EMBA program opened door for alum; now she’s paying it forward

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Ivy Barney (MBA ’11) helps lead Walmart, one of the world’s largest and most profitable retailers.

As senior vice president of operations at Walmart, Ivy Barney (MBA ’11) helps lead one of the world’s largest and most profitable retailers. With supervisory responsibilities extending from Georgia to Maine, she directs more than 800 stores on the East Coast, overseeing seven regional managers, more than 80 district managers and more than 800 store managers. Together, the stores Barney is responsible for employ more than 220,000 members of Walmart’s workforce.

Despite the enormous scope of her job, Barney is energized by the responsibility.

“The impact that I want to have is centered on ordinary people,” Barney says. “I want to help people be great and achieve more.”

Although she’s risen to the top of the world’s largest retailer, Barney did not begin her career at Walmart — or even in retail. Originally from Destrehan, Louisiana, Barney graduated with a degree in computer science from Hampton University in Virginia. Her first job was as a programmer at Accenture, where she worked on software integration for Fortune 500 clients in the telecom, media, entertainment and oil industries.

It was at Accenture that Barney honed the skills that would serve her later in her role at Walmart.

“I had to go in and learn a new business in a matter of a few weeks so that I could put together a solution that worked for the company,” Barney says. “Through my work, I built a knack for synthesizing large amounts of information very quickly.”

After 11 years with Accenture, Barney found herself more interested in the intersection of business and technology. She was ready for a change.

Enter the Freeman School.

After moving to New Orleans from Washington, D.C., she attended an information session for the Executive MBA program.

“I was sold right from the very beginning,” Barney says. “Learning business in a structured and formal setting was appealing to me.”

The quality of the cohort was another big draw. “Tulane does a great job of vetting candidates,” she says. “The EMBA program has very talented and ambitious classes. It’s people who want to grow their careers and grow their businesses.”

It’s also people who want to help others grow their careers, Barney learned. One of her classmates in the program was Tracy Rosser (MBA ’11), who at the time was senior vice president of store operations with Walmart. He told Barney he had an opening on his team and thought she’d be a good fit. There was just one catch.

“At that point, I had never worked in retail outside of a summer job in high school,” Barney says. “So I read this job description and I didn’t really know what it meant.”

It was the personal connection she’d established with Rosser in the EMBA program that ultimately convinced her to take the job. “I knew that I could trust Tracy,” she recalls, “and it became clear that Walmart would be a great fit for the next phase of my career.”

Just five months into the program, Barney made the leap and began a new career in field operations support at Walmart.

Today, it’s Barney who’s helping others advance their careers.

Her work requires a combination of strategic planning, day-to-day execution, logistical expertise and nurturing future talent.

Barney is responsible for overseeing big-picture operations for stores in the Eastern U.S., including managing profits and losses, making key decisions about real estate, short and long-term investments, and developing strategies to remain competitive as an omnichannel retailer offering products both online and in stores.

While she enjoys all the dimensions of her work, Barney says she is particularly passionate about helping others advance their careers.

“I love the opportunity to invest in people, and I want people to have a great experience at Walmart, whether they are with us for a season or want to have a career with us,” she says.

To support others on their professional journeys, Barney has been involved in a number of initiatives and associate community groups. She helped launch the Women in Supply Chain network at Walmart and previously served as chair of Walmart's Black and African American Associate Resource Group. For her, being a mentor and advocating for Walmart employees is a joy. "I think it's important for everyone to have an opportunity, and it's important for everyone to feel like they belong in the organization," Barney says.

At Walmart, Barney is dedicated to creating the same kind of opportunities she got in the EMBA program.

"Members of the cohort open doors for each other," Barney says. "I gained a network and friendships through my cohort. At Freeman, you get an education and an opportunity."