**Chapter I**

**Application Essay Examples**

INTRODUCTION

This appendix contains 115 actual essays written, by 17 different applicants, for leading MBA programs. They address dozens of different essay topics. The applicants and their essays have been selected to give you the widest possible range of materials from which to profit.

The first four applicants all applied to the University of Chicago. They were chosen by Chicago’s admissions director, Don Martin, according to my desire that they be from four very different people and of average quality for those admitted. In other words, these essays will show you exactly what you are competing against. They are of perfectly acceptable quality, but they should not discourage you. If you follow the lessons of this book you should be able to surpass each of these efforts.

The second set of three applicants—Melissa, Doreen, and Carol—is taken from Columbia University’s files. Columbia’s admissions director, Linda Meehan, was asked to supply several applications, again from people of widely differing backgrounds, but this time of superior quality. I think that this group’s applications are of a somewhat higher average standard than the Chicago applications, true to my request, but I do not think that any of them should prove daunting to readers of this book.

The remaining applicants feature a high proportion of candidates whom Education U.S.A. helped apply. This is not true for all of them, but what *is* true is that all of their applications are of a high standard. They have been chosen because they offer good models for learning in addition to representing the widest possible range of backgrounds and future goals. Thus here you will find everything from an American commercial photographer to a Cameroonian electrical engineering consultant. The range of applicants, however, extends beyond questions of their job and university backgrounds. Approximately half of the applicants are women, the other half men. A slight majority of the applicants are American, but the others come from a range of countries. (My company operates in Europe as well as the United States and does not just pay lip service to the notion of globalization.) The schools they applied to include over a dozen leading American and half-dozen European schools.

You won’t read page by page through this whole, lengthy section. The charts on the following pages are meant to facilitate your picking and choosing whatever is of greatest interest to you. For example, if you are coming from a traditional “feeder” firm or industry, such as management consulting or engineering, and want to see how

others distinguished themselves, you can profit from the essays of more than half a dozen applicants. If you had a weak college record, examine the essays of Jon, Terry, and Doreen. If you want to see examples from minority applicants, look at Isabella (Hispanic), Melissa (African-American), or Albert (African). If you are from a public sector background, look at the applications of George, Debra, and Albert. If, on the other hand, you are from an artistic field, try Terry’s. This does not exhaust the possibilities; whatever your circumstances, you are likely to find one or more applicants who were similarly situated.

To get the most out of this section, do three things:

* Read the best examples below—these of Roxane, Terry, Jon, Anne, and Joerg—to see how professionally someone can market him- or herself. These are textbook examples of good applications.
* Refer back to the discussion in Chapter 8 of overall marketing principles and the Chapter 9 analysis of specific essay topics you will need to address.
* Then look at the efforts of the people who most resemble you in terms of their backgrounds, critical issues they needed to address, and schools they were applying to.

Of course, you should not try to copy what these applicants have done. Instead, adopt the attitude of an admissions director and ask yourself just what worked and what failed for each applicant, and then ask what lessons there are for you.

(One last note: Some of the applicants wanted their full names used whereas others wanted only their first names used, or even wanted their identities lightly disguised by using a different first name or by eliminating the names of their bosses or companies. Thus there is no uniform policy followed here, except that of honoring the wishes of the applicants.)

**OVERVIEW OF THE APPLICANTS AND THEIR ESSAYS**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| APPLICANT | JOB |  | EDUCATION | SCHOOLS | SPECIAL ISSUES | | |  |
|  |  |  |  |  |  | | | |
| George | Municipal | government | BA, Social Sciences | Chicago | Switch from public to private | | | |
|  | employee |  |  |  | sector |  |  |  |
|  |  | |  |  |  | | |  |
| Isabella | Insurance executive | | BA, Hotel Management | Chicago | Analytical firepower | | |  |
|  |  | |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Robert | Corporate banker | | BA, Economics | Chicago | How | to | distinguish | himself |
|  |  |  |  |  | from applicant pool | | |  |
|  |  | |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Judy | Consultant (technology) | | BA, Mathematics | Chicago | ,How | to | distinguish | herself |
|  |  |  |  |  | from applicant pool | | |  |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Melissa | Strategy consultant | | |  | BA, Liberal Arts | |  |  | Columbia | How to distinguish herself from | | |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  | applicant pool | |  |
|  |  |  |  |  |  | |  |  |  |  | |  |
| Doreen | Journalist |  |  |  | (Almost a BA) | |  |  | Columbia | Quantitative abilities | |  |
|  |  |  | |  |  | |  |  |  |  | |  |
| Carol | Account | executive | | for | BA, Literature | |  |  | Columbia | Quantitative abilities | |  |
|  | garment | manufacturer; | | |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
|  | formerly | department store | | |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
|  | buyer |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |  |  | | | |  |  | | |
| Roxane, | Chemical |  |  |  | BS, Chemical Engineering | | | | Wharton | How to distinguish herself from | | |
|  | engineer | ,short-term | | |  |  |  |  | UCLA, | applicant pool | |  |
|  | planning | analyst | for | oil |  |  |  |  | Harvard, |  |  |  |
|  | company |  |  |  |  |  |  |  | Stanford, |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  | Tuck, Darden |  |  |  |
|  |  | |  |  |  | |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Roger | Entrepreneur | |  |  | BA, Economics | |  |  | Wharton, | NA |  |  |
| (German) |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  | Chicago, |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  | Michigan |  |  |  |
|  |  | |  |  |  | | |  |  |  | | |
| Sylvie | Accountant | |  |  | BBA, Accounting | | |  | Stanford, | How to distinguish herself from | | |
| (French) |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  | Babson | applicant pool | |  |
|  |  |  | | |  |  |  | |  |  | |  |
| Albert | Electrical | engineering | | | BS, | MS, PhD, | Electrical | | Columbia, | Low GMAT score | |  |
| (Cameroonian) | consultant | |  |  | Engineering | |  |  | Kellogg, |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  | Yale, MIT |  |  |  |
|  |  | |  | |  | | | |  |  | | |
| Joerg; | PhD internship | | retailing | | BS, MS, PhD, Mechanical | | | | Harvard, | Never worked full- time. | | |
|  | consultant | |  |  | Engineering | |  |  | Kellogg | Perpetual | student? | English |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  | abilities |  |  |
|  |  | | | |  |  |  | |  |  | | |
| Teny | Commercial photographer | | | | BA, | German | Literature | | Rotterdam, | Quantitative abfflities Mediocre | | |
|  |  |  |  |  | BFA (Photography) | | |  | INSEAD | grades |  |  |
|  |  | | |  |  | |  | |  |  |  |  |
| Jon | Shipping executive | | |  | In-house | | company | | London, | Lack of | proper | bachelor’s |
| (Danish) |  |  |  |  | education | |  |  | INSEAD | degree |  |  |
|  |  |  | | |  |  | | |  |  | |  |
| Philippe | Mergers | & acquisitions | | | BS | & MS, engineering | | | INSEAD | Too many degrees? | |  |
| (French) | analyst; |  | formerly | | MS, TechnoIo’ & Policy | | | |  |  |  |  |
|  | engineering | | project | |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
|  | manager |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
|  |  | | |  |  |  | |  |  |  |  |  |
| Debra (Dutch) | College administration | | |  | BA, | Education | | MA, | IESE | Quantitative | abilities | Business |
|  |  |  |  |  | Communications | |  |  | Nijenrode | orientation |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |

Anne (French) Airport manager BBA INSEAD NA

**THE ESSAY QUESTIONS, TOPIC BY TOPIC**

Career plans/why an MBA, why this school, etc. ( By all persons )

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Work experience（*Debra Anne*） |  |  |  |
| Walk in another’s shoes for a day (*George* | *Isabella* | *Robert* | *Judy Debra Anne* ) |
| What other career you’d consider (*George* | *Isabella* | *Robert* | *Judy)* |

Substantial accomplishments (*Melissa Doreen, Albert Joerg Teriy Jon Philippe Debra Anne)*

Most valued accomplishments outside work (*Joerg)*

Personal failure (*Melissa Doreen, Roxane Albert Teriy Jon Philippe Debra Anne)*

Multi-experienced school body (*Debra)*

Contribute to school’s diversity (*Melissa Doreen Carol Roxane)*

Challenged traditional thought of a group (*Roxane Roger*) World’s greatest problem (*Roxane Roger)*

Leisure/nonprofessional activities (*Roxane Roger, Albert Joerg Teriy, Debra)*

Strengths and weaknesses ( Roxane, Terry, Philippe, Debra Anne) Leadership (Roxane, Albert Debra)

Why an international program (Roxane, )

Show you’ll succeed academically (Roxane, Joerg) Challenging professional project (Roxane, Joerg) Representative job (Roxane, Joerg)

Ethical dilemma (Roxane, Joerg , Debra ) How to teach ethics ( Sylvie)

Contribution to your community (Roxane, Joerg )

People/events that influenced you (Roxane, Sylvie )

Exceptional manager/person (Roxane, Debra)

Biggest risk/obstacle ( Roger )

Whom to invite for dinner/conversation ( Sylvie, Jon )

Response to cross-cultural situation ( Albert, Debra, Anne )

How to effect organizational change ( albert, Debra, Anne )

Major trends in your industry (Jon)

Main factors accounting for your development ( Philippe, Anne)

Alternative means to ensure your development ( Philippe, Anne)

Why you studied what you did at university ( Debra )

In 40 years, what will reviews of your autobiography say ( Joerg )

Optional essay ( Philippe )

**---UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO ---**

**FOUR APPLICANTS’ ESSAYS**

**GEORGE**

*Background Data:*

**Job:** Advisor to municipal government regarding urban economic development

**Education:** Social science major, with multiple honors and awards, at a gooduniversity

**Nationality:** American

*Critical issues to address:*

The biggest problems for someone trying to move out of the public sector are to show that he understands what the private sector is all about, has the skills and the mindset to make the switch, and will fit well in an MBA program.

**1. Why are you seeking an MBA from the University of Chicago Graduate School of Business and what are your plans and goals after you receive your degree?**

My interest in pursuing a Masters in Business Administration began at the end of my public policy and administration studies, when I became intrigued by the role of government in promoting inner-city economic development. In addition to taking two courses at the Stern School of Business, I worked on a capstone project in which I analyzed economic development policies and programs in city X and conducted a case study of the MetroTech development in neighborhood Y.

After securing a position with agency Z, a key promoter of the MetroTech project, I began to work professionally on economic development projects designed to promote private investment and job creation in neighborhood Y. In this position, I learned the importance of business development to city X’s diverse communities; businesses not only provided the jobs that allowed people to provide for themselves and their families, but also generated the wealth from which the city government draws taxes to support services and programs for the truly needy. In my position with neighborhood Y’s Borough President, I had the opportunity to promote the borough’s businesses by performing a detailed study of the garment industry and advising the Borough President on the city’s commercial and industrial policy.

Although in this position I served as a facilitator of business growth and job creation, I wanted to be directly involved in managing companies and making investment decisions. I began to investigate business schools in the hope of identifying a program that provided in-depth exposure to the analytical tools and concepts needed to operate a successful business.

I became interested in the University of Chicago’s Graduate School of Business (GSB) because of its reputation for providing a rigorous intellectual experience in which its students gain a solid foundation in business concepts and develop the analytical skills to apply them. Moreover, its focus on leadership, international education, curriculum flexibility, and job placement further convinced me of the compatibility of my skills, experience, and interests with the GSB program.

I am particularly impressed by the Leadership Exploration and Development Program, which highlights the GSB’s serious concern for the development of leadership skills in its students. Through my experience in city X’s politics, I learned the importance of strong and visionary leadership. Therefore, I look forward to the opportunity to participate in a LEAD program in which students not only discuss and analyze issues, but also practice leadership skills in seminars and workshops sponsored by corporate leaders. Because the GSB empowers its students by allowing them to plan, direct, and evaluate this required part of the curriculum, I also hope to develop team-building and leadership skills by serving as a LEAD facilitator.

I appreciate the GSB’s respect for its students as further demonstrated by its flexible curriculum which would allow me to tailor the program to meet my needs and interests. With a limited number of required courses and the ability to take courses in

other parts of the university, the GSB offers me more academic freedom than any other business school program I have considered. Moreover, the GSB would permit me to replace some of the required courses with higher level courses if I have mastered the material in other courses. Because of course work taken toward my Masters in Public Administration, including courses in statistics and finance at the Stern School of Business, the GSB’s interest in having its students build upon their academic and professional background is especially important to me.

I am also impressed by the GSB’s commitment to providing an international business education. With over 20 percent of the full-time students from outside the United States, I believe that the curriculum’s focus on the globalization of business will be enhanced by the experiences and cultural backgrounds of my peers. In addition, the GSB’s International Business Exchange Program (IBEP) will provide me with the opportunity to return to Vienna, Austria, where I lived and worked during my undergraduate abroad experience. Studying at the Wirtschaftsuniversität Wien will allow me to further my capacity with the German language and to build upon my prior professional work experience in Austria.

Since business school will require the commitment of substantial time and resources, the Office of Career Services’ proven ability to generate professional opportunities for GSB’s students is critical to me. By providing its students with access to the world’s most prominent and successful companies, the GSB has assisted its students to achieve the third highest return on their educational investment of any business school. The success of GSB’s students in making the transition from business school to challenging and lucrative positions is enhanced by an intense interviewing schedule that will expose me to a wide range of prospective employers.

After developing analytical, quantitative, and leadership skills, as well as an enhanced international business perspective, at the GSB, I intend to return to city X. With the strength of the GSB’s reputation as the leading business school program in financial management, I believe I could obtain a position in the financial services industry. A position in municipal finance would be a natural career progression considering my background as an analyst of the borough Z budget, but I would also pursue opportunities with investment banks. I believe that a position with an investment bank would expose me to a large number of companies and industries, as well as allow me to apply an international investment perspective. Also, a large firm would provide the opportunity to learn about the structuring of sophisticated financial transactions and allow me to move into a managerial position as my skills and experience grew. This investment banking experience, coupled with the financial management skills developed at the GSB, would prepare me for a career as a venture capitalist.

**2 If you could walk in someone else’s shoes for a day, whose would you choose and why?**

If I could walk in anyone’s shoes for a day, I would choose those of Robert Kerrey, Senator of Nebraska, on the day that the Senate voted on President Clinton’s 1993 federal budget proposal. Since the Senate was split largely along party lines, Senator Kerrey’s vote would decide the fate of the most significant piece of legislation in President Clinton’s first year in office.

I would like to walk in Senator Kerrey’s shoes because I admire his determination to give thoughtful consideration to the budget’s long-term effect on the nation’s welfare at a time when he was under considerable pressure to make a politically expedient decision. Unlike most of his colleagues, Senator Kerrey had not based his support for the President’s budget proposal solely on his party affiliation. Instead, he spent several days before the vote weighing political considerations against the strength of his belief that the President’s budget did not reduce federal spending and the government’s deficit fast enough.

Furthermore, I would choose to walk in Senator Kerrey’s shoes on this particular day because I believe that people achieve self-awareness and growth through experiences that challenge their ethics and intellect. In this case, Senator Kerrey, a successful businessman and thoughtful politician, was forced to choose between the nation’s future prosperity and the success of his own party’s president.

**3. If you could pursue any occupation regardless of education, training, special talent, or monetary barrier, what would it be and why?**

If I could select any occupation without regard to limitations or barriers, I would choose to be a venture capitalist specializing in inner-city investments. I believe that in this occupation I could assist these communities to achieve self-sufficiency through economic development and generate a good return on my investments. I believe this economic development is most often achieved when private investors, motivated by profit, identify those potentially profitable companies with a comparative advantage derived from their inner-city location. Government could promote this private investment by reducing the capital gains tax on income derived from inner-city businesses. This tax benefit would overcome the real and imagined risks associated with inner-city investments.

In addition to giving inner-city companies access to a source of capital normally denied them, as venture capitalist I would provide consulting services to assist inner-city managers to most effectively capitalize on their competitive advantages of strategic location and proximity to markets. The City X garment industry, for example, has one important competitive advantage over producers in low-wage countries: their location allows them to respond to a production order from Manhattan designers or retailers in a number of days instead of months. Without the information processing technologies with which to implement “just-in-time” production, however, the managers of many City X garment firms fail to benefit from this competitive advantage.

By improving the performance of inner-city business through these financing and management services, I would increase the profitability of my investments. These returns would demonstrate to other venture capitalists that profits can be obtained through active investment and involvement in inner-city companies. Once the venture capital community recognized the potential profitability of inner-city investments, a new source of growth capital would become available to these companies.

These potentially profitable companies represent the inner-city’s most promising opportunity to provide long-term employment at a reasonable wage for its residents. With the financial independence derived from this employment, inner-city residents could provide food, housing, and health care for themselves and their families.

ISABELLA

*Background Data:*

**Job:** Insurance executive (risk management) for four years

**Education:** Hotel management degree, with numerous scholarships and awards

**Nationality:** American (Hispanic)

*Critical issue to address:*

A hotel management degree leaves open the possibility that she lacks the analytical firepower for a program like Chicago’s.

**1. Why are you seeking an MBA from the University of Chicago Graduate School of Business and what are your plans and goals after you receive your degree?**

Upon graduation in 1990, I eagerly sought employment opportunities in the hotel industry. The weak economy, coupled with the lack of quality of career opportunities in the hospitality industry in 1990, encouraged me to reassess the direction of my future career. After completing a detailed job search, I was offered an opportunity at Corporation X as an account executive intern in the commercial insurance brokerage industry. Accordingly, I adapted quickly to the dynamic and competitive nature of the brokerage world by focusing on the service skills that I learned during my undergraduate studies.

During my first year of employment at Corporation X, I developed a unique, comprehensive foundation in the property and casualty insurance brokerage industry. I was involved in client presentations, risk-financing projects, account renewals, marketing exercises, proposal preparation, numerous seminars, and document translation from English to Spanish and vice versa. Overall, my technical knowledge of the industry was developed through both a classroom setting and general

application. Upon completion of the account executive training program, I was offered a position as an account representative in 1991 and I was promoted to senior account representative in 1993.

During September 1994, Corporation Y invited me to interview with their senior management. At the time I was not seeking to change jobs. I had recently acquired a new property and casualty insurance account and was involved in several challenging risk management projects. Employment at Corporation Y, however, presented an invaluable opportunity for continued professional development. As a result, I joined their risk management department as an account executive during October 1994.

My contributions to Corporation Y were recognized by my colleagues during October 1995; with much pride, I received the prestigious Q.*U.E.S.T. for the Best* Award (Q. = Quality Work, U. = Unique Ideas, E. = Expertise, S = Service to Clients, T. = Teamwork). Only nine out of four hundred employees receive the award annually.

During my employment at Corporation Y, I have acquired substantive knowledge pertaining to the design and implementation of complex, sophisticated property and casualty insurance programs for Fortune 500 companies. As an account executive, I have more accountability compared to what I had in my previous position at Corporation X. In addition, due to my past experience in the management of hospitality industry accounts, I have been designated as a Hospitality Industry Specialist in order to concentrate on various segments of the hospitality industry, including hotels, casinos, athletic clubs, country clubs, restaurants, and racing facilities.

The insurance industry is competitive, challenging and fast-paced; as a result, upon completion of an MBA I plan to enter a different segment of the industry. I plan to synthesize my hotel administration degree and experience, along with my insurance background, by obtaining a position as a risk manager for an international hotel company. Within five years of serving as a risk manager, I will seek an appointment as Director of Risk Management and Insurance Services. An MBA from the University of Chicago will accelerate my professional development and facilitate the realization of my ambitions.

As a risk manager, I will have the responsibility of formulating cost-effective insurance programs including actuarial funding mechanisms such as self-insurance, paid loss retro programs, captives, and other cash flow techniques used to pay for losses including both damages to property and bodily injury to employees or third parties. These insurance or self funding programs cost millions of dollars a year. As a result, cost containment activities are a major priority. Therefore, I will also have the added challenge of motivating management to implement aggressive loss control systems that will decrease work-related injuries. Cooperation and team effort will determine the success of this endeavor. By developing a safer work environment, employees will be more productive and render higher quality service.

The hotel industry has recovered from a recession; consequently, occupancy rates and competition have increased substantially in the domestic and international hotel market. The insurance industry regularly shifts from a “soft market” that offers inexpensive property and casualty premiums to a “hard market” that, conversely, promotes expensive premiums. These two issues, coupled with the ongoing changes in the global economy, require a risk manager to develop a flexible, innovative, and proactive managerial style.

Participation in the University of Chicago’s MBA curriculum will sharpen my leadership and managerial capabilities. Another factor, which I deem essential, consists of the University of Chicago’s prominent global perspective. Participation in the International Business Exchange Program at the Instituto de Estudios Superiores de la Empresa (IESE), Barcelona, Spain, and collaboration with students from diverse countries will afford an unparalleled exposure to cultural diversity and develop substantive knowledge as to the globalization of business.

Ultimately, if provided with the opportunity, participation in the University of Chicago’s MBA program will refine my technical know-how and managerial capabilities and afford an invaluable opportunity for personal and professional development.

**2. If you could walk in someone else’s shoes for a day, whose would you choqe and why?**

If I could walk in someone else’s shoes for a day, I would choose to walk in my mother’s shiny leather loafers. My mother has strolled and jumped through various challenges in her life. She has confronted obstacles with energetic optimism and contagious humor. Her vision, fortitude, and creativity have always guided her self-assured steps and ambition.

It takes an incredibly courageous individual to decide to pack up his or her belongings and immigrate to another country during her early thirties. My mother saw unparalleled professional and educational opportunities for her children in the United States. With sincere faith and confidence, she guided my father in the transition from life in Colombia, South America, to life in the United States.

It is through the application of creative endeavors that an individual develops and nurtures his or her willingness to see life from a different perspective. My mother has continually promoted cultural awareness and experimentation. Her accomplishments as an actress in Colombia and New York City reflect her creative convictions. By attending her rehearsals and performances I was consistently exposed to a myriad of personalities and I experienced innumerable episodes of humor, drama, and creativity.

Vigor, dedication, and resilience are pivotal components of my mother’s character. For these reasons, I would welcome the opportunity to spend a day in her shoes.

**3. If you could pursue any occupation regardless of education, training, special talent, or monetary barrier, what would It be and why?**

Without doubt, I would savor a career as a fashion designer in the event that education, training, special talent, or monetary barriers were nonexistent. Apparel design has been a creative outlet that I have developed through the completion of several design courses and projects. After submitting a detailed proposal and portfolio, I was awarded a grant from the Cornell University council of the Creative and Performing Arts. During my fourth year of undergraduate study, I produced a fashion show promoting my collection entitled “The Latin Style.” Vibrant colors, exceptional fabrics, and sensual shapes came together and celebrated the romantic evening. This enterprise proved to be a rewarding and valuable learning experience.

A fashion designer must be energetic, creative, self-confident, flexible, and resilient. Designers must cater to specific markets and satisfy the needs of those segments. The delivery of new lines of apparel is fast-paced, competitive, and invigorating. A designer must be in the forefront of the industry and deliver innovative creations that will entice buyers, journalists, and photographers. Ultimately, the customer, through his purchase decisions, determines the apparel designer’s success. Nonetheless, I believe that true satisfaction is derived from the ability to help a client feel important, powerful, and elegant.

**ROBERT**

*Background:*

**Job:** Five years of experience in corporate banking, with several promotions

**Education:** Economics major at Duke University

**Nationality:** American

*Critical issue to address:*

The only real problem is to distinguish himself from the large number of applicants from the same field, either by showing that he is truly a standout in this field or by showing that he is more well-rounded than others, or both.

**1. Why are you seeking an MBA from the University of Chicago Graduate School of Business, and what are your plans and goals after you receive your degree?**

Open the 1986 yearbook for Acme High School and under my senior picture you will see “future goals: doctor in radiology.” At the time this made perfect sense. Ironically, a strong pre-med program was a major factor in my choosing Duke ahead of other

undergraduate schools (which seemed to have stronger business programs). Yet, by my second year in college, I suspected that my true interests were not in the medical sciences. To confirm these suspicions, I applied for an internship program in a hospital. Here I discovered medicine was not for me.

During that sophomore summer, some mental regrouping led me to aspirations in the field of business. An initial fascination with the stock market, corporate news stories, economics, and my parents’ businesses evolved into my current position as a derivatives trader/marketer. To continue to follow these interests, I believe now is the time to make a calculated move—attaining an MBA. An MBA at Chicago’s Graduate School of Business will be instrumental in achieving my long term goals.

Following two years at the GSB I plan to join a capital markets unit with a dominant international presence. Employers with little understanding of global finance may wonder about my leaving my current career path in one capital markets group, only to join another later. But I believe that this is where I can most efficiently learn about expanding businesses into international markets. Ideally, immediately following graduate school I will be placed overseas, which should also open exciting avenues for my wife, who has a PhD in mechanical engineering. The combination of this added work experience and a GSB education will give me the practical knowledge for my long- term professional goal.

Long term, five to ten years after achieving an MBA, I intend to hop the banker/customer fence. Throughout my career I have admired the key managers responsible for their company’s financial progress. As an advisor, I enjoy making financial suggestions that may influence a corporate manager’s business strategy. My goal is to be in a position similar to these key managers.

As a manager, I hope to work within the finance group of a middle market manufacturer. While global trade becomes increasingly necessary for corporate prosperity, my skills would be desired by domestic corporations seeking expansion. My objective is to plan an essential role in assisting a company into foreign markets through acquisitions and strategic capital expenditures.

On a personal basis, long term goals include my wife, family, and community. I will remain actively involved in the community by continuing my association with Junior Achievement and Habitat for Humanity, coaching youth soccer, and perhaps working for the public service commission.

The Graduate School of Business is a critical component of this entire plan, both professionally and personally. Among the very best in business programs, the GSB is unique in that it concentrates on *all* the areas needed by a highly competitive financial manager on the international scene a decade from now. An MBA at Chicago will sharpen my finance and general management skills. While these skills have blossomed with six years of work, Duke University’s liberal arts format did not provide the specific foundation I now desire. In addition, and perhaps more

importantly, a Chicago MBA will teach me how to think like a manager and recognize what questions to ask.

As an undergraduate economics major, I admired that the overwhelming majority of my research was based on publications by University of Chicago faculty. Today, in addition to superior faculty, I am drawn to the GSB’s team-oriented approach of LEAD, an international emphasis, and a diverse student body. The GSB’s urban setting in one of the world’s financial capitals is obviously a tremendous asset, not only from an academic perspective, but from a cultural perspective as well. I am anxious to choose from a large selection of electives in a curriculum that focuses on innovation. The combination of one of the broadest alumni networks and one of the strongest corporate recruiting programs worldwide is also vital to me.

In return, I believe that I can give fellow Chicago students a sampling of my experiences, possibly helping them to attain their goals as the GSB makes it possible for me to attain mine.

**2. If you could walk in someone else’s shoes for a day, whose would you choose and why?**

“Houston, we have a problem…” On board the Apollo 13, a crew of three scrambles to discern the cause, and effect, of a dramatic explosion. A gas is spewing from the side of the craft, and the oxygen gauge’s needle begins to descend. It is April 12, 1970, and I am Jim Lovell, commander of the Apollo 13, about to face the ultimate test in crisis management.

I have chosen to wear Lovell’s shoes for a day, partly for the excitement of flying in a spacecraft and for satisfying a childhood fascination—being an astronaut en route to the moon. However, my primary attraction to Lovell’s position lies in understanding how he managed to overcome such an extraordinary set of circumstances. Clearly, Lovell was challenged by events for which he could never have trained. Coherent analysis and life-dependent decisions came from instinct and gut reaction.

Throughout that fateful period as Apollo 13 lost much of its vital oxygen and electrical reserves, the commander remained calm. Not only did he direct a frightened crew in close quarters while barreling into outer space, but he also managed a staff of hundreds on earth at mission control. Placed in the cockpit of the spacecraft, I wonder how I would respond while a series of mishaps occurred around me. Would I be able to innovate to effectively control others in a remote location and drive them toward a common goal? Would I be able to abandon a lifelong ambition of walking on the moon when it was just within arm’s reach?

Lovell responded instantly to the changes dealt to him and put his own aspirations aside. I hope that, put in the same situation, I would react in a similar manner: recognize the big picture while paying attention to necessary details. A seasoned

manager, Lovell quickly changed course and refocused. “Gentlemen, what are your intentions? I’d like to go home.”

**3. If you could pursue any occupation regardless of education, training, special talent, or monetary barrier, what would it be and why?**

Anxiety swelled as two armed policemen escorted me through a metal detector into the city school. It was my first day as a teacher in the Junior Achievement program called Project Business. Introducing myself to the group of inquiring faces, I wondered whether these students would relate to me despite our cultural differences. Would they care? I did not realize at the time that the next two school years with JA would have such a profound influence on my life. If I were to pursue any occupation regardless of training, special talents, or other prohibitive factors, it would certainly be in a similar teaching capacity.

An evening news broadcast introduced me to Junior Achievement (“JA”). I volunteered to be placed at South Atlanta High School, where I would teach basic business principles to a ninth grade class. Initially, I volunteered because I had remembered the inspiration of coaching a youth soccer team in Winston-Salem, North Carolina; I thought JA would be similar. JA has given me new respect for those who can motivate, enforce self-discipline, and instill curiosity in others.

My passion for volunteer teaching in the community has carried over into the workplace. On a professional level, I relish the opportunity to speak before colleagues and customers. Explaining the complexities of derivative instruments has been a teaching challenge. In an effort to increase referrals, I have traveled throughout the corporate lending network of Sunmist Banks to conduct seminars on hedging. Likewise, as “derivatives” and “risk” have become synonymous to our client base, I have aggressively educated CFOs of concerned corporations (and their boards) in an attempt to combat a media-created frenzy.

Ultimately, my teaching efforts are rewarded, whether I am distributing JA diplomas to students or watching a customer finally understand a hedging product. Teaching others has taught me the importance of integrity and a good sense of humor.

**JUDY**

*Background Data:*

**Job:** Two to three years of experience in consulting (use of technology)

**Education:** Mathematics major at Yale

**Nationality:** American

*Critical issue to address:*

As a consultant, she needs to distinguish herself from the large number of candidates with a similar background.

**1. Why are you seeking an MBA from the University of Chicago Graduate School of Business, and what are your plans and goals after you receive your degree?**

The managers of today and tomorrow need to understand the importance of keeping up with technology in order to remain competitive. Taking the recent popularity of large-scale mergers in the telecommunications industry as an example, we are seeing more and more companies striving toward more complete service offerings and massive geographic coverage. While bigger and better implies more efficient, it often means more complicated. It also means more work for the small competitor. Managers on all levels will need resources to provide information and tools for acquiring and using information. The technology that provides these resources is constantly being improved, but even the most advanced technology is useless unless it can be successfully applied. This is the greatest challenge that future managers will face. Successful management of technical change requires careful planning, to ensure a consensus among management, the developers, and the “front line” users of the new technology.

The process of technological change has always interested me. I have watched it, learned about it, and wondered about it throughout my employment. Even in high school, as the manager and statistician of a basketball team, I helped to computerize the analysis of player statistics. During college, I wrote batch files and manuals to help the business office of a magazine make better use of their computer resources. In my current position, I have participated in small-scale application development projects, I hope to continue in this direction and build a career in the management of technological change.

The implementation of change requires more than a background in technology. Those employees who stand to benefit the most from a new business process are likely to be unconvinced of the extent to which their work will improve. They may be afraid of computers, concerned about their job security, or unwilling to invest the resources for training. Managers trying to implement any type of change must motivate the people who are affected to support the change and guarantee its success. They must acknowledge the connection between the technology itself and the human resource that supports it. Change often requires a capital investment. Managers may not know how to determine the value of the investment and the expected impact on the bottom line. Yet even small companies will need to update the way to help them make that happen. Such people must have a background in all management issues, including the management of human resources, marketing, and financial management.

I need to build such a foundation in management issues. I have always had ideas for change, but I have rarely had the authority, resources, or knowledge to implement change. I want to learn techniques for designing systems that address the user’s needs, solve technological problems, and optimize the bottom line. I need to learn approaches to training and other human resource issues. I seek a deeper understanding of financial management and marketing. Over the next years, I will address these needs by earning an MBA and working in strategic consulting. I will improve my quantitative and technological skills, and I will develop an understanding of the non-technical aspects of management. Ultimately I plan to have a leadership position in a consulting firm or to manage my own firm.

The Graduate School of Business at the University of Chicago is well equipped to prepare me for my future. The program provides a solid basis in general management, yet it allows for a concentration in a particular sphere. The course offerings in the areas of strategic management and information technology are relevant to the growth and survival of the modern company. The faculty includes some of the top minds in each field. The School attracts an intelligent and motivated student body, consisting of people who share my interests, such as technology management and small business consulting. The team-building focus, which starts as early as orientation, fosters the type of environment in which I will excel. I am certain that I will both gain a great deal from my fellow students and contribute to their experiences at the GSB. In today’s executive marketplace, there is no shortage of MBAs. In order to distinguish oneself and launch a successful career, one needs the appropriate credentials. I seek a degree in management from the Graduate School of Business because the GSB is uniquely qualified to provide the background that is required in order to manage technology.

**2. If you could walk in someone else’s shoes for a day, whose would you choose and why?**

“There is a thing passing in the sky; some thick clouds surround it; the uninitiated sees nothing.” *(Hani gve lewe ma negele ya nja gbili kaango kpowa ee to.)* Mende proverb, translated in Sylvia Ardy Boone, *Radiance from the Waters: Ideals of* *Feminine Beauty in Mende Art.* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986).

Sylvia Ardy Boone did not look like a typical Yale professor. Most people saw a quiet, heavyset woman who dressed in head-wraps and untailored clothes. To me, she was beautiful, successful, and admirable, clad in the graceful and flowing fabrics of the African people she studied. The above proverb, which she taught me, aptly describes her existence. Few members of the Yale community saw past the thick clouds surrounding this magnificent woman.

Boone’s award-winning dissertation covered the expression of ideals of feminine beauty through art. Her subjects, the Mende of Sierra Leone, place a high value on secrecy and privacy. Researchers are not welcome among them. Yet Boone was

dedicated enough to earn the trust of the Mende. She lived with them for extended periods of time, learning their language, culture, and art.

I met Professor Boone through an art history course. I knew very little about African cultures and the African-American experience, so I expected to be at a disadvantage. Happily, I was wrong. Professor Boone was one of the most caring and approachable professors I came across in college. She encouraged me to draw on my own experiences to understand the material and develop my own insights. I admired this introverted woman, who had the courage and commitment to live amidst a closed community.

Sylvia Boone died in her sleep about a year later. I learned from her obituary that she was the first African-American woman to be granted tenure at Yale. My respect for her increased, and I regretted the missed opportunity to learn more from her and about her. I would love to spend a day as this mysterious woman, this “thing” that passed in the sky.

**3. If you could pursue any occupation regardless of education, training, special talent, or monetary barrier, what would It be and why?**

If I could be anything, I would be a dancer.

Dance is a fundamental part of human existence. It exists in every culture, as ritual, as a rite of mating, as entertainment. Regardless of the reason for dance, it is always art. Dance simultaneously interprets and is interpreted. Whether accompanied by song, instrument, or silence, dance is constructed of movements that are born out of sound, emotion, and spirituality. These movements, a sculpture in motion, in turn inspire the watcher, invoke thoughts and feelings, perhaps summon the rain.

Dancing is control and freedom, tradition and breaking from the past, taught yet ultimately found in the soul. When I dance, I am aware of every movement. I am conscious of moving the air around me as I float or cut through it. The floor beneath my bare feet, acting as my canvas, allows me to resist the forces of gravity and almost fly. Every stretch and contraction is calculated, yet each breath releases tension. While I study positions and techniques, I move beyond them to express that which defies words.

When I dance, I can see inside myself. I find my limits, and I exceed them. I find my burdens, and I set them aside. I attend to my joints, one by one, learning how they function. I seek strength, and it flows from deep within. And when I dance, I connect with others. We fuse together into an organism, a harmonious sharing and building of space. Each person may create a unique path through space, or all limbs may move with synchronous precision. The feeling of belonging cannot be broken.

If I could be anything, I would be a dancer.

COMMENTS

1. Remember that these essays represent a cross section of the essays that succeeded at a leading program. In other words, all of these essays were written by people who ultimately attended Chicago. Each applicant has done some things relatively well and other things relatively poorly. These essays have been included more to give you a. realistic sense of the quality that typical (successful) applicants are turning out than to encourage you to mimic their efforts.
2. *George* has done a marvelous job, in his first essay, demonstrating that heunderstands Chicago’s program very well. He is quite convincing in showing how it will be helpful to him. This is particularly useful for someone like him who needs to convince the school that he will not be a liability insofar as he has not been in the private sector. This first essay shows that he is very aware of what he can get from an MBA, thereby suggesting that he would fit comfortably in the program and making his desires for the future all the more credible. His second essay reinforces his political background, but may not do much more for him. On the other hand, his third essay allows him to show in concrete form what he envisions for his future. He does so in an unusual fashion because most people answer this essay in terms of their desire to be a deep sea diver, painter, or president, whereas he dreams of doing what he is going to business school for.
3. *Isabella* has written a good first essay: it shows her to have been very successful todate despite having had to take a job in a field rather distant from the one for which she had prepared at university. Her discussion of insurance reveals an analytical approach to the industry and to her career, thereby addressing the most serious potential concern likely to be voiced about her candidacy. Her second essay reveals her mother as an interesting and praiseworthy woman, and reinforces the fact that Isabella is a second-generation Hispanic. I am not sure that it does much more for Isabella, however, other than showing her to be a grateful daughter. Her third essay, similarly, does not advance her case dramatically, although it does sketch in some more about her interests and personality, thereby making one potential use of this question.
4. *Robert* has the problem of someone applying to MBA programs from a typical“feeder” field—how to distinguish himself from the many other applicants with similar backgrounds. He makes a good start in the first essay by engaging the reader’s interest immediately. He shows how he ended up in business rather than medicine, which makes for good reading. In addition, he writes fluidly and well. His second essay, rather than humanizing him in a way that other applicants attempt for themselves, emphasizes his managerial interests. I am not convinced that a banker needs to persuade admissions officers that he is focused on business. He might have done better by taking more of a risk and showing more of himself. His last essay is on a good topic—teaching, especially of the underprivileged—and he does a good job of tying his alternative job to his actual one, On the other hand, he did not fully tie in

how integrity and a sense of humor are integral parts of teaching. In other words, his conclusion seems to be tacked on as an afterthought.

5. *Judy,* with her educational background and work experience, has no particular issues she needs to address, other than the need to distinguish herself from the applicant pool. Her essays help her do this by showing her to be very well-rounded. Despite being a mathematics major, emphasizing her love of anthropology suggests that she is anything but a mere number-cruncher. The biggest drawback to her essays is that she discusses very little concerning her job and what she does well professionally. It is not clear from any of these essays what she actually does or what major successes she has had. She has thus missed an opportunity to impress the admissions committee with information about her career to date.

**-- COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY –**

**THREE APPLICANTS’ ESSAYS**

**MELISSA PETERSON**

*Background:*

**Job:** Strategy consultant

**Education:** Liberal arts degree from a leading school

**Nationality:** American (African-American)

*Critical issues to address:*

As a consultant, she needs to distinguish herself from the large number of candidates with a similar background.

