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Advice for MBAs Aspiring to Be Sustainability Leaders

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Across a number of sectors, cutting-edge business leaders are integrating sustainability throughout their companies. As organizations strive to balance profit growth with the needs of our planet, it's critical that they also invest in a pipeline of next-generation sustainability leaders who are capable of moving these advancements to new, unachieved levels.

MBAs are an important pool of talent for the workforce. Based on growing demand from companies, these students are increasingly looking towards sustainability-focused careers. To be competitive, they must possess the right combination of business savvy, hands-on experience and passion needed to grow company profits by leveraging sustainable strategies.

University coursework can help equip MBAs with the foundational business skills they need for a successful sustainability career. But it's even more critical that these future leaders gain useful real-world experience that prepares them for the innovative thinking and interpersonal effectiveness they'll need in order to thrive.

Companies are continually looking for fresh thinking. MBAs must be ready to leverage on-the-job experience and an outside-in perspective in order to analyze an organization's sustainability challenges, and develop innovative ideas for new products and processes that are aligned with the principles of sustainability. Real-world experience also enables MBAs to hone crucial interpersonal skills. Future sustainability leaders must be able to communicate a clear business case for change to a variety of internal stakeholders, ranging from technical scientists and commercial directors to marketers. It's only with strong internal "buy-in" that sustainability becomes ingrained in a company's culture.

One of the best ways for MBAs to gain practical sustainability experience is through internships. These programs expose students to the real sustainability challenges and opportunities today's organizations face. For example, [Dow's MBA Sustainability Leadership Internship Program](#) allows MBAs to learn about [Dow's](#) sustainability journey from the corporate, business unit, functional and geographic level.

The 12-week summer internship program provides MBAs with an opportunity to gain exposure to various real-world situations while supporting a diverse range of high-priority projects targeted at addressing sustainability opportunities. For example, students might create business models for sustainable solutions, or build frameworks to evaluate

opportunities for sustainable business growth. Other projects could include assessing trends in new market growth, or developing cost-and energy-saving measures that lead to operational efficiency.

Through these types of rigorous internship programs and other real-world experiences, MBAs see how the business and environmental curriculum they've studied can be applied in a way that meets demanding shareholder expectations. MBAs develop the know-how they'll need to successfully integrate sustainability throughout a company and its value chain.

As current business leaders continue to increase their focus on growing operations sustainably, it will take a strong pipeline of next-generation leaders to advance this investment in the 21st century.

MBAs with meaningful work experience, those who strive to understand the complex sustainability issues of today and the critical role businesses have in helping drive solutions, will catch the attention of employers and have an unprecedented opportunity to move global sustainable development forward.

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