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Office of University
Communications

July 20, 2017

Andy Polk '02 Advises Officers and Executives at Fortune 500 Companies

Andy Polk, GWU alumnus, talks with President Barack Obama and U.S. Representative Sue Myrick. Polk worked for Myrick from 2003 to 2011.

As senior vice president of America's largest footwear business and trade association, Andy Polk '02 educates and advises chief executive officers and executives at Fortune 500 companies. The job requires the ability to process information and determine the best course of action, a skill he learned as an undergraduate at Gardner-Webb University.

"In today's world where technology and innovation is changing how we live and work, and disrupting political and business models, critical thought is key to understanding change and how to not just survive it but succeed," Polk explained. "I have worked on projects and in roles I was never trained for, but the academic program from GWU provided me with the ability to tackle them, because my mind was trained to absorb information, process it and develop solutions. If you want to succeed in intense environments, or any environment, it is not enough to know something. You have to think critically and act swiftly. Gardner-Webb can give you a foundation to learn how to learn."

Andy Polk in an interview with former United States Trade Representative Michael Froman

One class that developed his critical-thinking skills was American Literature. "This class exposed me to intellectuals I still read today and enjoy, but it really taught me how to think more deeply and concisely communicate complex ideas," Polk affirmed. "This course is a major contribution to my success at being able to translate intricate policy points, every day under deadline, and clearly communicate them for public consumption."

Because GWU professors take time to get to know their students, they could advise him on choosing a major. Based on Polk's interest in history and his outgoing personality, one professor suggested political science and encouraged him to apply for an internship in the

U.S. Senate. “I fell in love with public service – the ability to affect positive change for millions of people,” Polk related. “Working on Capitol Hill just seemed like a higher calling – to serve people.”

After graduation, Polk worked as U.S. Representative Sue Myrick’s director of communications and public affairs. He developed and directed communications strategies and campaigns, organized press conferences, and wrote speeches and editorials. In 2008, he served as Myrick’s foreign policy and national security advisor, and in 2011, Polk was accepted to the London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE) and earned his master’s in international relations. He studied global economics, foreign policy, and social shifts occurring inside states and across borders. He focused more specifically on China’s domestic politics and foreign policy, and received a distinction for his dissertation on how China’s rise is changing the balance of power in the Persian Gulf.

Andy Polk with Adm. Mike Mullen, who served as chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff from 2007 to 2011 under Presidents George W. Bush and Barack Obama

He became vice president of the Footwear Distributors and Retailers of America in 2012. He oversees communications, marketing, reports, newsletters, events and assists with member services and outreach. “I identify business trends and challenges and develop solutions for companies from training programs to reports to technology platforms,” Polk elaborated. “I consult executives on how taxes, trade policy and regulations impact their business or how to adapt to current law. I also develop our advocacy strategy and lobby on Capitol Hill for footwear consumers.”