**1. What are your career goals? How will an MBA help you achieve these goals? Why are you applying to Columbia Business School?**

As a Business Analyst in the Strategic Services Practice of Andersen Consulting, I developed a passion for the variety, challenge, and intellectual stimulation that a career in management consulting affords. I enjoyed studying the management and operations of client companies, analyzing and formulating solutions to complex business questions, presenting findings, and managing client teams. In fact, everything about management consulting seemed perfect. However, something was missing. The constant travel and long workdays were forcing me to neglect my first love: community service.

I have always been conscious of the fact that my personal success was made possible through the efforts of those who came before me. Without the sacrifices of people like Thurgood Marshall and Susan Brownell Anthony, the opportunities that I have today would be far less numerous. As such, I feel a moral obligation to assist those less fortunate than I, and to ameliorate the world in some small way for coming generations. To date, I have fulfilled this obligation through noncommittal volunteer work. In the future, I will fulfill the obligation by embarking on a career that will allow me to utilize my consulting skills to serve the community.

My short-term career goal is to serve as a business consultant to a nongovernmental organization in a developing country or as a business consultant to a nonprofit agency in the United States. This will allow me to further hone my management skills while serving the community. Also, it will prepare me to realize my long-term goal of starting a business in an area of high unemployment. The most effective form of community service helps others to help themselves. By creating jobs, I would help people to become self-sufficient and to support their families.

A Columbia Business School MBA would provide me with an internationally focused management education, which would better prepare me to plan and act strategically and to predict and manage change as a consultant and as an entrepreneur. Studying entrepreneurial management and assisting minority entrepreneurs with their business issues would provide me with a theoretical and practical entrepreneurial education. In brief, a Columbia Business School MBA would help me to achieve my career goals by helping me to develop the skills that are necessary to succeed in today’s global economy.

**2. In reviewing the last five years, describe the one or two accomplishments of which you are most proud.**

The two recent accomplishments of which I am most proud are related to my position as a Rotary Ambassador to Zimbabwe. The first started with a dream. For as long as I can remember, my fondest dream was of visiting Africa. Much as the adopted child who loves and cherishes her adoptive family, but still wonders who her biological parents are, I am a patriotic African-American who dreamt of sojourning in the land of my forefathers. So deep and strong was my desire to set foot on African shores that, in 1993, I dedicated myself to the fulfillment of the dream until I could visualize the sun rising above the veld, smell and taste the air after an ephemeral rain, and hear the wind thrusting through the leaves of the Baobab trees. I spent hours researching scholarships that would sponsor my trip to the continent and days completing scholarship applications and preparing for scholarship interviews. Hence, when I was awarded a 1994—1995 Rotary Ambassadorial Scholarship to Zimbabwe, a long-awaited dream born of diligence and desire had come true.

The second accomplishment of which I am quite proud was realized through my service as a Rotary Ambassador of Goodwill. Although I am not quite sure of when

my fear of public speaking developed, my first efforts to combat the fear were made at the Bronx High School of Science when I enrolled in a forensics class and joined the debate team for a year. These steps were the beginning of a long and difficult battle to vanquish my fear of public speaking and to become an effective and persuasive orator. Throughout college I continued the struggle by actively taking on positions of leadership (such as the presidency of Onyx Senior Honor Society and the vice-presidency of the Bi-Cultural Inter-Greek Council), which required me to address large audiences, and by taking courses for which oral presentations were mandatory. As a result of these efforts, my oratory skills improved greatly. I learned to write persuasively and to communicate clearly and concisely. However, I still lacked the confidence that all good public speakers possess and this diminished the effectiveness of my orations. As a Business Analyst for Andersen Consulting, my skills continued to improve, but it wasn’t until I began my service as a Rotary Ambassador that I noticed that my stiff, closed oratorical style had been replaced by a confident and open one. As a Rotary Ambassador, I give luncheon talks to Rotary Clubs upon request. Through these speaking engagements, I was able to triumph over my fears of public speaking by becoming a versatile and persuasive speaker. Both of these accomplishments stand as testaments to the value of hard work and perseverance.

**3. Discuss a nonacademic personal failure. In what way were *you* disappointed in yourself? What did you learn from the experience?**

Throughout my years at Our Saviour Lutheran School (grades K-8), I was lauded for my athletic and scholastic abilities. I was the captain and highest scorer of the women’s basketball team and was graduated valedictorian of my junior high school class. As a result, I became very accustomed to being the big fish in a little pond. So, in 1988 as I prepared to begin my first year of study at the Bronx High School of Science (a highly competitive specialized school), feelings of self-doubt consumed me. I was plagued by the irrational idea that Bronx Science academics and athletics were fundamentally different and more difficult than the Our Saviour variety. This belief set the stage for my worst failure.

When I began classes at Bronx Science, I quickly realized that the material was no more difficult than that which I had tackled at Our Saviour. Having made this discovery, I began to excel in the classroom. However, I continued to doubt my aptitude for basketball. Was I really a good player or were my peers at Our Saviour and at the other Lutheran schools in that league substandard players? The opportunity soon arose for me to answer this question. Women’s varsity basketball try-outs were held. When the 1988 team roster was posted, my name was not on the list. I had failed, but the competition had not beaten me. I had defeated myself. So sure was I that I would not make the team that I had not entered the trials. With this failure I lost my self-respect. In my eyes, I had done something unbelievably dishonorable; I had bowed to an irrational fear and called it master.

To restore my self-sovereignty, I tried out for the varsity team during my sophomore year. Although I hoped to make the team, doing so was not my primary concern. Through the act of competing, I was restoring my self-respect. When the 1989 roster was posted, my name was on the list. That year, I played more minutes than any other nonstarter. From 1990 to 1992, 1 was a starter and the highest point scorer on the team. I had succeeded on two levels.

From this experience, I learned the meaning of true failure. Failure only occurs when you do not try at all. If you make an effort, but do not succeed, there is honor and wisdom to be gained through the loss. Hence, you are better off than when you began. After all, success is not a destination—it is a journey.

**4. Columbia Business School is a diverse environment. How will your experiences contribute to this?**

Scientists have pondered the question of nature versu**s** nurture for a long time. I believe that it is the combination of these two forces which molds an individual and shapes the contribution which she will make to society. As such, I hold that the contribution that my presence would make to the diversity at Columbia Business School is defined by my beliefs and values, which have been shaped by life experiences and heredity. That said, the adult experience that has had the most profound effect on my belief system and world vision has been my trip to and study of Africa.

Thus far, the most valuable lesson that I have learned on this trip is that everyone and everything in the universe is interdependent. This verity, which guided the lives of aboriginal men, was all but forgotten by many of those who advanced through the Iron Age. Men renounced their humanity by enslaving and subjugating fellow human beings and plundering the earth, thus disregarding the chains which link the fates of the planet and its people. However, our oneness cannot be ignored. The African continent abounds with testaments to our unity. In South Africa, time revealed that the fate of the Boers is inextricably linked with that of the Black South Africans whom the Boers once abhorred. In Angola and Mozambique, the lives of millions were permanently altered when a coup was staged five thousand miles away in Portugal. In other African countries, people starve as tribalism destroys their economies and dissolves their national unity. And nowhere on earth is man’s dependence on his environment more apparent than in Africa, where water is such an important commodity that the strongest currency on the continent, the Pula, is named after it. All of this points to the conclusion that, for better or worse, humans must learn to coexist with the planet and with each other.

This belief, and the others which comprise my world vision, would allow me to contribute to the diversity of thought at Columbia.

COMMENTS

1. American schools, Columbia in particular, emphasize community service in a way that some European (and Asian) schools do not. Melissa’s first essay therefore is ideally pitched for Columbia; it would be very good, but perhaps not perfect, for a school that focuses less on the question of what applicants will do for their communities’ benefit.
2. One suggestion for improvement: to discuss something from her consulting work, because she includes virtually nothing from her professional life. Thus she gets relatively little mileage from her strong professional credentials, although she has other experiences that are interesting enough to talk about, so her presentation does not suffer greatly. This is due in part to her being quite different from what one would expect from a strategy consultant—more lyrical, less “data-driven.”

**DORREN HEMLOCK**

*Background:*

**Job:** Journalist for fourteen years

**Education:** Had not quite completed her bachelor’s degree at Wesleyan

**Nationality:** American

(Note: she was applying for a special program at Columbia. Journalists who specialize in business and economics are eligible for a one-year, nondegree program (the Knight-Bagehot Fellowship) that the Columbia Graduate School of Journalism offers, which includes classes at the Business School. Those who complete this program can apply for a second-year fellowship (the Wiegers Fellowship) through the Business School to complete their MBAs. Thus she was in her first year of study, applying to complete a second year and thereby finish her MBA.)

*Critical issues to address:*

None. (Her biggest issues, concerning why she would do further education in her mid-thirties and whether she could survive the quantitative aspects of the program, were essentially moot after she had gained a place in the first-year program. Nonetheless, her handling of these issues still comes through in the following essays.)

**1. What are your career goals? How will an MBA help you achieve these goals?** Why **are you applying to Columbia Business School?**

Journalism is not a career for me; it is a calling. There are deadline pressures. The low pay is frustrating. Politicians I cover are disrespectful. Yet I can think of no other work that is as challenging, stimulating and rewarding.

For the past 14 years, I have been based in Peru, Venezuela, and Puerto Rico, reporting and writing on business and politics for American, Latin American, and Caribbean media. Reporting has taken me far—to banks in Lima, electronics assembly plants in Haiti, coffee farms in Jamaica, corporate headquarters in Japan, and insurance offices in London, to name just a few places.

As a journalist, I have the chance to channel my curiosity, ask questions, learn, and give back to the community. I get to meet people, travel, research, and stay on top of current events. I get an opportunity to foster greater awareness and understanding. I get a chance to make a difference.

I became a journalist without even knowing it. The siren call sounded when I was transplanted from my native New York to the U.S. Virgin Islands. I wrote friends in New York about living without winter and with limited water supplies. I told them about high prices for food and low prices for liquor, about being a white minority and about life on a small Caribbean island. Even before entering college, I had my first job in media at the *V.I. Post* newspaper in St. Thomas.

To learn more about the region I call home, I pursued Latin American and Caribbean studies at Wesleyan University. There I embraced the idea that content should take precedence over form in journalism. I believe that editors and avid reading can improve one’s writing style, but knowing a topic in depth gives added value to readers and distinguishes a journalist from the pack. I specialized in business and economic journalism in Latin America and the Caribbean.

Throughout the years, I have realized the need for continuing specialization. Today, I am focusing on finance through a Knight-Bagehot Fellowship in Business and Economic Journalism. My interest grew in the wake of the Latin American debt crisis and the North American Free Trade Agreement. I recognize that equity financing, short-term capital flows, and direct foreign investment have increasingly important roles to play in Caribbean and Latin American development. At Columbia, I’ve also learned that financial systems require solid information flows to efficiently allocate capital. Specialized financial reporting therefore proves essential in hemispheric development.

After Columbia, I plan to return to journalism to work in international business news, especially on Latin America and the Caribbean. There’s a gap to fill, because business news on the hemisphere remains underreported in U.S. media. Washington rightly worries about immigration, drug trafficking and money laundering, and hemispheric free trade nowadays. Yet U.S. media still dedicate little space to the root causes of those problems in the economies of developing nations in the Americas.

Particularly disturbing for me is the scant attention given to the Caribbean Basin. The diverse, multilingual, and fragmented Caribbean runs the risk of marginalization in today’s global economy, where even large nations feel compelled to form trading blocs to compete. The Caribbean’s future has important implications for the United States and beyond. Clearly, international executives and policy makers could use more specialized economic coverage on Cuba, Haiti, Grenada, and Panama—to name just several nations that have surfaced as prime U.S. security concerns in recent years.

To continue bringing these issues to public attention, I plan to return initially to the *San Juan Star* newspaper in Puerto Rico, which has granted me a leave of absenceduring my Columbia studies. There, I plan to expand my freelance coverage, which already has included articles for *Bloomberg Business News,* the Caribbean News Agency, the *Denver Post,* and other media. Later, I hope to work at a large media outlet—likely in the United States. I believe that experience at a larger organization can provide greater access to editing and research resources, a more competitive environment to hone my skills, and a larger readership base for my work.

I also hope to use the knowledge gained through reporting at Columbia to help develop business and economic skills in other journalists in the Caribbean and Latin America. For starters, I am already planning several seminars at the *San Juan Star* on accounting and finance topics learned at Columbia Business School.

My ongoing year at Columbia has not changed my calling, but it has opened up new avenues to pursue my interests and expand my contribution through economic journalism.

**2. In reviewing the last five years, describe the one or two accomplishments of which you are most proud.**

In 1993, Puerto Rico’s economic life was on the line. The Clinton administration wanted to slash tax breaks for U.S. manufacturers on the island—endangering 40 percent of the Puerto Rican economy and more than 150,000 jobs. But Puerto Rico’s business community and its pro-statehood government could not agree on how to counter the attack.

At the *San Juan Star,* Puerto Rico’s only English-language daily newspaper, I covered manufacturing and international trade. I knew that tax breaks were Puerto Rico’s economic lifeblood. I jumped on the story. For seven months, I covered as many angles as I could find. I went to factories and interviewed everyone from hourly workers to CEOs. I interviewed top Puerto Rico executives, Washington officials, U.S. multinational lobbyists, Wall Street analysts, and Caribbean Basin leaders. Stories filled the business section front pages—and the hard work paid off.

The Star’s in-depth coverage helped stimulate debate and action. It played a role in getting Puerto Rico business and government to adopt a more concerted approach to

the issue. My articles were regularly faxed from San Juan offices to Washington and served as an important information source stateside, especially to U.S. government and business executives who could not read Puerto Rico’s Spanish-language media.

After months of vigorous debate, Washington and Puerto Rico reached a compromise: The tax incentives were cut, but far less than initially proposed. I felt proud to have used my bilingual skills, business specialization, and networks to serve as a communications link of this vital issue. That year, the Puerto Rico Manufacturers Association named me Journalist of the Year, the island’s top business reporting award. But more important, I felt I had contributed to the community at a critical time.

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“Would you accept a Knight-Bagehot Fellowship?” the caller asked.

“Yes, Yes, Yes,” I yelped. “I want it. I want it.”

Years of work in the Caribbean and Latin America had brought me regional recognition, but the Bagehot was a sign that my efforts commanded respect outside the area as well. I was proud to have been chosen to study at Columbia and in New York.

Then came a roller coaster ride.

First was math camp. My confidence plummeted. I hadn’t studied math since high school in 1973 and never studied even precalculus, let alone calculus. I cried over my problem sets—despite Prof. Peter Garrity’s good humor. Then, I patiently started from scratch, reviewing addition, relearning algebra, seeking out help from teaching assistants and classmates, studying hard—and—I passed, barely.

Next came classes in accounting and finance, with a language that sounded strikingly similar to Chinese. I thought I would never understand. Yet, as the semester wore on, it started to make sense. I worked with colleagues and professors, hit the books and prayed for the best. By January, I was happily surprised when the call-in grading system electronically informed me of straight Hs at CBS.

I am very proud to have the opportunity to study at a university again and to have learned that hard work does pay off. I am energized by the challenge of grasping new concepts and hope to take on more. I enjoy the stimulation of tackling the new and meeting performance goals.

**3. Discuss a nonacademic failure. In what way were you disappointed in yourself? What did you learn from the experience?**

I should have completed my bachelor’s degree years ago, but it has taken a return to academia at Columbia University to get me to do it. Not having the degree has been a personal failure. I have felt that I’d let my parents down, when they had worked so hard to put me through college. I also felt inhibited to seek full-time work in the U.S. media, fearing disqualification without a degree.

Still, for years I did not complete the senior essay needed to fulfill requirements for a Latin American studies degree from Wesleyan University. Working in small, understaffed newspapers in nations with huge development hurdles and with fascinating stories to cover, I had always been so absorbed by my work in journalism that I had never set aside the months to research and write the paper.

College had not been easy for me. I started at age 16, a time when I was moved more by hormones than homework. An impressionable teenager, I was confused by intellectually aggressive campus culture after years at a small high school in the Caribbean, where community meant more than competition. I took a semester off, but then missed the intellectual challenge, returning to Wesleyan only to seek exchange programs to try other environments for learning. I studied for separate semesters in Spain, at the University of Texas at Austin, and finally completed my required coursework for Wesleyan’s Latin American studies program at Catholic University in Peru. Then, I decided to stay in Lima, lured by Peru’s rich history, politics, and culture, I aimed to complete my senior essay there, hoping to write a case study on U.S. food aid in Lima’s slums, an outgrowth of an urban anthropology course there. I never finished. In Lima in the early 1980s I could not find the documentation on U.S. policy that I needed, and, out of school, I lacked a professor to advise me on the project. I became engrossed in journalism and put the paper on hold—until now.

My current academic year at Columbia at age 36 has given me the time and tools to undertake the project, with the goal both to complete my Wesleyan requirements and to continue studies at Columbia to obtain an MBA. I am currently working with Chazen Institute *professor* Ronald Schramm on an independent study on *multinational* business location decisions, focusing on tax incentive programs inPuerto Rico and Ireland. At Wesleyan, the Latin American Studies program director, Anne Wightman, also is working with me to ensure the paper fulfills requirements as a noncredit senior essay to allow Wesleyan to award me a bachelor’s degree.

I am relieved to be redressing this failure and happy to re-embrace academia at Columbia. I have learned over the years to better appreciate the dynamism, debate, and stimulation a university environment offers. Columbia provides an especially rich environment by incorporating the resources available only in a global city like New York.

**4. Discuss your involvement in a community or extracurricular organization. Include an explanation of how you became involved in the organization, and how you helped the organization meet its goals.**

Fellow reporters active in the Puerto Rico Journalists Association had heard my pitch repeatedly: Why did we stand up for press freedoms in Puerto Rico and not speak out for press rights in neighboring countries? Why did we look at issues narrowly, in a local context, and not comparatively at how other places dealt with crime, privatization, and other issues?

My international perspective came from years reporting in South America and elsewhere in the Caribbean. Most Puerto Rico journalists had not reported off the island.

In late 1991, colleagues approached me to run for a position on the association’s board of directors and, specifically, to focus on expanding international awareness among members. During my one-year term, I proposed and helped organize a conference on the press in Haiti.

The seminar came amid escalating repression and violence in that military-ruled country, including censorship and closure of radio stations and newspapers, as well as torture and even killings of Haitian reporters. About 75 people attended the event, mainly journalists. Speakers included, among others, two international news agency correspondents and a prominent Haitian-born University of Puerto Rico economics professor, who spoke on the role of radio news for Haiti’s mostly illiterate population. I moderated and provided an overview of violations against the Haitian media, citing reports from Amnesty International and other human rights groups.

It was the association’s first seminar on Haiti. The event helped meet the group’s goals of defending press freedom and expanding international focus. A colleague also wrote an article for a U.S. media magazine, bringing the subject to the attention of U.S. colleagues as well.

**5. Columbia Business School is a diverse environment. How will your experiences contribute to this?**

As a business journalist specialized in Latin America and the Caribbean, I believe I help enrich Columbia’s diverse environment in many ways.

First, as a reporter, I am unafraid to ask questions in public. In journalism, questions are a sign of inquisitiveness and strength. Colleagues in the entering MBA class have told me they’re glad that I unabashedly ask professors to clarify concepts or explain complex graphs and equations in plain English. They say that my questions reflect their own concerns, but they are too shy to speak out. Many come from competitive corporate environments where questions tend to be seen as signs of weakness.

Second, my experience in the Caribbean and Latin America enlivens discussions on economic policy and globalization. In class, I ask questions about options for small, open economies and bring up examples from countries I’ve covered. Outside the classroom, I am working with a group of fellow students interested in the Caribbean

and Latin America to organize events related to the region, including a panel on investment trends in Cuba and another on Caribbean stock exchanges.

COMMENTS

1. Doreen has an interesting tale to tell—returning to school in her mid-thirties to improve her knowledge of business and economics, not to get a job on Wall Street but to improve her coverage as a journalist. And, not surprisingly, given that she writes for a living, she tells her tale well. She makes it clear exactly why she wants to do an MBA. (Unlike most other applicants, she does not need to worry that she will sound like everyone else in the applicant pool.) She also does a good job of humanizing and individualizing herself with her discussion of her college experiences and how she failed to complete her bachelor’s degree on schedule. Another strong point is her discussion of what she can contribute, based upon her experiences in first year MBA classes. She is in the unique position of having already taken her first year classes and is thus able to capitalize on what she already knows are her unique ways to contribute.

CAROL

*Background:*

**Job:** Formerly a buyer for a department store chain, now an account executive for agarment manufacturer

**Education:** Bachelor’s degree in literature from a top quality liberal arts school

**Nationality:** American

*Critical issue to address:*

Showing herself able to handle the quantitative aspects of a top MBA program. (I have excluded two of her four essays because they concerned matters too personal for general dissemination. The remaining two, however, are sufficiently interesting to merit inclusion on their own.)

**1. What are your career goals? How will an MBA help you achieve these goals? Why are you applying to Columbia Business School?**

I am pursuing a career in the apparel industry during a time when the industry is going through major changes. Many of my employment choices have been based on the changing nature of the business. Chapter 7 and Chapter 11 used to mean sections of a Charles Dickens novel. Now, Chapter *7* dissolutions and Chapter 11 reorganizations, mergers, and acquisitions are everyday vocabulary. Throughout my career in the apparel industry, I have recognized the inability of the industry to anticipate and

promote the trends of the future. My work experience has taught me the pillars of merchandising, planning, and promotion, but my lack of experience and business fundamentals has made it difficult to initiate innovation. I believe that an MBA from Columbia Business School will enhance my managerial skills and give me the business knowledge I need to achieve my goals and be an innovator in the industry.

After graduating from college, I accepted a position in the executive training programs of a national department store. I set precedent by rising through the ranks in three years to become a buyer, responsible for my own business. As a buyer, I was responsible for analyzing, planning, developing, and distributing product to 49 stores. I developed and selected the merchandise for my department and reviewed selling history and pricing strategies to distribute the product profitably. I also managed and trained several assistant buyers and played an integral role in their development to buyer status. As the company became more integrated into the corporate structure of its parent company, the nature of my responsibilities changed. I became an accountant responsible for sales forecasting and budget reviews. What had been the essential focus of my job, the creative development and selection of product, was de-emphasized.

When a position became available with one of my suppliers in wholesale manufacturing, I saw it as an opportunity to be more involved in the development and marketing of product. I was soon offered a more challenging and stimulating job in a “start-up” division for a manufacturer of women’s dresses and sportswear. As an account executive, I have brought to the table my in-depth knowledge of retailing. I have developed new accounts and have achieved high sales volume for the company. However, new and progressive methods of promotion and merchandising are not emphasized and the management of my company is not interested in diverting from established and archaic forms of marketing.

For retail chains and wholesale manufacturers to move successfully into the 21st century, it is essential that decision makers discard outdated methods of sales promotion and merchandising, replacing them with more effective and innovative forms of marketing. In an industry where women represent only a small percentage of senior management, I envision becoming a pioneer in this decision-making process. I believe that a Columbia MBA education will assist me in achieving my goals.

**2. Columbia Business School is a diverse environment. How will your experiences contribute to this?**

My in-depth knowledge of the apparel industry will contribute to the diversity of Columbia Business School’s student body. My unique background in both retail and wholesale will offer insight into an industry that I do not believe is significantly represented in business school classes. My mature and experienced approach to teamwork will also be an asset to the Columbia Business School community.

In the past six years, the apparel industry has undergone tremendous changes. I have seen national retail chains merge, major retail chains merge, major retail stores go out of business, and established manufacturers file for bankruptcy. Through my work experience, I have insight into the impact of these changes on both the buyer and seller, As a buyer, I had to adapt to the variables in a changing industry. Now as a seller, I have had to be creative and find a niche for my product in a shrinking retail market.

My ability to forge strong relationships with my co-workers has been instrumental in my success in the industry. As a buyer, I worked closely with my manufacturers to turn around a down-trending and unprofitable department. This team effort was effective in improving the profitability of our business. Now, as a seller, I work with each buyer to develop our business based on the needs of the individual store. Using the same team approach, I have been able to successfully establish important business relationships and a strong customer base for my company.

My experience and knowledge in this turbulent industry can enhance the student body at Columbia Business School by contributing to the wealth of information that each student brings to an MBA education. My understanding of both sides of my industry has developed my appreciation for the ingredients required to create a successful business.

COMMENTS

1. Carol managed to address the question of her quantitative abilities elsewhere in her application.
2. Carol’s background is unusual. As an English major working in the garment industry, she stands out from the applicant pool. She certainly recognized this and capitalized upon it in her essays. She does a very good job of demonstrating the extent to which she has (quite unexpectedly) found herself involved in business issues, thereby showing both why she wants an MBA and that she is prepared to enter an MBA program. She does this without ever losing the advantage of being from an unusual industry, which is part of her potential appeal for Columbia.

**ROXANE**

*Background:*

**Job:** Engineer and, latterly, Short-Range Planning Analyst for a major oil company

**Education:** Bachelor’s degree in chemical engineering

**Nationality:** American

*Critical issue to address:*

As an engineer, she needs to distinguish herself from the large number of candidates with a similar background.

WHARTON

**1. Please discuss your future career progression to date and your professional goals for the future. How will the MBA influence your ability to achieve your goals?**

I have been working for Chevron at the Richmond Refinery since graduating from college five years ago. I have held six different positions in the engineering and planning departments. As a result of this mobility, I have been exposed to several different areas of the refinery and have acquired a broad manufacturing background. The first three years of my career, I focused on developing my problem-solving and interpersonal skills. My engineering experience taught me to identify the root causes of problems and develop permanent solutions to them. Because many of the problems I was required to solve were too large for me to address alone, I learned to delegate and manage my time effectively. I also learned the importance of selling my ideas in order to get them implemented.

My fourth year at Chevron, I was assigned to the position of start-up engineer for a project to rebuild a processing unit that had been badly damaged by fire. The unit had been down for two years and was being rebuilt at a cost of $125 million. This unit was a major contributor to refinery profitability and I was instrumental in helping to bring it on-line safely and ahead of schedule. This experience was a major success for me and I began to advance quickly. I learned to see the problems I was solving in the context of the entire refinery rather than as isolated problems. I was able to identify business opportunities on my own and took the initiative to convince management to implement them. I was able to assimilate all the knowledge I had accumulated over the previous three years and my value to the organization increased rapidly.

Next, I was assigned to the position of process representative in charge of coordinating the process definition and process design of two major ($84 million and $20 million) retrofit projects. I worked with the engineering contractor to ensure project objectives were met at the lowest possible cost. After the process designs for these two projects were approved, I was assigned to my present position as Short-Range Planning Analyst. In this assignment, I develop the short-range refinery operating plan focusing on maximization of refinery profit in a dynamic market-driven environment. I also work with Supply and Distribution to develop these plans and coordinate the efforts of the refinery operating divisions as needed to ensure smooth implementation of new processing schedules. This position has increased my involvement in the financial aspects of our business.

I am applying to the Wharton MBA program at this time because I have come to a crossroads in my career. As I have gained experience and received increased exposure to the business side of the oil industry, I have become aware that my engineering training has not prepared me adequately to deal with the broad strategic questions faced by senior level managers. I am seeking an MBA to supplement my work experience and gain high intensity exposure to the other business functions which are important to running a successful business. In addition, I am applying to the Lauder Institute to further develop my French language skills and improve my cultural understanding of France and the rest of Western Europe. I am interested in the joint degree program because it will allow me to shift from an engineering to a management career and will allow me to incorporate my interests in language and culture into my work.

My future career goal is to advance to a senior-level management position dealing with international management strategy for a multinational corporation. I am interested in strategy because I feel my strongest skills are in identifying the root causes of problems and developing and implementing lasting solutions to them. Because I am able to see problems in the context of the big picture, I am able to identify opportunities which will not only result in profits today, but will also increase flexibility and adaptability which will result in increased profitability tomorrow. I am especially interested in international corporate strategy, because of my strong interest in working overseas.

In addition to my personal interest in working in a language and culture other than my own, I have been influenced by the international aspect of my current position. During my tenure at the Richmond Refinery, products sold into the export market have become increasingly important to our refinery’s profitability. Chevron’s planners and oil traders typically come from the engineering ranks and often lack the business skills necessary to analyze the refinery’s competition in these markets. As a result, the export market is viewed not as a viable market worthy of cultivation, but as a dumping ground for products, which allows the refinery to operate at capacity. Wharton’s emphasis on international business and its joint degree program with the Lauder Institute lit well with my future career goals. I am not pursuing an MBA degree with an emphasis in operations expressly because my experience is in this area. I am interested in gaining a well-rounded understanding of each functional area of business with an emphasis in multinational management so I will be able to deal with broad strategic issues in an international environment.

**2. Describe a situation in your life when you actively challenged the traditional thought of a group. What level of impact did you have on the group?**

One situation where I actively challenged the traditional thought of refinery operations management took place last year when I was the process engineer assigned to two heavy oil processing units. One of these units provided feed pretreatment for the other. I was approached by Operations Coordination and was asked if Widuri resid,

a low value fuel oil stream, could be fed to the upstream of the two units. This would allow a portion of the resid stream to be upgraded to gasoil, a high value intermediate product. I agreed to address the technical aspects of the problem and asked Operations Coordination to deal with the logistics.

When we reconvened to finalize the plan, it became apparent that the logistical constraints would render the project uneconomical. Having gathered the physical property data, I realized that the Widuri resid could be fed directly to the downstream unit. I suggested we bypass the feed pretreatment step entirely. This would allow us to upgrade the entire stream rather than only a small portion of it as the original plan would have required. In addition, it would avoid some of the operating costs.

Operations Coordination was enthusiastic, but I knew it would be difficult to sell the idea to Operations. A resid stream had never been fed directly to the downstream unit and I knew Operations would be concerned about damaging the catalyst in that unit.

This was a major operational change, but I was confident it would work. I gathered the necessary data and developed a plan which included a good monitoring program and contingency plan. This would allow us to identi1i and respond to any unexpected problems if necessary. Two weeks later I organized a meeting for all the interested parties and presented my plan which anticipated and addressed management’s concerns. The following day the resid was being fed to the downstream unit. This project resulted in profits to the refinery of $8 million over a five-month period.

This project marked a change in my career in terms of maturity and initiative. Prior to this, my efforts were focused primarily on my own sphere of operation. The success of this project gave me the self-confidence to assert my leadership skills. I began to approach problems from a refinerywide perspective. In addition, I began to challenge traditional approaches and offer more innovative solutions.

**3. In your opinion, what is the world’s greatest problem? Why?**

I believe the world’s greatest problem is the disparity of wealth between the developed and underdeveloped nations of the world. While the plight of the poor in Third World countries is relatively unchanged from ancient times, the standard of living in the Western World has increased dramatically since the Industrial Revolution. This disparity of wealth is a problem because in modern times the world has become increasingly interdependent. The spread of Western ideas throughout the rest of the world began with the discovery of the New World and accelerated as a result of European political supremacy in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and improvements in communication in the twentieth. As a result, more people than ever before share Western ideals and strive for Western success.

While this is in many respects a positive aspect of European colonialism, it also has a negative side. Third World nations often try to industrialize their countries overnight. This often leads to disastrous political and social policies which attempt to duplicate

Western success without taking into account the cultural and environmental constraints of the country in question. While the Western experience can serve as a model for Third World countries, it is by no means a blueprint, The West owes much of its success to the virtues of capitalism, but the West did not get rich by the sweat of its own people alone. Exploitation of natural and human resources in colonial possessions was also a major contributor to Western success. As the West increased its wealth, it learned to value the environment and was able to afford to enact strict environmental laws. In addition, as life expectancy increased and cultural attitudes toward women in the workplace changed, population growth in the West stabilized. These changes took nearly a century in the West. In underdeveloped countries today, rapid industrialization causes extreme cultural and environmental pressures. These special circumstances must be considered when helping Third World countries to develop.

Population pressure is a major aggravation in the attempts of underdeveloped countries to industrialize quickly. While a large population should equate to significant global power, it seldom does in Third World countries. The most obvious influence preventing many highly populated countries from becoming very powerful is poverty. While in some cases this is due to a genuine lack of resources, in others it is caused by rapid increases in population which quickly overcome successes in improved technology and planned investment. In other cases, the pressure to feed a growing population results in shortsighted policies which often lead to environmental degradation. For example, in Brazil, the Amazon Forest is being cleared at an alarming rate to provide land for grazing cattle. Unfortunately, the top soil in this area of the world is only inches deep and quickly erodes away. As a result, additional forest must be cleared. Clearly this is not a sustainable policy and could eventually lead to widespread famine. Experience in developed nations has shown that population growth slows considerably with an increase in standard of living. When parents are confident that their children will live to be adults, they tend to have fewer children. Helping the Third World to increase its wealth through industrialization should help to slow the exponential population growth in these countries.

As appalling as many of us find large-scale environmental destruction, it is not enough for the West to simply require that the Third World stop these practices. After all, in many respects these countries are only doing what the West did during its colonial era. If the West wishes to protect the environment in the Third World, it must provide technological assistance. This is not only our responsibility, but will also benefit us in the long run. The rain forest is just one example of the biodiversity which exists on our planet. Many of the species which inhabit the rain forests may be of use to us in the future as technological advances are made. In addition, maintaining biodiversity is important to life on Earth. It is advantageous to have a wide variety of plant and animal species in order to survive climatic changes. (I am referring to the inevitable climatic change which occurs naturally as a result of continental shift. I am still not convinced that the Greenhouse Effect exists.) Standardization of plant and

animal life to those species which are superior today could be disastrous as these species may not be able to adapt to and survive in the climate of tomorrow.

Finally, the West must show a sincere commitment to helping underdeveloped nations industrialize while preserving their environments. This applies not only to our governments, but to individuals as well. I have moral and ethical difficulty with our approach to solving environmental problems here at home. For example, as a people we Americans lobby to prevent oil drilling off the coast of California and in the Alaskan National Wildlife Refuge. However, we do not make any substantial effort to reduce our consumption of petroleum products. Instead, we drill for oil in Third World countries where we can exploit cheap labor and avoid many of the costly environmental regulations imposed on industry in the United States. Is it right to prevent drilling in our own country which has the strictest environmental controls in the world only to turn around and develop oil fields in Third World countries? Is this what we call preserving the environment? Are the rain forests in Papua New Guinea any less beautiful than the coast of California? Who are we trying to fool?

Clearly the West must move to help underdeveloped nations industrialize. This should help to stabilize their populations and slow environmental degradation. It will allow the people of these countries to live the healthy and comfortable lives that those in the West enjoy. An additional benefit is that it may help to stabilize the governments in Third World countries, which could reduce the number of people killed needlessly in revolutions and civil wars. However, it is imperative that we consider cultural differences in the countries we try to help before attempting to prescribe a solution. Only then do we have a chance of elevating the rest of the world to our standard of living while preserving the environment for future generations.

**4. What nonprofessional activities do you find inspirational? At what level do you participate in these activities?**

Traveling is my principal interest outside of work. I spend all of my vacation time visiting foreign countries because I enjoy experiencing different cultures. Traveling has forced me to remove my small town blinders and open my mind to other ways of doing things. Traveling has shown me that the American way of doing things is not the only way and that flexibility and sensitivity are absolutely necessary to get along with others. I have found that this applies not only to people of different nationalities but also to fellow Americans whose views may be different from my own. These experiences have benefited me both in my personal life and on the job and I believe they will be an asset for me at Wharton.

I also study French in my free time. I studied French in high school but was unable to do so in college due to the large number of courses required in the engineering curriculum. I recently resumed my studies because I was planning a trip to France. While in France, I became even more enthusiastic about studying French because of the satisfaction I received from communicating with the French in their own language.

I have even found it to be useful here in the United States. While I was doing volunteer work for the Mill Valley Film Festival, I met many interesting people of various nationalities. All of these people spoke French in addition to their native language and I was excited to be able to participate in their conversations. I found that my ability to speak a language other than English increased the respect these people had for me. I believe it went a long way to dispel their beliefs that Americans are culturally insensitive and egocentric.

Literature, especially nineteenth century European literature, is another of my primary interests. My final semester, I took a literature course which was the most enjoyable class I had while in college. I have found reading to be an easy and inexpensive way to increase my exposure to the world. Because an author portrays the world through his or her eyes, reading has exposed me to many different philosophies of life and has helped me to better define my own. Reading books from many time periods with many different types of characters has taught me that people are people and the pursuit of happiness is a universal goal. While this seems to be an obvious point, I believe this realization has made me more sensitive to other people’s needs and concerns.

I should note that not all of my leisure activities are cerebral in nature. I love to scuba dive for the sheer pleasure of it. Diving makes the mysteries of the undersea world accessible. The ocean is a whole new world full of strange and exciting plants and animals and is the only place where you can feel as if you are floating in space. Nowhere on land can you find the magnificent colors and variety that make up the underwater landscape.

UCLA

**1. Please give a brief, candid evaluation of yourself. Include some discussion of the abilities and other attributes you believe are your strengths and some discussion of areas that you would like to develop more fully. How do you think others perceive you? What do you consider most unique or distinctive about you?**

My strongest attribute is my conviction to follow through with what I believe in. I show a tremendous amount of proprietorship in the projects to which I am assigned. During my tenure at Chevron, I have developed a reputation for getting the job done and I am often sought out by management to implement new or controversial ideas. I am always looking for better ways of doing things and focus my efforts on long term improvement. Because I do a good job at recognizing my customer needs, I am continually being recruited by those I have previously worked for.

My good written and oral communication skills ensure that I am effective in dealing with people at all levels of the organization, from peers to executives. This has enabled me to sell my ideas and motivate groups into action. The emphasis I place on getting input from others contributes to the overall quality of the solutions I recommend.

Finally, my excellent planning and organizing skills enable me to complete my projects on time or ahead of schedule. I am consistently told that I get more work accomplished than my peers. This is because I carefully prioritize my work and leverage my time by getting others involved as appropriate. By developing good working relationships with others, I am able to spend more of my time identifying and proposing solutions and less of it working out the minor details.

My greatest development opportunity is to learn to control my frustration with people who are resistant to change. I have very little patience with people who are willing to accept the status quo when better solutions are within easy grasp. Because I am always looking for better ways of doing things and am willing to take risks, I find it difficult to identify with those who do not. I set very high standards for myself and others and I always strive for high quality output. However, I believe that I will be even more effective if I learn to be more tolerant of those less competent than myself.

I believe my operations background will distinguish me from many of my classmates. This is especially true because women continue to be relatively scarce in heavy industrial environments. My ability not to just survive, but to succeed in this environment has contributed to my personal growth and has increased my self confidence over the years. In addition, I believe that my experience in manufacturing will enhance the learning experience of my fellow classmates as it will provide a much needed perspective on how things are really accomplished in the field. For those students who are not familiar with the tremendous inertia working against change inherent in a large manufacturing facility, my experience will provide insight and, at times, a reality check.

**2. Discuss two or three situations in the past three years where you have taken a leadership role. How do these events demonstrate your management potential?**

A recent situation where I have taken a leadership role took place last year when I was the process engineer assigned to two heavy oil processing units. One of these units provided feed pretreatment for the other. I was approached by Operations Coordination and was asked if Widuri resid, a low value fuel oil stream, could be fed to the upstream of the two units. This would allow a portion of the resid stream to be upgraded to gasoil, a high value intermediate product. While at first glance this appeared to be a good idea, it quickly became apparent that the logistical constraints would render the project uneconomical. However, I realized that the Widuri resid could be fed directly to the downstream unit. I suggested we bypass the feed pretreatment step entirely. This would allow us to upgrade the entire stream rather

than only a small portion of it as the original plan would have required. In addition, it would avoid some of the operating costs.

