



JOE HANDY A BIG FISH IN A BIG POND

**VICTOR CALLENDER TALKS TO JOE HANDY,
PRESIDENT & COO OF THE GEORGIA AQUARIUM**

Q. Can you tell me about your slightly unusual path to the Georgia Aquarium?

The shortest distance between points is a straight line. My path was a little less linear.

I started in this industry by working at the American Museum of Natural History in New York. Although I knew I wanted to help people, I wasn't yet sure how I would achieve this, so I decided to explore different areas of the Museum: education, visitors' services, exhibit security, call handling, and so on.

Interestingly, around this time, our primary benefactor, Bernie Marcus, wanted to give the city of Atlanta and the state of Georgia this wonderful gift, which we now refer to as the Georgia Aquarium. However, before doing so, Bernie wanted to gather more information, which meant visiting various global attractions. One of those attractions was the American Museum of Natural History and, naturally, Bernie had questions. Given that I'd spent time in pretty much every



department, the Museum decided I was probably the best person to speak to.

I later chatted to one of Bernie's team, not imagining what was to come, and was asked to be part of the Georgia Aquarium's opening team. So, although the Georgia Aquarium had not been on my radar, the fit could not have been better in terms of my desire to help people.

Q. As a New York native, you're used to giving and receiving exemplary customer service. How has this influenced your time at the Georgia Aquarium?

My time at the Museum taught me a lot about people. Whilst you cannot control the external factors that may have impacted someone's day prior to meeting you, you can control the experience they have when meeting you.

When I meet with my staff, and I meet with all of them, I remind them of this, and that people make a choice to spend time with us and visit our attraction. It's important we recognise and value that.

We also have to be focused on the experience that people leave with, and 'live' with. This is how we measure experiences. If you stay at a fantastic hotel and receive great customer service, you'll measure the next hotel by this experience.

Q. How has your EMBA guided your management of the Georgia Aquarium?

The EMBA at Kennesaw taught me to work on, rather than in, the business. Working this way, you're able to step away from the day-to-day and take a mile-high view in terms of what needs to be done and when.

Take repeat visitors as an illustration. Through good attendance we're able to build cash reserves and reinvest in, for example, a new signature animal, gallery, presentation or experience. These are the things we 'need to do' in order to keep people coming back. However, it's also a matter of 'when' these things are done.

As a new facility, bringing in high footfall is straightforward, but in three to five years being new isn't enough, so it's recognising this and making the necessary investment at the right time.

Q. Why did you choose the EMBA over the full-time or professional MBA?

There are a lot of high-quality programmes out there, but as I progressed in my career, I realised that what I really needed was that holistic approach offered by executive schooling; I wanted an overarching view of business tied to those all-important soft skills. Kennesaw's EMBA programme ticked those boxes.



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BIOGRAPHY

Joe Handy is the President & COO of the Georgia Aquarium.

Q. Why Kennesaw?

Atlanta is a very competitive market, and I considered a number of EMBA programmes, but Kennesaw's was a notch above.

The interaction you have with the business school, its staff and the professors is great. The curriculum's very rounded approach is also important, because you don't want there to be gaps in your knowledge. However, the emphasis they place on the human side of being an executive is what really sets the School apart.

Q. Can you talk about some of your instant takeaways from the programme?

For me it was teamwork and communication. The cohort structure of the EMBA programme highlights the importance of working with different people and groups in order to get the job done. As a leader you need everyone looking at the same goal, which is why the teamworking element of a cohort structure works so well.

The second of the takeaways, communication, has been crucial for me. I communicate with my teams and departments using their language, be it marketing, finance, or another aspect of business. Unless you speak the language of that particular area or department, there can be a discontent.

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Q. Can you point to gaps in your pre-EMBA skillset?

Pre-EMBA, I felt I knew things, but going through the programme I quickly realised that I still had a lot to learn.

If there was one skill that I needed to acquire and fine tune, it was an attentive ear. This was a skill I didn't have, pre-EMBA. It's not just hearing words and responding. Listening is understanding the motivation behind those words. Listening is not interrupting, letting someone complete their thought, and allowing things to happen organically. It's also about asking the right questions so that you're getting the information you need, but you can't do that without listening.

Kindly expand upon the learning environment and the support you received from Kennesaw on your EMBA journey.

Kennesaw's profiling of students on the programme allows them to create teams which are designed to excel. This in turn creates an open and honest environment in which you can share, and thrive. You also quickly recognise the skills your peers bring to the table, as is the case in business.

Throughout the programme, if there was ever a deadline I was struggling to make because of work pressures, or a topic I was finding heavy going, the professors were always on hand - they want everyone to succeed and recognise that you all start at different points with varying levels of experience and expertise.

Q. Can you talk about the quality of your cohort and how important they've been, post-EMBA?

You end up with a battle-hardened second family. It's like being in the military: You go through this process of being stripped back and then built back up with a group of people that are all going through the same thing, so they can empathise.

