

**Hoang Vu**

**Class XXXIV**

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1. What has been ALF's impact on you? On the community? On organizations and people that you work with?

The American Leadership Forum had a profound impact on me, on a personal level. I'm Asian and grew up in a fairly reserved household. We discussed all manner of things like work, sports or books, but seldom discussed or demonstrated our feelings. When I was going through my American Leadership Forum class, I learned to share deeply with my classmates. We shared profound experiences where we opened up to each other and during that process, I learned I needed to do the same thing with my loved ones and family. Now I am much more open and affectionate with the people I love, and my relationships with them have deepened considerably as a result.

I also feel strongly that ALF makes a tremendous impact on the community. The founder of the American Leadership Forum had tremendous insight to imagine the potential of a diverse cross section of Houston's leaders forming long lasting bonds during a tremendous learning journey.

The American Leadership Forum is unlike any other leadership organization that I've been a part of. The experience involves so much commitment and sharing, and because of that you understand your classmates and what other Senior Fellows have gone through.

We can each become better people when we journey through the ALF experience together. We open doors for one another and support one another. I have solved problems much more easily, for myself or the community, as a result of my ALF experience. For example, I ask for help in donations, time and connections, reaching out to others for introductions and all of this makes me a more effective leader for the organizations that I serve.

The American Leadership Forum reaches out to people who are community oriented and lights a fire in them to do things for others. We learn about leadership techniques and understand issues that the community is facing. This experience creates a stronger desire to help the community. I want to spend more of my time in deeper or more meaningful roles because of ALF. It builds that kind of spirit in community leaders.

2. Why were you interested in serving on the ALF board?

When you are on the selection committee you get to see the pool of candidates for ALF, which is extraordinary and humbling. There are so many leaders with such high levels of success who want to go through the program. It is great to serve in this capacity and to be able to see the future of Houston as the pool of candidates comes in. The least I can do to repay what the organization has given me is to give my time to help further the mission.

3. Are there any ALF lessons/techniques that you apply in your daily life/professional/community life?

I'm a corporate finance lawyer and believe that keeping an open mind is central to working on business transactions, because the client's number one goal is to get deals done. But what I realize now is that prior to my ALF experience, I was not nearly as open-minded as I thought. Until you regularly practice dialogue and listening and opening up, you aren't truly open minded. The ALF practices helped me to understand how deeply I need to listen. I also learned how much I needed to communicate more, not only what I think but what I feel. Now I use these learning techniques not only in my legal practice, but in my personal life. When I negotiate deals, I think more about what is motivating the other side, in order to try to reach a win-win situation. I understand that their concerns are just as valid as mine. Putting myself in others shoes makes me a better lawyer and person.

4. What value does your American Leadership Forum membership provide to you?

I think that the membership is priceless. Before joining I asked a number of my friends whether I should commit to this journey since it was such a big time commitment. Every single one of them said, "It is a no brainer. You have to do it." I will never forget sitting in an audience at Shell Oil and a senior executive began speaking and basically said that one of the single most important contributions to the success of her career was her ALF journey. That kind of reaction is what you get from Senior Fellows-- how deeply the journey affected them. I understand myself better now. I take the time to think about what I want and need. Can I be better or do better? And I'm closer to the ones that I love and my family. I have better relationships with them. I even let others understand me better.

You can't quantify the value of an ALF membership. We all know that we cannot succeed in life without people helping you or opening doors for you. Creating social, business and community connections leverages ideas to solve problems. Many of us don't feel comfortable reaching out to business or social acquaintances, but I feel significantly different about reaching out to the ALF network. I feel an instant interest in helping my classmates. I believe that everyone who has gone through the American Leadership Forum has a secret bond as Senior Fellows. Through our shared experiences, we've created a tie where relationships can be leveraged, and that is truly unique about the American Leadership Forum.

For example, though I was president of the Harvard Club of Houston before my American Leadership Forum journey, I drew myself deeper into the organization and took more specific actions to build it faster after my ALF experience. I realized that I needed to fuel my passion for education. I helped create the H2H initiative, which sends teachers and administrators from the Houston area to Harvard over the summer, to help them gain insights, ideas and innovations in education and bring them back to Houston in order to improve the quality of education back here in Houston. ALF made me want to help the community more — and I can now accelerate that goal because of my ALF experience and through the ALF network.