Operations Coordination was enthusiastic, but I knew it would be difficult to sell the idea to Operations. A resid stream had never been fed directly to the downstream plant and I knew Operations would be concerned about damaging the catalyst in that unit.

This was a major operational change, but I was confident it would work. I gathered the necessary data and developed a plan which included a good monitoring program and contingency plan. This would allow us to identify and respond to any unexpected problems if necessary. Two weeks later I organized a meeting for all the interested parties and presented my plan which anticipated and addressed management’s concerns. The following day the resid was being fed to the downstream unit. This project resulted in profits to the refinery of $8 million over a five-month period.

Another situation where I was able to demonstrate and develop my leadership skills took place approximately eight months after I began working at Chevron. My supervisor suggested that I begin planning for a major plant turnaround which would take place the following year. He wanted me to begin the work, but he made it clear that I might be replaced by a more experienced engineer as the shutdown approached. No one with my level of experience had ever been in charge of a $7 million turnaround at Chevron.

I did not want to do all the groundwork only to turn it over to someone else later on, so I decided to make myself indispensable. I began the work a year in advance compared with the usual six months. I worked closely with maintenance and the other engineering groups to define the scope of the work early. I set up a method of tabulating the work list which eliminated the need for long, drawn out meetings. The shutdown planning proceeded very smoothly.

Early in the planning phase of the project, I was asked if it would be possible to move the shutdown date up six months. Because I had begun the work early, this was possible. The shutdown was a major success and was completed ahead of schedule due to careful planning and cultivation of good working relationships.

These projects demonstrate my willingness to “grab my projects by the horns” and see them through to completion. I am willing to take risks but am careful to identify possible problem areas and develop contingency plans to address them. This has led to my success in selling ideas in a very conservative organization. I am able to develop good working relationships with others because I recognize the unique contribution of each person working with me on a project. This allows me to leverage my own time by utilizing all of the resources available to me. My excellent planning and organizing skills not only increase my own productivity, but also make it easier for management to decide on a course of action when I make a proposal. By clearly

identifying the problem and outlining possible solutions, the best answer is generally clear.

**3. Why have you decided to enter an MBA program? Why have you decided to apply to the UCLA MBA program in particular? What other options for next year, aside from remaining in your current position, have you seriously considered?**

I am applying to the UCLA MBA program at this time because I have come to **a** crossroads in my career. As I have gained experience and received increased exposure to the business side of the oil industry, I have become aware that my engineering training has not prepared me adequately to deal with the broad strategic questions faced by senior level managers. I am seeking an MBA to supplement my work experience and gain high intensity exposure to the other functions which are important to running a successful business. In addition, I am applying to the International Fellows Program to further develop my French language skills and improve my cultural understanding of France and the rest of Western Europe. I am interested in this program because it will allow me to shift from an engineering to a management career track and will allow me to incorporate my interests in language and culture into my work.

My future career goal is to advance to a senior level management position dealing with international management strategy for a multinational corporation. I am interested in strategy for a multinational corporation. I am interested in strategy because I feel my strongest skills are in identifying the root causes of problems and developing and implementing lasting solutions to them. Because I am able to see problems in the context of the big picture, I am able to identify opportunities which will not only result in profits today, but will also increase flexibility and adaptability which will result in increased profitability tomorrow. I am especially interested in international corporate strategy, because of my strong interest in working overseas.

In addition to my personal interest in working in a foreign language and culture, I have been influenced by the international aspects of my current position. During my tenure at the Richmond Refinery, products sold into the export market have become increasingly important to our refinery’s profitability. Chevron’s planners and oil traders typically come from the engineering ranks and often lack the business skills necessary to analyze the refinery’s competitive position in new markets, At times it is even difficult to identify the refinery’s competition in these markets. As a result, the export market is viewed not as a viable market worthy of cultivation, but as a dumping ground for products, which allows the refinery to operate at capacity.

UCLA’s strength in international business, in conjunction with the International Fellows Program, fits well with my future career goals. I am not pursuing an MBA degree with an emphasis in operations expressly because my experience is in this area. I am interested in gaining a well-rounded understanding of each function of business,

with an emphasis on multinational management so that I will be able to deal with broad strategic issues in an international environment.

Prior to deciding to pursue an MBA degree, I researched overseas career opportunities. I quickly realized that an MBA degree with linguistic training would greatly increase my chances of finding employment in Europe. In addition, it would give me the necessary skills to move into a management position. While it is possible for me to move into management while working for Chevron, it is unlikely that I would be given an overseas assignment for many years. An MBA will allow me to function as a manager outside the oil and chemical process industries and the International Fellow Program will be an asset to me in making contacts abroad.

**4. What leisure and/or community activities do you particularly enjoy? Please discuss their importance in your life.**

(See Roxane’s essentially identical answer to Wharton essay 4.)

**5. For applicants to concurrent degree programs, the Arts Management Program, or the International Fellows Program only: Why specifically are you applying to the program you have selected? How does an MBA fit in with your professional interests?**

I became interested in international business as a result *of* the traveling I did after graduating from college. Traveling stimulated my interest in foreign cultures and each time I planned a new trip, I put an increasing amount of effort into researching the history of the area I intended to visit. This effort resulted in far more rewarding travel experiences than I otherwise would have had. This trend culminated in a trip to France that I made just prior to deciding to return to business school. After returning from this trip, I knew that I needed to incorporate an international focus and the use of my second language into my career.

At the same time, I began to consider returning to school for an MBA. My involvement in the development of an export program while employed at Chevron made me aware of some of the special considerations of working in international markets. I decided that an MBA would give me the business skills I lacked and it could open the doors to an international career.

It was not until I began researching graduate management schools that I learned about the International Fellows Program. I was thrilled to find that such a program existed because it was so perfectly suited to my interests. Prior to discovering this program, I had expected to have to continue my French studies in my own time. This program will not only allow me to become more proficient in French, but will also enable me to get valuable experience and make important contacts overseas.

In summary, I am applying to the MBA/International Fellows Program because I have a strong interest in international business and believe that language skills are necessary to work successfully overseas. If I am not admitted to the International Fellows Program, I intend to continue my French language studies in my spare time.

HARVARD

**1. What evidence can you present to demonstrate your capacity to perform well academically in the Harvard MBA program?**

I believe my grades are a good indication of my academic ability when additional consideration is given to the time I devoted to outside activities. I graduated with Distinction in Chemical Engineering while working 25 to 36 hours per week to put myself through school. In addition, I devoted a significant quantity of time to my dancing (jazz, tap, and ballet). Because I believed I would benefit in the long run by leading a balanced life, I did not devote my time exclusively to my studies. Instead, I set priorities and managed my time which allowed me to lead a well-rounded lifestyle. As part of the prioritization process, I set a personal goal to maintain a grade point average of 3.5. I achieved this goal, which enabled me to graduate as the top chemical engineer in my class.

In addition to my past academic performance, I believe I would function extremely well in an environment where the case study method of teaching is utilized. My success at Chevron has been directly related to my willingness to voice my opinions and my ability to develop creative solutions to problems. In addition, I work well with others and am able to take others’ ideas and incorporate them into workable solutions. I believe these strengths will allow me to perform well at Harvard and contribute to other students’ experiences as well.

**2. Discuss a professional project which challenged your analytical skills.**

While engineering is by nature an analytically challenging profession, I am able to single out one project that was particularly challenging. Three years ago, I was asked to determine why we were unable to meet a product specification unique to export jet fuel. It was assumed this question could be answered easily by “finding out what others do.” Unfortunately, “others” were not in the export jet fuel market; this time, we in the Richmond Refinery were the pioneers.

After consulting my counterparts at other Chevron refineries, our technical experts in the home office, several jet fuel experts in the home office, and several jet fuel experts throughout the petroleum industry, I realized I would have to solve the problem on my own. This problem was especially difficult to solve because the specification was sensitive to the synergistic effects of different sulfur species in the jet fuel components. Because we use several components to blend jet fuel, I set out to identify

a blend of jet components which would not result in synergistic effects. This recipe would be used for export jet fuel.

I had many different combinations of jet fuel components hand-blended together and tested for this specification. Using this method I was unable to produce even one off-test result. I then attempted to duplicate the recipes of actual off-test blends to produce an off-test result. If I could not produce an off-test blend, the results of the on-test hand blends would be suspect. I was again unable to produce an off-test result.

A careful review of the data revealed that the material used in the hand blends had been sampled from the piping leading to the jet tanks while the off-test results for the actual blends were sampled at the tanks. I began to suspect a problem with the tanks themselves. After additional testing, I confirmed that this was in fact the problem. I recommended a solution which was quickly implemented. This project has resulted in profits of tens of millions of dollars for the refinery over the last several years.

3. **While recognizing that no day is typical, we ask that you describe a** **representative work day.**

I begin my day as a short-range planner in the refinery by reviewing the previous day’s operation. Next I attend a meeting with Operations Coordination to discuss operating problems and items of interest for the day ahead. After the meeting, I present the plan and associated economics for an upcoming test run to the operating superintendents. The test run objective is to establish the viability of substituting a new lower cost feed stock for the feed stock currently fed to a critical operating unit. This is a very controversial issue because it involves a fundamental change in the operation of the unit, so I am careful to back up my assertions with the data.

I then return to my office to finalize the operating plan for the winter season. I use a linear optimizer to determine the most economic refinery operation. I review the output and identify any work which must be completed by the various operating divisions prior to its implementation. After receiving approval for this plan from the refinery manager, I set up a meeting with the operating assistants and engineers to discuss the plan and their role in its implementation.

In the afternoon I have a meeting with my inventory reduction team. I am the leader of the “Breakthrough” effort identified by executive management as one of the five key areas on which our corporation should focus its efforts to reduce operating costs. We discuss our efforts to date and identify lack of communication along the supply chain as a major obstacle to reducing inventories further. After the meeting I return to my office to call another member of a related inventory team to discuss the communication problem.

This related team is a cross-functional decision support systems (DSS) team assembled to provide information to the individual inventory reduction teams

throughout Chevron. As a “user representative” I discuss my team’s concern about the communication problem and the lack of reliable supply and demand data for making inventory decisions. We decide that an enterprisewide logistics planning tool would make dramatic improvements in inventory and cash flow management. We agree to present our idea to the rest of the DSS team at the next monthly meeting.

**4. Describe an ethical dilemma you have experienced firsthand. How did you manage and resolve the situation?**

My junior year in college, I was offered a summer internship working in a metallurgical laboratory for Gold Fields of South Africa Limited. The opportunity to work overseas while gaining valuable work experience prior to graduation was very appealing. I accepted the job and immediately completed the paperwork required to obtain a South African work visa. In addition, I began planning the details of a trip I would make to Europe on my return. I wanted this experience so badly that I turned down an excellent opportunity to work at the Argonne National Laboratory outside of Chicago that same summer.

I was offered this position in the Fall of 1985. Early in 1986, the political situation in South Africa began to deteriorate rapidly and a State of Emergency was declared by the South African government. Several friends working for Gold Fields assured me that I would not be in danger if I were to go to South Africa. However, my conscience began to get the better of me. I attempted to justify accepting the job offer on the basis that I should see the situation firsthand in order to judge it. In addition, I was well aware of the importance of South Africa to our nation’s supply of strategic minerals. I believed that American involvement in South Africa was necessary to ensure change in that country’s racial policy while assuring that America’s strategic interests were tended to.

As the situation worsened, however, I found my decision to go to South Africa increasingly difficult to justify. I could no longer ignore the pleas of the African National Congress to remove outside support of a racist government. I knew that I was offered the serious position because South Africa was experiencing a serious “brain drain.” By agreeing to work in South Africa, I personally was supporting the racist policies of the Afrikaaner government. As much as I hated to do it, I had to cancel my plans.

In retrospect, it is still a difficult problem. It is impossible to judge a problem as complex as apartheid from the thirty-second news briefs provided by the media. Had I gone to South Africa, I would have gained valuable insight into this problem that I could never hope to get from the outside. This experience would have given me a different perspective about racial tensions in our own country. However, I still cannot justify the personal growth I would have realized when there was much more at stake for the people of that country.

**5. Describe your three most substantial accomplishments and why view them as such.**

*Financing my college education*

Financing my college education is easily my most substantial accomplishment. My parents were divorced and my mother was working was a secretary so she could not afford to pay for my education. While my father could afford to give me some assistance, he would not because he felt I would appreciate my education more if I financed it myself.

My father was right! I financed my education through a combination of scholarships, grants, loans, and work. When I graduated with Distinction and landed a great job with a major corporation, I had no one to thank for my success but myself. This sense of accomplishment proved to me that I can achieve anything I put my mind to regardless of the odds.

*TKC start-up*

I recently held the position of Start-Up Engineer for a project to rebuild a processing unit that had been badly damaged by fire, The unit had been down for two years and was being rebuilt at a cost of $125 million. Because this unit was a major contributor to refinery profitability, it was critical that it come back on line quickly and safely. I was very excited to be presented with such a challenge.

I worked with Operations to develop operating procedures for the new unit and helped to train the operators. I expedited catalyst delivery which allowed catalyst to be loaded into the reactors three months earlier than planned. This prevented catalyst loading from becoming a choke point for the project and was instrumental in starting up the unit a month ahead of schedule. I also implemented a long term monitoring program which allowed information required to maximize the unit’s profitability to be learned quickly.

The start-up proceeded very smoothly as a result of careful planning and excellent procedures. Because of my success with this project, I have been moved into positions of increased responsibility and visibility twice in the past year. My greatest satisfaction, however, comes from the respect I gained with the operators and operating management because of my hands-on approach to this project.

*A-Train shutdown*

After working at Chevron for approximately eight months, my supervisor suggested that I begin planning for a major plant turnaround which would take place the following year. He wanted me to begin the work, but he made it clear that I might be replaced by a more experienced engineer as the shutdown approached. No one with

my level of experience had ever been in charge of a $7 million turnaround at Chevron. I did not want to do all the groundwork myself only to turn it over to someone else later on, so I decided to make myself indispensable. I began the work a year in advance compared with the usual six months. I worked closely with maintenance and the other engineering groups to define the scope of the work early on. I set up a method of tabulating the work list which eliminated the need for long, drawn out meetings. The shutdown planning proceeded very smoothly.

Early in the planning phase of the project I was asked if it would be possible to move up the shutdown date six months. Because I had started planning early, this was possible. The shutdown was a major success and was completed ahead of schedule due to careful planning and cultivation of good working relationships.

**6. Discuss a contribution you have made in your community.**

The most satisfying contribution I have made to my community was participating in the Tutor Richmond Youth program. In this program Chevron employees contribute their lunch hour once per week to tutor youth from the community surrounding the refinery. This is a very poor community that is high in drug use and violent crime.

The student I tutored was a bright young lady in the eighth grade whose ambition was to become a nurse. I was aware that she looked up to me and considered me a role model. While this was flattering, I was not aware of the responsibility that goes along with being a role model until she asked me to read a letter from her boyfriend.

The letter was very sexually explicit. At first I was not sure what to do, but I decided she would not have brought the matter up had she not wanted to talk about it. Difficult as it was, I felt I needed to discuss the letter frankly with her. We talked about her future as a nurse and how an untimely pregnancy could ruin her plans. We discussed the pressures of being an adolescent and the option of waiting until she was ready to have sex. Finally, we talked about birth control and safe sex.

I do not know what has happened to her since that year. I only know that she, as well as all the other kids in her community, face incredible obstacles to success growing up in the neighborhood they do. Just how difficult it can be to break out of the trap of poverty became vividly clear to me that day. I can only hope that the year I spent as her friend, and the discussion we had that day, had a positive influence on her life.

**7. Discuss a situation in which you influenced a group.**

(See Roxane’s essentially identical answer to Wharton essay 2.)

8. **What are your post-MBA career plans?**

My future career goal is to advance to a senior-level management position dealing with strategy and international management for a multinational corporation. After five years of engineering and planning experience at an operating company, I have come to a crossroads in my career, As I have gained experience and received increased exposure to the business side of the oil industry, I have become aware that my engineering training has not prepared me adequately to deal with broad strategic questions, I am seeking an MBA to supplement my work experience and gain high intensity exposure to the business functions which are important to running a successful business.

I am interested in strategy because I feel my strongest skills are in identifying the root causes of problems and developing and implementing lasting solutions to them. I am especially interested in international corporate strategy, because during my tenure at the Richmond Refinery, products sold into the export market have become increasingly important to our refinery’s profitability. Chevron’s planners and oil traders typically come from the engineering ranks and therefore lack the business skills necessary to analyze the refinery’s competitive position in new markets. At times it is even difficult to identify the refinery’s competition in these markets. As a result, the export market is viewed not as a viable market worthy of cultivation, but as a dumping ground for products, which allows the refinery to operate at capacity. I am seeking a general management education so that I will be equipped to deal with these types of problems as a senior level manager.

STANFORD

**1. Each of us has been influenced by the people, events, and situations of our lives. How have these influences shaped who you are today?**

Growing up in a single parent *family* has shaped who I am more than any other factor. My parents separated when I was ten years old. My mother, who had never worked outside the home, suddenly had to support my sister and me. Shortly after starting her first job as a secretary, she injured her back and had to have surgery. This kept her out of work for six months. During this time, she received only seventy-five percent of her already meager salary. To make things worse, my parents’ divorce was not yet final so my father was not paying child support.

These were especially difficult times for our family. We nearly lost our home and could not afford to heat it. My mother applied for food stamps but did not qualify because she owned a car and was unwilling to give it up. She could not give up the car because she would have no way to get to work when she had recovered from her injury (there was no public transportation in Reno at the time). Somehow we managed to survive these difficult times through sacrifice and help from friends and family.

I learned many important lessons about life during this period of my childhood. This experience brought our family closer together and showed us that with sacrifice and

hard work, we would always be able to get through the hard times. It has also given me a greater appreciation for the things that I now have. While I am happy to have a well paying job and look forward to even more success in the future, I am very aware of how fortunate I am. Because I began working when I was fourteen years old, I was able to learn the value of hard work at an early age. I developed a strong sense of determination and the belief that I could have all the money and success I wanted as long as I was willing to work for it. The difficult times I endured during my childhood are largely responsible for the work ethic that has resulted in my success to date.

When I was sixteen, my mother remarried and we moved to a small town east of Reno. This experience also had a major impact on my life. Life in a small town was very difficult for me. While my sister and I acquired instant popularity after moving there, it was still difficult to truly break into such a close-knit society. Having come from a larger city, I found many of the people in this town to be rather close-minded. I often found myself as the sole defender of outsiders, minorities, and others who did not fit the small town mold. I also spoke up and challenged conventional ways of doing things if they did not make sense. This outspokenness often caused me problems and kept me out of organizations such as Honor Society. However, I believed that it was more important to stand up for what I believed in than to yield to peer pressure. This conviction has remained with me through the years. I continue to fight for what I believe in rather than conform to the status quo in order to keep from making waves. While this is often the more difficult route, I believe it is the right one.

I left home a week after graduating from high school and moved back to Reno. I found a job and enrolled at the University that summer. I was able to finance my entire education through scholarships and work. While it required a tremendous amount of effort and focus to work part time and graduate at the top of my chemical engineering class, I was still able to devote much of my spare time to dance. I had always wanted to become a dancer when I was growing up but we could never afford the lessons. However, when I entered college I was able to obtain a dance scholarship at an off- campus dance company. To attain success with so many demands on my time required me to learn to manage my time effectively. This period of my life was a lot of work but was also the most rewarding. When I finally graduated and was offered a job at Chevron I had no one to thank but myself. To this day, when I am feeling down or running low on self-confidence, I think back to this accomplishment.

In recent years, traveling has been the major influence in my life. Now that I am working full time, I am able to travel every year. Traveling outside the country has allowed me to meet people with many different viewpoints and priorities in life. This has forced me to examine my own beliefs and challenge my assumptions of the kind of life I want to lead. While I will always want a successful career, I now know that there is more to life than just work. I spend my spare time reading literature and history and studying French because I believe that it is important to have a well rounded education to get along with people of all types.

All of these events have shaped who I am today. I have a very high work ethic and am determined to achieve the goals I set for myself. I work hard and expect to be compensated for my efforts, but because of my modest beginnings I am always aware and appreciative of how far I have come. I believe this makes me more sensitive to the positions of those less fortunate than I am, Finally, my travels have forced me to remove my own small town blinders and have opened my eyes to all that our diverse world has to offer.

**2. How do you see your career developing? How will an MBA further that development? Why are you applying to Stanford?**

I am applying to the Stanford MBA program at this time because after five years of engineering and planning experience at an operating company, I have come to a crossroads in my career. As I have gained experience and received increased exposure to the business side of the oil industry, I have become aware that my engineering training has not prepared me adequately to deal with the broad strategic questions faced by senior level managers. I am seeking an MBA to supplement my work experience and gain high intensity exposure to the other business functions which are important to running a successful business. In addition, a general management education will increase my career flexibility. Without a formal business education, it would be very difficult for me to change business functions or move into a senior level management position outside the chemical process industries.

My future career goal is to advance to a senior level management position dealing with strategy and international management for a multinational corporation. I am interested in strategy because I feel my strongest skills are in identifying the root causes of problems and developing and implementing lasting solutions to them. I am especially interested in international corporate strategy, because during my tenure at the Richmond Refinery, products sold into the export market have become increasingly important to our refinery’s profitability. Chevron’s planners and oil traders typically come from the engineering ranks and therefore lack the business skills necessary to analyze the refinery’s competitive position in new markets. At times it is even difficult to identify the refinery’s competition in these markets. As a result, the export market is viewed not as a viable market worthy of cultivation, but as a dumping ground for products, which allows the refinery to operate at capacity.

Stanford’s emphasis on a general management education fits well with my future career goals. I am not pursuing an MBA degree with an emphasis on operations expressly because my experience is in this area. I am more interested in gaining a broad understanding of each of the functional areas of business so I will be able to deal effectively with issues which impact the entire organization. In my current position as a Planning Analyst, I recommend changes in operation designed to increase refinery profitability. Historically, Planning Analysts at Chevron only considered refinery operation when making these recommendations. However, as the business becomes more complex and competitive, additional aspects such as payment

terms and inventory carrying costs should also be incorporated to ensure profit maximization. Because I have had very little exposure to the other functional areas, it has been very difficult to incorporate these operating costs into my economic analyses.

Finally, an MBA will give me the skills necessary to be an effective change agent. While “fighting fires” often leads to a successful career at Chevron, this is not an effective form of management. Many of these problems occur as a result of poor planning. I believe that problems should be anticipated and avoided. By adopting a broader perspective and a strategic viewpoint, change can be managed and the road into the future can be made smoother. While I have incorporated these ideas into my career to date, I believe a general business education will allow me to apply these strengths more effectively and at a much higher level in the organization.

**3. The issue of diversity increasingly is recognized as a critical element of successful workplaces. What specific changes would you implement in your current company to address inequities and/or enhance diversity?**

As the workforce becomes smaller and more poorly educated, it is becoming increasingly important for companies to not only accept but nurture diversity in their organizations. To be competitive, companies must hire the most qualified candidates available. They can no longer discriminate on the basis of gender or ethnic background if they expect to hire the most productive workforce available, Economic necessity will ultimately break down the barriers that women and minorities currently encounter in the workplace.

I personally have seen this phenomenon at my own company. Oil refineries typically do not have particularly good track records in terms of diversity. As a result, my company is currently facing a crisis with respect to encouraging diversity in the workplace. Because we do not have women and minorities in highly visible positions, we are finding it increasingly difficult to attract young women and minorities to our company. As a result, we have not been able to hire the most qualified college graduates.

A top-down approach is required to facilitate cultural change in a large organization. If diversity is to be valued at the bottom levels of an organization, it must be very clear that it is valued at the top. First, management must be educated as to what constitutes diversity and how discrimination occurs. While blatant discrimination still exists, subtle unconscious discrimination is far more common. Unless people are aware of what constitutes discrimination, they will continue to discriminate unknowingly.

As part of the educational process, the benefits of diversity should be stressed. Diversity is becoming increasingly valuable in the workplace because it introduces concepts from a wide range of viewpoints and ultimately results in more innovative

solutions. While the workforce in the refinery is becoming technically more diverse, those people who conform to traditional role models continue to be the most successful. As a result, the organization suffers. I have seen countless cases where the most qualified person was passed over for a promotion because he or she did not “fit the mold.” This is particularly devastating because the “mold” does not exclude people only on the basis of gender or race, but also on the basis of educational background, age, and personality. By employing narrow definitions, the organization ultimately suffers.

To break down these paradigms, management must focus on work products and results rather than work processes when making promotional decisions. For example, our management has been reluctant to place women in line management positions because it was feared that women would not be tough enough to handle the job. However, many women are more effective than men in dealing with the blue collar workers because they are able to develop good working relationships with them. What is important is not how tough women are, but whether or not they will get the job done. Because management is focusing on work processes rather than results, women are being placed in “nice” staff jobs rather than the highly visible line supervisor positions.

A final topic is minority outreach programs. While these can be effective, they can also create animosity among other workers who fear reverse discrimination. However, the dismal record of our company for hiring minorities requires that we implement special programs to develop minorities for our future workforce. If these programs are to be successful, they absolutely must be based on performance. Hiring minorities to meet quotas only encourages labeling and ultimately hurts those people it is designed to help. By developing and hiring only candidates who can perform at the same level as their peers, we will break down the stereotypes which currently pervade our workplace.

**4. Describe a day in your life you would like to relive.**

The day I would most like to relive is not just **a** day but an entire era of my life. That era begins the day I entered college. While my college career continues to be one of my most substantial accomplishments, with the experience I now have, I would have done some things differently. For example, I would have worked hard at my engineering studies but I would have taken more liberal arts courses. My last semester I took a literature course which ended up being the most enjoyable class I had in college. While I continue to read widely in my spare time, I miss the classroom environment where I could discuss my impressions with others. Since leaving college, I have not found anyone who is interested in discussing literature. This class made me realize that there are many things I am interested in besides engineering and business and I would have liked to have had more exposure to them while I was still in the university environment.

I would also have taken the opportunity to live abroad. I never seriously considered doing a semester overseas because I was worried about the expense and I was afraid it would force me to add an additional year to my studies. While both of these concerns were legitimate, I now know the benefits would have far outweighed the costs. Having had the opportunity to travel since graduating from college, I realize how much my life is enriched every time I leave the country. This aspect of my life has become one of the most important to me and I intend to work overseas at some time during my career. I want to experience a foreign country from the perspective of a resident rather than just a tourist. I am especially fond of France and have recently resumed my French studies.

I also would have spent more time deciding where I wanted to attend college. **I** did not apply to any schools other than the University of Nevada-Reno because of the expense. I now know that I would have been able to finance my education one way or another and that cost should not have been the only factor. In addition to thinking about where I wanted to go, I would have challenged my ideas of what I wanted to do. I decided to be an engineer my junior year in high school. After that time, I spent all my effort on achieving that goal. Since women are still rare in engineering, I had many people tell me that I would not succeed in accomplishing this goal. This provided me with even more drive and focus to get the job done. However, once I finished college, I found myself asking if this was the right career move. Ultimately I decided that it was, but I found it disturbing that I might have spent the previous four years working toward a goal I really did not want. I vowed never to jump so blindly again.

Fortunately for me, this is an era that I can “relive.” Now that I have examined my professional goals and decided that graduate business school is the next career step I really want to take, I am once again faced with the chance to do the things I did not do the first time around. Now that I am more mature and have a better idea of what is really important to me, I will be sure to take full advantage of all that this opportunity has to offer. I will take an active role in organizing study tours to foreign countries, take a wide range of elective courses, and join student organizations that will allow me to meet people with similar interests.

TUCK

**1. Discuss your career progression to date. What factors have influenced your decision to seek a general management education? Based on what you know about yourself, how do you envision your career progressing after receiving the MBA degree? Please state your professional goals and describe your plans to achieve them.**

**I** have been working for Chevron at the Richmond Refinery since graduating fromcollege five years ago. I have held six different positions in the engineering and planning departments. As a result of this mobility, I have been exposed to several different areas of the refinery and have acquired a broad manufacturing background. The first three years of my career, I focused on developing my problem-solving and interpersonal skills. My engineering experience taught me to identify the root causes of problems and develop permanent solutions to them. Because many of the problems I was required to solve were too large for me to address alone, I learned to delegate and manage my time effectively. I also learned the importance of selling my ideas in order to get them implemented.

My fourth year at Chevron, I was assigned to the position of start-up engineer for a project to rebuild a processing unit that had been badly damaged by fire. The unit had been down for two years and was being rebuilt at a cost of $125 million. This unit was a major contributor to refinery profitability and I was instrumental in helping to bring it on-line safely and ahead of schedule. This experience was a major success for me and I began to advance quickly. I learned to see the problems I was solving in the context of the entire refinery rather than as isolated problems. I was able to identify business opportunities on my own and took the initiative to convince management to implement them. I was able to assimilate all the knowledge I had accumulated over the previous three years and my value to the organization increased rapidly.

Next, I was assigned to the position of process representative in charge of coordinating the process definition and process design of two major ($84 million and $20 million) retrofit projects. I worked with the engineering contractor to ensure project objectives were met at the lowest possible cost. After the process designs for these two projects were approved, I was assigned to my present position as Short-Range Planning Analyst. In this assignment, I develop the short range refinery operating plan, focusing on maximization of refinery profit in a dynamic market-driven environment. I also work with Supply and Distribution to develop these plans and coordinate the efforts of the refinery operating divisions as needed to ensure smooth implementation of new processing schedules. This position has increased my involvement in the financial aspects of our business.

I am applying to the Tuck MBA program at this time because, after five years of engineering and planning experience at an operating company, I have come to a crossroads in my career, As I have gained experience and received increased exposure to the business side of the oil industry, I have become aware that my engineering training has not prepared me adequately to deal with the broad strategic questions faced by senior level managers. I am seeking an MBA to supplement my work experience and gain high intensity exposure to the other business functions which are important to running a successful business. In addition, a general management education will increase my career flexibility. Without a formal business education, it would be very difficult for me to change business functions or move into a senior level management position outside the chemical process industries.

My future career goal is to advance to a senior-level management position dealing with strategy and international management for a multinational corporation. I am interested in strategy because I feel my strongest skills are in identifying the root causes of problems and developing and implementing lasting solutions to them. I am especially interested in international corporate strategy, because during my tenure at the Richmond Refinery, products sold into the export market have become increasingly important to our refinery’s profitability. Chevron’s planners and oil traders typically come from the engineering ranks and therefore lack the business skills necessary to analyze the refinery’s competitive position in new markets. At times it is even difficult to identify the refinery’s competition in these markets. As a result, the export market is viewed not as a viable market worthy of cultivation, but as a dumping ground for products, which allows the refinery to operate at capacity.

Tuck’s emphasis on a general management education fits well with my future career goals. I am not pursuing an MBA degree with an emphasis on operations expressly because my experience is in this area. I am more interested in gaining a broad understanding of each of the functional areas of business so I will be able to deal effectively with issues which impact the entire organization. In my current position as a Planning Analyst, I recommend changes in operation designed to increase refinery profitability. Historically, Planning Analysts at Chevron only considered refinery operation when making these recommendations. However, as the business becomes more complex and competitive, additional aspects such as payment terms and inventory carrying costs should also be incorporated to ensure profit maximization. Because I have had very little exposure to the other functional areas, it has been very difficult to incorporate these operating costs into my economic analyses.

Finally, an MBA will give me the skills necessary to be an effective change agent. While “fighting fires” often leads to a successful career at Chevron, this is not an effective form of management. Many of these problems occur as a result of poor planning. I believe that problems should be anticipated and avoided. By adopting a broader perspective and a strategic viewpoint, change can be managed and the road into the future can be made smoother. While I have incorporated these ideas into my career to date, I believe a general business education will allow me to apply these strengths more effectively and at a much higher level in the organization.

**2. Evaluate a recent experience that required the use of your leadership skills. What impact has the experience had on your personal and professional development?**

My biggest leadership success took place last year when I was the process engineer assigned to two heavy oil processing units. One of these units provided feed pretreatment for the other. I was approached by Operations Coordination and was asked if Widuri resid, a low value fuel oil stream, could be fed to the upstream of the two units. This would allow a portion of the resid stream to be upgraded to gasoil, a

high value intermediate product. I agreed to address the technical aspects of the problem and asked Operations Coordination to deal with the logistics.

When we reconvened to finalize the plan, it became apparent that the logistical constraints would render the project uneconomical. Having gathered the physical property data, I realized that the Widuri resid could be fed directly to the downstream unit. I suggested we bypass the feed pretreatment step entirely. This would allow us to upgrade the entire stream rather than only a small portion of it as the original plan would have required. In addition, it would avoid some of the operating costs.

Operations Coordination was enthusiastic, but I knew it would be difficult to sell the idea to Operations. A resid stream had never been fed directly to the downstream unit and I knew Operations would be concerned about damaging the catalyst in that unit.

This was a major operational change, but I was confident it would work. I gathered the necessary data and developed a plan which included a good monitoring program and contingency plan. This would allow us to identify and respond to any unexpected problems if necessary. Two weeks later I organized a meeting for all the interested parties and presented my plan which anticipated and addressed management’s concerns. The following day the resid was being fed to the downstream unit. This project resulted in profits to the refinery of $8 million over a five-month period.

This project marked a change in my career in terms of maturity and initiative. Prior to this, my efforts were focused primarily on my own sphere of operation. The success of this project gave me the self-confidence to assert my leadership skills. I began to approach problems from a refinerywide perspective. In addition, I began to challenge traditional approaches and offer more innovative solutions.

**3. Describe the characteristics of an exceptional manager using an example of someone whom you have observed or with whom you have worked. Illustrate how his or her management style has influenced you.**

I have been fortunate to have had the opportunity to work closely with our Refinery General Manager since being assigned to the position of Short Range Planning Analyst. Mike Hannan has made dramatic improvements in our refinery’s profitability since becoming Refinery Manager two years ago. Historically, the refinery was operated for the sake of engineering rather than making money. This is because Chevron’s managers come from the engineering ranks and generally prefer solving engineering problems to solving business problems. To make matters worse, the corporate research and engineering staff is located next door to the refinery. Because of its close proximity to our refinery, the research department was continually using our refinery as a giant pilot plant. As a result, our refinery provided more than half the research company’s revenues even though Chevron has a total of eight refineries and several chemical plants. Thus, research projects occupied an excessive amount of the refinery employees’ time and diverted their attention from making the refinery a

profitable business unit. In fact, the refinery’s financial performance was so poor that it was in danger of being shut down.

Mr. Hannan immediately focused on solving this problem. He was able to focus the efforts of all refinery employees by clearly stating his objectives in a mission statement. This made it very clear that it was important to reduce operating costs and increase light product yield. Because the employees were now able to understand their role in the larger context of the refinery, teamwork improved and people began to find innovative solutions to problems that were previously viewed as handicaps inherent to an older manufacturing facility. In less than a year, our refinery became a top performer in the Chevron system.

Mr. Hannan also required that capital projects be funded from the refinery’s revenues and the refinery return money to the corporation. This requirement forced close scrutiny of all capital projects and only those projects which were consistent with the refinery’s mission statement were funded. This dramatically cut the number of frivolous projects and helped to keep the research company from using the refinery for test programs that were inconsistent with our business objectives.

Mr. Hannan focused on not only the primary business functions, but the support functions as well. For example, our public affairs policy has always been developed independently of the business plan and was executed in a rather random fashion. The budgeted sum of money was distributed to anyone who asked for it on a first come, first served basis. Mr. Hannan required that the public affairs budget be consistent with our business plan. Money would be given preferentially to the community surrounding the refinery to improve our relationship with our neighbors. Because the ability to get environmental permits is critical to completing our capital projects, a good relationship with the community is absolutely necessary. By focusing our public efforts in this area, we are improving the likelihood that the community will view us as good neighbors and support us in our efforts to obtain permits.

Mr. Hannan also improved the work environment in the refinery. He empowered people by putting decision making authority at the proper levels. Previously, decisions were made at very high levels in the organization by those who were furthest from where the actual work was completed. This resulted in inefficient use of the employees’ talents and often resulted in less effective solutions to problems. In addition, Mr. Hannan has fostered an environment where risk taking and creativity are rewarded. Employees are beginning to step out of the old conservative ways of doing business and are making dramatic improvements in their work processes. Now even the employees at the lowest level of the organizational hierarchy feel they can contribute.

Because Mr. Hannan has focused all aspects of the refinery on the same goals, all employees are able to see how they fit into the organization and how their efforts contribute to the bottom line. I have seen the morale at this refinery increase

dramatically since these changes were implemented. This has resulted in a more profitable refinery and a more pleasant work environment. Mr. Hannan has had a tremendous influence on me because I have been able to see first-hand how an effective manager works. By providing clear focus and objectives, he was able to mobilize all the employees and accomplish many of the goals he outlined in his mission statement.

I am lucky to have an office two doors away from Mr. Hannan. He enjoys developing bright young people and often comes into my office to share his philosophies of business with me. I have a tremendous amount of respect for him and take his advice to heart. Now when I begin work on a new project, I clearly define how the project will contribute to the refinery’s bottom line. I have begun to think more strategically and look not only for the answers that best suit our needs today, but will also serve us in the future. I continually challenge the status quo and take calculated risks knowing that I will have some failures. Because the problems I solve in my current position cross operating divisional boundaries, I am dependent on the assistance of people from all over the refinery to solve them. I have learned how to identify who is best suited to solve particular problems and how to get them involved in the planning process. This has resulted in improved planning and more profitable refinery operation. I believe that working with Mr. Hannan has helped me to take the first step toward becoming a manager rather than just an engineer.

**4. what are your principal interests outside of your job or school?**

(See Roxane’s essentially identical answer to Wharton essay 4.)

DARDEN

**1. Specifically address your post-MBA short- long-term professional goals. How will Darden assist you in attaining these goals?**

(See her essentially identical answer to Stanford essay 2.

**2. The Darden School seeks a diverse and unique entering class of future managers. How will your distinctiveness enrich our learning environment and enhance your prospects for success as a manager?**

My broad manufacturing experience will enable me to bring a unique perspective to the learning environment at Darden. During my employment at a large oil refinery, I have worked in various aspects of manufacturing including the design and operation of the equipment used to produce a wide variety of petroleum products. In my current position, I plan the operation of the refinery as a whole to maximize profit in a dynamic, market-driven environment. I believe that my experience in manufacturing

will provide a much needed perspective on how things are really accomplished in the field. For those students who are not familiar with the tremendous inertia working against change inherent in a large manufacturing facility, my experience will provide insight and, at times, a reality check.

My experience will provide yet another unique insight into the diversity issue. I have spent my career working in an environment in which traditionally very few women have worked. I have had to learn to deal with people who doubted my abilities based on my gender alone. I have been able to build a very good professional reputation in an environment where women are often labeled as weak and unable to survive in the difficult refinery atmosphere. The perspective I bring with respect to the diversity issue is unique and will enhance any discussions which take place on this subject.

I am willing to speak my mind, which is critical in a classroom in which the case study method is utilized. In addition, I work well with people of varied backgrounds and am able to utilize the specific strengths of others to develop workable solutions to problems. In a team environment, one is required both to give and take. I have had the chance to develop these skills in my present position. Because teamwork is essential to the success of the case study method, these skills will be invaluable to me at Darden.

