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**CORDEL FAULK:** Hi, I'm Cordel Faulk, assistant dean and chief admissions officer at the University of Virginia School of Law. In this episode of *Law Schooled*, we talk to Lou Alvarez, Jr., the president and chief executive officer of the Law School Foundation.

Lou tells me and admissions director Ashley Merritt about his risky gambit as a prospective law student. After not hearing back, he made a last minute attempt to talk to the dean of admissions, Al Turnbull at the time, into securing him a seat. We'll hear how that went and more.

Well, Lou, thank you so very much for joining us today. You live in a part of the law school that a lot of current students are surprised when they find out there is a third floor.

**LUIS ALVAREZ:** Yeah.

**CORDEL FAULK:** And then once they graduate, they spend a lot of time thinking about the third floor. [LAUGHS]

**LUIS ALVAREZ:** They do.

**CORDEL FAULK:** So let's just start with introducing you to our folks. Who is Lou Alvarez?

**LUIS ALVAREZ:** So I am the president and CEO of the Law School Foundation. And I happen to be a graduate of the law school.

**CORDEL FAULK:** '87?

**LUIS ALVAREZ:** 1988.

**CORDEL FAULK:** '88.

**LUIS ALVAREZ:** And you and I talk about that a lot, Cordel because I think it matters a lot to the health of the institution to have people who have had the experience be the stewards and the representatives of it. And one of the things, which you and I have also discussed a lot, is a distinguishing feature of the law school is that the people who are responsible for the daily life of the students in the building are people who care deeply about the institution.

And they're also very grateful to you, as the dean of admissions, for curating classes of

students who are opting in to a particular culture, who themselves, well, lived what we lived when we were students, and then in their postgraduate lives are going to be alumni who care about the institution, pay it forward, and hopefully, when they get to be my age, can care about a generation of students that will come in behind them.

So the Law School Foundation, I'm proud to say, is trusted with responsibilities to the law school that are complementary to the academic management of the institution. So everything that is not academic management, I like to think, we were either directly responsible for or an extra pair of hands in ensuring that it's done well, so fundraising, alumni relations, gift accounting, our contributions to external communications, capital campaigns, the financial accounting of all private funds that are held for the benefit of the law school.

And then you can imagine that we try to hold ourselves responsible for making good use of the dean's time. She has a lot of responsibilities inside the building. She is clearly the CEO of the faculty. And she is clearly the head, both in fact and, what I'd call, spiritually, of the entire institution.

And the Law School Foundation and its staff-- and there are about 26 or 27 of us-- love serving the dean. We love serving this dean. And we've loved serving all of her predecessors. I think one of the great blessings of the University of Virginia Law School has been that the line of deans going back decades--

**CORDEL FAULK:** Decades, yeah.

**LUIS ALVAREZ:** --has absolutely been superb. And I don't think that there is a law school faculty in this country that you could canvass, and ask that question, where the University of Virginia Law School would not be one of the top three or four schools they would identify as having flourished under superb leadership, and have kept the place strong in its identity, strong in its values, and a place that has a very unique hold on, what I'd call, the public mind, and the federal judiciary, and the practicing bar, and in the general public, where our alumni, obviously, also go serve in government and in the public interest positions, everywhere from Robert Mueller as the special counsel to former White House counsels to the current secretary of Homeland Security to mayors of cities around the country and governors of states from Maine to other places.

So when people think of a UVA graduate, one thing that I think is nice is that no matter what industry, or business, or part of the country you happen to either live in or work in, you tend to

see the same type of profile on display from people who have come through the law school and hold our degree, which is a high IQ and high EQ.

And the social intelligence part of that combination has tended to commend them to be great team players and then, in their moments, great leaders. And so their ability to work together with others, their ability to listen, and then their ability to distill the issues that matter, and then, where appropriate or where asked, they always wind up being the leaders as well.

And we're very, what I'd call, overrepresented in ways that prove that. We have had, for almost all of my 20 years at the Law School Foundation, been number one or two in the number of alumni who were managing partners or chairs of America's leading law firms. We've always been number one or number two in the number of our alumni who are general counsel of Fortune 500 companies.

You'll always see us in very visible positions of political leadership in the country at every level - community, state, local, and federal. And that's not an accident. It's not an accident. We have a very clear brand. And that brand has been durable.

And I think between the good work that you do in admissions and the work I try to do with the caring and feeding of those people as they enter the building and then leave the building, we try to remind them of all those sort of things that made them admits in the first place, and then, hopefully, students when they choose us, and then happy alumni for the rest of their lives.

