

# Entrepreneurship with the Vice President of Development at Edgewood Holdings LLC

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MEMP Alumnus  
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**A** family-funded private equity firm, Edgewood Holdings LLC is special to

Matthew LaFiandra who is the Vice President of Development and a Duke MEMP Alumnus. It is special because all the employees must be accountable and flexible in the way they do business. The trade? Mining, ports, railroads, petrochemicals, and fertilizers.

“Could you tell us about your current work at Edgewood Holdings?” said Junwen, interviewing for CDAR.

“Sure thing. I’m tasked with diligence and development of industrial assets. I also do asset evaluations, construction contract negotiations, and construction management. Since much of the work we do is related to the international industrial commodity markets, an understanding of the global marketplace helps us target and secure oversea customers and partners.”

“How do you like this work?”

“Resource extraction and infrastructure happen where natural resources are located, which takes me to some pretty out of the way places. I like the opportunity to go places most people don’t and be part of building industries that provide long-term prosperity for the people living there. Plus I have the opportunity to travel. That’s always fun.”

“What do you value most at your company?”

“The access to opportunities, mentorship of my colleagues, and visceral connection to the health of the business. Sometimes working in a small company can be frustrating, but when you succeed, you succeed big.”

“Which skills do you apply the most at work?”

“Listening is my most applied skill, and I wouldn’t hesitate to say I should do more of it. I’d also say critical thinking, work ethic, intelligence in collecting intelligence, and people management.”

“Let’s talk about MEMP for a bit, if you don’t mind. Were there any courses that you found most useful?”

“Gladly. Management was very useful. It improved my soft skills and emotional intelligence, which, if you’ve yet to take the course, is something nearly everyone can benefit from improving. All of the MEMP courses give you the chance to work in teams with international students. I made two good friends from China, one who was born in Hong Kong and grew up in California and another who came from Beijing. My Duke experience working successfully with Asian teammates was very helpful when I began procuring machinery from China and working regularly with Asian mining and steel customers.”

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“Is there anything you think MEMP students may need to study more in-depth if they are working as entrepreneurs?”

“I would suggest contract law. It’s important to learn how to review and negotiate commercial contracts. You have to know how to navigate a commercial contract, negotiate the terms, relate them to the nuts and bolts of your business, and work with your lawyer to avoid pitfalls.”

“Good to know. I know you came into MEMP with five years of work experience. Did you find any differences between yourself and students who had come straight out of college?”

“Both types of students had something to offer, such as team building and various perspectives on cases. My job experiences equipped me with a deeper understanding of workplaces and responsibility, and the consequences of failure or mistakes. I think my work experience helped me build more productive and happier teams because I’d been working professionally in

teams for 5 years prior, sometimes with people I didn’t particularly like.”

“How do you think MEMP has helped transform you from an engineer to a businessman?”

“It made me think a lot more about how I present my self to the world. There was a casual to formal transition, in which appearances do matter. You have to be aware of how you look and act in business, and your professional behavior will is important to being perceived as credible. In a lot of respects, MEMP helped me polish off some of my rough edges.”

“Thank you, Matthew! I want to wish you and Edgewood Holdings lots of continued business. It’s great to hear the success of our alumni.” ■