Finally, I spend all of my vacation time traveling and devote much of my free time to reading and studying French. Traveling has forced me to remove my small town blinders and open my mind to other ways of doing things. Traveling has increased my awareness of the fact that the American way of doing things is not the only way and that flexibility and sensitivity are absolutely necessary to get along with others. I have found that this applies not only to people of different nationalities but also to fellow Americans whose views may be different from my own.

These experiences have benefited me both in my personal life and on the job, and I believe that they will be an asset for me at Darden.

**3. Describe a significant leadership experience, decision-making challenge, or managerial accomplishment. How did this affect your professional/personal development?**

(See her essentially identical answer to Tuck essay 2.)

**4. What is the most difficult ethical dilemma you have faced in your professional life? Upon present reflection, would you have resolved this dilemma in a different manner?**

(See her essentially identical answer to Harvard essay 4.)

COMMENTS

1. There is a lot to like in Roxane’s essays. She does a very good job of distinguishing herself in several ways. First, she successfully positions herself as a woman who has had to work hard for the success she has enjoyed. She is from a relatively poor family from a very small town, so her career success owes a great deal to her determination and cleverness rather than her family’s situation. Second, she shows that she is a very talented engineer by emphasizing her highly profitable successes. This is all the more impressive for the fact that there are very few women to be found in her sort of industry. Third, she demonstrates that her talents are not limited to engineering. Her essays are very well written, suggesting that her communication skills are much better than might be anticipated. In addition, her 730 GMAT score had her in the top 2 percent in both verbal and quantitative ability, again demonstrating her intellectual balance. Fourth, she shows that she has already had substantial managerial success and yet would still benefit substantially from an MBA, One of the factors in her managerial success is the fact that she understands how to work with and through other people. Her political savvy appears well developed. Her teamwork and political skills are valuable items at a time when business schools emphasize these “softer” skills. Last, she makes it clear that she will bring a lot to her classmates in terms of her relatively unusual skills, experiences, and attitudes.

The net result is that she appears to be an engineer who is very skilled at her job, but brings much more to a school than just engineering knowledge. Given the great number of engineers applying to leading business schools it is useful for her to be able to position herself both as a top quality engineer and as more than just an engineer. (The “have your cake and eat it too” approach.)

1. I have included several different versions of her “why I want an MBA” essay because she has recast it to suit each school to which she applies. In applying to the joint MBA-International Studies MA program at Wharton, for example, she emphasized her interest in international strategy and in the development of a strong second language. For Stanford, on the other hand, she emphasized her interest in general management. She was not dissembling in mentioning these different areas, merely highlighting whichever of several actual interests was most pertinent to the given situation. Note that she is able to support each of these positioning efforts. The Tuck essay features a combination of the Wharton and Stanford essays, giving a good demonstration of how to recycle essays. Tuck essay 2 (on leadership) is another good example of recycling, this time of Wharton essay 2 (on challenging the thought of a group).
2. Her weakest essay is probably Wharton’s “what is the world’s greatest problem.” This is a hard one to write because it asks the respondent to pontificate on a subject that is seldom a matter of true expertise. Although that is probably the case here, she at least manages to avoid embarrassing herself with a truly naive essay, while still gaining credit for being reasonably knowledgeable and concerned about more than her own engineering field.

4. In Tuck essay 3, note the masterful exposition in the opening paragraph. She informs us of the context in which her manager was operating, thereby giving us the opportunity to understand the rationale and significance of his actions.

**ROGER**

*Background:*

**Job:** Entrepreneur

**Education:** Bachelor’s in economics from a German university

**Nationality:** German

*Critical issue to address:*

None.

**WHARTON**

**1. Please discuss your future career progression to date and your professional goals for the future. How will the MBA influence your ability to achieve your goals?**

My career path has been rather unorthodox. While I was still a student I started my own firm. For the first four years this consisted of embroidering terry-cloth textiles for department store chains. I began the business for two reasons. I had spotted this niche market which offered what I thought was a chance to make a fair amount of money. Of course, the reason that I was even thinking in those terms was that I had a strong desire to work for myself, because I very much enjoy having the opportunity to ‘create” something.

Getting this business established required that I put in long hours making sure that the machinery worked, that our deliveries would be made in spite of a truck breakdown, etc. I had to learn most things from scratch, since I had essentially no experience related to anything I was now doing. My biggest obstacle may have been the first one I faced, selling non-existent product to department store chains (which order only on a chain-wide basis) before I even had a company. I solved this as I solved other problems, by learning all that I could about the problem by doing library-type research and talking to everyone I could find who had experience of the issues involved, and then pushing and pushing until something worked out.

I eventually had a bit of money put aside, so I was able to take the next step in building my business. I rented a store of my own in which to sell our textiles. I

expanded our output by adding four machines, which allowed me also to expand the range of our output. This expansion allowed us to serve the hotel trade as well.

The business certainly expanded from a sales perspective as well. Turnover for the first year was 120,000 marks, By the sixth year we enjoyed revenues of 2,400,000 marks. This was in spite of the fact that our underinsured store burnt to the ground early in this sixth year (1989). Oddly enough, this cloud had a silver lining to it. We received a great deal of press coverage and our ensuing special sales led to the development of a greatly expanded clientele. We designed a new store which was truly state-of-the-art and much larger than our old one.

We then expanded our product line and added several more stores. Last year’s results showed turnover of 10.8 million marks and strong profitability, despite Germany’s poor business climate.

I very much hope to be able to continue “running my own show” in the future. But I hope to run a much bigger, more complex one. To do so will require a much greater understanding of things which I have grasped at only the most practical of levels, such as marketing and finance. I therefore view an MBA as essential step to taking this large step forward. I am in the fortunate position of having developed strong enough managers under me that I can be away from day-to-day supervision of the business, so now is a perfect time to make this investment in my managerial future. My choice of Wharton is due both to its reputation for overall excellence and to its strong entrepreneurial program.

**2. Describe a situation in your life when you actively challenged the traditional thought of a group. What level of impact did you have on the group?**

This question does not really apply to my situation. For the past decade I have been running my own business. As the boss of a small company which I started myself, I have not been answerable to anyone. Also, my principal community and social activities have not involved challenging a group’s traditional thought.

Consequently, in order to respond to this question, I will have to go back to a not terribly important event of some years ago. When I was first trying to get into business I wanted to embroider terry-cloth textiles for large department store chains. Such chains buy only on a chain-wide basis, so I had to be prepared to manufacture on a scale suitable to a chain’s potential requirements. To do so required buying some machinery at a price of 40,000 marks for each of several machines. I had very little money, so I needed to get my financing elsewhere.

I approached my local banks for a loan. The bankers I had to deal with were in their fifties and sixties. They were quite conservative in their views of life as well as lending; one might describe them as stodgy rather than simply conservative. They were uniformly hostile at first to an inexperienced, very young fellow who wished to

run a business for the first time. Winning them over to my point of view required several things. The most important thing I did was that I kept at it. I did not give up even in the face of their discouraging attitude and remarks. I also went to great lengths to show them that I understood what the business was about, and that I was prepared to work extraordinarily hard to be successful.

The combination of persistence and knowledge eventually convinced them to take a chance on me, which was good for them as well as for me.

3. **In your opinion, what is the world’s greatest problem? Why?**

The world seems to be presenting too great a choice of major problems. I am by no means certain that there is a single “greatest” problem, but I shall respond in the spirit of the question. Lack of tolerance for peoples who *are* different from one’s own group is not merely extremely widespread but also has had, and will continue to have, catastrophic consequences.

The lack of tolerance I am talking about can be in terms of others’ political, religious, racial, or ethnic backgrounds or beliefs. The particulars of a given situation may differ from those of other situations, but the key element is an unwillingness to allow other people to pursue their own lives in the fashion they choose.

My concern about this problem may owe a great deal to my being German. The “particulars” of our own history are all too well known in this regard. Lately various new problems, or rather similar sorts of problems which have bedeviled our history, have surfaced. The elements of this latest series of episodes are perhaps unique to Germany—the number of refugees; the laws prohibiting them from working, which makes them appear lazy to those who remain ignorant of the law (or its consequences), while at the same time granting them benefits at least as good as those granted to the unemployed; the impact of a recession; and, of course, the cessation of the parental role played by the East German state. The net result has been uncertainty and fear, two emotions which have had such terrible consequences in German history.

Other examples are similarly all too easy to find. The Northern Ireland battle over economics and religion. The religious (and historical) battle between Arabs and Jews. The remarkable upheavals in the former Soviet empire. The efforts of the Malays to keep ethnic Chinese subordinate. The list starts to feel endless, even though I have just begun.

The fact that innumerable such conflicts exist is clear. The sad thing is that modern weaponry offers the chance for killing beyond the proportions considered possible even in nightmarish novels a century ago. While human beings are unlikely to exist without substantial conflict, the sad thing is that progress on other fronts has been matched neither by the diminution of “tribal” hostilities nor by the improvement of peace-making mechanisms. I fear that the next decades may have such terrible tolls in

human lives, due to conflicts arising from tribal intolerance, that we may yet view the Cold War as a “golden age.”

**4. What nonprofessional activities do you find inspirational? At what level do you participate in these activities?**

My principal interests outside my job have been sports, especially volleyball, and a community project which aims to bring together people of different ages.

I have been playing volleyball ever since early in high school. What I liked about it right from the start was the uncomplicated way in which you can make friends and the different types of groups you can get to participate. I have played with my classmates, colleagues from my job, youngsters at the local sports club, and people I just met at the beach while on holiday. The only equipment needed is two poles, a rope, and a ball, and then off you go.

What fascinates me about volleyball is the amazing transition one makes from being an individual to being part of a team. The team changes character as the players rotate to new positions, and as the requirements change from needing a spike to needing a dig, etc., just as the teams themselves change after each game ends. Who has winners? Who can stay for just one more game? The game is extremely swift, with each change in requirement for success rewarding different attributes, so the team that acts most like a real unit and marshals its skills, without individual egos or simple confusion getting in the way, is most likely to win. The challenge of taking a group of strangers, or rivals in some other aspect of life, and making a *team* of them is a constant challenge which I love.

My interest in community work is somewhat similar. Several years ago several friends of mine and I decided to try to do our part in ameliorating some of the difficulties faced in living in our suburb. This suburb of Frankfurt was built in a rush in the seventies. It consists largely of high rise apartment complexes. Although the facilities are good, there is no sense of community to the environment.

We asked the local Protestant church for space in which people could meet. They agreed to provide this and to advertise forthcoming events in their newsletter. We also advertise the existence of this group and its activities at bulletin boards in the area.

Our focus is getting people to contribute whatever it is that they most value about themselves or most want from these interactions. One elderly woman with time on her hands baby-sits and cooks for several of the single mothers in the area. One pensioner who is a skilled tinkerer enjoys showing others how to take care of their apartments and appliances. Various young people are happy to do the shopping for elderly invalids. And so on. We also organize regular bus trips to local spots of interest, like a winery, dripstone cave, or picnic grounds.

Many dozens of people now feel that they know their neighbors and are part of a real community.

CHICAGO (Selected)

**1. Why are you seeking an MBA from the University of Chicago?**

As a German entrepreneur who would like to expand his current business, I believe an MBA is necessary for me at this time.

My career path has been rather unorthodox thus far. While still a student, I started my own firm. For the first four years, this consisted of embroidering terry-cloth textiles for department store chains. I began the business for two reasons. I had spotted this niche market which offered what I thought was a chance to make a fair amount of money. Also, I had a strong desire to work for myself, to “create” something, and was delighted to take the opportunity available to me.

Getting this business established required that I put in long hours making sure the machinery worked, that our deliveries would be made in spite of truck breakdowns, etc. I had to learn most things from scratch, since I had essentially no experience related to running a business. I learned as much as possible through doing library-type research and talking to everyone I could find who had experience with the issues involved. Then **I** pushed and pushed until something worked out.

I eventually had a bit of money put aside, so I was able to take the next step in building my business. I rented a store of my own in which to sell our textiles. I expanded our output by adding four machines, which allowed me also to expand the range of our output. This expansion allowed us to serve the hotel trade as well.

The business certainly expanded from a sales perspective as well. Turnover for the first year was 120,000 marks. By the sixth year, we enjoyed revenues of 2,400,000 marks. That year we designed a new store which was truly state-of-the-art and much larger than our old one. We then expanded our product line and added several more stores. Last year’s results showed a turnover of 10.8 million marks, despite Germany’s poor business climate.

I very much hope to continue “running my own show” in the future. However, I would like to run a much bigger, more complex one. To do so will require a much greater understanding of things which I have grasped at only the most practical of levels. In particular, there are two areas I must address if I intend to be successful in this expansion: control systems and finance.

Thus far, my business has been run through personal management, literally being on the spot to address any problems that arise. I would like to move toward a more “professional” management style, putting a management structure in place that would

provide a built-in control mechanism. I have benefited from the fact that my business is a community-type enterprise, where I know my clients and employees personally. This has cultivated a certain loyalty to me, but in the long run, reliance on this overly personal view of things could be detrimental to the expansion of the business.

My desire to understand more about finance relates to my desire to expand my business. Right now I think that I understand too little about how to analyze my financing needs, and will consequently be unable to raise substantial sums of either debt or equity.

My interest in a rigorous, theoretical approach to such subjects—to balance my purely experiential understanding—drives my desire to attend the University of Chicago. Since I already have much practical experience, I am not interested in a case method program which simulates the “real world,” I am looking for a serious quantitative approach to finance, as well as hard-edged marketing skills to supplement the intuitive grasp I already have. I am in the fortunate position of having developed strong enough managers under me so that I can be away from the day-to-day supervision of the business, so this is an ideal time to pursue the MBA.

I think I would be able to contribute to the school in terms of being a German entrepreneur who has been running a business for ten years. I understand firsthand retailing in Germany, including the legal framework, customer attitudes, and the general business environment of post-reunification Germany. And I am an extremely outgoing person who gets along easily with others.

I believe the MBA would supplement my developed interpersonal and practical skills, and give me the necessary “hard skills” to see my business expand into the next decade.

MICHIGAN (Selected)

**1. What was the biggest risk that you have taken or most substantial obstacles you have overcome?**

The biggest risk I have undertaken is opening my own business. There were a number of major obstacles I overcame at every point in the expansion of the business.

The first major obstacle was my own youth and inexperience. I started the textile embroidery business when I was 21. The first thing I had to do was to sell nonexistent products to department store chains (which order only on a chainwide basis). At first, many managers were reluctant to even hear my pitch; they saw me only as an untested “kid,” After analyzing my first failures, I saw that there was no way I could get around my inexperience. Instead of trying to act smooth and experienced (which came

off phony), I decided to turn my youth to my advantage, by conveying enthusiasm and energy. Soon, I had these same managers chatting and laughing (and signing orders), I learned a lot those first few years about communicating with, and influencing, people.

Another challenge came when I requested my first bank loan. After two years, I had established a fairly large clientele of department store chains and needed to invest in four new machines at a price of 40,000 marks each. The bankers I had to deal with were in their fifties and sixties and were quite conservative in their views of life as well as lending. They were uniformly hostile at first to an inexperienced, very young fellow who wanted to run a business for the first time. Winning them over to my point of view required that I really keep at it. I went to great lengths to show them that I understood what the business was about, and that I was prepared to work extraordinarily hard to be successful.

As the business took off, and I matured both in personal and professional life, other challenges arose. I arrived at a point where there was a ceiling of profit in the textile embroidery business, and I needed to diversify into other products. After many hours of research, visits to the chamber of commerce, and personally handing out surveys at the local mall, I decided to focus on the group of women consumers between 25 and 50 with a large disposable income. I diversified into upmarket hardware, tableware, and electrical appliances, and firmly entrenched myself to do battle with the other fellow at the mall who was selling similar products. By pointed advertising campaigns, and a clear view of my clientele, I established my own niche in this market, and saw, despite competition, a dramatic increase in profits.

These challenges (and many others) contributed to my personal and professional development. I saw that hard work and exploiting one’s strengths (while working seriously on one’s weaknesses) was the way to make a gamble pay off. I have matured along with my business, and am eager to seek even greater challenges as my skills and ambitions increase.

**2. Imagine that through the marvels of technology, you have the ability to relive one day of your life. What day would you choose? Why?**

The day in my life I would like to relive was a day of tremendous relief, after what started as a potential disaster. After six years in business, my underinsured store burned down (on the one-year anniversary of the new store). Just two days before the fire, I had called the insurance agent to request more coverage (we were about 30 percent underinsured). After the fire, the insurance agent said there was nothing he could do, based only on a spoken telephone agreement. However, several people in the agent’s office had heard our conversation (he was using a speaker phone), and they went to the Board of Directors with this knowledge. The Board took up the matter and we were told we would have to wait several weeks for a decision on whether the agreement constituted a viable contract.

Meanwhile, two weeks later, we set up a hallway stand in the mall to sell our products. We were used to doing about 15,000 marks per day, and figured we would be lucky to make 5,000, just enough to tide us over. A seeming miracle happened, however. Not only did we make the usual amount of money, but in fact on that day, we grossed 100,000 marks! We could barely keep up with demand, fostered by the press coverage about the fire in the local newspaper. (In fact, these elevated profits continued for weeks on end.)

On the same day, I got a call from the insurance agent, who said the Board had decided to consider our telephone conversation a contractual agreement, and was willing to put up the money required to pay for the damages. I can’t say that this day ranks among the most enjoyable in terms of fun; however, after two weeks of constant worry, I slept ten long hours, and felt an immense sense of relief.

In fact, this cloud turned out to have a silver lining. Not only were we able to stay in business, but the press coverage brought us an expanded clientele, and the profits we made in a relatively short period allowed us to invest in a second store.

COMMENTS

1. In the first Wharton essay Roger recognizes his unusual position as an entrepreneur and looks to capitalize on it by immediately bringing it to the reader’s attention with his opening phrase. This frames the essay and has one ready to see what makes him unusual, (Note, however, that he does a more effective job of showing why a given school is appropriate for him in his Chicago essay, which he anchors more firmly to what is unique about Chicago.)
2. Later in this first essay he shows that he bootstrapped his way into the business, starting with very little indeed and needing to work very hard at unglamorous tasks. Later in the essay he shows the remarkable progress he made from this humble start. This includes showing that he has become a real manager insofar as he has developed strong managers under him, Saying that they could handle the business while he goes off for two years of education makes his managerial skills clear.
3. His record marks him as a serious businessperson. He is therefore wise to show the other side of his character by talking about a nonbusiness issue in essay 3; the world’s greatest problem thus is intolerance rather than some business or economics issue. In the following essay, discussing his sporting and community interests performs the same function. (Were he from a nonbusiness background, I would have preferred to see him take every opportunity to discuss business issues to show that he is going to fit into the school.)
4. Discussing sports, as he does in Wharton essay 4, is not generally particularly interesting insofar as most of the candidates for business schools have participated in them. Here it is useful, though, because it shows that he is not a loner and, for that matter, fits the profile of a typical applicant in some ways at least, and will thus fit in

well to the school’s social life. Similarly, discussing his community work shows that he has a heart.

5. His Michigan “day to relive” story is a marvelous tale. It is interesting and shows that he has accumulated a substantial amount of community goodwill.

SYLVIE

*Background:*

**Job:** Consultant (formerly an accountant)

**Education:** Accounting degree from a good French business school

**Nationality:** French

*Critical issue to address:*

As an accountant, she needs to distinguish herself from the large number of candidates with a similar background.

**STANFORD**

**1. Each of us has been influenced by the people, events, and situations of our lives. How have these influences shaped who you are today?**

I was raised on a small family farm located in the southwest of France, about twelve kilometers from Albi. For many years I regarded my childhood as a disadvantage, but I have come to realize that in fact the determination and teamwork I learned as a child continue to serve me today.

I lived with my parents, my brother, my grandfather, and the two youngest brothers of my father. Because my father lost his mother when he was young, he raised his brothers along with his children.

My father was a great influence in my life. He had a calm strength and determination, as well as a deep affinity with nature. Even though he had health problems and financial difficulties he refused to abandon the farm. He believed that independence and self-determination were necessary for survival. I remember the day in the garden shed when I was seven years old, helping my father extract honey from the bee hives. He said, “bees spend their lives working together to produce honey for people. It is the same for our family.” Because the links in our family were strong, we were able to work together toward a common goal. It is this spirit of productivity and collaboration which inspires me.

I worked on the farm with my family for eighteen years: harvesting grapes and corn, milking cows, cleaning animal stalls, feeding hens, pigs, and rabbits, and tending the vegetable garden. During the school year I had to ride my bicycle four kilometers to school every morning, and back again in the evening. At night I was responsible for feeding the animals, after which I did my schoolwork and went to sleep, exhausted. I did not have much of a social life because all my time was divided between school and work on the farm.

I attended secondary school at Lycee Bellevue in Albi, the nearest city. In 1981 1 passed the Secondary Education Baccalaureat in Mathematics with High Honors, thereby proving to my father that I had inherited his determination. Because of my parents’ financial difficulties my studies were financed by my own earnings, partial scholarships, and bank loans. When I first arrived at Ecole des Cadres in Paris, I felt an outsider because most of my classmates were the children of business executives.

There are still quite pronounced class distinctions in France, and I was sometimes looked down upon by other students as a result of my modest origins. I started to hide my family’s occupation even when, during school holidays, I went back to work on the farm. We all came back to school well tanned, but I may have been unique insofar as I did not get my tan from being on a beach.

My shame resulted from the usual combination of peer pressure and the desire to fit in. I came to view the value of my background quite differently once I graduated first in my class at Ecole des Cadres. I realized at last that my upbringing had been a great advantage. I still view it as by far the most important influence upon who I am today. A few examples will probably make that clear.

I have never had anything “given” to me. I had to struggle to break away from the typical future that awaited most of my classmates in the countryside. I had to struggle both financially and psychologically to succeed as a student in Paris, and then again as a businesswoman. I consequently recognize an opportunity when I see one and do my best not to waste it.

When I had a chance, through scholarships, to go to a prestigious university, I seized it. I took fullest advantage of the opportunity too, not just in terms of getting top grades or producing my prize-winning thesis. I spent extra hours in the library researching issues that were only touched upon in class, such as special planning techniques and cost control methods. During research for my thesis I spent twenty hours each week at FR3, a public television station, in order to learn from the inside how it functioned. I was also elected class representative, despite my provincial upbringing, and managed to work part time as a cashier to help finance my studies.

As a certified public accountant I saw the opportunity to learn the workings of various industries. Each project represented for me a chance to learn about something new, whether it be the transportation, real estate, communication, or nuclear industries.

Even in my personal life I have tried to seize every opportunity available to me. For example, when the real estate market was favorable, I bought an apartment which I then spent two years refurbishing. As my finances were limited, I did this construction piecemeal, living in the midst of planks and pipes, until I saw my dream realized.

**2. How do you see your career developing? How will an MBA further that development? Why are you applying to Stanford?**

The MBA is an important step on the way to creating my own business. It would build on the strong quantitative and leadership skills I already have, and provide me with three important skills necessary for my undertaking: a broader perspective on business and management; experience working collaboratively in groups; and a creative approach to entrepreneurship. I have chosen Stanford for its excellence in each of these three areas.

My long-term professional goal is to create my own business: a financial advisory firm for small to medium-sized companies. The focus of this enterprise would be on nonroutine financing and investment decisions which smaller firms lack the in-house expertise to handle without assistance.

After seven years of professional experience I have acquired some of the skills necessary for my undertaking. My experience, however, has been limited in scope. While my education and work at Deloitte-Touche prepared me to deal expertly with accounting and auditing, I lack a more general view and understanding of business. My desire to learn more about business, and to do so in a more free-flowing environment, prompted my move to D.G. Conseil. While this experience has been valuable, I have not yet gained a sufficient understanding of numerous functional aspects of business or, indeed, a general management perspective. My lack of these things is one reason for wanting an MBA at this time. Another is that I have had very little professional experience in working in collaborative groups, which I view as important to my own managerial development, particularly in light of my desire to start my own business. A third reason for my interest in an MBA is that I would like as much exposure as possible to entrepreneurial theory and practice.

These three desires, when matched with the strengths of Stanford’s program, made clear to me that the GSB would be an ideal fit for me. Its general management emphasis, emphasis upon teamwork, and, of course, its remarkable tradition of producing successful entrepreneurs, make its program most desirable for me.

I would be remiss if I did not admit that its sterling reputation (in France and elsewhere) also plays a role in my thinking.

**3. Create your ideal small group with whom to have a conversation. You may choose anyone and any topic. Explain your choices and why they are important to you.**

I would like to gather together four very different people in order to discuss the notion of success. The reason that “success” is a topic of interest to me is that I have worked very hard throughout my life, and enjoy doing so, but I know that I have never really asked myself why I work as I do, or why I enjoy it the way that I do, I suppose that now is as good a time as any to open the inquiry.

My first conversation partner would be Epicurus, the founder of a school of thought which emphasized a nearly hedonistic approach to life. His notion of “carpe diem” suggested that life is to be lived to the fullest, albeit with an underlying suggestion that pleasure in its simpler forms is the likely, perhaps even appropriate, outlet.

My second conversation partner would be a far more spiritual individual. The specific representative of this approach to life is not particularly important to me, but I will choose Gandhi as a conventional choice to speak for this very different set of values. His view that one’s life is to be valued to the extent that one helps others while leading an extremely modest existence oneself represents a view opposite to the sensation-centered Epicurus.

My third partner would be Shakespeare, or at least the Shakespeare represented by the idea that “nothing is but thinking makes it so.” (I hope that this translation from French back into English is accurate.) The idea that one’s objective circumstances are unimportant relative to the way one understands or views them provides a perfect counterpoint to the Epicurean and spiritualist views.

My fourth partner would be my father, insofar as his views are much more pragmatic and earthy than any of the other participants. (Of course to the extent that I am my father’s daughter I suppose that he would not be strictly necessary to this discussion, but I am reluctant to deny him a chance to participate in this company.) He considers that a successful life is based on your attitude to life, regardless of what you achieve in a practical sense. In other words, you are successful to the extent that you make it clear to your family and friends how much you care about them, and by trying your hardest, with enthusiasm and courage, to promote the interests of those closest to you.

I would enjoy very much the discussion which I would try to foster concerning how one might view the successful life. The group I have chosen should provide a very good balance of competing perspectives, which would no doubt be well presented. (I hope that my father and I would come close to holding our own.)

**4. How would you teach ethics? Can ethics be taught?**

I suspect that it is most appropriate to respond to these questions in reverse order. I think that ethics can indeed be taught, but I think that there are very clear limits to the impact it will generally have upon people who are already in their mid to late twenties. I think that the Jesuits were (are?) probably right in their view that the critical learning period regarding large moral issues is up to the age of seven. Therefore, I think that the largest influence upon a child is inevitably going to be its environment in the early

years of its life, most especially its family. The impact of learning later in life is likely to be modest in comparison.

This does not mean that I am altogether pessimistic about the possibility of influencing people by the time they reach adulthood, but I think that one must inevitably have somewhat limited objectives. The objectives should probably be to influence “some of the people some of the time,” An appropriate course in a business school should probably aim to give a reasonable overview of the different notions of ethics which have been developed through history. These notions should then be applied to the business environment in which students will again soon be working.

The application of these ideas should be quite realistic, given the tendency of many to shrug off this sort of subject as so much hot air. This suggests that a case study approach is probably necessary. The application also needs to look very carefully not just at the different options open to the participants, and the ethical implications of each option according to the various theories, but also the likely outcomes of each option. By outcomes I mean the impact upon the companies involved, their customers (suppliers, employees, etc.), and the individuals involved—in terms of their careers at their respective companies, and also in terms of the psychological impact of each possible course of action.

In other words, I think that such a course when presented to people of this level of maturity and sophistication cannot be “preachy” or simple-minded. Rather, it must be “real world” in nature as well as on a par with the level of difficulty of other courses in the curriculum. Otherwise I fear that it would invite being taken less than seriously.

**BABSON (Selected)**

**1. How do you feel the Babson MBA can help you attain your specific career and personal goals for the five years after you graduate?**

The Babson MBA is an important step on the way to creating my own business. It would build on the technical skills I already have through my work as a CPA and marketing manager, and provide me with entrepreneurial skills, as well as a broader, global view of business.

I have chosen the Babson School first because it accents entrepreneurship. My long-term professional goal is to create a financial advisory firm for small to medium-sized companies. The focus of this enterprise would be on nonroutine financing and investment decisions, since many small firms lack the expertise to handle this, In order to pursue this goal, I would like exposure to American-style companies as well as courses in general entrepreneurial theory. My experience as CPA for Deloitte-Touche prepared me to deal quite expertly with accounting and auditing

methods, but the firm had a rigid, hierarchy type of structure, which did not allow me to define my own functions or gain entrepreneurial experience. I would take advantage of internships offered through Babson in order to see firsthand the structure of an American business. I think this would provide a model to consider in my own undertaking, as well as introduction to American-style management.

I also believe a Babson MBA will help broaden my business perspective. After becoming frustrated with the rigid structure in Deloitte-Touche, I moved to a consulting firm, DG Conseil, a much smaller company which allowed me to create my own position as marketing manager. This job did give me more management responsibility, but I in no way feel ready to risk opening a business at this stage. I simply was not exposed to enough situations that one likely encounters as entrepreneur. Because Babson stresses real management case studies, this education would give me tools in a short time to rise to different occasions presented by the real world. Also, I am not satisfied with just knowing a little about French companies. I would like to make my perspective broader, as more and more firms do business across borders. I would also like a chance to use English in my career and I think it is best to study business issues in this language, which is even in Europe considered the “language of business.”

Naturally I would not be ready immediately upon graduating to open a business. I would like to work for two to three years in a consulting company, with greater responsibility than I had at DG Conseil. Because my background is so technical, many firms are reluctant to hire me, even if I can most surely do the job. The Babson name and qualification would make me more marketable to businesses, which ensures that I get good position, responsibility, and experience soon. I would especially like to work in the States, and hope even maybe to establish contacts for future work while at Babson. Its closeness to Boston would make this an easier search, or at least give me ideas about what sort of company to pursue before coming back to France.

Because Babson promises an entrepreneurial foundation, plus a broad business perspective, as well as its location in a place in America I have always wanted to live, I am quite committed to this school as my first choice for the MBA.

COMMENTS

1. Sylvie’s determination is brought out in terms of being just a “farm girl” who has never had things given easily to her. By writing an optional essay that conveys in concrete, evocative words her origins, she was able to show how much she has pushed to get where she is in life (a successful Parisian businesswoman). Showing herself to be from a farming background separates her from the majority of candidates who have a predominantly middle-class background.
2. She shows that whatever she has undertaken, she has accomplished in an exemplary way, always going beyond what is required of her:

1. She not only went to college (a considerable feat in her circumstance), but graduated first in her class.
2. In materials not included here, she mentioned that she completed her CPA requirements in two years, instead of the usual five or six, which necessitated her working evenings and weekends and sacrificing her vacations.
3. Her provincial background, strong undergraduate academic performance, and years of successful work experience, are all worth emphasizing, both for their own sake and to counteract the impact of a low GMAT score. The first of these factors suggests a reason for not performing so well on the GMAT, whereas the latter factors suggest her underlying analytical skills.
4. The same is true of her small-group essay. She shows that her provincial background and undergraduate accounting study do not prevent her from discussing obscure historical figures. Discussing how the group should work as a group suggests that she has given some thought to the question, because implicit is the question of why you have selected them together, not just individually. In addition, showing her gratitude to her hard-working father strikes a very nice note. It would have been nearly impossible for this to work as well if she had not demonstrated her independence and maturity via her schooling away from home and two successful jobs. Had she been applying right out of college, her invocation of her father would have suggested immaturity rather than gratitude.
5. Her ethics essay is very well reasoned and well stated. The depth and sophistication to most of her answers rebuts the provincialism and weak GMAT indictments.
6. Her essays reveal her to be very hard working. Her key themes, which she establishes very successfully, are clearly persistence and hard work.

7, Her Stanford application is superficial, however, in showing how Stanford could help her. Her Babson essay, in contrast, does a very good job of demonstrating that she understands the nature of the Babson program and knows precisely how it will be useful to her.

8. She writes nearly lyrical essays, especially for an accountant. This is uncommon and very useful, especially for a non-native English speaker.

ALBERT

*Background:*

**Job:** Electrical engineer/consultant

**Education:** Doctorate in electrical engineering

**Nationality:** Cameroonian

*Critical issue to address:*

Low GMAT score

COLUMBIA

**1. Discuss your career plans, and what has influenced these plans.**

I would like to attain a high-level management position in a large international firm. I have come to realize that my current career path will not easily permit me to reach my goal, which is why I am considering an MBA at this time. Several factors have led me to this realization.

While I began my career as an assistant instructor of computer science in Cameroon, it might be more appropriate to view my three and three-quarter years with Electricité de France (EDF) as the starting point.

This project (described in Essay 2) was decisive in determining my career path. I was satisfied with this project from an analytical point of view, but not in other ways. My position as researcher and the bureaucratic nature of this public enterprise gave me little opportunity to implement the changes my research clearly called for. The introduction to management (I was entirely responsible for the project), along with the frustration at my lack of influence, made me determined to seek a more influential position in which I could push abstract achievement into practical value. This realization made me turn away from the idea of becoming a scholar, and made me resolve to seek a career in the business world.

This sense of frustration at my lack of influence led me to take a job as project engineer for Cap Gemini Sogeti. I manage small groups of three to four engineers, working in close collaboration with clients. This work has given me the opportunity to examine firsthand several types of industries, including communications, aeronautics, transportation, and heavy industry. I have been pleased by many aspects of my job: I enjoy being a group leader; I enjoy being in a position to influence our clients to take positive action; and I have enjoyed working in a variety of industries and countries.

I am now at a point when I would like to take another large step in my career. I am proficient at, and well regarded for, what I currently do. However, I wish very much to move into high-level general management. I do not want to forsake the skills I have, but rather, through greater management skills, to bring them to bear with greater impact. Evolution to managerial positions for technical experts is a slow process, and

at least in France, there seems to be a ceiling for those who are considered foremost as engineers. This prompts my desire to seek the MBA at this time.

After completion of MBA studies, I hope to join a firm like Cap Gemini, but in a different position. I hope also to be able to work in my native country, Cameroon. This latter desire may have to wait for a time, but eventually I intend to return to Cameroon. If opportunities to benefit my country are unavailable to me once I have the necessary set of skills, I will start my own firm. I believe that an MBA will provide me with the necessary management skills to take a leadership position in these future endeavors.

**2. Describe the two accomplishments of which you are most proud.**

My most substantial accomplishment was the completion of my PhD doctoral dissertation at Electricité de France in 1989.

My project was to model the dynamic behavior of power system loads. Loads are the consumption of electricity in a power system. I was required to analyze the production-consumption balance, which is critically important because electricity cannot be “stocked.” Whereas production was known because it was determined by EDF, consumption was unknown since it depended mainly on users.

I consider this my most important accomplishment for three reasons. First, it was the most highly analytical project I had encountered. Numerous variables had to be defined and means of measuring them determined in order to create a software package that would encapsulate this knowledge. From this point of view, the project was quite successful. I created an elegant software package, which is still in use at EDF, and I was invited to publish and present a paper at the IFAC conference in Austria.

Second, I was introduced to the rigors of management. I had to manage input from experts, organize campaigns of on-site experimentation, and present clear progress reports both to my PhD committee and to EDF managers, whose interests were not always compatible. I had full responsibility for the project and completed it on schedule in four years. Finally, as I mentioned in the first essay, this project largely determined my career path.

Another achievement which I am proud of was a professional project at Cap Gemini Sogeti for FANSTIC, a European program which studied air traffic control. I was pleased to be chosen as a representative for the French contingent of a pan-European program. I was able to meet engineers from Greece, the Netherlands, Belgium, and many other countries. In addition, the program was a cutting-edge study of new technologies at a research center established expressly for this purpose. Being able to hold my own in, and also to add value to, a group composed of some top European

engineers greatly increased my personal and professional confidence, and gave me a clear, positive perspective on my own abilities.

From a career perspective, I realized that technical experts all over Europe share the same plight. It is very difficult for them to gain access to broad management. Their access to management positions proceeds through “natural evolution” which often takes ten to fifteen years, and still often remains limited in scope. This realization prompted me to begin considering the MBA as a means of achieving my goals.

3. **Discuss your involvement in a community or extracurricular organization.**

**Include an explanation of how you attained your position in the organization and how you help the organization meet its goals.**

Young Cameroonians in France intent upon a business career lack the “networks” that can be helpful in giving career advice and support. Several friends and I decided to change this by forming the National Association of Cameroonian Executives, a group which provides a support system to Cameroonian business people in France. We meet regularly to discuss how to obtain a work permit, formulate a goal-oriented career plan, manage conflicts at work, etc.

While the organization originally started as a local group in Paris, interest in the group has caused us to expand to the national level. We now have over 250 members. Our increased size has allowed us to formulate more ambitious goals. For example, later this year we will host a conference which will bring together international companies with operations in Cameroon and young Cameroonian professionals working in France.

I am very proud of the success of our group, and am inspired by the feeling of community and commitment it brings. It means a great deal to me to be able to help my fellow Cameroonians reach their professional goals. Personal advancement without benefiting one’s community is ultimately not rewarding.

**4. Discuss a personal failure.**

In 1988, ten friends of mine and I established a computer engineering consultancy. I did this “on the side” while still working for EDF. Part of our activity was devoted to transferring computer technologies to Africa.

At the beginning we met with some success, winning contracts both in Cameroon and in France. Two factors, however, eventually led to the dissolution of the business. Our group of partners had differing views on how to pursue the market, which the geographic dispersion of the company, and the fact that this was a part-time activity for many of us, made it difficult to resolve. Also, our undercapitalization limited the time we had in which to build agreement among the management team. Within two years, time had run out for our company.

I was naturally quite disappointed at having missed what seemed to be a great opportunity. Our group offered a wide range of talents and abilities, plus we had good market prospects and strong support from decision makers in Cameroon, It also seemed that we shared a rare blend of enthusiasm and commitment, fostered by the fact that we were all close friends engaged in a collaborative effort.

My objective had been, naturally, to establish a successful business. However, I eventually learned that enthusiasm and hard work are not enough in this regard. To achieve success in such a venture, a well-thought-out management structure is required from the beginning. In addition, even though the venture was unsuccessful, it gave me a taste for the freedom and excitement of setting up my own company, a possible option for the future. From this experience, I know that I must augment my management skills, including organizational ones, in order to succeed in such a project in the future.

**5. Describe a cross-cultural situation in which you were challenged and how you responded.**

This question is not simple to answer, because my entire life, as an African pursuing a business career in Europe, is a cross-cultural challenge! I am constantly reminded of my position as an outsider, and have had to cultivate much judgment and flexibility in navigating my professional life.

One aspect of this situation that particularly challenges me is the individualistic nature of French society. Life in Cameroon is much more community-oriented, and it is considered selfish to pursue solely personal aims. While I appreciate the relative freedom of this individual pursuit, I am sometimes distressed by the egotism and jealousy caused by this individualistic notion of success. I am especially disappointed by the lack of group spirit.

I adjust to this situation by devoting considerable time to the Association of Cameroonese Executives, which allows me to help others in my community. Also I try to bring a sense of group commitment to professional projects in my current job, which I think others appreciate and seem to respond to in the same spirit.