**CORDEL FAULK:** Absolutely. Well, Lou, like you said, you are from the class of 1988. So you made the decision to come to be UVA Law. So I'm going to ask you two questions. Who was f Alvarez leading up to that, and then why did Lou Alvarez make that decision in 1988.

**LUIS ALVAREZ:** So that's a-- so we're sitting here after I just celebrated my 30th class reunion last May. And the coincidence of you asking me that question is a lot of us when we were together in Charlottesville for our 30th reunion were telling stories about how we all chose UVA back in--

**CORDEL FAULK:** I find those stories fascinating.

**LUIS ALVAREZ:** They are. Well, it would have been 1985. So in my particular case, I had come to the University of Virginia for college. And for me, that was a life-changing experience. My parents are from Spain, which explains my name. And so I was an immigrant's child.

And I was first generation college-going because one had graduated high school, but the other

had not finished high school. And when they were in this country, obviously, back then and still today, the immigrant's dream is, hey, your children are going to have a better life than you did. And for me, the University of Virginia represented that opportunity.

I grew up in Tampa, Florida, which then was not a large city. It was a small town. In many ways, it was influenced by a Latino community of Hispanics of Cuban origin and Spanish origin and Italians as well.

And so a couple of things were true. The opportunity to go get a great education anywhere it was on offer was appealing. And then the second was being able to go almost 1,000 miles away from home had its own developmental attractiveness. Because if you were going to become your own person, being able to do it in a place where you were clearly going to be away, independent, and on your own was the way to do it.

And so I came to Charlottesville. And I thought I had a tremendous high school experience, which I did, at a Jesuit high school in Tampa, Florida. And that was followed by what I thought were the best four years of my life at the University of Virginia undergraduate. And I had such a positive experience in Charlottesville and at the university that when it came time in my fourth year, as they called them at UVA undergraduate, a senior, to apply to law school--

**CORDEL FAULK:** Why law school?

**LUIS ALVAREZ:** So law school, for me, was interesting for a number of reasons. I spent most of my time in the classroom in the humanities as an undergraduate. And even then, without having, what I would call, a more studied opinion of it, I could tell that I was a believer in a liberal arts education. And to me, a liberal arts education really does do a couple of things.

The first is it exposes you to the kinds of thought, over human history, the struggles with a lot of issues that are cultural, societal, civilizational, how peoples rise and fall, how they develop and advance and progress, how they organize themselves well or poorly in political systems. And at the end of the day, what you're trying to do is develop the kind of education and knowledge that will make you a better issue spotter and problem solver when you encounter the same things in your own life in the small chapter you'll have on this Earth, right?

So I think what I've just described points directly to why law matters and why law school is a wonderful path to, ultimately, hopefully, have a career or a life around those issues. So law school was very attractive to me for that reason. It's also true that my mother, when my

parents came to the United States, was bilingual and ended up working for a very small law firm in Tampa, Florida that ended up becoming a very large law firm called Holland & Knight, which is one of the largest firms in the country.

**CORDEL FAULK:** I didn't realize she was there when it was a small firm.

**LUIS ALVAREZ:** She was there when it was three lawyers.

**CORDEL FAULK:** Oh, I had no idea.

**LUIS ALVAREZ:** And today, it's over 1,000 lawyers.

**CORDEL FAULK:** I had no idea.

**LUIS ALVAREZ:** --in foreign countries and oversea.

**CORDEL FAULK:** Wow.

**LUIS ALVAREZ:** So all of the leading lawyers at that firm, as you can imagine, back then, it was just a Florida-based firm. And so, obviously, without making comment about other law schools, but they largely would have been lawyers from Florida schools. But all the top lawyers in the firm and the leaders of the firm, which ended up also being true of other law firms, of which I was aware, in Florida, were usually only from three truly elite national schools. And one of them was Virginia.

And because my mother was such a veteran senior employee as a legal secretary for 45 years to one of the named partners in the firm that merged, she was beloved by lawyers. And when they found out that I was interested in law school, they almost all said to her to tell me, you got to make sure he applies to Virginia. If he gets in, he goes.

So you have a person my age, now, reflecting on all of that input from 35, or whatever, years ago. But that was why law, and that was why law school. And so the last chapter of the story, to answer your question, is you had a predecessor named Al Turnbull, who was a member of the law school class of 1962, not something I knew when I was 21 years old and in my last year at the University of Virginia as an undergraduate, but which I came over the years to know and appreciate.