Going through the programme is a humbling process, because the weaknesses you're pinpointing and the areas you're working on are exposed to others. However, this makes you comfortable asking for help.

I still speak to many of my classmates to this day. If I need a different viewpoint or lens, they will happily give me an unbiased perspective, which is invaluable, because it allows me to look at a problem or challenge in a different way.

As you grow your network, you're also growing your pool of information. The great thing about your network is that they have skills you don't - they also know your strengths and weaknesses.

Q. How did the Kennesaw's EMBA programme tap into to your entrepreneurial qualities?

Working with, and for, Bernie Marcus planted that entrepreneurial seed and gave me a very solid foundation. So, going into the EMBA, the first floor of my entrepreneurial house looked very solid. However, going through the programme allowed me to furnish the different areas of that house.

Q. What tips would you give to potential students that are thinking about, or have enrolled in, Kennesaw's EMBA programme?

I think 'acceptance' and 'openness' are the operative words here. You have to be willing to do a self-audit and pay attention to that audit. There are going to be things that you learn about yourself that you didn't know, and you have to be willing to accept them and work on them. You also have to be willing to accept diversity of thought. You have to be willing to appreciate that the person sitting on your right or left may view something differently to you, and it may not be right and it may not be wrong, but it will be different.

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KENNESAW STATE UNIVERSITY'S EMBA

The facts and figures behind Kennesaw State University's Executive MBA Programme.

TIME EFFICIENT

■ The KSU EMBA is the only programme in metro Atlanta with a true weekend format



■ Classes meet, on average, one weekend in every month

■ Students are able to complete the programme in 19 months

TEAM-BASED SUCCESS

■ The programme is team-based in order to promote collaboration, decision-making, resourcefulness, ingenuity, and entrepreneurship.



■ Students complete a DISC® personality profile assessment before entering the programme and results are factored into the formation of teams.

GLOBALLY FOCUSED

■ The KSU EMBA is the only programme that offers an eight-month global teaming experience, which allows students to gain invaluable global business skills.



■ The global experience includes a 10-day international residency, programme-long virtual teaming with the largest EMBA programme in Europe, and a cultural immersion.

FACULTY

“As we enter our silver anniversary, I'm reminded of the many successful alumni that have passed through this programme over the past 25 years. For 15 of those years, I, personally, have witnessed the growth and development of our students into the leaders of tomorrow.

“Our EMBA Programme is uniquely designed to address the interpersonal needs of professionals and companies alike. Our teaming, coaching, and mentoring model works to create the next generation of global leaders while providing them with relevant and applicable material in the classroom that they can apply in their organisation immediately. Nothing brings me more satisfaction than hearing current students and alumni speak about the impact this programme has had on their personal lives and professional careers.”

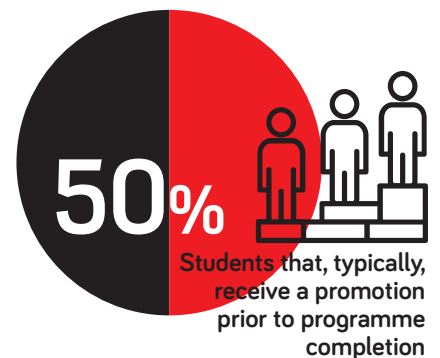
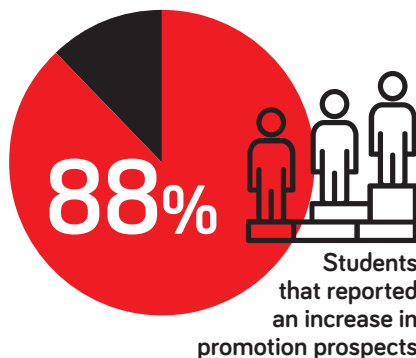
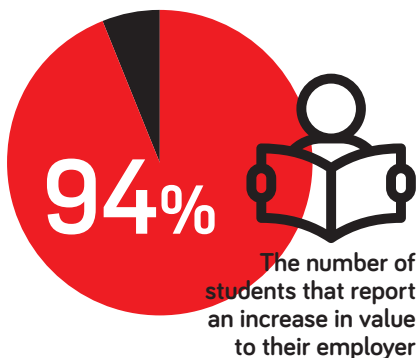
ALISON M. KEEFE
PH.D., EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
AND ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR OF ECONOMICS

ADMINISTRATION

“I am amazed at the growth of KSU since my days as an undergrad in the early 90s. I received my undergraduate degree from Kennesaw when it was a state college; my MBA reads ‘Kennesaw State University’. My deep ties in the community, history with KSU and research into the EMBA programme are what led me to this role. I certainly feel a sense of pride when I interview prospective students and they talk about the reputation and ranking of KSU being leading factors in considering the University for their Executive MBA.”

ALLAN BISHOP
DIRECTOR OF RECRUITMENT AND BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT

STUDENT STATISTICS



39
Years of age

9
Years of management experience

16
Years of work experience

50%
Non-business undergraduate majors

20%
Salary increase after graduation

*The figures indicated denote the average for each area listed.