**6. What has motivated you to apply to the Columbia Business School?**

My reasons for wishing to attend Columbia are quite simple. My criteria for a business school are a perfect description of Columbia, I would like a program which is American but very international, located in a large east-coast city, and offers a well-balanced academic program.

I have wide exposure to European business, so I would prefer to learn more about American methods. In addition, I look forward to having the chance to pursue

subjects in depth via a two-year program rather than a one-year one. These factors point me toward America, and especially toward Columbia.

KELLOGG

**1. Briefly describe your career progression to date.**

I began my career as an assistant instructor of computer science in Cameroon. This was just a means of paying for my studies at that time, however, so it might be more appropriate to view my three and three-quarter years with Electricité de France (EDF) as the starting point.

I was charged with modeling the dynamic behavior of power system loads, a project which also served to meet my PhD requirements. Loads are the consumption of electricity in a power system. I was required to analyze the production-consumption balance, which is critically important because electricity cannot be “stocked.” Whereas production was known because it was determined by EDF, consumption was unknown since it depended mainly on users. I had to gather valid technical information, manage input from experts, organize campaigns of on-site experimentation, and present clear progress reports both to my PhD committee and EDF managers. The project was extremely analytical in nature, as it required numerous variables to be adequately defined and means of measuring them determined, in order to then create a software package which would encapsulate this knowledge.

I was satisfied with this project from an analytical point of view—insofar as I completed an elegant software package and had my thesis published and presented at the IFAC conference in Austria—but not in other ways. My position as a researcher, and the stratified bureaucratic nature of this public enterprise, gave me little opportunity to influence the implementation of needed changes.

My consequent dissatisfaction led me to take a job as project engineer for Cap Gemini Sogeti. I manage small groups of three to four engineers, working in close collaboration with clients. My work has extended across a variety of industries, including communications, aeronautics, transportation, and heavy industry. I have been pleased by many aspects of my job: I enjoy being a group leader; I enjoy being in a position to influence our clients to take positive action; and I have enjoyed working in a variety of industries and countries.

I am now at the point where I wish to take another large step in developing my career. I am highly proficient at, and well regarded for, what I currently do. I wish very much to move into general management, however, and the natural career progression for an engineer into general management is very slow. That is why I am hoping to pursue an MBA at this time.

**2. Your background, experiences, and values will enhance the diversity of Kellogg’s student body. How?**

I believe that there are two things which separate me from the majority of applicants, and which would thereby enhance Kellogg’s diversity.

The first is that because of my experience as a technical consultant I have had the opportunity to work in a variety of industries. My clients have included SNCF (the French national railroad system), RATP (Paris public transport), FANSTIC (a European community program which brought together engineers from across Europe to study air traffic control), Deutsche Aerospace, Volvo, IKEA, and many others. In group discussions I would be able to offer valuable information not only on technology and information systems, but also on the implementation of these in several types of industries. I have firsthand knowledge of both public- and private-sector enterprises and would be able to compare them in terms of management, culture, and business environment. For my classmates who were considering working abroad, I would be a source of information about business culture in France and Europe generally.

My African origin is another aspect which would bring diversity to Kellogg. I grew up in Cameroon and received my undergraduate education there. I have maintained a commitment to my community, while at the same time integrating myself into European professional life. (Because I am an outsider I have never taken European culture and business organization for granted; the pressures to adapt have given me a degree of sensitivity that many others lack.) It has been my experience that many are ignorant of the political and economic situations of Africa, and I would be able to offer valuable information and advice to those who were interested in doing business in Africa. I hope to be able to establish contacts while at school, both as a service to those who wish to go to Africa and also with the goal of developing my native country, to which I am most committed.

I hope that I would also add to the diversity of the social life at Kellogg. I am eager to share my own customs with others, whether it be discussing politics and traditional life, or sharing meals, soccer games, and stories. Americans are famous for their openness to new cultures, and I am eager to be a part of this cultural exchange.

**3. For fun l...**

The activity I appreciate most during my leisure time is to play soccer with friends. We meet regularly on Saturday afternoons at one of the Paris stadiums, organize in two teams, and have a match.

This is so enjoyable because it is completely informal and spontaneous. (We are not even registered as a permanent club at the police station.) The teams change every time, so that we have a chance to play with and against each of our fellows. These

meetings also give us a chance to chat, to laugh, and to relax from the difficult work week. From time to time, we even organize weekend excursions to other cities (Orleans, Rennes, Rouen, Strasbourg) to meet our comrades there. The usual program consists of sightseeing in the morning, soccer throughout the afternoon, and dancing in the evening until our strength gives out.

**4. I wish the Admissions Committee had asked me what my conception of leadership is.**

Since the moment I opened my eyes, I saw the French and English in power in Cameroon, dominating our society with their superior strength and technology. Their “leadership” of our society failed because they had only very selfish goals. The native governments which replaced them also failed, due to lack of skill rather than lack of community orientation. I see many examples at work of such leadership through force, rather than knowledge, and without community orientation. I view them as leading to imminent danger as a result.

A traditional Cameroonian views himself as part of a larger community. Consequently, a leader should work as part of the community, influencing people through his knowledge rather than his hierarchical authority, being successful because of his knowledge and because he is seeking what is best for his group, not mere personal glory. I try always to bring this spirit to my work.

YALE (Selected)

1. **Please describe your learning goals in the MPPM training as applied to your** **career plans.**

I hope to move from engineering to general management. Part of the reason for this is a simple need to keep growing personally and professionally. Another reason is that I have a great desire to be able to manage not just something technical, but rather a whole operation. Underlying these desires is my devotion to Cameroon: I think that I can make the most positive impact upon the country by being more than an engineer. By being a general manager with a strong technical background I hope to be able to work for, or establish myself, a company which will have a positive, modernizing impact upon the country.

Yale’s program is of particular interest to me because my background is in both public- and private-sector organizations. I am unable to say whether I will work in one rather than the other sort in the future. In all likelihood, I will end up working in both. Whether I am in the public sector or the private one, I feel that I do not yet understand enough about the nontechnical, managerial dimensions of issues. I hope to learn much more than I currently know about marketing, finance, organizational

development, and, indeed, about general management. (One of my reasons for applying to a two-year program, by the way, is because I think that it will be beneficial to have more instmction than is available in one of the ten-month European MBA programs.) I hope to learn enough from the MPPM program so that, with a little further seasoning in terms of experience, I can lead a large, integrated team of professionals. In other words, I hope to be able to be in charge of the type of effort my friends and I once undertook (as I described in essay 1), but with the appropriate degree of understanding of “the big picture.”

MIT-SLOAN SCHOOL OF MANAGEMENT (Selected)

**1. Describe a situation you encountered in your employment or educational experience that required organizational change. Tell how you would effect that change as the manager in charge and what skills you expect to learn at MIT to help you accomplish this.**

My work for Electricité de France (EDF) involved some very large experiments which had to be conducted on site without shutting down the rail network. The engineering difficulties involved in doing this were often immense. On the other hand, the managerial difficulties were, if anything, even greater.

My first step, after designing my desired “campaign,” was to discuss the experiment with the local technicians who would have to help me carry it out. I needed to make sure that they understood what would be involved, just as I needed to learn from them of any local complications—often political—which would necessitate changing target dates (or even sites).

My next step was to convince the head of my department that this was both necessary and doable. Then my department head had to contact the head of the department of the local site to get his approval, without which no work could possibly proceed.

This background work was just a prelude to the formal approval process. Formal description of the experiment, along with all possible requirements and work schedule implications, had to be provided to the local site’s department head. He would ordinarily respond to this about two months later. He would often deny the request because he received no direct benefit from the activity, whereas his department might be inconvenienced by the work. His was not the only department which had to agree to the work. Various finance departments, for example, needed to approve.

The basic problem was that EDF was highly departmentalized, despite being in a business requiring a system-wide view of many activities. This tendency was exacerbated by the fact that almost no one understood, let alone sympathized, with the activities of another department. Very few people, for example, have ever worked in

more than one department. Neither are there in place liaison offices or standing committees to coordinate information and activities between the departments with the greatest need to work together. This is despite the fact that many activities naturally cross many of the company’s departmental boundaries.

My suggested solution to the problem of excessive departmentalization of the company is, first, to acknowledge the existence of the problem, and, second, to institute the job rotation and other programs noted above as lacking.

I think that EDF suffers from not looking at the overall picture of the business it is in. 1 am applying to MIT because I think that it offers me an opportunity to learn about technology management as one aspect of general management. In other words, I expect to understand this overall picture by learning about the functional disciplines I know too little about now, and by combining functional knowledge with organizational understanding. (It has not escaped my attention that MIT’s faculty includes famous organizational specialists like Dr. Schein.)

COMMENTS

1. Albert was easily able to overcome his weak GMAT score by emphasizing his strong educational background and the heavy analytical component of much of his work.
2. It was important to make it clear that he was truly African rather than largely Europeanized, to retain the uniqueness value of his being African, a rarity among applicants at top business schools. Thus he emphasized his commitment to his community by talking about his intention to return to Cameroon, his founding of the Cameroon Executive Association, his Cameroonian soccer pals, etc.
3. By the same token, he needed to show that he could succeed at a top business school, so he discussed his success at French universities and with a top consulting engineering firm.
4. To help make up for the low GMAT score, he also discussed his highly analytical dissertation topic on power system loads.
5. Columbia essay 2 gives a good explanation of a technical problem. It is clear why it mattered to him, and he shows that despite being a doctoral dissertation it had a real-world dimension as well.
6. He consistently elevates himself by elevating the group that he is dealing with. By praising his company, he also encourages a school to believe that he would also be a good advocate for it later on.

7. In Columbia essay 4 he shows that he understands why his effort failed and does a good job of tying it to his need for an MBA. In addition, as an engineer it is useful to emphasize his business experience to show that his interest in an MBA is eminently sensible.

8, His discussion of why he wants to attend Columbia, however, is very thin. Simply noting that it is international and in a large East Coast city does not do justice to the program.

9. Note how good he is at telling stories. He sets things up by describing the story’s background, establishes the conflict, and then describes the resolution.

**JOERG**

*Background:*

**Job:** Working as an intern to finish engineering doctoral degree project

**Education:** Finishing doctoral degree in mechanical engineering at a leading Germanuniversity

**Nationality:** German

*Critical issues to address:*

Lack of full-time work experience.

Having already pursued master’s and doctorate degrees, is he a perpetual student?

A German doctoral student in engineering inevitably runs the risk of being regarded as a humorless nerd.

Is his English close enough to perfectly fluent to allow him to succeed in a case method program?

**HARVARD BUSINESS SCHOOL**

**1. What evidence can you present to demonstrate your capacity to perform well in the Harvard MBA program?**

I am assuming that there are several requirements for superior academic performance at Harvard. First, that one must be able to sort, assimilate, and master a large amount of data. Second, that one must be bold enough to contribute in the competitive atmosphere of case-based classes. And third, that one should be of a cooperative enough nature to benefit his or her study group. I am thus assuming that intellectual ability (of a certain nature), competitiveness or aggressiveness, and a cooperative spirit are the desired components of a potential MBA student. (The last two may be taken to be in conflict, but I view them as situationally based in this regard.)

My intellectual capabilities, and especially my ability to process information extremely quickly, are evident from my success in my undergraduate, master’s, and doctoral engineering work. I have taken far less time to complete my studies than the average student does—about 2.5 years less, worked far more on the outside to support myself, and still stayed in the top one-tenth of my class throughout my studies at what may be Germany’s finest engineering program. On top of this, I fully expect to have a substantial patent result from work I have directed, as discussed in another essay.

My competitive spirit is probably already suggested by the above. My determination, my desire to seize opportunities, on the other hand, may not be quite so obvious at this point. In fact, I think that I have almost routinely made much more of situations I have been in than would have seemed possible for most people. In order to pay for my master’s studies, for example, I did some computer consulting work for a marketing consultancy. I was able to demonstrate quite quickly to the owner (Mr. R. Wehmeyer), that I was willing and able to acquire new skills, so he ended up hiring me to perform various types of marketing work as well! I did analyses of upmarket male and female customer purchase criteria regarding different types of clothing, boutique site selection criteria, etc.

My verbal abilities should not be an issue in regard to competing for air-time in classes. I have held my own in this regard, in English, in wide-ranging scientific discussions with senior colleagues in the United States at the University of Wisconsin, Madison, in Japan, and in Germany.

My cooperative spirit is perhaps best demonstrated by my leading a team of researchers and technicians on my hair and fiber “shape stability” research project, discussed in other essays. This “team” is a team in name only. Its members are parts of different organizations, working in different places, and have been lent to me only on a “dotted line” basis. I can get results from them only to the extent that I can motivate them. This involves everything from convincing a technician to stay late to get additional data for me up to convincing a department head to allocate more money for me to buy experimental equipment. As my referees probably make clear, I have been highly successful in leading this team.

In sum, I think that I am well equipped to pursue an MBA at Harvard.

**2. Discuss a professional project which challenged your analytical skills.**

While working for the Wehmeyer consultancy in spring 19911 was asked to analyze Mauritius’ potential as a source of textiles. Several textile firms were located there. They offered what appeared to be decent quality textiles for a low price, making them possible alternatives to Hong Kong and Singapore suppliers.

The problem was that the real quality of cloths the manufacturers produced could not be determined simply from a test sample. Because this would be the first such contract for one of the local firms it was necessary to analyze its capabilities carefully.

Besides doing various analyses of the country concerning its infrastructure, etc., I had to analyze the quality of the cloth regularly woven there (as opposed to what might have been done specially for a sample). I used an expert system I developed to reveal the reason for specific failures in textile materials. I designed a system in the form of a “failure tree,” using specific graphs and text shells connected by number codes. This system enables one to analyze woven material by tracing back faults to their specific mechanical, operator, or raw material problems.

I examined regular cloth—not samples—from each of these firms. I determined that one firm in particular would be a highly acceptable supplier, but that the others were inevitably going to encounter quality problems given the difficulties they were revealing via their current output. Our client decided to engage this firm as a supplier.

**3. While recognizing that no day is typical, we ask that you describe a representative work day.**

8:00 A.M. I hand my last night’s written work and letters to my secretary, check for time changes in today’s meetings and notify colleagues of new developments affecting their work.

8:45 A.M. I discuss yesterday’s experimental results with a technician and plot today’s experiments, taking account of what happened yesterday. Then I have Purchasing buy appropriate materials for future experiments.

9:30 A.M. Update session with department managers at which budgeting and marketing changes are discussed, as are new developments from the labs— especially those with budgeting or scheduling implications.

10:30 A.M. Appointment with sales manager from Rodenstock company to discuss their instrumental equipment and performance and ask him for cost estimate.

11:30 AM. Ask colleague in chemistry department for help concerning some experimental difficulties.

12:00 P.M. Meet my academic research advisor and people from various departments (marketing, other research group) for lunch.

12:45 P.M. Drive to patent lawyer’s office to discuss new technical drawings and other ideas to see whether we might be infringing upon any existing patents.

2:15 P.M. Call our sister research department in Hamburg to discuss the problems with their last batch of hair samples and then to order a new batch. Afterwards I visit a technician I hope to convince to do some experiments for me.

2:30 P.M. Prepare presentation of recent results, about the impact of silicon-based shampoos on hair, for tomorrow’s presentation to marketing. I compare our products to our competitors’ in this regard.

4:00 P.M. I lead a discussion concerning future experiments which will involve the use of our scanning electron microscope to determine the porosity of chemically treated hair.

5:00 P.M. I go to the library to make copies of articles, patents, and specifications concerning my experiments and design work.

5:30 P.M. End of the day tasks: I check today’s letters and faxes and tomorrow’s timetable, evaluate data from today’s experiments, and dictate letters to chemical companies (in order to get a specific polymer for some new tests).

6:00 P.M. My last hour is spent working on drawings for my robot hand.

*7:00* P.M. I leave the company, taking with me the articles I copied in order to dosome background reading about recent developments in related fields.

**4. Describe an ethical dilemma you have experienced firsthand. How did you manage to resolve the situation?**

I designed a device to measure the shape stability (“body”) of hair and fiber. This device, however, can only work in a climate-controlled room. Such a room eliminates the temperature and humidity changes which upset the ability of the device to monitor changes in shapes.

I needed to purchase such a climate-controlled room for my work. The cost to my company would equal approximately 40 percent of my total project budget, so it was very important that I minimize this expenditure.

The companies which offer this sort of room are, with one exception, “West” German. The exception is an “East” German company. Given the reunification of Germany, I had a strong personal desire to buy from the “East” German company in order to benefit the poorer section of our country. The problem was that their product was markedly inferior to the other companies’ products.

I discussed the dilemma with the “East” German company, which did all it could to help me (and thereby help itself). Together we searched for ways to improve their product. They had remarkably motivated employees who were willing to work extremely hard, but that was insufficient to overcome all of the design defects involved. We searched for ways to cope with these design defects, such as buying in some parts from “western” firms, but we could not find a way to achieve the narrow tolerances my project required.

I reluctantly bought a room from one of the “western” companies.

**5. Describe your three most substantial accomplishments and explain why you view them as such.**

1. My finest accomplishment is nearing completion at the moment. I have been in charge of a complex research project at Hans Schwarzkopf GmbH, which should result in a patent in which I will hold a one-fourth share. The project itself, as I describe elsewhere on another essay, involves the building of a device to measure the shape stability (“body”) of human hair in order to measure objectively and reliably the effectiveness of permanent wave products.

I was chosen to manage this project because of my expertise in fiber analysis, gained during my master’s degree study. (A moderate competence in chemistry, such as I possess, was also required.) The actual task, however, has required as much managerial as technical skill.

My job has involved pulling together various strands of analysis in a rich mix of fields, including robotics, organic (peptide) chemistry, and image analysis employing a variety of mathematical techniques. I need to do some parts of this work myself, delegate and supervise the rest, and provide the necessary machinery and materials for the whole team. Thus the need for me to be both scientist and manager.

The project is on schedule for a planned patent application in early 1993. A likely patent is one measure of success, but I also value this project for another reason. I have had to manage a far-flung, disparate group of people in a variety of organizations, who did not necessarily owe me any loyalty or favor, in the complex process of developing a new machine, and I have succeeded in doing so.

2. My second most important accomplishment will be the completion (in spring 1993) of my BA, MA, and PhD in Mechanical Engineering in approximately two and a half years less time than the average student requires, without sacrificing the breadth or depth of my studies. In addition, this will have been done at Germany’s finest engineering school.

I very much wanted to have a “practical” engineering capability, not just academic/laboratory skills, so 1 sought out a wide range of traineeships in German

and Japanese companies. These ranged from production engineering in a Japanese “just in time” factory, through foundry engineering in one of the biggest steel manufacturers in Germany, to computer-aided design engineering in a German nuclear power station company. I also managed to hone my academic abilities by taking, for example, an assistantship at the University of Wisconsin, Madison, which allowed me to work on advanced mathematical theories relevant to computer aided engineering for polymer processing work.

I had to support myself through my studies, since my parents are disabled. As a result, I worked part time for two business consulting firms throughout large parts of my education. Despite my efforts to gain a great deal of hands-on engineering experience and my need for income, I was still able to progress extremely rapidly through these degree programs while maintaining a top 10 percent class rank.

3. My third accomplishment relates to my work for a marketing consultancy, Rudolf Wehmeyer Marketing Beratung. This work provided me with an opportunity to gain valuable business experience while also allowing me to realize that I have some talents useful in the business arena.

I began my relationship with the firm as a computer consultant, employed by Consultax. Wehmeyer appreciated the work I performed for it sufficiently to lure me away from Consultax. Wehmeyer’s business focused on consulting to clothing firms, so it thought I could be of value with my background in both computers and textile engineering. Despite my lack of marketing experience, I was chosen for projects which required an understanding of both marketing and information systems.

Wehmeyer chose me for this work, in fact, because I had succeeded in a complex project of exactly this type for Wehmeyer itself. Wehmeyer had a chain of clothing stores which was using an antiquated order entry and inventory management system. It wanted to be able to perform these tasks in a simple manner, but it also wanted to gain marketing advantages as well, by tracking marketing sales trends by region, store location, type of customer, garment, color, size, etc. My work required that I understand their marketing efforts as a prelude to designing an appropriate information system.

Wehmeyer saw that I could understand quickly the connection between marketing desires and information system requirements, so it recruited me. Although I began as a system “expert,” I ended up doing a lot of pure marketing work. I am proud of having been able to switch fields so successfully. (Besides feeling a degree of pride, I was also motivated to seek out a variety of business courses to audit in preparation for an eventual business career.)

I had sought this work because I could not subsist on the poorly paid apprenticeship offered to German engineering students. This consultancy work, although not closely

related to my studies, nevertheless offered the opportunity to make the money I needed. It was my good fortune that it changed my career orientation as it did.

**6. Discuss a contribution you have made in your community.**

I have long been involved in the International Club in Julich, which is dedicated to helping the foreign scientists, and their families, who came to work at the Forschungszentrum jülich (Jülich Research Center). It was due to my membership in this club that I came to get a student out of the People’s Republic of China.

I met Fanzhia Ling after she had broken her arm in a bicycle accident. I helped her to get worker’s compensation, then helped her get back the pension payments she had previously made to the government (based on the fact that she will not retire in Germany). I now manage this money for her, which is the only independent source of funds she has. All of her official earnings were split fifty-fifty with the PRC government (which we have kept ignorant of this other sum).

Fanxhia Ling went back to China, at which time she told me that she wanted her money kept as a secret reserve account for her son, Li Ling, who hoped to come to Germany to study in the future.

I eventually arranged for Li Ling to come to Germany, but only after countless interventions for him. Li Ling began German lessons in Xiang. After six months of study he applied for a passport, while I simultaneously arranged for him to be admitted to the University of Cologne. My family served as his financial guarantors as well. The University’s acceptance was conditional upon his passing a German exam and arriving at the University before March 1989.

The Chinese government refused him a passport. I arranged for the University of Cologne to postpone his enrollment, giving him time to reapply for a passport. He was given oral approval for a passport, but this was withdrawn after the Tiananmen Square events (in which he was tangentially involved, in Xiang). I got the University to renew its offer of a place once again. I also telephoned Li Ling’s father to request that he speak with the Chinese ministry about his son. He was unable to do this initially, because the ministry was sealed off in the aftermath of the ‘flananmen Square events. He eventually did reach the appropriate official and miraculously convinced him to issue a passport.

The last phase of this effort concerned the refusal of the German embassy in Beijing to issue Li Ling a visa, based on its view that Li Ling did not speak German well enough to qualify for a student visa. I spoke with the embassy. The embassy relented and agreed to issue a visa. Then, however, the official in charge of this left on vacation, necessitating a second round of convincing yet another official, in order to secure Li Ling’s visa just days before the University year began.

Li Ling is now an excellent student at Cologne and he does indeed speak German fluently.

This is a pseudonym; her/his real name, as well as the actual university attended and other relevant details, should remain disguised.

**7. Discuss a situation in which you influenced a group.**

My research project at Hans Schwarzkopf GmbH, discussed elsewhere in my application, requires that I motivate people who have been temporarily “borrowed” for my project. These researchers and technicians come from three different independent groups in the research department, all with large responsibilities and tight deadlines facing them.

The challenge of getting output from resources I do not own could be tackled in several ways. I decided to act opposite to the manner in which other research department project managers typically act. They try to pressure people and to control their actions directly. This attempt at direct, tight control does not seem to work very well. The people being controlled resent the heavy-handed approach and rebel.

I decided to emphasize friendliness and involvement instead of direct control. For those interested in the intellectual elements of the project, I explain at great length the goals of the whole team and how interesting their work will be. I keep them informed about the interesting developments across the project. For those interested in a more personal work relationship, especially with a leader of one of their projects, I find time to discuss their personal and work-related problems. In general I try to make the team’s members feel part of a group, one which is engaged in important and interesting work, and one that can succeed only if their own efforts measure up.

The results seem to me to be an endorsement of this approach to motivation, at least in my current environment. Our project is on schedule and on budget. And, I have not done anything like setting fictitious deadlines or publicly belittling someone—which would prevent my working with these same people again. In fact, our collaborative effort will make a second project that much easier to manage than the first has been.

**8. What are your post-MBA career plans?**

**I** have pursued my education in mechanical engineering to the doctoral level becauseof my interest in technical manufacturing matters. My interest in getting an MBA stems from my desire to work in manufacturing industries in ways which require both engineering and business experience.

(I know that this route to a business career—via an engineering doctorate—may seem odd to Americans, but to Germans it is perhaps the most respected route to such a career.)

My short-term plans are to work in marketing for a reinforced composite material company, such as Mitsubishi, Du Pont, or Id. My in-depth knowledge of the technical side of this industry, combined with my continuing interest in the field, suggest that this is an area I should focus on. Eventually I would hope to be involved in establishing new markets in the Far East, combining my own interest in that region with the opportunities provided by rapidly industrializing markets.

My long-term plans are to own and run a business in a related field which focuses on a niche market (which I hope to spot while working for the above-mentioned reinforced composite material company). By the time I set out to develop or purchase such a specialized and focused company, I expect to have the marketing and general management skills that, combined with my technical capabilities, will allow me to do a first-rate job leading such a firm.

KELLOGG

**1. Briefly describe your career progression to date. Elaborate on your future career plans and your motivation for pursuing a graduate degree at Kellogg. (400 word limit)**

I have *followed* a traditional German route to a serious business career by pursuing my education in Mechanical Engineering to the doctoral level. In spring 1993 1 will complete my ME education in approximately 2.5 years less than the average student requires, without sacrificing the breadth or depth of my studies and apprenticeships, even while doing this at Germany’s finest engineering school.

My engineering efforts have been meant to prepare me for a business career combining engineering and marketing skills. The marketing side *of* the effort started with my work *for* two business consulting firms in the late 1980s. I had to support myself throughout my studies since my parents are disabled. I consequently sought the highest paying outside jobs I could get which also fit my school schedule. The first of these jobs was with a computer consulting firm, Consultax, One of my projects for Consultax involved helping a marketing consultancy, Wehmeyer Marketing, develop and implement a new marketing information system.

My work for Wehmeyer Marketing Consultancy, whose principal activity was textile consulting, convinced them to hire me away from Consultax. Wehmeyer wanted me to apply my computer and textile engineering skills, as well as the ability I had demonstrated to understand quickly the marketing dimension of a business. I ended up managing numerous projects which combined technical and marketing elements, including, for example, the analysis of potential textile suppliers in Mauritius.

Since early 1991 1 have been managing a research project’ at Hans Schwarzkopf GmbH to develop a new machine to measure the shape stability of chemically treated fiber and hair. This work, which will also satisfy my ME doctoral thesis requirements, should result in one or more patents once it is completed this spring.

My career, while focused upon engineering, has started to straddle the marketing area as well. I very much wish to combine my engineering knowledge with marketing and general management skills. I would prefer to do so by getting an MM at Kellogg, given its international reputation in these areas (and emphasis on teamwork). For the future, I hope to do marketing work for a technically based company, perhaps in the reinforced composite material field. And, not surprisingly, I would like eventually to run such a firm.

*“described in detail in my employment histoty*

**2. Your background, experiences, and values will enhance the diversity of Kellogg’s student body. How? (400 word limit)**

My very strong technical background, project management expertise, and international exposure will, I hope, enhance Kellogg’s student body.

The strength of my technical background—which will shortly include a Ph.D. in Mechanical Engineering and already includes substantial engineering work experience in a variety of engineering disciplines—should be clear. While there will be other engineers in the Kellogg Program, I suspect that few will possess the same depth and breadth of knowledge and experience which I have acquired.

My project management experience, described briefly in my employment history, has involved the development of a device to measure the shape stability of hair and fiber. This project has required me to motivate, integrate, and control people in various parts of Schwarzkopf Co., ranging from technicians in workshops of different companies to scientists in chemistry laboratories (and even to company owners).

My international background consists of several components. I am of course German and have worked and gone to school in Germany for most of the last 20-plus years. On the other hand, I have also sought out opportunities to live and work abroad. These experiences have included working in a Japanese factory and doing marketing/engineering work in Mauritius, as well as being a research intern at the University of Wisconsin, Madison. In addition I have worked in various parts of Europe.

I recognize, however, that my experience will not benefit others at Kellogg except to the extent that I am what Americans call a “team player.” I certainly regard myself as precisely that, one who enjoys people of different skills and interests, and, for that matter, different nationalities. My experiences in different disciplines (from chemistry

to mechanical engineering to marketing) and different countries (from Japan to Europe to Mauritius) have caused me to enjoy greatly being part of multifaceted teams, I have sometimes led such teams, as I am now doing at Schwarzkopf, but I have also enjoyed participating in research groups as a very junior member. I derive great satisfaction from being able to contribute and thus hold up my own end, while simultaneously learning from others with very different skills. My enjoyment of multidisciplinary groups is actually one of the reasons that I look forward to combining my engineering skills with what I hope will be my strong marketing and general management skills in the future.

**3.a. It’s the year 2030 and your autobiography has just been published. What do the book reviews say? (150 word limit)**

*(As translatedfrom the Japanese)*

Mr. Otzen’s view of the first twenty years of his career—perhaps uniquely for a German industrialist—provides a lighthearted view of his climb to the top of Du Pont’s Asian operations. There is little surprise that his polymer processing background, combined with his marketing skills, led him to Du Pont. Similarly, his long-time interest in Asia explains his early posting to China. The surprises, of which there are many, come instead from his uninhibited joy in virtually all that he did. He loved the early engineering challenges which yielded his treasured patents. But he also loved the managerial side of his career, particularly working with people from every conceivable country and background. This combination appears to explain at least part of his success.

Volume 2, much anticipated by this reviewer, will cover his controversial years as CEO of Du Pont and then as Germany’s Commerce Secretary.

**3.b. What are your most valued accomplishments outside of work? Why? (150 word limit)**

Through my long involvement in Julich’s International Club, which is dedicated to helping the foreign scientists working at the Research Center julich, I met Fanxhia Ling,’ a Chinese woman anxious to get her son out of the PRC. This couldn’t be arranged until she returned to China, so she needed someone to help from within Germany.

I eventually arranged for Li Ling to come to Germany, but only after countless interventions on his behalf. I arranged his admission, without interviewing, to Karlsruhe University. The PRC refused him a passport several times due largely to his ‘flananmen Square activities, but each time I was able to convince both Chinese and German officials to intercede for him. Then I convinced the German Embassy to give him a second chance to prove his German was acceptable and to grant him a student visa.

He is now a student here, and we are friends.

*“These are pseudonyms; their real names, due to his/her involvement in the Tiananmen Square activities, should remain undisclosed.*

**3.c. For fun I... (150 word limit)**

For fun I travel as much as I can. Of course there are other things I greatly enjoy doing, ranging from skiing to scuba diving, but the most satisfying of my pursuits is traveling.

My sort of traveling may not suit everyone. I enjoy going to stay with the people I have met through the International Club of Julich, which assists visiting scientists and their families. I prepare for each visit by learning all I can about the history, geography, and culture of the region. By staying with friends, however, I am able to see other countries through the eyes of the local residents rather than as a tourist. Because this discovery process exhilarates me so much I have explored much of the United States, nearly a dozen European countries, and parts of Japan. But the most interesting thing still awaits me: to see Li Ling’s family in China. (See essay 3b.)

COMMENTS

1. Overall, this is a very well written, complete, unified application. Joerg shows that he has had plenty of real-world experience despite having been a student throughout the last seven—eight years. In addition, he provides the German context to his education, which shows that his pursuit of so many degrees is actually appropriate for someone seeking to get to the top of German industry. He also shows that he is quite well-rounded and has a deep humanitarian streak, thereby eliminating the “humorless nerd” problem. (His listing, in the résumé part of the application, of his travels, sporting activities, and other hobbies also helped in this regard.) His very good command of English is demonstrated throughout the essays, helping to eliminate fears that his English would not be sufficiently good to survive an American MBA program, even a case method program.
2. berg’s first essay makes it very clear that he understands what an MBA is all about, and in particular, what Harvard’s case method system of education involves. He is then able to demonstrate that he possesses the requisite capabilities.
3. His third essay shows the great variety of his tasks and also avoids lapsing into professional jargon. In addition, he constantly talks about working with people, which is a useful counterbalance to his working as a laboratory engineer. The message is that he is able to communicate and work with nonengineers.
4. He succeeds in showing a surprising amount of business analysis and other experience for someone without lengthy full-time work experience. In fact, he makes

it sound as though he has been working all of his life. This is meant to address the issue of whether he has sufficient work experience to be ready for an MBA program.

1. In essay 5 he handles a technical discussion with great clarity. This is always a plus, but especially when applying to a case method school (like Harvard) that emphasizes clarity of expression more than most.
2. In essay *5* he also discusses dealing with customers, again emphasizing that he is not just a laboratory nerd.
3. His discussion of his efforts to help get someone out of China is impressive both because of the results and because it is clearly not just a résumé blurb like signing up to help at a community soup kitchen two weeks before applying to business school.

TERRY

*Background Data:*

**Job:** Commercial photographer

**Education:** Bachelor’s degrees (2) in German literature and fine arts

**Nationality:** American

**Other:** Based in Germany

*Critical issues to address:*

Is he quantitatively able enough to survive the program?

Is he analytical enough, given his mediocre college grades and work in an industry not noted for analytical skills?

Does he know enough about business and MBA programs to be sure that this is the right step for him, and are his goals for the future realistic enough that he will be employable when he finishes an MBA?

ROTTERDAM SCHOOL OF MANAGEMENT

**1. What are your career objectives? In what specific ways would attendance at the RSM help you to fulfill these intentions? (Explain how your study plan fits in with your previous training and your career objectives.)**

I trained as a photographer and have, since graduating six years ago from the Art Center (Pasadena), run my own commercial photography business in Munich. In this time I have learned a great deal about the advertising industry specifically and about business more generally. But I feel that I have reached the limit of what can be done here. I have surpassed my initial goals and, in fact, outgrown them. Having run a small business, I now want to learn how to manage a larger business, either my own or someone else’s. This is why I want to earn an MBA; it is the most efficient way to learn all the components of how to run a business on a larger scale.

I understand a great deal about certain aspects of marketing and marketing imagery. I have gained much experience in analyzing customers and in intuitively understanding their needs and wishes. I have also dramatically improved my knowledge of selling in the past six years. Yet I want to study all the other principal aspects of running a business in much greater depth as well. And whereas I may know about these things for a small company in my particular industry, I would like to explore them on a larger scale and independent of my own particular business sector (advertising).

After completing an MBA I see myself working in marketing, either in a corporate structure or as a marketing consultant. Business-to-business marketing would be my area of choice, as opposed to consumer marketing, but I believe it would be a mistake to limit my future possibilities too soon. That would go against the reason why I want an MBA, which is to broaden my knowledge of business and my horizons, not to narrow them.

Although marketing is my natural field, I want to be able to perform well in other areas of business, too. Even if I do in the end spend the bulk of my career in marketing, I believe a solid knowledge of all aspects of business is indispensable for success at the highest levels in marketing. just as a modern manager must be able to communicate with people of diverse cultural backgrounds, in order to effectively operate in the worldwide market, in the same sense he must also be able to communicate effectively with the various members of other departments of the company. For example, I suspect that a major hindrance to managing change effectively is the inability of many people within a company to see problems and changes from the other person’s (and department’s) point of view.

I want to get a high-quality MBA, with a marketing emphasis, from a very international school, preferably one located in Europe. RSM, with its strong core curriculum and attractive marketing electives, not to mention its outstanding reputation, fits my needs perfectly. I believe that RSM would provide an excellent “bridge” between my previous work experience running my own business and my future career marketing goals.

**2. Please give an account of your personality (your strengths and the traits that you would like to improve).**

I would describe myself as Creative, Inquisitive, Resourceful, Self-Confident, and Organized. *Creativity* is the one trait without which I could not imagine myself. Whatever I am doing, be it private or business, active or passive, I think about low I could do it differently, in a way perhaps no one has before. My *inquisitiveness* as a child was so well known that my friends often called my by the nickname “Questions.” Fortunately this natural curiosity of a child has never left me. I was drawn to commercial photography through this curiosity, along with my desire to use my creativity and *resourcefulness* professionally. I was also attracted by the opportunity to work with so many different types of people and businesses, as is possible in advertising.

*Sef-confidence* can be both a strength and a weakness. It has helped me a great deal inmany aspects of my life, for example in starting up my own business in a foreign country. But it can have a negative side, for example when I become overconfident and neglect to analyze a given situation carefully enough.

One of the first things clients tell me they notice about me is my passion for *organ*i *zation.* A large part of my clients being German, a nation notorious for itsorganizational zeal, makes this praise all the more remarkable. This strength also leads to my greatest weakness: my habit of getting too involved in the details, even on occasions when it would be better to concentrate on the general picture. Being aware of this tendency helps me in my effort to improve it.

**3. Discuss your interests outside of your job.**

At the risk of it sounding like a cliché, I must admit that my greatest interest in life is my family. As the father of a four-year-old daughter and two-year-old son, I am daily confronted with such endless curiosity, energy, enthusiasm, and other sources of joy and fascination that I would hardly require any other interests. Nevertheless I do have many other areas of interest, which I pursue whenever possible. The first one began early in my *life—internationalism.* My parents raised me in a very international atmosphere. From my fifth year on we spent every other summer traveling outside the United States, principally in Europe, but also through many other parts of the world. The alternate summers we traveled throughout America. These travels imbued me with an insatiable interest in the world, in all of its many cultures and nations, not just in their present state, but throughout history. They also were critical in forming my own view of myself. I do not see myself as an American living and working in Europe. I see myself as an international person with a European cultural base. This strong international aspect of my childhood’s family life has, not so coincidentally, also been carried over into my adult family life: my wife is half Italian and half German. Our children are consequently citizens of three different countries. At home we speak English, German, and Italian.

*I* am also very interested in history and *literature.* I was torn between the two when itcame time to choose my major for my first undergraduate degree. I wanted a major

which would allow me to pursue a strong liberal arts education, and both were well suited. In the end I chose German Literature over history because of its added benefit of giving me the opportunity to learn a second language at the same time. Nevertheless, history remains one of my greatest interests, particularly ancient history. When I can find the time, I especially enjoy reading original texts from ancient authors.

Another strong interest of mine is *astronomy.* Although I was able to take only one general course on astronomy while at university, it is a subject which never ceases to fascinate me. The infinite vastness of the subject, and the endless possibilities involved in theorizing about the nature—past, present, and future—of our universe, is indescribable. One aspect of astronomy which I find especially interesting is its nature as a science where one can spend an eternity studying it purely from the perspective of physical laws and mathematical equations, or equally well studying it strictly from a philosophical point of view as the ultimate subject of metaphysics.

I also enthusiastically enjoy *sports.* Tennis is my favorite sport, and the one I have participated in on a competitive basis as well as recreationally. Aside from tennis, I also enjoy skiing, squash, and golf.

**4. Describe a situation when your objectives were not met and what you learnt from it.**

Aside from working for companies through their advertising agencies, I also work with many companies directly, usually with their marketing departments. In one such case I was given the job of producing an image for the cover of the annual report of a large German bank. This single image was of immense importance to the bank. They wanted it to incorporate many different symbols of their diverse business activities. I set myself the objective of producing an image which would satisfy all of their needs.