And Al, apparently, had a practice where he would hold every decision in the admissions process until, like, April 1, some date. And there was no such thing, as we're familiar with

today, of rolling admissions back then. Things were, obviously, much less systematized. And you did it however you did it. And Al's particular practice was he'd wait until April 1.

So I had heard from a couple of other places. And I'd heard from Columbia, which is the place that would have been Virginia's nearest rival. And as wonderful a school as that is, I really wanted to go to Virginia.

And I was starting to get nervous because I was thinking, I don't know when I'm going to hear. And I don't want to go to the place that has accepted me. I want to hear from UVA. And now, I'm getting nervous because it's taking so long, because I don't think I really understood this hold everything until April 1.

I remember being-- I remember living on Main Grounds at the time and having this moment where I thought, I wonder if it's not too late for me to try to put in a good word for myself as we get close to what must be a date by which they're going to send letters. So back then, it was landlines. There was no such thing as cell phones.

And I had a phone in my room. And I picked up the phone. And back then the University of Virginia would publish a directory of every student, faculty member, and administrator at the University. I know that this is almost impossible to imagine today.

**CORDEL FAULK:** Not for me because we did the same thing, right.

**LUIS ALVAREZ:** It was, basically, a white and yellow pages of the University of Virginia. And it wasn't particularly thick. And I went through it. And I looked at-- and I think it might have also been-- there might have been an alpha section by name. And there might have also been a section that was by school, or something.

So I remember looking there. And it would say admissions. And I think it just said admissions in the law school section. And I called that number. And so I didn't know who I was talking to. But somebody picks up on the other end of the line.

I identified myself. And I said, look, I'm calling because I'm wondering if I can talk to somebody. I've heard from this other school. And it's getting late in the year. And I really want to go to University of Virginia for law school.

And I'd love it if I had a chance to make my case right before you make a decision because it's taking a while. And I'm beginning to wonder if the process isn't bending my way. And the

person on the other end of the line says-- honest to God-- what are you doing now?

[LAUGHTER]

And I said, now? Now, I'm not doing anything. And he says, well, neither am I. Why don't you come up to the law school, and we'll talk. And I said, with whom am I speaking? And he says, this is Dean Al Turnbull.

[LAUGHTER]

[INTERPOSING VOICES]

**CORDEL FAULK:** Your heart heat must have sank.

**LUIS ALVAREZ:** And I thought to myself, oh, my God. I can't believe this. And so I remember saying, I'll be right there. I'll be there within some period of time, whenever.

**CORDEL FAULK:** That's right. This is the moment.

**LUIS ALVAREZ:** And like I said, I was on Main Grounds. And I remember cleaning up, and then, I think, walking out from behind the lawn, and picking up a university bus. And I was at the law school, probably, within an hour, certainly within an hour. It could have even been 30 minutes, for all I remember.

And I remember it was the afternoon. I won't forget that. And back then the law school grounds was different than it is today. The bus would go right up where we now have our version of a lawn in front of the law school.

**CORDEL FAULK:** It looked like a bus station.

**LUIS ALVAREZ:** It really did.

**CORDEL FAULK:** It looked like a bus station.

**LUIS ALVAREZ:** You'd come in, and there was this red brick plaza that was between, what are now, the two wings of the law school connected by a hall. But back then, they were distinct standalone buildings. And you would get off. And you're in this little motor drive, a turnaround for the buses. And you walked into what is today--

**CORDEL FAULK:** Withers-Brown.

**LUIS ALVAREZ:** --Withers-Brown. And I went and found Dean Turnbull. And we sat down, and we talked for a while. And so anyway, so there I am. I'm with Dean Turnbull on that afternoon. We had just been on the phone earlier. I do the talking. He doesn't identify himself until I tell him why I'm calling. He says, come up. So here I am.

And so I make the same pitch in person. And he says, I went back and looked at your file. And he says, I've enjoyed our time together. And he says, I hold all decisions until, I think he said, April 1. For some reason, I remember April 1.

**CORDEL FAULK:** That makes sense.

**LUIS ALVAREZ:** And I remember this being very late in March. Like, this had to be the 25th, 26th. It was late in the month. And he says, if you can be patient until then, I think you'll like what you hear.

**CORDEL FAULK:** How did you feel?

**LUIS ALVAREZ:** And it was great. And it was-- because it was also one of those moments where he was so-- we all know Al, right?

