well, so going back to the session we had this morning, I think the conversation that we had with international MBAs today is a conversation where it makes me feel vulnerable because I'm talking with something I'm talking about something with them that goes a little bit against what they believe they need to do. They believe that they need to pitch. They believe they need to sell themselves at all times. They believe they need to be perfect and tell the world exactly what they want to do after graduation. So a common question that I get from international students is, Marcelo, how do I find this balance of showcasing my skills but also doing what you're asking us to do, which is really to be very honest with people about our difficulty? So finding the right balance is a common question that students ask me.

Ken White

Interesting. I love what you said earlier today you don't go to the gym once a week and expect to be fit. Don't expect to network once a week and expect to find a job. This is work, and this is something that people have to do on a regular basis get out there and connect with people.

Marcelo Barros

It is something that needs to be done on a regular basis, and it's not something that many of us like to do. It is, but it is just as important as exercise. So even you need to find a way to motivate yourself and give yourself a goal and say I'm going to create two new contacts this week, and that's your target, and you drive towards that number. And if you do it often enough, it starts getting easier. It starts getting more fun. It's not so painful. It's just like going to the gym. Those first few tries will be extremely painful, but then you get into a good rhythm. And what we try to do here with the international MBAs today is to put them on this path of finding their rhythm so they can self-sustain and continue the activity.

Ken White

That's our conversation with consultant, coach, and author Marcelo Barros. And that's our podcast for this week. Leadership & Business is brought to you by the Center for Corporate Education at the College of William & Mary's Raymond A. Mason School of Business. The Center for Corporate Education can help you, and your organization meet and exceed your goals. With business and leadership development programs that fit your needs and get results. If you're interested in learning more, visit our website at wmleadership.com. Thanks to our guest this week, Marcelo Barros, and thanks to you for joining us. I'm Ken White. Until next time have a safe, happy, and productive week.