This developed into an extremely complicated production. Logistically it was necessary to plan, organize, and then construct a complex set in the studio. Creatively it was a challenge to develop an image which could communicate so much without departing from the bank’s established corporate imagery. I was successful in designing and building the studio set and in developing what I regarded as an appropriate image. This “success” was for naught, however, because I failed to maneuver successfully the complex hierarchy of decision makers inside the bank’s marketing department. At the first level of authority, the person I dealt with initially had no real authority to make decisions on her own. Hence she could give me information as to the client’s wishes, but she could not make commitments as to how these should be visually realized. At the second level, her boss, who could, was only sporadically available for consultation, even though the project was being done under great time pressure, At the third level, the person ultimately responsible for the annual report was essentially unavailable. This structure of building walls between each level

of authority made it impossible for me, within the given time constraints, to determine what the client really wanted to communicate and how.

I had failed to establish at the outset of the project exactly what they wanted from me, and to make clear the degree of communication I would require of them in order to complete the project on schedule. Because of this failure they did not use my photographs. This experience showed me the great importance of determining the goals and structures of cooperation—how two partners intend to work together—at the outset of a collaboration.

COMMENTS

1. Terry is very successful in addressing each possible issue raised by his candidacy. His quantitative abilities are addressed in part by his GMAT score and his noting in his interview that he had already enrolled in a Managerial Economics class and had begun receiving individual tutoring in calculus. He addresses the issue of his analytical abilities indirectly by presenting his essays in a very persuasive way and by discussing hobbies that have an intellectual component (such as astronomy). He addresses the business interest and knowledge issue by demonstrating that he has long been in business insofar as his photography operation is first and foremost a business.
2. Note how he gets right into a discussion of his business background and success at the beginning of the first essay. He knows that one of the concerns he needs to address is the extent to which he has a business background, appropriate goals for an MBA program, knowledge of what an MBA program entails, etc. He goes a long way to answering these concerns in the first half of this essay. Similarly, his comments about his goals for future employment sound sensible. He shows that industrial marketing would not be too much of a stretch from what he has already done. Last, his discussion of managing change and communicating within companies sound like a young corporate executive’s views rather than those of a photographer, further emphasizing his solid business background. The message: He is a businessman who happens to be in the commercial photography business, rather than an artistic spirit unaware of business.
3. Terry’s discussion of his outside interests in essay 3 suggests that he has strong intellectual interests, in history and astronomy, to lend depth to his self-portrait. In terms of the critical issues he faced, this helps deal with possible concerns about his analytical capability. His discussion of his sporting interests is meant to show that he will fit in with the young executive crowd at business school, rather than to impress anyone with his great skill or unusual interests. (As a photographer, the questions for him concern whether he can fit in with the business school environment, not whether he can stand out in terms of bringing something unusual.) The essay’s initial focus on fatherhood marks him as mature. The rest of the essay shows him to be thoughtful and interested in the world. He would probably be an interesting and engaging conversational partner.

1. His last essay shows him as a photographer, which is nearly absent from the other essays and is thus important here. It also shows that he has had extensive involvement with corporate organizations and issues, which is relevant to the concern about his business background and understanding.
2. Terry had his recommenders address his analytical capabilities (in addition to all their other comments), which was a sensible move, given his mediocre undergraduate results. (It should be mentioned, however, that he did extremely well in his second bachelor’s degree.)

INSEAD (Selected)

**1. Describe what you believe to be your most substantial accomplishment to date, explaining why you view it as such.**

Coming from America to Europe to establish my own commercial photography business is an accomplishment of which I am quite proud. Setting up one’s own business for the first time is probably always difficult; doing this far away from home is a further challenge. After managing to overcome the hurdles of German legal codes and permits, I had to learn how to market myself and my services. My lack of local contacts required that I make endless phone calls, introductions, and presentations. The result of this lengthy marketing blitz was that my presentational and marketing skills, in English but even more so in German, improved dramatically.

To be successful I also have had to manage ad hoc teams on a routine basis. One has to be able to work together with an incredibly diverse group of people in commercial photography. To maximize the team’s performance requires learning what is important to whom, and what is not, and how to get the best out of each person—to discover their strengths and put them to use. Given the extreme time constraints common in this industry, it is impossible to work alone. Teamwork is crucial both within my own studio, and with all the external parties involved: client, ad agency, production services, etc.

A prerequisite for my work is being able to lead a team. I am ultimately responsible, but all members of the team bring in fresh input and ideas. The atmosphere is one of great openness for new insights, possibilities, and differing opinions. Thus the potential exists for this creativity to turn to chaos. It is up to me to be a veritable circus leader, integrating the different inputs, troubleshooting the ongoing project to be sure that each person is contributing what is needed at the right moment, and controlling the flow of events through to the postproduction conclusion. In an environment where people come together for one project rather than on a long-term basis, this integration and control function is of crucial importance.

I view the experience of setting up my own business as my most substantial accomplishment to date because of the great challenge it represented to me—and as a result of all that it has given me the opportunity to learn. Part of that learning is to have faith in my ability to meet difficult challenges.

**2. What would be your main contribution during your time at INSEAD?**

My main contribution at INSEAD would be the unique set of skills and experiences that I have acquired in the course of my professional and private life. On the professional side, I feel I would fit very well into INSEAD’s mixture of different business backgrounds. Also, I am used to working very hard, an absolute necessity when running one’s own company. At the same time, I feel I can offer other students some unique qualities to balance their particular professional backgrounds: I would come into the program from the entrepreneurial side and also from the artistic side. As an entrepreneur I have learned a great deal about: how different cultures require different approaches for making business connections or selling; how important it is to recognize priorities specific to a given business; how to recognize the “unwritten” guidelines that clients often ultimately use when deciding with whom they will work; how to invest energy, time, and capital wisely and effectively, taking chances where the potential is worthwhile and yet recognizing when it is time to “write ofr’ a bad investment; and taking responsibility not just for one’s own actions, but also for the entire business. As a photographer, I have learned to see things from a more creative perspective than most “normal” business people. I would also contribute to the diversity of the school’s intellectual base through my strong visual and design sense. I can bring these viewpoints to discussions and team projects as a contrast to the likely views of students from a more traditional corporate background.

On the private side, I feel I would contribute to INSEAD’s very international atmosphere. As I mentioned earlier, as an American who has spent a large part of his life traveling and working outside of America, I am used to dealing with people from many different cultures. In fact, my wife is half Italian, half German. Our children are consequently citizens of three different countries. At home we speak English, German, and Italian. Last, but not least, I would contribute my legendary (!?!) sense of humor and natural talent for making friends.

COMMENTS (regarding the two INSEAD essays)

1. In the first essay, Terry makes a good case for being a good team player and leader in an interesting business setting. He goes into some detail regarding how his projects function because it is unlikely that the admissions committee knows much about the commercial photography business and yet it is important that they see how he functions in his own milieu.
2. He starts the second essay by noting that he is from a business, not just an artistic, background. He is implicitly showing both that he would fit into the school, but is

different enough from the usual applicant that he will also add value through his artistic and creative abilities. This is a critical point: A creative type can be a useful addition to a program because he is different, but if he is too different, and too unfamiliar with the business and academic environment he will face, he poses a large risk to the school.

3. Although his discussion (in essay 2) of the entrepreneurial skills he will bring to the program is not particularly impressive, the important point is that he does have this entrepreneurial side, which adds immeasurably to his value as a creative “type.” After all, few creative, artistic candidates will also bring this entrepreneurial business perspective as well.

**JON**

*Background Data:*

**Job at time of application:** Shipping executive

**Educational background:** In-house “degree” from his shipping company, pluspart-time business school coursework

**Nationality:** Danish

**Other:** Mother tongue Danish and Faroese, ultrafluent English, Thai

*Critical issue to address:*

His lack of a “proper” bachelor’s degree could suggest a lack of analytical firepower in addition to lack of a credential.

LONDON

**I. Our students participate in the MBA programme for many valid reasons, for example: to change from a specialist to a broader career; to move upward within an organization; to change organizations or industries; to change job function or to work in a different country. Please explain why you wish to earn an MBA qualification. There is no “right” answer, so please be as frank as you can.**

I wish to earn an MBA qualification as it will significantly assist me in achieving my career goals.

Since I was 19 years old I have known the type of career I wanted. Working for seven years in a highly international environment, with a two year stay in the Far East, has only confirmed my decision,

I want a management position working for a multinational concern in a foreign country. Experience has shown me that I possess the personal qualifications needed to become a successful manager, and I feel that I can reach the very summit of a multinational concern significantly faster if equipped with the management tools taught at London Business School.

All of my experience has been in shipping, with just one company. As valuable and enjoyable as it has been, I recognize that I would be best served by exposure to new concepts and experiences. I want to get to the top of a large multinational, but to do so (even in shipping) will require that I develop knowledge and skills beyond those I now have. For example, as I note in the next essay, I want to gain a more profound understanding of finance and corporate strategy.

I also want to understand the nature and operations of other industries, since it is clear that no one industry such as shipping contains the best example of how to approach the full range of problems that I will encounter in my career. This exposure both to intellectual concepts and practical knowledge is most easily found, I suspect, at a highly reputed business school. I suppose that I could learn some part of what I seek by working for another firm in a different industry, but I certainly doubt that I will learn as much in a short time. After all, an MBA is meant to be a highly organized intensive learning experience.

An MBA will allow me to work without boundaries. It will assist me in becoming a truly “global executive,” a career path which is the logical consequence of my upbringing and education, as I have always considered it one of the largest intellectual challenges in life to work and function in a culture different from my own.

My conclusion is that the education I am looking for is best achieved by earning an MBA qualification from London Business School. Its international environment will train me for future work in foreign cultures with foreign languages and, last but not least, significantly different ways of doing business.

I already have substantial management experience and I want further management education, but not the one-size-fits-all type of education. I want to be able to pursue certain key areas in real depth. As I mentioned above, I intend to focus on finance and corporate strategy. These are the factors which have led me to London Business School.

**2. Please explain what your experience at work tells you about your likely strengths and weaknesses as a manager and how you hope to see your career**

**progress over the five years following the MBA programme. Please include an assessment of the effect of not obtaining a place on the MBA programme.**

The key word to describe my career progress and personal development over the next five years following the MBA programme will be: international. I determined many years ago that I want to pursue an international education and career and that focus remains unchanged. I am ready to work in any country in the world, as long as the job is challenging and rewarding.

In five years I anticipate working in a management position for a multinational company in a foreign country. I know one of my responsibilities will be to explore new business opportunities, both outside and within the borders of the country in which 1 am working. This responsibility will preferably lead to extensive deal-making and possible joint ventures, during which I will make full use of the finance and corporate strategy skills I have obtained at London Business School. All through my career I have been involved in new business projects of that kind and I have found it to be extremely challenging and stimulating.

No matter where in the world I work, I will continue expanding my knowledge of foreign cultures and languages. My interest in these issues has always been substantial and I expect my education in that field to continue for the rest of my life.

The internationalization of business has created a pool of expatriates who are working for foreign companies in foreign countries. These global executives speak several languages and know an industry or a foreign country very well, This group of people will inevitably grow over the next five years following the growing globalization of the business world, and I want to continue being a part of it.

If I do not obtain a place at the MBA programme I will still continue to pursue my career plans. I will, however, be forced to seek the necessary managerial tools elsewhere. This solution will obviously be more time consuming.

As described earlier, I am presently pursuing the second half of the Danish management education, H.D. This is not, however, on the same level as London Business School. I will continue with the H.D. if I am not accepted at London Business School, but I would be sorry to lose the opportunities which London Business School offers.

**3. Please describe what you believe to be the major trends in your industry.**

I believe that there are three major trends in the fuel oil industry:

* decreasing availability of fuel oil
* deteriorating quality of fuel oil

* implementation of drastic measures to prevent oil spills

*Decreasing availability of fuel oil*

Fuel oil is a by-product of the refining process when refining crude oil. It is primarily used for utilities and as fuel for larger vessels (when used in the maritime industry fuel oil is referred to as “bunkers”).

Up until now, fuel oil has been readily available. In older refineries the fuel oil output amounts to 30%—40% of the crude oil volume processed. However, by means of advanced technology, this share is being significantly reduced. Newer refineries install so-called cat-crackers and hydro-crackers to break the molecular compounds in the crude oil. These refineries yield a larger amount of distillates, leaving only lO%—15% of fuel oil.

Refineries can also choose to install so-called cokers (at a cost of approximately US$ 1 billion per refinery unit). These refineries are so efficient in the refinery process that they leave no fuel oil at all.

*Deteriorating fuel oil quality*

Not only does the improved technology in the refining industry lead to lower fuel oil output but the quality of the fuel oil is also deteriorating. When refiners become better at extracting the best products such as gasoline and gas oil from the crude oil, the by-product, the fuel oil, is of a lower quality.

The increasingly poor quality is forcing the major shipping lines to take measures to protect themselves against fuel oil that is not within the international ISO specifications.

A.P. Moller has, as a direct consequence of the deteriorating fuel oil quality, introduced the concept of “predelivery testing” when bunkering around the world. The introduction of such a concept is necessary to protect the shipping companies against fuel oil which does not live up to the ISO specifications. A predelivery test is carried out by an independent surveyor 24 hours prior to the bunker delivery. The fuel is analyzed and compared to the ISO standards.

This way of avoiding expensive and time consuming off-loadings of nonstandard fuel from the vessels is slowly spreading in the market. The major shipping lines are begin- fling to copy the principle of never accepting a bunker delivery without a predelivery test. In the case of A.P. Moller, the concept has dramatically decreased the number of debunkerings.

*Oil spills and CPA -90*

As a consequence of the “Exxon Valdez” disaster in Alaska in 1990 the United States implemented the “Oil Pollution Act of 1990” (called OPA-90). The law makes it impossible for carriers of crude oil to limit their financial liabilities in case of an oil spill. As an example of the amounts involved, the U.S Coast Guard is requiring that all vessels taking bunkers in U.S. territory must present a bank account with a minimum deposit of US$50 million to cover the first part of the cleaning job after a possible oil spill. Possible environmental damage is notoriously difficult to quantify, which leaves open the possibility that a company could be held responsible for highly speculative damages.

The introduction of such drastic measures has been a hard blow to my industry. It is presently very difficult to buy fuel oil in U.S. ports. The majority of well-established oil companies have totally withdrawn from the U.S. bunker market—companies such as Texaco, Shell, and Mobil. The oil majors have withdrawn from the U.S. bunker market as they cannot afford to pay the insurance needed to meet a claim from the government in case of an oil spill.

*The bunker industry in five years*

I could easily foresee that in five years’ time no vessels would take bunkers in U.S. ports since the consequences of an oil spill in U.S. waters are fatal for almost any company with the present U.S. legislation. Several U.S. suppliers have already seriously considered supplying bunkers in international waters.

Due to tighter and tighter availability and a deteriorating fuel oil quality, the marine industry could very well be forced to change from fuel oil to gas oil. Gas oil is a better product which is extracted at an early stage of the refining process. The availability is more or less unlimited and the quality superb.

However, due to the heavy investments required to take full loads of gas oil, the change from fuel oil to gas oil might not happen within the next five years, but rather within the next ten. The possible change from fuel oil to gas oil would significantly change the competitive situation in my industry. Japanese shipping lines are already using gas oil on board some of their vessels and the engines on board these vessels are built for that purpose.

That means that if the change occurs, the Japanese will have a major competitive edge by being one or two years ahead of their competitors with regard to investments in new engines, etc.

**4. Please describe a situation, either work or personal, where you faced particular frustration or difficulty. What was the outcome and what did you learn from the experience?**

I have chosen to describe the situation when I was repatriated to Denmark after having stayed in the Far East for only a little over two years. I had expected to be there for perhaps a decade or more. I found my unexpected repatriation frustrating and difficult to handle.

My contract in Thailand was open-ended. When I had stayed in the Far East for only a few months I was approached by the Far East Manager himself. He told me that I, and a few others in similar situations in countries in the Far East, should consider ourselves ‘life-time expatriates.” He now believed he had gathered the strongest team possible in the Far East and had thus decided that all future job rotations should be among ourselves. He saw no reason to waste valuable experience by sending people to other parts of the world.

From that day on, I started planning my life accordingly. I traveled intensively in the Far East, not only in my capacity as Quality Coordinator but also during weekends and holidays. I made an effort to understand the various cultures in the Far East, to get to know the distinctions between the countries, and to familiarize myself with the A.P. Moller offices throughout the region.

After having stayed for two years in Thailand, I was approached by the Personnel Department in Denmark and told, much to my surprise, that I was to take up a position in the Oil Purchasing Department in Copenhagen. I was to become the right hand man for the manager of the department. My specific responsibilities were to be Far Eastern purchases, with a total budget of US$ 90 million. One of the A.P. Moller vice presidents, whom I had worked for before I was sent to Thailand, had made a strong case to get me for the position. The manager of the department had for some time needed someone with the ability to analyze potential cost savings and evaluate the existing working procedures.

The frustrating thing was, however, that I felt that this transfer was definitely not the best use of the company’s resources. It had taken me two years to build a good net-work of national and foreign business people operating in Thailand. I spoke the language better than any Maersk expatriate before me and was in the unusual position of having the locals behind me in every project I initiated.

I would have liked to see the results of the projects which I had worked hard for: the establishment of a well-functioning marketing section, the foundation of the Danish Chamber of Commerce, my recommendation for our company to enter into business in Laos, the implementation of a Total Quality Management system, and last, the strong relationship to our multinational customers that I had built during my stay.

Also, on the personal level I felt frustrated. For two years I had done everything to assimilate myself to the life in a foreign country—the life that I had always wanted— and now I was going home. It was difficult not to feel that this was a step backward.

The ironic thing was that when I came home, I got the most interesting job I have ever had, and being responsible for the Far East, I could utilize a lot of the experience I had gained by living there. I still traveled in that part of the world, mostly in Singapore and Hong Kong, and in the Copenhagen office I soon obtained a position as a bit of a Far Eastern expert.

It was, however, in my position as a right-hand man for the manager that I realized the true potential of my new assignment. Working in Copenhagen, I was much closer to the actual decision makers on the strategic level than I could ever be working for an agency such as Maersk Thailand.

I soon obtained a position as deputy for the manager of the department and by January 1, 1995, I was officially made Assistant Manager. I have for two years now been involved in a number of projects, some which were initiated by Mr. Maersk McKinney Moller himself, and have had the rare opportunity to present my recommendations directly to the top management of the company. I would never have had the opportunity to participate in meetings with Mr Moller, at the age of 26, had I stayed in the Far East.

My initial frustration at not being able to see the long-term results of my efforts in Thailand proved to be without reason.

**5. If we asked three of your closest associates to describe you, what would they say? Which adjectives would they use and why? What would they say are your strengths and weaknesses?**

Very early in my career in the Oil Purchasing Department, I was exposed to the higher levels of the A.P. Moller hierarchy. The Vice President of the Group showed me the confidence allowing me to participate in meetings concerning the long-term strategy for the Group’s oil purchasing activities because I was perceived to be responsible.

I have a **strong sense of focus** and managed to pass my exams without losing focus at work (please refer to “Higher Education”). The same year as I passed the exams I was promoted to Assistant Manager (deputy) of the Oil Purchasing Department. (An equivalent managerial level has as of today only been obtained by four people from the class that graduated in 1990. This places me among the top 10% of my year.)

People who work for me would say that I possess **strong leadership abilities** and that I am a motivator. The daily price negotiations within my department follow a certain routine and it takes approximately two months to become familiar with a new area like, for example, the Arabian Gulf. Therefore I have introduced a rota system that makes sure that every employee becomes familiar with all areas of the world and that everyone is facing new challenges every day instead of routine work.

My immediate superior in Thailand would mention the word **empathy;** the ability to understand signals and interpret the feelings of other people. He would also mean the ability to adjust, to create confidence, and to get a decision through without the use of force.

My sense of empathy was put to a test when I first arrived in Thailand. My superiors had very high expectations for some of the projects that I was responsible for and I was determined to make these projects a success. At the same time, I had to realize that I was a very young manager, only 22 years old, working in a culture in which age automatically means respect and authority and in which you under no circumstances can make anyone “lose face,” especially not people older than yourself.

I have a **restless nature.** Fortunately, with my present job, I never have to look far to find new challenges as the interests of my company cover the whole world. Once a procedure has proven cost efficient in one part of the world, I take the experiences gained and implement them in ports similar in character around the world in order for A.P. Moller to stay one step ahead of competition.

I can be **intolerant** at times—that is, if I feel that some of the players on my team are not totally committed. To achieve goals and stay ahead of competition, commitment is essential and when met with a lack of same, I find it very difficult not to voice my dissatisfaction. I am also rather **impatient.** If it has been decided what course of action to take, I find it very hard to wait. I prefer action over waiting any day.

I hope my closest associates would describe me as a **good** friend. I try to help the people I care about and it is extremely important to me to have a good relationship with my family and friends.

**6. If you could choose any three people who have ever lived to join you for dinner, whom would you invite and why?**

If able to choose freely among people who have ever lived, I would invite the Norwegian writer and member of the resistance movement **Nordahi Grieg,** the Danish philosopher **Soeren Kierkegaard,** and the Danish businessman and shipowner **Maersk McKinney Moller.** These three people have all in their own way contributed to the way I think and the way I want my future to be.

The topic of the dinner should be: **“Commitment to your own life and commitment** **to changing things for the better.”**

Nordahl Grieg was a Norwegian poet and writer who died in 1943, shot down over German territory while serving as a pilot in the Royal Air Force.

When the Nazis invaded Norway in 1940, he was entrusted with the Norwegian gold reserves by the king. He flew the gold reserves to England and joined the RAF. There he started working as a news speaker in the broadcasts to the Norwegian resistance

movement and until the day his plane was shot down he gave the Norwegian people the same faith in victory as Winston Churchill was able to give the rest of the free world.

What makes Nordahl Grieg outstanding in my eyes was his determination to fight for what he believed in. Even though he was a poet and a writer he still had the vision to see that ideas alone are not enough. Idealists will always be defeated by aggressors if they are not able to be equally disciplined. He had the will and determination to do what had to be done.

**Soeren Kierkegaard** was a philosopher who in the ninteenth century was able tomake his small country known around the world. His works concentrated on the subjects which have interested people throughout time: how should life be lived, and, what is the meaning of life.

Kierkegaard was for a short while engaged, but soon had to realize that he was totally unable to commit himself to marriage or any other close contact with his fellow human beings.

What fascinates me about him is that even though he was unable to live a so-called normal life, he was still able to write brilliant books about subjects such as “the meaning of life.”

In his book *Either-Or* Kierkegaard describes the relationship between aesthetics and ethics. Being a philosopher, he is trying to establish whether life should be lived in an aesthetic or in an ethical way. His conclusion was that the correct road to travel was somewhere in between, and without ethical values and commitment life is not worth living.

My third guest for dinner would agree with that statement. Maersk McKinney Moller is the owner of the A.P. Moller Group. His father, the late A.P. Moller, founded the company, and under Maersk McKinney Moller the company has grown to be the largest shipping company in the world. Moller has earned respect all over the world. He is the only non-American who has ever been on the Board of Directors of IBM and he has received more distinctions than any Danish businessman before him.

It is, however, not the distinctions but rather his business ethics which have made him respected all over the world. He has a motto that Nordahl Grieg would also agree with: “He who has the ability also has the duty,” and he has lived by it all his life. He, and his employees with him, has had the ability to build a large concern without losing focus on the ethical values necessary to survive in the business world in the long run.

Another of Moller’s mottoes sounds like a cliché, but has proven highly workable as a company motto. Through this motto one gets a good understanding of his perception of how life should be lived: “Everything that is worth doing is worth doing well.”

Working for Maersk McKinney Moller has taught me that he is a man with a strong determination to do the best he can. He has managed to imbue the whole A.P. Moller group with that same way of thinking and has through his own life shown how far one can get with determination and personal commitment.

I believe that the participants in my dinner party, including myself, would agree that the will to do your best is a very important qualification if you want to succeed in the business world. Success will then follow, like an unintentional side effect of your personal commitment to a cause larger than yourself.

**COMMENTS**

1. Jon had an interesting combination of a weak educational background and an extremely successful career to date. He needed, therefore, to emphasize the latter and either camouflage the former or show that it did not matter because his inherent abilities were sufficient that a lack of formal education should not be of concern. In fact, he did all of these things. He made sure that he capitalized on his successful, varied career by telling a wide range of stories from his business life. He camouflaged his lack of traditional education by referring to classes he was taking, by discussing everything in a very logical and well-thought-out fashion, and by explaining work he had done that had a very analytical component. These approaches, taken together, made it clear that he has plenty of intellectual horsepower.
2. In the first essay, Jon shows that he knows two strengths of the London Business School program and is a very appropriate candidate for it insofar as a strong grounding in finance and corporate strategy are exactly what he wants. He also states a clear rationale for getting an MBA.
3. In essay 3, he demonstrated a strong overall strategic understanding of his industry, showing that he has not just remained in a cubicle, but has instead considered the context in which he is operating. Indeed, his analytical discussions, plus good prose, belie his lack of formal education.
4. Note his emphasis in essay 6 upon a writer and a philosopher, part of the effort to overcome his modest academic credentials. He also chose to emphasize his “Danishness” by choosing two Danes and one Norwegian, only one of whom is known to the outside world. This is a useful counterbalance to his internationalism, which is evident throughout his discussion of his Asian experiences and his desire to operate internationally. The Danishness suggests that he is not stateless and will indeed bring a Scandinavian as well as global perspective to bear during the program.
5. Note how positive he is throughout these essays about his career to date and his prospects. Similarly, he is very positive about his company. He notes that it is a top company, suggesting that he must be a top-quality manager to be working for it. His very positive approach, which includes being a veritable booster for his company,

suggests that he will probably be a booster for the business school he eventually attends, something that cannot fail to have value for a school.

INSEAD (Selected)

**1. Describe what you believe to be your most substantial accomplishment to date, explaining why you view it as such.**

During my first year in the Oil Purchasing Department of A.P. Moller, I managed to totally eliminate volume cheating involving Maersk vessels in Singapore.

The large amounts of money involved in the oil business in Singapore have attracted criminal elements to the trade, resulting in the regular theft of 5%—I 0% of the fuel oil that ships purchase.

The problem lies with the barge operators who are acting as subcontractors to the major oil companies. Due to the difficulty of obtaining solid evidence of the cheating, these problems have been more or less accepted by the trade and the Singapore authorities for years.

By joining forces with the suppliers, however, I managed to eliminate these problems for all Maersk vessels. In short, the “cure” was:

1. I made it clear to our suppliers that I wanted to get to the bottom of this problem and that I expected their assistance. I used our Vice President to open the doors.
2. In cooperation with selected suppliers I developed a performance questionnaire that enabled our vessels to report on the performance of the bunker barge and crew directly to the supplier and to my department.
3. Through intensive joint lobbying we persuaded the Singapore authorities to implement a licensing scheme for bunker barges to decrease the number of dishonest barge operators.
4. In cooperation with the Port Authorities of Singapore I managed to make the rules for barge operations inside the port limits far more flexible, thus eliminating the barge operators’ main excuse for bad performance.
5. I made it a rule that every captain should visit my department when in Copenhagen, in order for me to have firsthand knowledge of developments in Singapore.

I regard this as my most substantial accomplishment as I managed to save approximately 4 million dollars (U.S.) of recurrent annual costs.

**2. Briefly describe a situation taken from school, business, civil, or military life, where you did not meet your personal objectives, and discuss what you learnt from this experience.**

One of my functions while working in Thailand was that of Quality Coordinator. I had been educated in the concept of Total Quality Management (TQM) in Denmark, and it was my responsibility to implement this concept in the various work processes of the Thai staff. Before leaving for Thailand, I made the objectives of the corporate office my personal objectives and promised to fully implement TQM within the first year of my stay in Thailand.

When I arrived in Thailand, I was shocked to see how low the educational and professional level of our Thai staff actually was. It was obvious that the corporate office knew nothing of the actual situation in Thailand when the decision to implement TQM was made. It would take at least another five years before the staff could be made ready to get any substantial benefits from the concept. Until then, trying to implement it would create more problems than it would solve.

I soon had to realize that I was not going to meet my personal objectives. When I had realized that, much to my surprise, I felt a sense of relief. I felt that my hands were free and that I was able to act again, and instead of implementing the TQM concept I implemented proper job descriptions for all local staff. This way I paved the way for a future implementation of TQM and at the same time eliminated a substantial amount of double work and routines that were not adding to the goals of the company.

The experience taught me to trust my own judgment and the importance of understanding the needs of the parties involved before working out strategy and goals. Had I forced the TQM concept through, the result would have been disastrous. By understanding the actual needs of the local staff I managed to turn a major failure into a win/win situation.

COMMENTS

1. I have included these two essays because they provide interesting examples of two of the most common essay topics. In each case, Jon does a good job of explaining the situation and how (and why) he succeeded or failed.

**PHIUPPE**

*Background:*

J**ob:** Project manager of air force command and control system. Later, mergers and acquisitions associate for a high tech group.

**Education:** Bachelor of science degree from Ecole Polytechnique, MS from ENSTA,and MS from MIT

**Nationality:** French

*Critical issue to address:*

**Does he need a fourth degree?**

INSEAD

**1. Give a candid description of yourself, stressing the personal characteristics you feel to be your assets and liabilities.**

What I perceive as a major asset resides in the fact that I am extremely rigorous. I am strongly committed to well-done things and I wouldn’t do or produce anything that looks approximate or amateurish. Consequently, I am considered a very reliable person. Also, I have always been perceived as trustworthy. Whether this relates to natural openness and honesty, or to a good capacity to listen to and to care for others, the fact is that people trust me, not only on a professional basis, but also as a confidant or an adviser. Third, I have a good ability to communicate I am always very clear in my explanations and presentations, and I know how to make a meeting lively and productive. Besides the fact that I am a hardworker full of energy (which I believe every applicant to INSEAD is), I also have a communicative enthusiasm when undertaking something, combined with a good sense of humor.

On the liabilities side, I lack confidence when it comes to subjects that are not in my area of competence. This type of situation makes me feel uneasy since I am not in a strong position to argue. This is one of the reasons why I am applying to INSEAD: I need to acquire skills in finance and management related topics. Also, I have to pay sustained attention so as to curb a tendency to disperse myself in various activities of interest to me. I can say that I succeed in focusing on priorities, but this requires a steady effort from me.

**2. Describe what you believe to be your most substantial accomplishment to date, explaining why you view it as such.**

During my three first years of professional experience, I was in charge of the conception, development, and implementation of a large scale command and control system for the French Air Force. When I started the project, there were five major companies involved in specific parts of it (Dassault for the aircraft, Aerospatiale for the missiles, Sagem for guidance systems, plus two other software companies). There also were two distinct chiefs of staff on the Air Force side, each with his own

operational requirements. Last, I had to understand the deterrence concepts in order to conceive a global computer-based system. That was indeed a big challenge, since I had to integrate all the points of view of the different interlocutors, as well as the technical characteristics of the different subsystems. I also had to get all these people around the same table so that they would work in the same direction, using the same language. This required a good deal of diplomacy. The responsibility of the global coordination and of the good achievement of the project was entirely mine.

When the system was finally accepted and used by the Air Force, I knew I had accomplished something. Not only did I develop aptitudes in communicating with multiple persons, in negotiating contracts within a given budget, and in making things happen, but I also keep from that experience the pleasant feeling of paternity of this system, now fully operational at the Strategic Air Command, that a part of myself is embedded in it.

**3. Briefly describe a situation taken from school, business, civil, or military life, where you did not meet your personal objectives, and discuss what you learnt from this experience.**

When I was finishing my master’s studies at MIT, that were sponsored by the French Ministry of Defense, I was so interested in the research work I was conducting (i.e., information system modeling) that I wanted to pursue this research through a PhD. Therefore I applied to the doctoral program in MIS (management information systems) at the MIT Sloan School of Management. The admission cycle was such that I received my admission to the program more than six months after I started working for the French MOD in Paris. There was then a conflict of interests between my personal objectives (going back to MIT) and the priorities of the Defense Department (the completion of the system I was in charge of). Finally, although I strongly insisted, my hierarchy did not allow me to go back to the United States.

From this experience I learnt several important points:

* We are not living in a world of absolute independence, and in that sense such a situation, where personal objectives were confronted by superior priorities, enhanced my own maturity.
* Indeed it turned out that it is a greater accomplishment to honor one’s commitments than to satisfy one’s personal objectives regardless of these commitments.

In most dissatisfactions there is something positive; in that case I learnt that to run a technical project can be as enriching and stimulating as conducting research.

**4. Comment on the main factors which you believe account for your academic and professional development to date. Explain your career aspirations and why you choose to apply to INSEAD now.**

At the end of Polytechnique, I thought that even if I wanted to work in private indus try I should take the opportunity to get acquainted with government affairs since such an opportunity is only given once and not to many people. And indeed I do not regret this choice; I’ve been given large responsibilities in my first job as a project engineer. My second appointment was a great challenge since I moved from the very technical side of defense activities to the policy side: I dealt with vast subjects like the relations between France and NATO on nuclear policy issues; this was not only challenging but also highly exciting.

But after these four years I realized that if I wanted to pursue my initial idea to work in industry I should move to the private sector rapidly. The times when civil servants joined companies after fifteen years or so of governmental service are now over: with the European build-up, the influence of national administrations will decrease, and most of the action will take place within industry (the current restructuring of the defense electronics and armament business is a good example). Therefore I decided to join the MATRA group by the end of 1988, for at least two reasons: its private status and the European composition of its capital.

My career aspirations, which of course coincide with Matra plans, are to become within a few years the operational manager of a European-based entity within the group, with full responsibility for profits and losses. The other idea of the corporate vice-president for strategy is to have me working with him as a member of the corporate staff for several months, so that I get used to the corporate strategic issues and that I bear them in mind when I assume operational responsibilities. To achieve these objectives I need to develop skills and knowledge that I am now lacking, i.e., in finance, accounting, and general management. These are the reasons why I am applying to INSEAD, which is moreover attractive to me because of its European orientation.

**5. What means of ensuring your personal and professional development are you seriously considering as an alternative to INSEAD?**

First, Matra has set up an internal management program that is designed to give to its participants a basic knowledge in managerial topics. Besides this, since it lacks the international dimension, Matra and I are also considering intensive programs (15 weeks or so) for management development in leading business schools.

**6. What do you feel you would contribute during your time at INSEAD?**

I can bring and share with other INSEAD people what I learnt from my professional experience:

* a very good knowledge of government-business relations, of government policy-making and decision-making process;
* the practice of negotiation, either in contracting or in international policy issues;
* how to appreciate the changes in East-West relations and the political build-up of Europe, topics that are today subject to major attention;
* how the industrial strategy of a high tech group like Matra is handled, bringing in actual examples.

On top of that, I think that I can also bring a positive contribution in class sessions as well as in team work, through personal qualities such as enthusiasm, intellectual curiosity, a good sense of humor, and a permanent good mood.

**7. If you wish to discuss any matter, other than the items *of* information already requested, please develop it here.**

1. I am enclosing three letters of recommendation instead of two, because I think that INSEAD should have an appreciation of the three aspects of my past experience: academy, government, and industry.
2. I would like to make a short comment about the fact that I am applying to do a fourth degree. I want to stress that there is nothing special about this since I got the three first degrees within four years (between age 20 and 24); Polytechnique is meaningless without an “École d’application,” which lasts two years, and I spent that second year at MIT instead of ENSTA through an equivalence agreement. This explains how I will have 60 months’ full-time work experience by the fall of 1989 and that I am not diploma-addicted.

COMMENTS

1. Philippe was and remains one of France’s high-fliers. When applying to INSEAD, he had everything going for him: a stellar academic background and outstanding experience both at the defense ministry and at one of France’s leading companies. His only potential liability was his “excessive” number of degrees.
2. His first essay shows that he may have weaknesses, but he is on top of his tendency not to prioritize sufficiently and he can therefore control it. He claims in the first essay that he can explain matters well, something that later essays demonstrate in spades as he treats technical topics with ease (despite writing in his second language).
3. In the fifth essay he makes it clear that his company thinks the world of him insofar as they are looking around for how best to develop his talents.

1. The sixth essay focuses on his intellectual capital, the knowledge he has that he will bring to INSEAD. He is, for example, very clear about his technical and business-government relations strengths. This is particularly helpful to evaluations of his talents. He goes a helpful step further by showing that he is the type to share that knowledge and contribute positively.
2. His extra contribution (the “optional essay,” number 7) is ideal. He addresses the very specific issues that warrant attention and does so very efficiently.

DEBRA

*Background:*

**Job:** Marketing and admissions director for an American college in Europe

**Education:** Bachelor’s degree in teaching, master’s degree in communications

**Nationality:** Dutch

**Other:** Strong languages

*Critical issues to address:*

Her quantitative abilities are likely to be called into question, given her very nonquantitative schooling and job history.

Her human resources orientation raises questions about her toughness. (This is probably even more the case for a woman.) And is she sufficiently business-oriented in general?

**IESE (Barcelona)**

**I. DESCRIBE YOUR WORK EXPERIENCE**

As Associate Director of Admission and Marketing **I** report directly to the Dean of Admission of College X in City Y, USA. On a day-to-day basis I report to the Dean of College X in Europe. The Dean, the Business Manager, and I form the management team of the Institute.

Working for College X in Europe has been much like an entrepreneurial experience. I was one of the first employees of this degree-granting branch of an American college in Europe, founded in the early 1990s. Preliminary marketing research for this venture had been limited, and none of my American colleagues had experience in recruiting

students for a European-based degree program. Without much guidance, I developed and implemented marketing strategies, reaching out to prospective students, their parents, and the guidance community. In addition, I developed and implemented admission procedures to support the marketing activities. In the first year of the program we enrolled *35* students, and this number grew to 50 in the second. By 1993, our third year, we realized a more than 100 percent increase in enrollments with a total of 115 students.

From the beginning I have been involved in nearly all aspects of the College’s operation, including: resolving personnel hiring and contract issues, implementing an academic advising and registration system, contributing to curriculum development decisions, designing the billing procedure, and finding housing for both students and faculty, among others. The variety of my responsibilities has enabled me to acquire a broad insight into the workings of an organization, and to apply my analytical and managerial skills. Over the course of my employment at College X, other professional positions have been filled, allowing me to hand over a number of responsibilities and to develop marketing and admission strategies to a more sophisticated level.

**II. PROFESSIONAL AND OTHER QUALIFICATIONS**

**A. In addition to the academic and professional activities already mentioned, describe other activities that you have participated or presently participate in. This includes college, university, community, athletic, political, or cultural organizations. Also include articles published, awards won, professional titles obtained, etc.**

I am **a** member of the regional Public Relations Association of City Z (in Europe), through which I keep up with current developments in my profession, meet colleagues in the field, and learn more about the industries in the area. Since November of 1993 I have been enrolled in an economics class at a local college, out of general interest and to prepare for entrance into an MBA program.

I have an active interest in the arts, in particular fiber arts and sculpture. Whenever possible I try to find the time to put my interest in the arts into practice. Since completing my undergraduate program, I have taken a course in silk-screen printing, and currently I assist in teaching a desktop publishing workshop.

I am always involved in at least one sport, to keep my body in shape, to relax, and to socialize. In secondary school, I played badminton; during my undergraduate studies, I was an active volleyball player; while living in the United States I sailed and worked out in the gym, which I continue to do now in City Z (in Europe). I have also participated in several group vacations, learning sailing and canoeing.

Upon graduation from my undergraduate program I went abroad to improve my foreign language skills. I took intensive French and German language classes, in

which I increased my foreign language skills, as well as my knowledge of Swiss, French, and German cultures.