**CORDEL FAULK:** Right, yes.

**LUIS ALVAREZ:** Because Al--

**CORDEL FAULK:** Yeah, he's still in the building.

**LUIS ALVAREZ:** He's such a good person. And he comes and visits. And he's just a remarkable human being. And he carries himself with so much dignity and grace. So the way he expressed that, obviously, preserved the integrity of his schedule and process, right? But it, obviously, sort of signaled a decision.

And so I felt great. And I thanked him without saying anything more that would then undo the wonderful formulation by which he had communicated this information to me. And I just felt great. I mean, I remember just walking out of the building sort of levitating, like, on air, back to the bus stop, and feeling great about it.

And I do remember going home and calling my-- going back to my room and calling my parents. I do remember that, saying, I don't want to read too much into this. But I think it's all going to work out. I think it's all going to work out. And it did work out.



**CORDEL FAULK:** It did work out.

**LUIS ALVAREZ:** And it did work out. I stayed at the University of Virginia. Yeah, so the best four years of my life were followed by the best three years of my life.

**CORDEL FAULK:** I remember the exact date. It was March 21, 1998. I remember the exact date. I went down. And I got the mail. And I cried. So we interview now, and sometimes we tell them at the end of the interview.

And sometimes people start crying, and they apologize. And I tell them, no, I did the same thing. I cried. They were more composed than me because I fell down. I fell down. I couldn't stand anymore.

**LUIS ALVAREZ:** Well, I think people-- I think people get more invested in the University of Virginia the more they experience it. So the one thing where I'm very sensitive to it could be young people applying to law school making a decision, or it could be others who are just trying to interact with great academic institutions for other reasons.

But I had had the advantage, obviously, of some inputs from the law with my mother working at a firm where there were lawyers who were great exemplars of professionalism, expertise, leadership, and service. And then I had the benefit of having been at the University of Virginia for four years.

So I could experience the effect of the physical environs, the values that are on display in the way students behave toward each other, the way faculty talks to people. And so I think you and I have observed the same thing over the years with the admitted students open house. When kids come, and they're holding offers from Harvard, or Chicago, or Michigan, or Georgetown, or wherever--

**CORDEL FAULK:** [INAUDIBLE]

**LUIS ALVAREZ:** They come. And we are either an affirmation of a predisposition they already hold when they come to admitted students open house, and the deal is sealed. Or if they really were on the fence, and didn't know, and may even been leaning in a different direction, all of a sudden, they come out with a really hard decision because they know that there's something different and special about the University of Virginia Law School.

And you can feel it. You can feel it. And you can detect it in the way that faculty come prepared to class, in the way me and my office and my wonderful colleagues treat everybody in the building, and then, my God, treat every alum all the way up to Mort Caplin at age 103, from the class of 1940, with whom we have regular contact, and who came and visited us for the solar eclipse last year,

**CORDEL FAULK:** Which was first day of orientation.

**LUIS ALVAREZ:** Right. I mean, what other reason can there be for a 103-year-old man to come back to the law school, unless he loves this place.

**CORDEL FAULK:** He got a standing ovation as he walked in the building.

**LUIS ALVAREZ:** Absolutely. That's right, by the first year class.

**CORDEL FAULK:** Yeah, they did.

**LUIS ALVAREZ:** They were stunned that he was there, right? Yeah. So the place is special.

**CORDEL FAULK:** So you have 30 years of experience now, after having made that decision, 33 years, after making the decision. How do you think about-- how do you think about having made that decision the way that you did? And what advice would you have for the folks who are listening to this now who are trying to make a decision about where to go to law school?

**LUIS ALVAREZ:** That's a really good question. So I would look at it probably along two dimensions. The first would be satisfy yourself that you're at a great law school by reputation and by academic quality. And obviously, if you've been admitted to the University of Virginia, you can check that box, but even better, if you have other options where the same can be said of at least one or more of those options. All credit to you because you've put yourself in exactly the place you want to be.

And so number one is satisfy yourself of that, right? Don't just get comfortable about the fact that you've heard about UVA. You know that it's a top 10 school. You know that it's at the top of [INAUDIBLE] tables, and that you've heard of it, that it's been recommended to you. Go do your own research and satisfy yourself of that.

**CORDEL FAULK:** That's so right.

**LUIS ALVAREZ:** And I think by the time that you go through a faculty directory where you see who the dean is

and her biography, and who all of these leading scholars are and their backgrounds, and then hear and learn that UVA is a teaching institution where the faculty all must teach-- they don't go hide in centers and institutes where the University of Virginia Law School gets to claim them as faculty members, but students never see them, learn from them, become research assistants for them, can lean on them for recommendations for federal judicial clerkships or jobs.

