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1. WHAT IS THE BEST WAY TO APPROACH ALUMNI?

There are two ways you can approach alumni: on an individual basis or within a group:

- **Contact on an individual basis**

You can use any of these three avenues :

- call the alumnus's assistant;
- call him/her directly.

When you approach them (on the phone) make sure to:

- ✓ identify yourself by saying your name twice and spelling it. Then specify the year where you graduated. You might want to repeat this to get their attention;
 - ✓ apologise in advance for possibly disturbing them and ask if it's a good time to talk. If it's not a good time, ask when you can call back;
 - ✓ tell them the purpose of your call (i. e. to meet with them, gather information...)
- contact her/him by email.

In this case, you might want to call their assistant beforehand and find out if you can email them a PDF document. In this email (in which you ask for a meeting and justifying it briefly) her/him boss. Then email a cover letter to the assistant with the PDF attached for their boss.

- **Contact within a group**

Take advantage of a gathering, such as a professional reunion, a monthly lunch or reception..., and network.

Approach the targeted person when she/he is available. Smile and smile again!!! and ask them your question.

That's it. Make it simple...it will work.

Can i ask alumni if they ever made any mistakes and what they consider the biggest achievements in their career?

Yes, you can, provided that you do it at the right time, at the right place...

- **Mistakes they may have made**

Avoid using the word "mistake". Say something like: *"In hindsight, if you could do certain things differently, what would they be?"*

- **Their achievements**

This question is much easier. People love to tell you how successful they have been and how unique they are.



2. WHAT CAN WE TALK ABOUT WITH ALUMNI?

Everything. However, as usual, be careful when it comes to:

- Sex;
- politics;
- religion.

People love to tell you about their uniqueness.

If you find a specific point you have in common with them, they will open up more easily.

If they have time, they'll put you in touch with their network of people who share this very specific point you all have in common.

3. WHY WOULD ALUMNI WANT TO HELP ME AND/OR SPEND TIME WITH ME? WHAT MIGHT THEIR MOTIVATION BE?

It may seem surprising, but older alumni do help new or future alumni a lot, and for several reasons. Helping you:

- can promote the image/reputation of the school;
- means that they must enjoy helping others;
- gives them a sense of importance and being useful;
- might remind them of their own children (hoping other people will do the same with their kids when the time comes);
- can show how wonderful they are;
- returns the service they might have received in the past when they themselves were lent a hand.

4. CAN I APPROACH ALL ALUMNI - EVEN THOSE WHO ARE VERY SENIOR, VERY IMPORTANT...?

You can approach all alumni provided that you respect basic rules of etiquette.

It is not always a good idea to approach alumni who graduated in the last two years. Many of them are quite insecure and pretend they have an outstanding position and huge responsibilities, when in reality, this is not the case. It seems, in fact, that the best contacts are made with alumni who already have some kind of track record and real achievements to talk about. They are also likely to be more accessible.

Above all, when you approach them, let them know right away the purpose of your visit and that it will not exceed 12 minutes.

If they want to extend the duration of the meeting with you, they will let you know. Respect their time.

If you are going to meet several alumni and there is, among them, an exceptional and/or very important one, make sure that you meet this one last. This will give you a chance to rehearse and avoid any mistakes you might have made with previous ones.



5. WHAT SHOULD I SAY TO ALUMNI WHEN I FIRST MEET THEM? WHAT ABOUT DEVELOPING A PITCH?

It is essential that you prepare a pitch that you will deliver, if need be, during the first two minutes.

This pitch is about you. It should not exceed 20 seconds. You should avoid using adjectives and adverbs to describe what a wonderful and exceptional person you are.

Just state facts and highlight a couple of points that might be of interest to the alumnus you are talking to.

If the alumnus shows some interest and asks you to elaborate, use a second level pitch (no longer than two minutes).

To hit your target and deliver a good pitch with a strong impact you should:

- develop your text ahead of time and put it in writing;
- rehearse and repeat it 5 to 15 times to some of your friends, so that it will sound natural.

When you meet the alumnus make sure to:

- get there on time;
- establish eye contact;
- offer a warm handshake;
- wait 1 to 1½ second before opening your mouth.

Neglecting any of the above points can jeopardize your meeting.

6. HOW CAN I GET MYSELF AN INTERNSHIP / PROJECT / MISSION THROUGH AN ALUMNI?

Remind yourself that when you ask nicely for something, the worst thing that can happen is that the person says "No" or "No thank you".

One way to build your self-confidence is to write down "*The worst thing that can happen is that they tell me no*" on a little note card that you carry in your wallet.

If you plan or wish to do an internship / project / mission, you can use alumni as:

- information providers/brokers,
- go-betweens/ambassadors.

Avoid embarrassing them by reminding them, at least 2 or 3 times during the beginning of your meeting, that what you're only looking for is information and not a recommendation. Once they trust you, they will feel at ease and will open up.

• Alumni as information providers/brokers

The information you can get from these alumni could be:

- the different types of projects / missions that they can carry out. Approach alumni who work in the field in which you want to do your internship / projects / mission. Ask them what the hottest topics and issues of the moment are and what could be used as themes or subjects for your work.



- information about the organizations you want to approach. This might include their structure, names and titles of key persons, problems faced, issues addressed, priorities ...
- **Alumni as go-betweens / ambassadors**

You might also use the alumni to help you organize a meeting with a specific person (who is working either in their organization or in the company where they know people).

The alumnus you want to meet could either be another ambassador or, most probably, the person for whom you want to carry out an internship / project / mission.

Make sure you put alumni at ease right at the beginning of your meeting and tell them, during the first seconds why you are approaching them.

7. CAN I USE ALUMNI FOR RECOMMENDATION PURPOSES?

Of course you can, provided that they know you well enough.

You cannot approach an alumnus out of the blue, nor one you don't know, and ask her/him to recommend you to someone.

You should only ask an alumnus who knows you this kind of favour.

When you approach one do not blurt out, *"Could you recommend me to Mr. or Mrs. XYZ?"*

Tread softly and proceed in steps.

Put them at ease by saying: *"You may have reasons that prevent you from recommending me to this person. I can understand that but do you know anyone who might give me any information and/or help me?"*

8. WHEN SHOULD I MENTION TO AN ALUMNUS THAT I'M LOOKING FOR A JOB?

As a rule, it is a good thing to meet an alumnus for information, rather than for job hunting purposes.

If you happen to be in a "job hunting phase", adopt a low-key attitude and avoid any sort of hard selling.

Say something like, *"I have completed my validation phase for a job XYZ, and am now in the job hunting process. If you have any advice for me, I would very much appreciate it."* Say no more and see what happens.

Unless the alumnus has reasons to want your plans to fail, she/he will congratulate you and wish you good luck. This would mean that the meeting is over.

In other cases, the alumnus may start asking you questions and maybe offer her/his help. Accept any show of interest with a degree of reserve. She/he will certainly appreciate your discretion and be encouraged to help you. She/he will feel much more inspired to help someone who has good manners.



9. WHAT ROLE DO ALUMNI PLAY WHEN I AM DOING AN MBA?

The decision to pursue an MBA is usually based on the belief that the outcome will improve your professional situation and secure your future, since an MBA essentially implies:

- acquiring new techniques/methodologies,
- developing skills,
- using the Alumni network.

Actually, the order is not quite the same:

- The first outcome of an MBA is **developing skills**.
- The second outcome of an MBA is **getting to know Alumni** and **enriching your network**.
- The third outcome of an MBA is **acquiring new techniques and methodologies**. In most instances, you will use only 10% to 30% of the knowledge that you will acquire during your MBA. This is usually a high source of frustration.