As a secondary school student I assisted in organizing summer camp activities for children. Indeed, I have always been an active participant of the groups of which I am a member, whether during work, study or spare time. I make the effort to organize social gatherings and group excursions to bring colleagues or peers away from the formal environment and to thus strengthen group ties.

**B. Describe any position of leadership you have held. Please indicate whether you were elected or appointed to the positions held and show the dates of involvement and scope of your responsibilities.**

Although I have not held any officially appointed or elected leadership positions, I would characterize my role in a number of groups and organizations in which I have participated as the informal leader and the person who creates group cohesiveness.

In my current professional position, for example, I have received the trust of both my superiors and colleagues. On a regular basis, the Dean as well as my co-workers turn to me for advice, and to discuss troublesome work issues. My ability to listen, coupled with my analytical reasoning and problem-solving skills, helps others to identify the source of the problem and to find creative solutions, Due to my involvement at all levels, I am often able to act as the mediator between parties.

Because organizations constantly require adaptation to the new needs and demands of a changing environment, I believe that it is important for employees at all levels to identify areas which need modification, and to propose ideas for improvement. I therefore actively stimulate and challenge colleagues to take responsibility for bettering their work practice and environment wherever possible. Doing so has contributed to cultivating an enthusiastic and dedicated staff, in which the individual members feel responsible for, and instrumental contributors to, the success of the organization.

From secondary school on, and in particular during the years I spent abroad, I have been engaged in numerous formal and informal group settings. During my undergraduate studies I served as an orientation leader during the new student introduction and I was the founder of a student volleyball team. On many occasions I have organized social gatherings and group excursions, such as a study trip to a major fibre art exhibit in Switzerland and several long weekend trips. These activities have had a positive influence on the groups I participated in, in that they have unified group members, and have often made me the informal leader, the person members turn to for facilitating group decisions.

**C. State what the reasons were for choosing your university studies.**

When **I** completed secondary school I was quite young, just about to turn 17, and not quite ready to make a career choice. Because the Dutch education system does not offer a broad liberal arts education, I chose a profession I was familiar with, teaching, and a field which would allow me to apply my creative skills, fine arts. However, during the final years of my bachelor’s degree program, I came to the conclusion that neither secondary school teaching nor the creative arts gave me satisfactory intellectual fulfillment, Upon evaluation of my personal strengths and career aspirations, I decided to enter the field of public relations.

I spent two years abroad, improving my foreign language skills, and acquiring work experience in public relations. Through this experience I realized that, in order to find the professional challenge I was looking for, I needed to further my education in the field. This prompted my decision to enter a master’s degree program in Business Communication and Public Relations at College X in the United States where I acquired both theoretical knowledge as well as practical experience in business communication.

**D. Indicate the reasons why you wish to follow an MBA Program and how the Bilingual MBA Program will fit in with your career plans.**

My overall aim is to apply my strengths and experiences in those environments which offer me a challenge, that is, an opportunity to continue to expand by personal boundaries.

My current position as Associate Director of Admission and Marketing for the international branch of an established American college, has allowed me to apply my knowledge and skills, and to experience and contribute to the development and growth of a new organization. In this position, I apply public relations primarily as a marketing tool, with activities which are predominantly forms of one-way communication. However, I find that my particular interest now has become focused on the function of public relations and business communication, which is much broader than serving as a marketing tool alone. The task of the business communication manager is to act as a liaison between an organization and all of its publics, including its employees, stockholders, the community, the media, and the public at large, among others. In this role he/she is responsible not only for communicating management issues to the public, but also for monitoring public opinion and analyzing its possible impact on the organization. The findings of the communication manager thus contribute to the strategic planning process of the organization.

My immediate goal is to acquire a position in the communication department of a medium to large international organization. In the longer term, I aim at managing such a department, and eventually I wish to apply my knowledge and strengths as a consultant. In order to achieve these goals, I find it imperative to supplement my

business communication education and to reinforce my marketing management experience, by pursuing an MBA education.

As communication member or consultant, I will be a member of, or consultant to, the general management of the organization. Because I will be dealing with all publics and all facets of the organization, this will require an understanding of the organization in its broadest possible scope. The MBA program will strengthen my general business knowledge, and my knowledge of economics, corporate finance, business policies, strategic management, organizational behavior, and political trends affecting business in particular. The emphasis on the interrelation of these individual business areas through the case methodology used at TESE is of particular interest to me because it will provide me with the knowledge and experience necessary to identify and analyze those complex public issues which impact an organization.

I also chose IESE to pursue my MBA degree because it offers a truly global program. I have been engaged internationally, through work and study, for the past six and a half years, and have enjoyed and learned much from the intercultural interaction. I wish to continue to be engaged internationally in the future, both personally and professionally. In addition, I believe that current business practitioners can no longer afford to ignore their competitors over the border. Mergers and takeovers change many industries into multinational conglomerates with new communication demands, and more and more companies employ immigrants coming from a variety of cultural backgrounds. These intercultural settings require internationally educated managers— managers who have proven to be able to operate successfully in multicultural settings. The bilingual MBA program offered by IESE provides the education and experience in just such an environment, through its international curriculum, faculty, and student body. In addition, becoming fluent in Spanish will greatly enhance my effectiveness for working in international settings.

**E. Given your experience with employers or educational institutions and given the opportunity to effect one change, what would that be? Describe how you would implement the change and what difficulties you would expect to encounter.**

The organization I currently work for, College X, is not at all consistent in communicating with external publics via its printed materials. Each individual department— undergraduate admission, graduate admission, continuing and external education, alumni relations, and the European campus—develops its own printed materials. This creates a variety of communication pieces ranging from prize-winning quality to desktop experiments. I would like to bring all of these efforts in line with one another, and to do so I would propose the following.

A publication manager should be appointed who will be responsible for all publications emanating from the college. This individual, who will possess excellent writing skills and knowledge of graphics and design, will write most of the materials

him/herself. He/she will be assisted by a graphic designer and will be able to call upon external copy writers and/or designers whenever necessary.

There will be four primary benefits from this approach:

1. A single publication manager will ensure consistency in the use of language, logos, and images.
2. Consistency in promotional materials will increase recognition among target audiences and will thus increase recognition of the college as a whole.
3. Through multiple use of graphics and pictures, and by negotiating large contracts with printers, the college will save in production costs. This will allow even those departments who work with small printing budgets to produce representative and effective promotional materials.
4. Individual departments will no longer have to spend time on production of publications, which will account for significant time savings in offices with few employees such as my own.

The major problem I expect to encounter is resistance to change. Most offices on campus have been in charge of their own publications for as long as they can remember, and each individual office believes it is doing a fine job on its own. Even though not directly competing, there is a sense of rivalry among the offices and they do not have much faith in each others’ marketing capabilities. It will therefore be important to allow each office to contribute to the appointment of the publication manager and to allow for their direct input when it concerns a publication produced for their use.

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**1. Give a candid evaluation of your personality, just as you see yourself.**

I am successful in my current position **at** College X, primarily because of my analytical reasoning skills, combined with my ability to think creatively. Due to these strengths, the Dean of the College involves me in many organizational decisions beyond my marketing responsibilities, including budget planning, curriculum development, and student life concerns. My resourceful nature has caused one of my colleagues to describe me as a level-headed problem solver, and many of my co-workers often seek me out to discuss troublesome work issues. Due to my involvement at all levels, I sometimes act as mediator in the case of a conflict or communication problem. I enjoy applying my versatility and flexibility to tackling these diverse matters, and doing so has allowed me to gain insight into the various aspects of a managerial function.

Another one of my prime assets is my ability to communicate. During my three and a half years abroad, in which I lived in four different countries, I was able to adapt with ease to new environments, situations and people, which was largely due to strong interpersonal communication skills. In my current position, in which I inform prospective students, their parents, and college counselors about the educational opportunities offered at College X, my success relies heavily on excellent interpersonal communication and oral presentation skills.

I perform at my highest level under pressure. My current position requires me to constantly maneuver a variety of tasks which have the tendency to become urgent all at the same time. It is under these pressing circumstances that I am most energetic and productive.

I have a natural drive to organize and to create structure, which has been essential for my professional accomplishments. As public relations assistant at Essilor International in Paris, I was completely in charge of the logistics and execution of foreign group visits to the parent company in France, Careful planning, excellent timing, an eye for detail, and regular communication with my colleagues in the international subsidiaries and the local plants were imperative to meeting the expectations of the participants and ensuring smooth and enjoyable visits. In my current position, I have successfully developed and implemented operational structures for the admissions office, as well as for the organization as a whole.

A liability that I face is my tendency to be somewhat of a compulsive perfectionist. I often find myself adding criteria onto the task at hand right up until the deadline. Improving my time management skills and forcing myself to realistically assess quality versus time invested will help me to improve my work efficiency.

Perhaps typical for a Dutchman, I have a direct approach and am a results-oriented person. When bureaucracy, internal politics, and rooted procedures stand in the way of getting the job done, I sometimes tend to lose my temper. I am learning that the most direct approach is not necessarily always the most effective, and that it is sometimes necessary to first build a good working relationship before starting to work on the task at hand.

My professional career is very important to me, and I therefore devote a lot of time and energy to my job. To find satisfaction in my work, it is important that I believe in the organization I work for, the product or service it delivers, and its management style. Because I frequently go beyond the call of duty, I continually need to monitor maintaining a healthy balance between my professional and personal life.

**2. Describe two substantial accomplishments and one failure in a professional, academic, private, or family endeavor and explain why you view them as such. Mention also what you learned from them.**

1. One of my most substantial professional accomplishments to date is marketing the new branch of an American university in Europe. Its success is demonstrated through its growth from 35 students in its initial year, 1991—1992, to 50 in its second, and a more than 100 percent increase to 115 students in its third year. This effort, combined with my involvement in the general management of the organization, has contributed significantly to its overall success.

I see this as a substantial accomplishment, due to a number of obstacles I had to face to achieve this.

* For the first year and a half, until I started reporting to the Dean of Admission on the U.S. campus, I found myself with hardly any professional guidance. Relying on limited preliminary research, I was responsible for defining targets and developing marketing strategies. At first this created some anxiety for me, but I soon started to appreciate and exercise the independence it offered. In addition, I had to learn to maneuver among the varying and sometimes conflicting demands of the interim director, the incoming dean, and the vice president for external programs located in the United States.
* From a marketing point of view, the biggest obstacle was, and continues to be our tuition. College X has a long tradition of educating communication professionals and, through its educational balance of theory and practice, offers a viable alternative to the existing communication education programs in Europe. However, attracting students to College X has been a challenge because of its costs. As a private, not-for-profit university, College X is entirely tuition driven. Fees are therefore ten to fifteen times higher than those of most public universities in Europe, and this means that (1) only a small percentage of the general population can afford our education, and (2) we are operating in a market where people are not accustomed to paying for their education.
* Finally, from day one I have been involved in nearly all aspects of the College’s operation. Through this broad range of responsibilities, described earlier in this application, I have gained significant insight into the workings of an organization and, among other things, have learned how to manage people and deal with working under pressure. However, at the same time this wide variety of responsibilities has seriously diverted my time and energy from my primary responsibilities, marketing and admission.

2. Another major accomplishment is my successful career change from education to business. I entered my master’s program at College X with business experience obtained solely through my position as public relations assistant at Essilor International in Paris. In a relatively short period of time I mastered the theories of the field of business communication and was able to apply my newly acquired knowledge to case studies, research projects, class discussions, and an internship. In my current position I have shown that I have been successful not only in marketing the

organization, but also in quickly moving into general management duties through which I have contributed significantly to the overall development of the organization.

3. A situation in which I did not reach my objectives occurred toward the end of my undergraduate studies. For the final project, a fellow student and I decided to design and produce a visual theater performance in which objects, instead of actors would play the leading roles. In addition to the design and construction of the objects, we were also responsible for the choreography, sound, and lighting of the performance. Although both of us had worked on a similar project before and could thus anticipate the work involved, our plans went beyond what could be considered realistic. After three months of brainstorming, planning, and designing, we had to come to the conclusion that a project this ambitious could not be carried out by a team of just two people. Notwithstanding our excellent cooperation, we decided to break up as a team, and I started a new project on my own. A year later I graduated with a successful sculpture exhibit.

The most important thing I learned from this experience is the necessity, at the initiation of any project, to establish goals carefully, outline the means to reach these goals, and test the feasibility of reaching them in the time available. Had we conducted this exercise during the planning stage of our project, we would have been able either to downsize the magnitude of the final production, or to get additional people involved to assist us with the sound and lighting, for example.

This particular experience was important to me, because the year of primarily solitary work in a studio taught me a lot about myself. Even though solitary work allows one to fully concentrate on acquiring new knowledge, I felt a lack of stimulation which comes from cooperation with other people. It became clear to me that, whatever career I pursue, interaction with others is crucial to finding satisfaction in my work.

**3. Describe an ethical dilemma you have experienced. Discuss how you managed the situation.**

To get a quick start recruiting College X’s first European class, the U.S. campus employed four persons for the admission office including an admission coordinator (myself), and two recruiters. Contracts ran from January through June, at the end of which the positions would be evaluated based on performance and program staffing needs.

Both full-timers wanted to, and assumed that they could, continue their employment with us. At the time they were hired, the U.S. campus gave them the impression that they would have a fair chance of continuing beyond their first contract period.

However, toward the end of May, the U.S. campus decided that the admission staff was to continue as a two-person office; that is, my position and that of one assistant. After careful evaluation, the Dean and I concluded that neither one of the current recruiters was the optimal candidate to fill the position. Both were College X

graduates, and possessed a great deal of enthusiasm to get prospective students excited about the College X programs. However, both lacked a certain maturity and professionalism, which we felt was particularly important in their contacts with guidance counselors and parents. In addition, now that the admission office was being reduced to two professional staff members only, I felt that it was important to get an assistant who would contribute to developing and implementing operational structures for the admission office. Neither one fit that profile.

The U.S. campus’s decision about the new configuration of the admission staff did not come until the end of May. It then took the Dean and me another couple of weeks to define which qualifications were needed for the newly defined admission assistant position. This brought us to mid-June, close to the end of the recruiter’s contract period. Because all this evolved very late, we had not communicated the new scenario to the two people involved. The fact that their contracts might not be renewed came therefore as a surprise to both of them.

College X had no legal obligation to offer to renew their contracts. Both expired in June, and no commitments had been made for continuation of employment thereafter. However, the combination of late decision making and poor communication created false expectations and caused an ethical dilemma for the Dean and me.

In addition, even though it was clear to me that we needed a stronger candidate to fill the position, I found it difficult not to renew the contracts of these two employees, who had both worked hard and been loyal to the organization. In the Netherlands, employment provides a fair amount of security. Even though this is changing under the influence of economic recession and values adopted from other cultures, I grew up with the idea that an employee is fired only when he/she is guilty of serious misconduct, or when the company is forced, because of financial constraints, to reduce the total work- force. I therefore also felt a social obligation toward these employees.

The moral dilemma created was whether we should base our decision solely on what would be economically most beneficial for the organization, or whether we should take into account the College’s social responsibility to these employees. In addition, the situation had become more complex than necessary because of late decision making, and consequently a lack of timely communication with the employees involved.

After careful consideration, our final decision was to hire one of the recruiters in a services position, not to extend the contract of the other, and to advertise the position of admission assistant. This enabled us to hire an admission assistant who was better suited for the newly defined admission position, thus strengthening the competence of the admission office. The recruiter who was offered a new contract obtained a position for which he was much better qualified. The person whose contract was not

renewed did not find alternative employment in the area, and eventually returned to the United States.

**4. Give the name of an individual who has positively influenced your professional, academic, private, or family life. Describe what that person did and how it affected you personally.**

**A** person who has very positively influenced my professional career has been myfather.

First of all, he has been for me an inspiring example of a successful businessman. As a farmer’s son, he combined his personal interests with a career in business, working the major part of his life in the agricultural industry. He worked for an organization in which he was able to utilize his entrepreneurial talent; as director of Cebeco International Projects he initiated many successful agricultural projects in developing nations as well as in the former Soviet Union. His professional endeavors have contributed to the agricultural development of these countries as well as to the success of the organization for which he worked.

Second, my father has always acted as my advisor and mentor on important educational decisions, without at any moment forcing his advice on me. When I decided to make a career change, he was instrumental in helping me to map out my future career path. He has stimulated me to go abroad to improve my language skills and eventually to enter a master’s program, which has had a very positive influence on my personal and professional development.

Finally, he continues to act as an objective external consultant regarding some of the personal and professional dilemmas I encounter. His pragmatic, down-to-earth approach helps me to see complex issues from a new perspective.

NUENRODE (NETHERLANDS) (Selected)

**1. During your study at the Nijenrode International MBA Program, you will be part of a diverse multi-cultural, multi-experienced community. What rewards and challenges do you anticipate in this environment, and how do you expect this experience to prepare you for your future personal and professional endeavors?**

Living and working with people from various cultural backgrounds has broadened my views of other values, opinions, and beliefs, and has made me look with more criticism at my own. Working in a multicultural environment has also exposed me to new challenges. It is one thing to go out for a drink with a non-Dutch national; even though you have to settle on the choice of a bar, you can each choose your favorite drink. It is something else to work out a business proposal or to solve an

organizational conflict with someone who did not grow up with the same set of values and beliefs as you did. It is these types of situations I expect to also engage in at Nijenrode.

I believe that it is important to continue to develop intercultural knowledge and communication skills, because tomorrow’s business world will be even more global than it already is today. Most traditionally national industries can no longer ignore their competitors on the other side of the border; mergers and takeovers change many industries into multicultural conglomerates with new communication demands; and more and more companies employ immigrants coming from a variety of cultural backgrounds. These intercultural settings require internationally educated managers; managers who have proven to be able to operate successfully in a multicultural setting. Nijenrode provides the education and experience in such a setting.

The multi-experienced community brought together in a Nijenrode class allows its participants to benefit and learn from each other’s professional expertise. Also, in a relatively short period of time, the group members acquire insight in a broad variety of industries and organizations. This multi-experienced community offers a challenge in that it forces one to cooperate with people who come to the field of management from different disciplines, and with various business perspectives. The Nijenrode class thus mirrors an organizational setting, in which one is also required to closely cooperate with colleagues who come from a variety of professional backgrounds.

Finally, upon graduation, this multicultural and multi-experienced group of people is expected to branch out in a variety of disciplines, all over the globe. This will create a strong international network of personal and professional contacts.

**COMMENTS**

1. Debra managed to show that she had the “people person” qualities to be expected of someone in education and also emphasized the business aspects of her education work, thereby showing that she was not a high risk candidate. She showed herself to be knowledgeable about business and clear (and realistic) regarding where she was headed and how an MBA could help her get there. She also gets full credit for being a very interesting candidate who is not at all like the usual accountant/engineer/banker/consultant applicant.
2. She failed to get the most from her application in one way. She showed herself to be a leader, but did too little to draw attention to this. In essay B she is too modest; she ran this office and should have claimed the credit for her actions. Similarly, her discussion in essay 3 of whether to fire two workers concerns a down-to-earth problem constantly faced by managers. Unfortunately, she does not drive home the point that she took the lead and swayed the decision.

1. In essay C, she notes how young she was when she chose the field she would enter, a subtle way of excusing her failure to choose something appropriate for her and also of indicating her surprising determination to get on with things. Completing high school at 16 indicates that she has more firepower and determination than might be expected of an almost—high school teacher.
2. In essay D, she shows that she knows what business is all about by discussing her interest in consulting. This is also her chance to show that she understands what an MBA is all about, and that she recognizes exactly how it can help her. By the same token, she knows what IESE has to offer—its case method of teaching and bilingual program in particular.
3. In essay E, she is persuasive in discussing what she would wish to change in her job, but she could have been more so had she provided specific numbers regarding the impact her suggestion would have, particularly the likely cost savings.
4. Her description of herself in essay 1 as a results-oriented Dutch person is a good counterbalance to the presumption created by someone being in education (and thus being viewed potentially as a waffly bureaucrat).

ANNE

*Background:*

**Job:** Airport manager

**Education:** Bachelor’s degree in business and master’s degree in law

**Nationality:** French

*Critical issues to address:*

None. She is a strong candidate who merely needs to communicate her numerous strengths. She graduated in the top 10 percent of a good under- grad program, did well on the GMAT, and has had very strong operating experience in a very international industry (airlines). The only concern is that she be able to present herself in a manner reflecting her abilities.

INSEAD

**Work Experience/Job Description**

I started working for Airlnter in 1987, just after completing my original studies. I worked for six months as an attaché direction (assistant) for the Strasbourg-based

regional manager. When I returned to the company after doing my degrees at the Faculté de Droit, Aix en Provence, I was the assistant manager to the Lyon station (i.e., airport) manager. I very much liked being at the point of contact with the customers, ground staff, and flight crews.

I therefore applied to be a station manager myself, eventually getting the job in Mulhouse which I have held up until my recent pregnancy leave. One could divide the job into four components.

The first is the management of 150 people, with an operating budget of 4 5—50 million francs and a capital budget of approximately 10 million francs. The management responsibility is nearly total. The station manager decides how many people to hire, whom to hire, and how to train them; the manager also manages the facilities and finance functions, deciding, for example, when and how much to invest in replacing equipment, in addition to running the ongoing operations of the facility.

The second component involves seeking out “handling agent” business for other airlines. This means that one performs all the ground functions to enable KLM, for example, to make daily stops at the airport. In other parts of the Airlnter system this is a simpler task because the company generally has a monopoly at each airport. Because this is not true at Mulhouse, the marketing and bidding processes are trickier, This part of the business, by the way, currently generates revenues of approximately 15 million francs, a substantial increase over the last several years.

Third, the manager must be “on call” at all times. The airport runs nearly twenty-four hours a day, and it is on an international border, so there are constantly major decisions to be made. For example, the recent Airbus 320 crash at Mont St. Odile took place near Mulhouse, necessitating that I head to Strasbourg, the airport nearest the crash, to help the overwhelmed manager there.

Fourth, I represent the company’s interests in front of the airport authorities. This is particularly important in Mulhouse for two reasons. The first is that we do not have our customary monopoly position there, having to share the airport with Swissair. The second is that we are the world’s only binational airport, with both Swiss and French authorities having power. In commercial, immigration, and security matters, things are much more complex in Mulhouse than elsewhere because of the multiplicity of interested parties, making good representation of the company all the more important.

Further descriptions of the challenges involved and my relative success in handling them are to be found in the essays.

**1. Give a candid description of yourself, stressing the personal characteristics you feel to be your assets and liabilities.**

My assets can be divided into three general categories. The first is that I have **strong** **interpersonal skills.** I work well with a wide range of people, whether young or old,French or German, graduate or laborer. For example, I was regarded as a strong team player when I worked on the Airlnter corporate staff with other young graduates.

Later I managed a group of 150 ground employees and commercial staff—essentially none of whom had a university background—as station manager at Mulhouse airport, and developed such a good working relationship that we were virtually unique in having no work stoppages during my tenure. [The personal characteristics underlying this probably include the fact that I am very much bien dans ma peau (comfortable with who I am) and not overly emotional on the job. This calm under fire is particularly valuable as a station manager in the airline business, being respected by all, and making it very comfortable for people to work with me.]

The second is that I am **a good analyst.** While station manager at Muihouse, for example, I was unable to learn from our controle de gestion (accounting) people whether we made money as handling agents for other airlines. So, before bidding on such work, I did an analysis of this business which revealed its underlying costs, thereby enabling me to know how and when to bid for it. The costs of this work are highly complex because of the large number of different groups involved in performing it, without keeping proper activity-based cost data, and, because the complexity added to the system due to the need to handle additional types of aircraft, is inherently difficult to quantify.

The third is that I am very **hard working and determined,** something I may have acquired from my immigrant parents.

My weaknesses are also quite clear. I am not a really creative person, being more of a practical nature. I dislike personal confrontations and go too far out of my way to avoid them. For example, I sometimes prefer to redo something a subordinate has done poorly rather than confront him with his mistakes. By the same token, I may be too demanding of my subordinates and colleagues and be inappropriately disappointed when they appear not to be as committed to the business as I am.

2. **Describe what you believe to be your most substantial achievement to date,** **explaining why you view it as such.**

My most substantial accomplishment was making **a** real success of my first operational job, that of station manager of Mulhouse Airport. I faced several barriers that made my ultimate success all the more pleasing. I was the only person ever to be given such a post without many years (typically twenty-plus) of experience in a station. In fact, I had only eighteen months’ experience, and none managing people, at the time. In addition, the airport I was given is one of the most complicated in the Airlnter system. (Mulhouse is the world’s only binational airport, being operated jointly with Switzerland.) Perhaps of significance as well is the fact that I was the first woman to be made station manager.

My success in this position can be measured on several dimensions. The first is that we turned this airport into the model for the whole Airinter system in terms of early adoption of new techniques. If, for example, other station managers want to learn about computerized check-in of international passengers, formerly done manually, they are told to see how Muihouse does it. Second, we managed to operate throughout this period without any strikes or work slowdowns, even in the face of a mechanics’ walkout throughout much of the rest of the system. This was due to our willingness to listen careftilly to what each of our work groups felt, and to what they knew about how best to run the business. We also managed to integrate the Air France and Airlnter operations when the two firms merged without serious disruptions. I personally felt pleased that I was able to manage supervisors who had an average of twenty-five more years of experience and three fewer degrees than I did.

**3. Describe a situation taken from school, business, civil, or military life, where you did not meet your personal objectives, and discuss what you learned from this experience.**

I was made assistant manager in Lyon approximately four years ago. I started with high expectations but left after just one year with none of these expectations realized.

Despite getting on well personally with my manager, I never found a way to work well with him. He gave me virtually nothing to do and thwarted my efforts at carving out areas in which I could work. The basic problem was that he was new at his job and was unwilling to delegate because he did not yet understand what his own job entailed.

This was a bad situation which I initially hoped would improve of its own accord. Nothing happened, however, until I pushed to get another assignment.

What I learned was quite simple. The inability to work in a positive manner was devastating to me. I was not able to report to work and just read memos all day or stare out the window. I also learned that personal compatibility is not sufficient to guarantee professional compatibility as well. In addition, I reaffirmed my basic notion that the world is not waiting to give me the job; I have to manage my own career just like I have to manage any other task I care about.

**4. Comment on the main factors which you believe account for your academic and professional development to date. Explain your career aspirations and why you chose to apply to INSEAD now.**

The characteristics I mentioned in Essay One—having good interpersonal skills, being a good analyst, and being very determined—have contributed significantly to both my academic and my professional development. The additional factors to note are two. My academic progress resulted in part from my great curiosity about my studies; I greatly enjoyed being a student, (And thus, perhaps, my graduating from the

Faculty of Law with high honors.) My professional development undoubtedly owes a great deal to my enthusiasm about the airline industry.

I hope to remain in the airline industry, preferably on the operational side, albeit in higher positions. I very much enjoy the general management nature of dealing with customers on the one hand, and all of the airline’s staff (such as flight crews, commercial agents, ground crews, and the corporate staff) on the other.

My reasons for wanting an MBA are set forth in Essay Six. My reasons for wanting to attend INSEAD are also described there. The reasons that I wish to attend INSEAD now are quite simple. With the birth of my baby I have reached a natural break point. Also, I have now gained enough practical experience to benefit from additional education.

**5. If you were given the opportunity to effect one change in your work environment, what would that be? How would you implement this change?**

I would change the compensation and promotion system. Right now Airlnter operates just like a government bureaucracy. Promotion and pay are determined by a combination of seniority and exam results. As a station manager, I cannot reward more that three or four of my 150 employees, and that only with a 3000 franc bonus. Not only am I basically unable to reward good performance, I am unable to penalize poor behavior. This is clearly inappropriate in a company which should be attuned to the coming global competition in the airline industry, a competition which will require far better performance than we now manage.

Changing the system will be a major task. At my level in the company, I currently try to work around the problem by seeking to allow one employee to take a promotion exam a few months ahead of schedule, or whatever. The real task, however, is system wide. To convince the more conservative, not to say lower performing, part of management that this is necessary will not be easy but it will be simple compared to changing union attitudes.

I am not able currently to commission a consultant to compare our performance levels with those of leading American carriers, or to lay out a disaster scenario of how fast we will go bankrupt in the event of unfettered competition in the future. In any event I am not sure that such major change can be made absent a crisis, although the British Airways change is certainly worth studying. As a personal matter, I intend to pay close attention to questions of organizational change at business school, particularly as they can be applied to this sort of service industry. If possible, I hope to study exactly this case so as to help to push Airlnter’s management and unions at least a bit in the right direction.

**6. What means of ensuring your personal and professional development are you seriously considering as an alternative to INSEAD?**

**I** have concluded that an MBA is the right step in my professional development at thistime. I want to get more of a senior management perspective than I saw as a veritable kid at Ecole Des Affaires de Paris (EAP) years ago. Now that I know how a company functions, and what is particularly relevant to the industry that I have chosen, I am anxious to get started on a top program.

The two programs that I have looked at seriously are those of INSEAD and IMD. I want top programs devoted to development of senior, general managers. I also want a one- year program because I think that two years represents a greater time commitment than is appropriate given my current level of knowledge and operating experience. Last, I want a very international perspective given the increasingly global nature of the airline business, making these two schools the natural choices in Europe.

If I am not admitted I shall consider other career options. It will be difficult to gain the perspective I am seeking at Airlnter because several of its attitudes run directly counter to those appropriate for the future. It is, for example, run by engineers with little marketing and no customer orientation. Consequently, if unable to pursue an appropriate MBA, I shall try to get a job with a non-French company with a real devotion to marketing and customer service. This will probably mean an American carrier.

**7. What do you feel you would contribute during your time at INSEAD?**

My background in the airline industry gives me several things to share with my classmates. I have learned a great deal about the airline industry for one. Also, I have had several years of running a 150-person operation, working not just for a French company but with several large international carriers as clients as well (in our handling agent capacity), all within the unique binational structure of Mulhouse Airport, which requires constant cooperation and negotiation with my Swiss counterparts. In addition I have managed groups of people very different from myself, insofar as they are true “blue-collar,” unionized employees.

These experiences have contrasted with the work I initially did as a corporate staff employee at corporate headquarters, so I know that this perspective will be a bit different from what the typical management consultant or banker will bring. Because I enjoy working on teams with very different sorts of people, due to what I can learn as well as my own opportunity to contribute to their learning, I look forward to participating in such groups at INSEAD.

COMMENTS

1. Overall, this is an exceptionally successful effort that highlights Anne’s numerous strengths and takes full advantage of being a relatively senior person, with an unusual job, when compared with other applicants. Note too that this is a very lean application; there is no excess to her essays.

1. In her job description, she does an admirable job of quantifying her responsibilities as well as explaining what they are. The latter is important for a job which is not likely to be well known to admissions officers.
2. Her first essay is very effective. She presents a convincing case for her several strengths, focusing on a limited number of them rather than simply listing a large number, She handles her weaknesses in the right way by listing several that are believable, but not disabling, without dwelling upon them.
3. In the last line of her second essay she shows that she may be “overeducated,” but is still very practical at heart, thereby addressing one potential issue.
4. One small flaw: in essay 3 it is not clear that she has extracted all potential learning from her failure. She makes it sound as if it was all her boss’s fault, but is that necessarily true? On the other hand, she has gleaned important personal career management information from this experience, recognizing that rather than indulge in recriminations she should simply move on.
5. In essay 4 she does something few applicants do; she relates her successes to her personal and professional strengths. In other words, she ties together essays 1 and 4. By showing how her strengths have contributed to various professional successes and her professional development, she makes those strengths clearer and more believable than they otherwise would be.
6. In essay 5 she shows two positive things about her: she bears heavy responsibilities (150 people work under her) and she is aware of the international aspects of her business (which she makes clear by discussing American and British operations).
7. In essay 6 she makes clear why she needs a second business degree: her first one was done when she was still a youngster and she needs the sort of senior management perspective that is not part of a BBA education and would, in any event, be nearly irrelevant to nineteen-year-olds.
8. Throughout the application she shows how international she is, Whether she is discussing the organizational change efforts at British Airways or discussing what is involved in running a binational airport, she makes it clear that a truly international program like INSEAD’s is her natural home.

Chapter II

UNDERSTANDING THE KEY ESSAY TOPICS

One leading business school states, “While we believe that previous academic records and standardized test results are useful tools for (our) evaluation, we find several less quantifiable indicators to be of equal or greater importance. Please keep this in mind as you complete the questions. . . . Use these short essays to show us your personality, motivation, goals, leadership abilities, and communication skills.” (IESE, Barcelona)

Essays offer you the chance to show schools who you really are. Take advantage of this opportunity. Recommenders can show only a part of who you are, since most of them are instructors or employers and have thus seen you in only one context.

Similarly, interviews are not under your control to the same extent as the essays, which can be rewritten and reexamined to make sure that the “real you” is presented.

Rather than imagining that an ultraserious admissions committee is going to read your application, imagine that a pleasant chap with a glass of port in one hand is examining your essays, hoping to find something that distinguishes you and makes it possible for him to know you even without having met you.

Your essays can and should present a clear picture of you, but they do not need to tell all. Sketching in the main points with appropriate stories will show who you are. In fact, whenever possible, try to tell a story rather than write an essay. The task will seem lighter.

This is your chance to choose which parts of your past and yourself to highlight, and to determine how people should view them. This is a precious opportunity; take full advantage of the chance to color your readers’ interpretations.

This chapter analyzes the essay questions; the following chapter shows you how to write your responses. 115 examples of actual essays written by applicants are available in the Appendix. The chart at the beginning of the Appendix shows where to find specific examples, classified by the background of the applicant, the school applied to, and, of course, the specific question asked.

QUESTION:

WHAT ARE YOUR CAREER OBJECTIVES AND REASONS FOR WANTING AN MBA?

WHY THE QUESTION IS ASKED

Schools ask this question for a number of reasons. They want to make sure that you have given substantial thought to your future career. They want to see that an MBA fits with the future that you envision for yourself. They want to understand why now is the time. Although schools will not, for reasons of political correctness, confess to this on the record, I believe that they are especially desirous of finding women who will not retire from the workforce for long periods to raise a family. Top schools want people who will get to the top of the business world, so anyone who looks likely to drop out of business *for whatever reason* will be viewed as suspect.

THE TYPICAL APPLICANT

Many people apply to business schools because they are unhappy with their current situations and are hoping to do virtually anything as long as it is different from what they currently do. Too many of them have no idea of where they are heading, just what they are running from. Their response to this question tends to show that they do not have a realistic career plan. They either describe their hoped-for jobs in vague, rosy terms, saying that they hope to find something liberating, empowering, with substantial responsibilities and high pay, or they mention a popular career like investment banking, for which nothing in their past even remotely qualifies them.

Other applicants discuss the virtues of an MBA, including the fact that it can increase graduates’ skills, salaries, and career options, which the reader in the admissions office knows quite well in any case.

A BETTER APPROACH

This is a truly critical essay. You will be manifestly unsuccessful in writing the other essays if you have not thought carefully about your future career. It will be extremely helpful to know where you are heading when you try to answer many of the other essay questions. Start with this essay. Do not go on to the other questions until you have completed—at a minimum—a good draft of this essay.

The place to start is obvious: what do you want to be, now that you are all grown up? If you do not currently know with any degree of assurance, explore the possibilities by consulting the relevant career literature and discussing the possibilities with family and friends. Only after you have settled on an approximate goal will you be truly ready to apply for an MBA. This does not mean that you must be certain of where you are headed, but you should, at a minimum, be able to articulate several possibilities that you intend to explore and that are clearly related to your experiences, strengths and weaknesses, and likes and dislikes. Show that you are being realistic in your planning.

Once you know in general terms where you are headed, how does an MBA fit into your plans? In other words, what is it that you need from an MBA program in order to get where you want to go? There are innumerable reasons that would be quite sensible for wanting an MBA. For example, perhaps you want additional:

* General management perspective
* Understanding of various functional areas
* Knowledge of one specific area (although this might be better served by doing a specialized master’s degree rather than the inherently more generalist MBA)
* Exposure to people from different backgrounds (cultural, functional, etc.)
* Understanding of for-profit (rather than nonprofit) firms
* Knowledge of business approaches beyond your own industry Understanding of analytical techniques not readily learned on the job

Perhaps you seek to advance in an industry that requires people to eventually jump from a nonbusiness area to the management side of the business. You might be knowledgeable about directing plays, for instance, but want to be able to run a theater; or you wish to gracefully jump from one segment of the business world to another—for instance, *from* marketing to finance, or from the creative side of a corporation to business management.

The next point is to show that an MBA is right for you *now,* not in several years. The younger you are, the more likely this is to be a critical issue. Standard reasons for wanting an MBA now are:

* You have reached a natural break in your career. For example, you are about to finish a four year tour of duty in the Navy.
* You cannot progress further in your career without one. In some fields, for instance management consulting, this might be more an issue of needing to have your “ticket punched” than needing the actual knowledge, but it is a well understood reason nonetheless.
* You could progress without one, but you would do so much more slowly than you would with an MBA.
* You are involved in a family business, and need to take over the reins sooner rather than later.

Take the approach that you have already had substantial accomplishments but that you could nonetheless go much further, faster, if you had an MBA (and the sooner the better). Above all, do not make it sound as though you know little and have done less.

Be sure that you tie this specific school’s offerings to your needs, to show that you know and value the fine points of this program.

ADVANTAGES OF THIS APPROACH

Our approach will allow you to show that you know where you are going and that you therefore have a good chance of actually getting there. It will also show you to be sensible concerning what should be a matter of great concern to you—your career. Failure to demonstrate clear thinking about this will mark you as someone not ready for an MBA. You are likely to miss out on a great deal of the value of an MBA if you do not know what you want out of it, which depends upon where you are headed. Similarly, showing the admissions committee that you have not been serious in thinking about where you are headed suggests that you may not even be serious about business, which is likely to be particularly damaging if you are, say, an arts graduate working in the nonprofit sector at the moment.

QUESTION:

WHAT WOULD YOU CONTRIBUTE WHILE AT OUR SCHOOL?

WHY THE QUESTION IS ASKED

Schools want to know what you consider a “contribution.” They also want to have certain skills and experiences represented in the student body. This essay gives you a chance to show what you bring to the mix.

THE TYPICAL APPLICANT

The typical applicant mentions a set of boilerplate. First, he claims that he is a very hard worker. Next, he says that he will try to contribute to class discussions, and the fact that he is an accountant will be very valuable in this regard. Last, if he is really thinking hard, he may note that he is a good guy whose company will be enjoyed by one and all.

A BETTER APPROACH

The first step is to show that you will fit into the school’s student body. In other words, you are not hopelessly strange. You have the attributes normally expected of top managers, such as intelligence and determination. In addition, you are accustomed to dealing with others like you and you have typically compared favorably with them. In other words, you will not be intimidated by your classmates.

The second step is to show that you would add something valuable to the workings of the school. These workings are not just in class, but equally important outside of class.

Thus, your being able to work well on a team, and in a study group or project team, will be useful here. The usual things that applicants mention are worth noting in passing but should not be the focus of your effort if you can find something more interesting to discuss. The “usual” includes:

* Knowledge of industry A, technology B, function C
* Computing skills
* A second language
* Personal characteristics: sense of humor, likeability, determination

Each of these can be worthwhile, but they are best not dwelt upon unless you possess them to an unusual degree. For instance, one of the candidates (“Joerg”) whose essays we reprint in the prior chapter and in the Appendix notes that his engineering skills are of a very high order indeed. He can say this because the breadth and depth of his knowledge were extraordinary. (He was finishing a PhD in mechanical engineering from Germany’s finest program, had done top-flight work in testing the shape stability of fibers, and had significant assignments in North America, Japan, and Africa as well as in various parts of Europe. Comparatively speaking, someone with a bachelor’s degree and three years of experience in reverse-engineering widgets might be better served looking for something else to emphasize.)