All right. Where you actually see the quality of the place, and understand that the entire experience is geared toward the three year JD experience, and it's you, right? Check that box, but satisfy yourself. I just told you that. But you should go satisfy yourself.

**CORDEL FAULK:** I always tell people, don't substitute somebody else's research for your own in this situation.

**LUIS ALVAREZ:** Exactly. Exactly.

**CORDEL FAULK:** You have to make the decision that's right for you. And walking in the front door, and talking to people in that building, or talking to folks who've been in that building, nothing substitutes for that. And nothing substitutes for you doing it yourself.

**LUIS ALVAREZ:** Right. Right. So the second consideration, the other consideration which I think matters more, and more. And we were talking about it over lunch, just before we started this conversation, was about outcomes-- what your life will be like when you leave the law school, and at graduation, and maybe in, what I'd call, the first decade of your life, and then thereafter. And so I think that our outcomes, honestly, are almost unequaled.

I mentioned, what I would call, some bragging points for alumni visibility and representation in the highest levels of government, and the practicing bar, and business, et cetera. But more generally, our placement rates with America's leading law firms--

**CORDEL FAULK:** Judges.

**LUIS ALVAREZ:** --our placement rates in federal judicial clerkships, our representation placing Supreme Court clerks with the highest court in the land, our placement rates in the Solicitor General's Office with the Department of Justice are just extraordinary. I think people know, at this point, that an elite law degree is also the credential to have.

I think without saying anything that is too judgmental about other professional courses of study, the fact of the matter is that we live in a very sophisticated world, as a matter of

business, as a matter of policy, as a matter of finance, and as a matter-- as a result of all of that, law.

And the people who are able to unpack every issue in a professional, sophisticated, knowledge-based world tend to be lawyers. And they tend to be the lawyers from places like UVA. And so I think people know that the people who come to recruit and want UVA students are not just law firms. They're McKinsey. And they're Booz Allen. And they're--

**CORDEL FAULK:** The State Department.

**LUIS ALVAREZ:** --the State Department. And they're Wall Street banks. And so the outcomes that are provable because everything has to be measured. And the data has to be collected. And we have to publish it. So you can find it for yourself on a website, our website.

And you just put it side by side with any of our peer schools. I would say, we're equal or better to all of them. And I would argue, better. And the only reason I now mention that as the other dimension along which to make a decision about where one might go-- besides the first, which is satisfy yourself that we are as great academically as you believe and know us-- as we say we are and you believe us to be. Satisfied-- that's done.

But then, at that point, you're making a decision about what the rest of your life might look like. And here's the thing, I mean, I'm in the business of connecting dots. I'm in the business of trying to make sure our alumni stay connected, and that doors open for people, and that I keep opening those doors for every alum.

And one of the things that's true is there are almost no accidents, just events of good fortune that follow from going to this law school. So you go to this law school, and you're going to begin in a good place. And if you begin in a good place at graduation, it's going to be followed, almost always, by more good things happening to you.

And so the fact that we absolutely nail, crush, and own great results and outcomes, starting with your summers and your immediate post-graduation plans, means that I think we have contributed to what will be a great sequence of things that will happen to you from the day you graduate until, hopefully, your 50th reunion and beyond. And I see it, right?

I mean, I see it. I see our people. I make my living on the phone, writing email, in meetings, and, largely, on airplanes flying all over the place to see our grads. And the bottom line is they have wonderful, happy lives. And it's nice for us to be able to say that we've contributed to

that.

**CORDEL FAULK:** It makes it easier for us to recruit folks when we know the folks who've had outcomes for the past 50 years.

**LUIS ALVAREZ:** Exactly.

**CORDEL FAULK:** And we know that's what they're heading into. And we can feel good and sleep well at night knowing that these people are going to lead things--

**LUIS ALVAREZ:** Absolutely. Absolutely.

**CORDEL FAULK:** --and have those opportunities.

**LUIS ALVAREZ:** Absolutely. And it's an honor to serve. It really is.

**CORDEL FAULK:** Indeed. Indeed. Well, Lou, thank you. Thank you for joining us today.

**LUIS ALVAREZ:** Thanks.

**CORDEL FAULK:** And we'll see you guys in the next session.

[MUSIC PLAYING]