*Unusual* items that you could emphasize might include:

* A different perspective. Are you from an unusual part of the world (at least insofar as where most of this particular school’s students come from)? Have you worked with unusual people, for instance workers with disabilities?
* Knowledge of an unusual industry, technology, or function. Consultants, engineers, and accountants are, if anything, overrepresented in MBA programs, but professional tennis players and jazz musicians are not.
* Unusual work conditions. Perhaps you are a corporate strategy firm research associate, which is a common position for an applicant, but you have done your cost analysis work for a client brewery in Lagos rather than Milwaukee.
* Personal qualities that are all too rare, such as a sterling sense of humor. But you will need to back this up with solid evidence.
* Unusual outside interests. A person who has published a successful book, been ranked in squash, started a successful part-time business, or whatever, has something unusual to talk about. *You* might not think any of these things are significant, but you are probably better off at least mentioning them than dwelling upon the fact that you are yet another junior accountant. For example, you might think that being a top squash player is irrelevant, but remember that one U.S.

Supreme Court Associate Justice allegedly chose his clerks largely in the light of skill on the basketball court. While idiosyncratic, this is by no means atypical.

Remember, too, that a skill that might be considered typical at MIT might be quite rare elsewhere.

The last component of this essay is to show that you are the sort of person who will share knowledge with others in the program. In other words, you are the sort of person who will work well with other people and value their contributions, too.

ADVANTAGES OF THIS APPROACH

A knowledge of what distinguishes you from other applicants is particularly important in answering this question. What you would contribute to a program is best answered by thinking not of the skills many of your peers share but those that seem uniquely yours. Doing so will allow you to appeal to schools hoping to diversify their student bodies on as many dimensions as is possible.

QUESTION:

WHAT DO YOU HOPE TO GAIN FROM OUR PROGRAM?

WHY THE QUESTION IS ASKED

This question is meant to reveal how you view an MBA program and degree. Are you thinking of it narrowly or broadly? Do you have a clear reason for wanting an MBA yourself?

THE TYPICAL APPLICANT

Too many people mention the amount of money they will make after they have their MBA. Others describe the technical skill or skills they will acquire. And many just mouth the platitudes of how marvelous MBA degrees are, as if trying to convince the admissions staff of this fact.

A BETTER APPROACH

Treat this essay just like the “why do you want an MBA, and why from our school” questions. Start by explaining what you hope to accomplish in your career and what you lack in order to do so. Show how an MBA will help you acquire some or many of the skills and other assets you lack, thus helping you to reach your goals. Then note how this program in particular will be most appropriate for you in addressing these needs. Make it clear that you will gain more from this program than others because it best fits your needs.

Do not stop there, however, because if you do you will make it seem that you are so unworldly as to think that a top-quality MBA program is nothing more than a skill transfer mechanism. In fact, as this book has emphasized, you will gain from the credential itself and the network you can tap into. You can expect to have career opportunities open up to you that someone without a top MBA will never have. And, yes, you can expect to make more money. The problem, however, is to show that you are savvy enough to appreciate the many career benefits offered by a top MBA without looking like a greedy creature intent upon nothing more than maximizing his or her salary. The best way to do this may be to note the ancillary benefits of the school’s network without talking about the money or credentials.

ADVANTAGES OF THIS APPROACH

Following this approach will make it clear that you have a well-considered reason for getting an MBA. It fits into your own career scheme and is not something you are pursuing just because it is trendy to do so, or because you need your “ticket punched.” It will also be clear that you have thought through your choice of school.

QUESTION:

WHY HAVE YOU APPLIED TO THE OTHER SCHOOLS YOU HAVE?

WHY THE QUESTION IS ASKED

Schools typically ask this question to learn two things. First, they want to learn how much you value their school relative to others you might be considering. And second, they want to understand how much you value an MBA.

THE TYPICAL APPLICANT

Most applicants make one of several mistakes. Some applicants tell Bentley College that they are applying to Harvard and MIT. Bentley College is a good school, but it does not realistically expect applicants to choose it over Harvard or MIT. Listing these other Boston area schools tells Bentley that he or she does not really want to attend it, that it is just a backup in case Harvard and MIT both say no. Bentley is unlikely to get excited about such applicants. If an applicant tells Harvard that she is applying to Bentley College, Harvard is likely to conclude that she does not really see herself as being of Harvard quality and that she does not have the self confidence necessary for a top program.

Other applicants reveal that they are not certain of what they want from their MBA education by listing very different types of schools. Applying to both Harvard and Darden, two case method schools that educate general managers, makes sense, but

applying to Harvard and Theseus, the French school devoted to training telecommunications managers, suggests that the applicant has not yet decided what he is seeking.

A different type of mistake is made when someone states that he is applying to school X and no other, for fear of offending school X. If an applicant has good reasons for wanting an MBA, it is highly likely that more than one school will serve his needs quite well. If this is the case, he will be determined enough to want to go to any of a number of schools. Failing to list other schools, therefore, suggests that he is not really serious about getting an MBA.

Another mistake is made when applicants simply state that school X is the best, famous for its (fill in the blank), and is what they have always hoped to attend. This is a mistake insofar as it represents a missed opportunity to market oneself.

A BETTER APPROACH

Start by showing what you need in order to meet your goals. For example, perhaps you are an experienced sales representative who wishes to move into general management. Despite your knowledge of sales, you do not know much about accounting, finance, strategy, organizational development, or the international aspects of business; you may be looking to acquire substantial skills in these areas. Depending upon the kind of company, and industry, you are aiming for, some of these areas are likely to be much more important than others. Thus your pitch might be:

My goal: work for my current firm, but in general management

What I am lacking: general management skills, especially in finance, marketing, and strategy

Then show how school X will be right for you. You do this by showing how it meets your requirements. If you want to become a consumer marketer, note that school X has a host of relevant courses. What besides course offerings might be important to you? You might choose on the basis of the languages used at the school, the nature of the student body (age, functional backgrounds, etc.), the reputation of a specific department—and thus the quality and number of companies looking to recruit, say, consumer marketers from the school. Refer to our earlier discussion about how to choose a school.

Apply these factors to the other schools you are considering. Note that each school will be acceptable in terms of meeting the bulk of what you are looking for, but note also that school X is more desirable insofar as it offers more consumer marketing courses or whatever. It is unlikely that any one school will be the most desirable on all counts, which gives you the opportunity to say good things about each school in terms

of how it meets your needs. Your conclusion, however, should emphasize the factors that favor school X, thereby putting it at the top of your list.

ADVANTAGES OF THIS APPROACH

This approach will help make it clear that you are serious about getting an MBA. In addition, it shows that you have researched this and other schools; it reinforces your seriousness about getting an MBA at the same time that it shows you to be a sensible decision-maker gathering data for this important decision. This approach also shows that you value school X, and for substantial reasons— because it better meets your needs than do other schools.

QUESTION:

IN WHAT OTHER WAY WILL YOU PURSUE YOUR DEVELOPMENT IF OUR SCHOOL REJECTS YOU?

WHY THE QUESTION IS ASKED

This question helps schools determine two things about you first, how carefully you have planned for your future, and second, how determined you are to succeed.

THE TYPICAL APPLICANT

The typical applicant notes that he will reapply next year if school X turns him down this year.

A BETTER APPROACH

The starting point is to state what your goals are, and what you lack in order to meet them. (For a full discussion of this, refer to the “Why Have You Applied to the Other Schools You Have” analysis.) This will help to demonstrate that you have given serious thought to your future career.

Your needs can probably be met, at least to a reasonable degree, by another MBA program. You will thus almost certainly note that you are applying to other schools.

You should also consider whether some part-time educational programs would meet at least some of your needs. A local school’s offering of introductory marketing courses may not suffice to make you into a crack consumer marketer, but they will almost certainly be better than nothing.

Another possibility may be training programs that your company offers. Or, you could shift jobs (either within your company or by switching companies), in order to learn

about a different function or even a different industry. As you will **V** recall from our discussion of why to get an MBA, further job experience is not likely to provide you with the conceptual understanding that is part and parcel V of an MBA. Companies seldom feature lectures on quantitative methods for V managers or applications of the capital asset pricing model. MBA programs are set up to increase dramatically your intellectual capital, whereas companies are set up to make money, preferably sooner rather than later. A new position or company is not likely to provide you with all that you hope to get from an MBA program, but something is better than nothing.

The last option is self-study. You can always read the interesting popular books in a given field or, better yet, the textbooks used at business schools. This is a difficult way to learn, however, and it is unlikely that you will be able to learn advanced quantitative methods in this fashion.

The conclusion is always that you would prefer to get an MBA, but you will do whatever you can to gain as much knowledge as possible.

ADVANTAGES OF THIS APPROACH

This approach shows that you have considered your future with care. It also shows that you are hungry for improvement in your knowledge and skills, and that you are determined to succeed and action-oriented. If going to school X will not work you will go to school Y. If you cannot go to a top school you will look to learn on this or another job. The picture that you convey is therefore one of a person striving to reach his or her potential. Remember that you are applying to an educational institution, so showing that you are hungry for knowledge and determined to improve yourself by acquiring it is a “can’t miss” proposition.

QUESTION:

DESCRIBE YOUR CURRENT JOB

WHY THE QUESTION IS ASKED

This question may not help schools assess the candidacies of, for example, research associates from McKinsey because the admissions committee already knows what the typical McKinsey R.A. does. For people in less familiar positions, however, this question enables a much clearer understanding of an applicant’s background.

THE TYPICAL APPLICANT

Most applicants simply list a few of the elements of their formal job descriptions or just list their job titles. If you were to say simply that you were a marketing associate

for a computer firm, an admissions committee would know almost nothing about your responsibilities. Do you provide field support? Do you do online research only? Do you do competitor analysis? Do you liaise with the research and development staffs in the development of more user-friendly products? Do you analyze the productivity of different advertising media or promotional campaigns? What do you *do?*

A BETTER APPROACH

There are usually numerous elements to a given job. You must figure out and list the many things you do. Next, you must determine which are the most significant parts of your job and which are most consistent with the position you are attempting to communicate, and then characterize them as favorably as possible. The following should help you with this process.

*Is your job important?* Most people would say so only if they are egotists or aremaking a lot of money and enjoying a very impressive title (Senior Executive Vice President for Marketing and Strategy, perhaps).

Assuming that you are not in this situation, does this mean that your job is unimportant and that you will have to be apologizing for it? No, of course not. A job is of real importance under a number of different circumstances. In particular, work gains significance whenever two things are true about it. First, the degree of uncertainty is high, and second, the potential impact upon the firm’s success is great. In other words, is there a fair likelihood that an average-quality performer in your job would make a hash of things? And, if so, would that really affect your firm’s performance, or that of one of its components? If the answer to both of these questions is yes, then your job is of real importance.

*What must you do to perform successfully?* In other words, what challenges do youface? For example, if you are in sales support, one of your biggest headaches might be to get the junior people in marketing, who report directly to the regional marketing manager, and report on only a dotted-line basis to the regional sales manager, to provide the current competitor analysis material to the sales department. This can be characterized as a liaison role. Or, if the relationship is particularly poor, you might describe your role as conflict resolution—particularly in light of the fact that sales and marketing often have an antagonistic relationship.

Perhaps your greatest challenges are satisfying two different bosses with two completely different agendas. If you are in a matrix structure, reporting to the regional manager and an engineering director, you can expect to be unable to please either one. The regional manager is probably concerned with making money, today, and wants everyone to work as a team without regard to functional specialties. The engineering boss, on the other hand, wants her people to maintain their specialized skills and the prestige of the engineering department. Working on cross-functional teams without taking time out for updating technical skills may strike the former as standard practice

and the latter as anathema. To perform your job well may require balancing these conflicting desires.

If the last two occupants of your job were fired, say so. This will make your performance look all the more impressive.

A number of other circumstances can lend importance to a job. The more senior the person you report to, the more important a job will look. Similarly, the fate of prior occupants of your job may be relevant. If the last occupants were promoted high in the organization, the job will appear to be one given to high- fliers, thereby increasing its significance.

Have your recommenders discuss these points, too.

*W1iat is the nature of your work?* There are many different types of work. A marketresearcher is generally doing analytical work. A brand manager is likely to be doing a combination of analytical work and influence work insofar as she must analyze the factors for the brand’s relative success or failure in different market and competitive conditions in her country, and then try to influence the manufacturing, packaging, or whatever department, to take the action she wants in order to address these factors. She typically will have no power over these departments and will have to rely on her influence skills (personality, reasoning, expertise, etc.) instead. A restaurant manager will probably be most concerned with managing people, whereas a technical manager may be most concerned with the management of physical processes.

Many other aspects of your work can also be characterized. Is your job like being in the army: crushing boredom interspersed with brief moments of sheer terror? Are you expected to perform at a steady pace to a predictable schedule or do you work like a tax accountant, 50 percent of whose work may take place in three months of the year? Are you supposed to be the steadying hand for a bunch of youngsters? Are you supposed to be a creative type who will respond flexibly to each new situation rather than simply referring to the corporate manual?

*Do you supervise anyone?* How many people, of what type, are under yoursupervision? What does this supervision consist of7 For example, are you in charge of direct marketing activities, necessitating that you monitor the phone calls of your direct reports and also analyze their performance versus budget and various economic and industry factors?

*Do you have control of a budget?* If so, what is the amount you control, andwhat amount do you influence?

*What results have you achieved?* Results can be looked at from many differentperspectives. From a strategic perspective, what have you achieved regarding the market, customers, and competitors? From a financial perspective, what have you

done regarding costs, revenues, and profits (not to mention assets employed, etc.)? From an operational perspective, what have you done regarding productivity of your unit, or of your direct reports, or of yourself; what have you done regarding the percentage of items rejected, or bids that fail, and so on? Similarly, from an organizational perspective, have you taken steps such as altering the formal organization or introducing new integration or coordination mechanisms? Provide numbers whenever possible to buttress your claims.

*How has your career evolved?* Did you have a career plan in place before graduatingfrom college or university or soon thereafter? If so, did you pursue it wholeheartedly? Did it include a focus on developing your skills and responsibilities? What, if anything, has altered your original plan? What was your reaction to events that altered or affirmed this plan? When dealing with the development of your job with a given employer, be sure to note the employer’s *reasons* for promoting, transferring, rewarding, or praising you as well as the *fact* of these things.

ADVANTAGES OF THIS APPROACH

It is important to take this question very seriously. The answers will provide you with much of the ammunition you will use in responding to other questions. Your currentjob is of inherent interest to business schools. They will always want to know what you are doing, and with what success, because that suggests a great deal about your talents and interests, the way your employer views your talents and attitude, and why you might want an MBA.

Taking a broad view of the job description enables you to put the best light on your responsibilities and performance. It also allows you to build the basis for later essays where you will be able to save space by referring to this write-up rather than listing the same things when space is at a premium.

QUESTION:

DESCRIBE YOUR WORK EXPERIENCE

WHY THE QUESTION IS ASKED

This question is, of course, intended to elicit what you have done over the course of your career, what impact you have had. It is also designed to give you an opportunity to show what you have learned about yourself and your abilities.

THE TYPICAL APPLICANT

Most applicants simply list what they have done in the past without showing what has driven their career choices and changes. The result is a list in which the elements appear nearly unrelated to one another.

A BETTER APPROACH

Look at our discussion of the “Job Description” essay. Then think in terms of telling stories rather than simply listing events dryly. A good story has conflict; that is, it has obstacles placed in the way of the hero. The hero may be unable to overcome each of the obstacles, but he tries hard and is unwilling to give up.

One possible approach is as follows. Find a theme that unites the elements of your job history. For instance, you show how you responded to challenges that were initially daunting. You tried hard and learned how to do what was required. As you learned better how to do the job, you started to take more initiative. In fact, once you mastered your initial responsibilities, you understood them in a broader context. Having done so, you moved up to the next level of responsibility—or you are now at the point of needing further scope for your talents but cannot move up without an MBA or years of experience on the job.

The telling of your career story should focus upon where you have come from and where you are now headed. If you have changed your direction, explain what happened to change your direction. If you have had your decisions reaffirmed by experience, describe them and how they convinced you that you were on the right track.

This essay is closely related to the “Your Career and the Reasons for Getting an MBA” essay.

ADVANTAGES OF THIS APPROACH

Telling stories that focus on obstacles and the attempt to overcome them makes this essay interesting to read. Focusing on your personal development in response to challenges is well aimed for an audience of educators. They are preconditioned to appreciate your developmental capabilities.

This approach also sets up your need for an MBA. You have been overcoming obstacles by learning how to perform new jobs, and you have acquired new skills and knowledge; now you need to take another step up.

QUESTION

WHAT ONE CHANGE WOULD YOU MAKE IN YOUR CURRENT JOB (AND HOW WOULD YOU IMPLEMENT THIS CHANGE)?

WHY THE QUESTION IS ASKED

This question is designed to reveal how savvy you are about organizational matters and how analytical you are about your company’s operating and strategic needs.

You may be too junior to have run a department or a company, but that should not stop you from thinking about its operations and environment. How much perspective do you have on these things? Can you write a persuasive analytical piece showing that you have been able to step back from your own tasks to take a more senior manager’s view? If not—if you can see only your own job’s details—you are missing a chance to show that you are in fact senior management material.

THE TYPICAL APPLICANT

Most applicants fail to define what this question is really asking. The question itself is open to several interpretations. For example, does it ask you to improve things for you or for your company? How realistic must you be in your suggestion? Must this be an aspect you can indeed change, rather than something that only a very senior manager could affect? All too many applicants end up interpreting the question to mean, “How can *you* make your own job easier to do?” Consequently, they make themselves look self-centered and concerned only about the minutiae of their jobs, since any meaningful change would require someone else’s intervention.

Virtually all applicants run into the implied follow-up question: If this proposed change is such a good idea, why haven’t you done all you could to implement it? Failing to answer this can make an applicant look hypocritical or ineffectual. If he claims that a change in the pattern of his sales calls will dramatically improve his results, why has he never tried to convince his boss of this? Is it that he does not really care about the company’s success or that he cannot imagine persuading his boss to make any change? In either case, the force of the applicant’s suggestion is diminished by failing to address this issue.

A BETTER APPROACH

Focus on the benefits for the company rather than personal benefits. In other words, show that the reason the change makes sense is that the company’s balance sheet will improve, or some other equally important advantage will accrue, not that your job will become easier.

You may have spotted only one change the company should make. If so, you should certainly discuss it. On the other hand, if you have several possibilities, choose the one that will best do the following:

* support your positioning effort, including your current need for an MBA (which can be shown by suggesting that you have outgrown your current responsibilities)
* show that you are thinking about how your job relates to others

If you do not have any obvious changes in mind, how can you develop some? For one thing, you can look at the examples of this essay included in the Appendix. Beyond this, consider the following possibilities:

* Should the nature of your *reporting relationship* be changed? For example, perhaps you report to a regional manager but would be better off reporting to a functional one. Or perhaps you are matrixed—reporting to two different bosses in different departments—and the matrix structure is preventing decisions being reached in a timely fashion. If so, simplifying the reporting relationship might be appropriate.
* Should the nature of your *responsibility* be changed? For example, are you currently responsible for revenues but not costs, or assets employed? Should you have complete profit and loss (or return on assets employed) responsibility?
* Should the various *control systems* be harmonized? For example, perhaps the accounting systems are designed to control one thing whereas your bonus is tied to something contradictory.

If you are describing proposed changes in, say, the design of your job or the way in which you are evaluated or controlled, you will want to show that the current standards cause suboptimal performance in a way that your proposed change will not. You may also need to show that the proposed change will not lead to new problems or that any such problems will not be as large as the ones currently faced.

Deal with the implementation issue head-on. In other words, answer the implicit follow-up question as to why, if this change is such a good idea, you have not yet made it happen. Maybe you have just learned of the need for this change, in which case you have not had the time to do anything about it. For example, maybe you just started this job, or you have just gotten new responsibilities; or perhaps a recent problem first exposed the need for change. Another possibility is that you have been aware of the problem for some time but have been engaged in gathering the necessary data to analyze the situation fully.

The question’s phrasing is hypothetical: “What change would you make?” This seems to eliminate the possibility of discussing a change that you have recently made. In fact, business schools would love to have you discuss a change you have actually enacted; the only reason that they phrase the question thus is because so few applicants have a real example to talk about. If you have actually implemented a substantial, praiseworthy change, by all means discuss it.

ADVANTAGES OF THIS APPROACH

This approach shows that your primary concern is the company’s welfare. It also shows that you have analyzed your environment and are aware of the areas of weakness and strength. Using a real example is better than using a hypothetical one insofar as it shows that you actually take action and have an impact.

QUESTION:

WHAT ARE YOUR STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES?

WHY THE QUESTION IS ASKED

This question is clearly designed to elicit your opinion of yourself. Modest people, and people from cultures less egocentric than that of the United States, have a hard time responding, because it obviously asks you to brag a little. Less self- assured applicants find it hard to be honest and to mention their shortcomings. This question provides a good gauge of how self confident (or arrogant), accomplished (or boastful), decent (or manipulative), mature, self-aware, and honest you are.

THE TYPICAL APPLICANT

Most applicants list a large number of strengths and one or two weaknesses. Their weakness is generally a strength dressed up as a weakness (“I am too much of a perfectionist.” “I work too hard.”).

A BETTER APPROACH

Start by choosing two or three primary strengths. Use these to organize your essay by grouping other strengths around them. For example, if you claim that you are very *determined,* you might discuss your *patience* in working hard for a long time in orderto achieve something important as related to this determination. The problem is not generally finding something good to say about yourself. Usually the problem is limiting yourself to a manageable number of strengths. You want to have few enough that you can discuss them in a persuasive fashion rather than just listing them. Using two or three as central organizing devices (i.e., themes) helps to achieve this.

Remember that simply listing strengths is a very weak way of writing. To make your strengths credible and memorable, use illustrations of them. Instead of bragging about being determined, note your five-year battle to overcome childhood leukemia.

The bigger problem, however, is finding a weakness to discuss. Simply calling a strength a weakness (“I work too hard”) is not sufficient. This tactic is used by countless applicants, and its insincerity is nearly guaranteed to repel those reading

your essays. For one thing, *you have failed to follow instructions;* you were asked to list a weakness and failed to do so. In addition, a failure to recognize your own weaknesses means that you are blind to something very important. It is far better to recognize your weaknesses and thus be in a position to try to overcome them than to pretend that they do not exist. If you recognize that a weakness exists, you are in a position to make a constructive change. Being willing to discuss a weakness is thus a sign of maturity, and, consequently, a strength in itself.

Do not carry a good thing too far, though, and discuss huge flaws such as your drug addictions. Your choice of a flaw may depend upon exactly how the question is phrased. If you are asked for a weakness, you can certainly discuss the lack of skills or knowledge that currently limit your managerial success and that have occasioned your desire for an MBA. This is an easy version of the question. The hard version asks you about your *personality* strengths and weaknesses. The focus on your personality means that you cannot simply respond by discussing what skills you want to acquire. To respond to this you must discuss a true personality flaw. One approach is to look at the dark side of one of your strengths. If you are a very determined person, does that mean that your drive is accompanied by a terrible temper? Or perhaps it means that you are too willing to trample upon peers’ feelings? If you are a strong leader, does that mean that you do not always value the inputs of your subordinates? If you have been very successful doing detail-laden work, have you overlooked the big picture? Are you so concerned about quality that you find it overly difficult to delegate or share responsibility?

Be sure to avoid discussing a weakness that will be a major handicap at a given school. For example, if you are applying to a quantitatively oriented program, be leery of talking about your difficulties with numbers.

Be careful to discuss your weakness differently from your strengths. The correct space allocation is probably about three- or four-to-one, strengths to weakness. You will note that I say “weakness,” because you should discuss only one or two weaknesses. When doing so, do not dwell on your description of it, or of the problems that it has caused you. Do so briefly, thereby limiting the impact that the specifics will have upon admissions officers. Then note what steps you take, or have taken, to try to overcome it.

You want to describe yourself as having numerous strengths that relate well to your positioning effort, without sounding arrogant.

ADVANTAGES OF THIS APPROACH

Grouping your strengths in an organized fashion will give you the chance to cover a lot of ground without taking a scattershot approach. Emphasizing strengths is obviously appropriate. Writing about them in some detail, with appropriate

illustrations, will make them memorable. The use of illustrations also makes your claims realistic rather than boastful.

Describing your weakness in a cursory way, and being detailed about the steps you take to overcome the weakness, will gain you points. It shows you to be willing to face up to your flaw without the flaw itself being emphasized. This offers you the best of both worlds.

QUESTION:

WHAT ARE YOUR MOST SUBSTANTIAL ACCOMPLISHMENTS?

WHY THE QUESTION IS ASKED

This question obviously gives you a chance to “blow your own horn.” You can brag a bit about what you have accomplished in life. Moreover, you have the chance to put your own spin on what you have done. A particular accomplishment is all the more impressive when you explain the obstacles you had to overcome in order to succeed.

The question also allows schools to learn more about you insofar as you must explain why you consider something to have been a substantial accomplishment. Some accomplishments are of obvious significance. Winning the Nobel Prize for Physics is obviously significant; you probably do not need to elaborate on the fact of having won it. Other accomplishments are much more personal. For example, if you had stuttered as a youth and finally ended your stuttering in your twenties, this might be an extremely significant accomplishment for you personally. You have probably done things that have had more impact upon the rest of the world, but for you this accomplishment looms larger. You will probably want to talk about it as an example of your determination and desire to improve yourself. This essay gives you the chance to do so.

This question gives you an opportunity to discuss matters that are unlikely to be listed on your data sheets or mentioned by your recommenders. Even if you just discuss accomplishments of a more public nature, including something listed in your data sheet (or discussed by your recommenders), you can personalize it in a way in which just listing it (or having someone else talk about it) does not do.

THE TYPICAL APPLICANT

Most applicants use the whole of their essay to try to demonstrate that their *accomplishments* are impressive; they focus on their accomplishments and not onthemselves. These accomplishments, by the way, tend to be things like making the high school basketball team or graduating from college or university. Another

mistaken tendency is to list a string of things rather than to explain one or two in detail.

A BETTER APPROACH

The first step is to determine which accomplishments you will discuss. Your criteria for choosing appropriate accomplishments will be familiar. Which ones will help your positioning effort? Which will be unusual and interesting for admissions committees to read about? Was this accomplishment truly important to you?

The following criteria are also helpful guides:

* You had to overcome major obstacles, showing real determination in doing so.
* You learned more about yourself.
* You came to understand the need for further skill development and thus, perhaps, an MBA.
* You used real initiative, perhaps by pushing a bureaucracy to respond or bypassing one altogether.
* Your success was unexpected.
* You worked extremely hard toward a clear goal.
* Your impact can be clearly seen (i.e., you were not simply tagging along with someone else who did the real work).

If you are trying to show that you have had a lot of relevant business experience despite being only 23, you will probably want one (or preferably more) of these accomplishments to be in the business realm. Not every accomplishment will fulfill all of our criteria, but you should be able to include most of them in the course of the full essay.

In writing the essay, go into sufficient detail to bring the events to life, but do not stop there. Discuss why you consider this a substantial achievement, why you take pride in it, and what you learned from it. Did you change and grow as a result of this? Did you find that you approached other matters differently after accomplishing this?

The admissions committee will read this for more than a brief description of the items you list on your data sheet. It will want to learn more about these accomplishments and more about the private you, if you discuss significant accomplishments of a personal nature here. It will want to know what motivates you and what you value. It will also want to see how you have developed as a person and as a manager.

ADVANTAGES OF THIS APPROACH

This question gives you a lot of latitude, as our criteria suggest. Using it to show more of the real you will help you to avoid the usual problems people create for themselves on this essay. You do not want to restate the facts you have already listed on your data sheet; you want to show that you have been ready to face challenges, determined to overcome obstacles, and able to accomplish things that have mattered to you. The essays in the Appendix show a limitless number of potential topics; the excerpted essays were successful because they revealed their authors’ characters while explaining the personal importance of their achievements.

QUESTION:

WHAT HAVE YOU DONE THAT DEMONSTRATES YOUR LEADERSHIP POTENTIAL?

WHY THE QUESTION IS ASKED

Top schools expect to produce top managers, that is, leaders. They are looking for applicants who have already distinguished themselves as leaders, since past performance is the best indicator of what people will be like in the future.

THE TYPICAL APPLICANT

All too often, applicants discuss being part of a group that achieved something noteworthy without making it clear that they themselves were leaders in this effort.

A BETTER APPROACH

This question is deceptively similar to the “Substantial Accomplishment” essay. The “Substantial Accomplishment” essay, as I explained, asks you to describe a real achievement (and what it means to you). The “Leadership” essay, on the other hand, is not looking so much for an “achievement” as it is ‘for an understanding of how you *led an effort* to achieve something. In other words, your emphasis should be uponyour *leadership* rather than the achievement.

To write this essay, you must understand what leadership is. One obvious example is *managing* people who report directly to you. Less obvious examples involve pushingor inspiring non-subordinates to do what you want done. How? Leading by example, using your influence as a perceived expert in a relevant field, influencing through moral suasion, or influencing by personal friendship? You might have led people through direct management or through influence. Describe your methodology—what strategy did you employ? And why? You may not have been deliberate or extremely self-aware in your actions, of course, in which case you might wish to discuss what you did and why it was or was not a good choice. What problems did you confront?

What did you learn about managing or influencing people? Would another strategy, or different actions, have been better choices? Why? (Do you have a philosophy of leadership?)

You should emphasize that your leadership qualities are the sort that describe a future CEO rather than a high school football hero. In other words, such qualities as maturity, thoughtfulness, empathy, determination, valuing other people’s input, the ability to influence or manage very different types of people, the ability to integrate disparate inputs into a unified perspective, and integrity are highly desirable.

You are free to choose something from your business career, but you might wish to choose something from your extracurricular or private life, too.

ADVANTAGES OF THIS APPROACH

Viewing this question as concerning your understanding of leadership, and the ways in which you yourself lead, will result in an essay with the appropriate focus. It is not your achievement that is paramount here; it is your method of approaching and resolving leadership issues that concerns the admissions committee. If you show yourself to be aware of the leadership issues inherent in your situation, and extract some suitable comments regarding what worked or did not work, and why, you will have the core of a good essay.

QUESTION:

DESCRIBE AN EXPERIENCE IN WHICH YOU DID NOT REACH YOUR OBJECTIVES (AND WHAT YOU LEARNED FROM THIS)

WHY THE QUESTION IS ASKED

This question is essentially asking: Are you mature enough to admit that you have made a mistake? Did you learn from it? Can you change and grow?

THE TYPICAL APPLICANT

Most applicants focus more on the mistake they made, or failure they suffered, rather than what they learned from it.

A BETTER APPROACH

You have a great deal of latitude in choosing your failure or mistake. Several factors should govern your response. (1) Try to further your positioning effort. If you are trying to present yourself as a worldly international negotiator, you might wish to show how you flubbed your first negotiations with people from another culture due to

your lack of understanding of how they valued different components of a deal. (You can then go on to explain that this started you on the path of investigating the values and beliefs of your negotiating partners and opponents in all future deals, something you believe has underpinned much of your success.) (2) Show that you have truly learned from your mistake. One implication of this may be that you will want to choose a failure from your more distant past, not last week. You will not have had much of an opportunity to learn from a recent failure, whereas a failure from two or three years ago may have afforded plenty of opportunity to learn. The reason is that you generally need some time to reflect upon matters in order to benefit fully from them. (3) If you choose a distant failure, you are not saying that you are currently making these mistakes. It may be better to admit to having been prone to mistakes long ago, not currently.

Having chosen your failure, do not belabor your description of it. Remember that it is what you learned from this failure that is critical here, not the failure itself. Consider what you learned from the experience concerning yourself, your job, your company, your industry, how to manage people and soon. One key piece of learning may have been that you came to see your need for much more conceptual knowledge, such as that which you hope to acquire by doing an MBA.

When describing failure, a sense of humor may help. If I were writing this essay I might describe my work on a retail strategy case for a UK brewer. I spent several months on this case without understanding that the “fruit machines” that were frequently mentioned as a new cash generator for pubs were gambling machines suitable for Las Vegas rather than dispensers of actual bananas or oranges. As a result, I could hardly contribute to the discussions concerning their future potential. I should have paid more attention in pubs to see what *was* involved rather than just keeping quiet when these machines came up in discussion. In writing this essay, I could then go on to note how I resolved to learn the details of clients’ operations rather than treating them at just an abstract, strategic level.

ADVANTAGES OF THIS APPROACH

The emphasis here should be upon your development. We learn more from our mistakes than from our successes. A willingness to admit mistakes and then try to learn from them is one hallmark of a mature adult. It is also the trait of someone who will benefit from more formal education.

QUESTION:

DISCUSS AN ETHICAL DILEMMA YOU HAVE FACED

WHY THE QUESTION IS ASKED

The ongoing debate over the proper role of business in society has made ethics an important issue in a manager’s training—or so the admissions officers will tell you. The reality may be somewhat different. Business schools have felt the need to talk about ethics as a result of the various scandals of the 1980s and 1990s, although it is clearly a subject of limited interest for most of the professors. The need to appear interested in the subject, at least to critical outsiders, has probably been as important as anything else in generating the use of this question.

For some schools and some admissions officers, this question is a sincere attempt to understand your ethics. For others, the question is not so much about ethics as it is just another chance to see your writing and read another story about you.

THE TYPICAL APPLICANT

Most people have trouble finding something to discuss, so they end up choosing something trivial. In discussing it, they think that a question about ethics must call for a holier-than-thou stance, so they sound like refugees from a sensitivity training session.

A BETTER APPROACH

The toughest part of this essay is to find a suitable subject. Here are some possible topics:

* People versus profit. For example, should you fire the Italian researchers you have working for you now that your firm no longer markets in Italy? They are too old to be hired by someone else. On the one hand, you may feel that you owe it to the shareholders to maximize their returns. On the other hand, you feel concern for the researchers. Is it a clear-cut decision? Maybe, but that will depend upon the circumstances. If the company promised the researchers that they would be employed until they reached retirement age, and this was one of the things that helped lure them from another firm, you will probably feel one way. If the researchers have been working second and third jobs at the same time that they have been *officially* employed by your firm, you may feel differently.
* Your career versus someone else’s. When you are in a meeting and your boss takes credit for your idea, what should you do?
* Taking advantage of someone’s lack of knowledge or opportunities. Should you sell a product to someone who does not know that it will be inappropriate for his needs? By the time he figures this out you may have moved on to a new division in the company so you will not face his fury or the longterm consequences of having an angry customer.

The essays in the Appendix contain interesting examples of other ethical dilemmas. Note that you can also consider writing about something that happened in your private

rather than your business life. In fact, such dilemmas are a part of everyday life, so failing to find one runs the risk of appearing unaware of the moral dimension of life.

This question is asked in one of two different ways. In one version, you are asked simply to describe an ethical dilemma and what you thought of it. In the other version you must describe an ethical dilemma and what you did in response to it. The second type obviously is more demanding than the first because you must have a situation that you ultimately managed well. Some situations may lend themselves to excellent management, but the nature of a “dilemma” suggests that there may not be a perfect way to handle it.

In writing this essay you will want to show that there was truly a dilemma, at least on the surface. You will probably want to show that you explored and investigated the nature of the problem, since you were no doubt reluctant to make a snap decision when it appeared that any decision would have substantial adverse consequences. If you are called upon to describe what you did, rather than just what you thought, you will want to show that you explored every option and did your best to minimize the adverse consequences.

The tone of your essay is another minefield. If you sound like an innocent seven-year-old who believes that it is always wrong to lie, you will not fit in a world of tough senior managers who constantly need to make hard decisions with rotten consequences for somebody. On the other hand, if you sound like a Machiavelli, for whom the only calculus depends upon personal advantage, and for whom the potential suffering of other people is irrelevant, you will be rejected as a moral monster. You need to be somewhere in the middle, someone who recognizes that the world and the decisions it requires are seldom perfect, but that it is appropriate to try to minimize adverse consequences as best one can. Only in extreme circumstances would it be appropriate to walk away from the decision (and the job).

ADVANTAGES OF THIS APPROACH

It is critical to find a subject you can get your teeth into. Our examples may help you find such a subject, one with layers of detail and dilemma. If you go into depth in exploring it, without sounding like a naive child or a totally cynical manipulator, turn it about and examine it from different angles, and weigh the various options thoughtfully, you will show yourself to be senior management material.

QUESTION

THE MOST IMPORTANT TREND FACING BUSINESS

WHY THE QUESTION IS ASKED

This question is designed to find out whether you have thought about the “big picture,” are aware of the issues currently facing industry, and have the ability to discuss a big topic in a sophisticated fashion.

THE TYPICAL APPLICANT

Most people discuss the most headline-grabbing item they can think *of.* In past years this would have been global warming or the moral imperatives of business—with special reference to apartheid in South Africa. Their discussion, moreover, tends to resemble the headlines of tabloid newspapers: Global Disaster Forecast! Major Changes Needed Now! No research informs the essay. The other approach—too often seen—is that of cribbing all too obviously from a recent lead story in *Business Week* or a similar magazine.

A BETTER APPROACH

Do you have any real views on this subject? If you firmly believe, for example, that the Internet will change how your particular business operates more than the telephone and computer have, then you will probably want to choose this as your topic.

Most applicants do not have such a clear-cut opinion. Instead, they have some not overly well-informed opinions about a handful of topics, any one of which could fit well here. If this is your case, choose the topic that shows you off to best advantage. It should enable you to (1) express sensible but not blindingly obvious views, (2) enhance your positioning, (3) show why you want an MBA, and perhaps, (4) show why this school is right for you. This is a rather daunting set of criteria. You may not satisf’ each one, but at least it gives you a target. A quick look at one of the many possible topics reveals how to get started.

*Globalization.* This is an old favorite response to this essay question. It is a truism thatthe increasing globalization of business is continuing to have substantial impact upon how business is conducted. Is this topic right for you? It would be highly appropriate for someone applying to a school outside her country, or one that uses a language other than her own for many of its courses. It would also be highly appropriate for someone applying to an internationally focused program such as the Lauder program at Wharton, the University of South Carolina’s highly rated international business program (either in the United States or at its companion program in Vienna at the Wirtschaftsuniversitãt Wien), or one of the European schools whose whole *raison* *d’etre* is training international managers.

How will you discuss globalization? You might begin with an explanation of how you became aware of this issue in the first place. Have your own company’s operations been dramatically affected by foreign competition? Then discuss in what other ways business is being affected by increased international competition. Next, move on to

the underlying trends that will cause greater globalization and, finally, examine the impact this is likely to have upon your industry overall. Your degree of specificity will depend in large part upon the allotted space. This discussion will help you demonstrate why you want to attend a school that has a serious international focus.

What are some of the other possible topics?

* Deregulation and Privatization
* Service Management (i.e., the change from industrial to service management concerns)
* Changing Demographics of the Workforce (or Managing Diversity)
* Flattening of Organizational Structures (or the Change from Hierarchy to Network)
* The Information Revolution
* The Internet
* Environmental Limitations
* Quality Management (although this is already a time-worn subject)
* Political Turmoil

Is this list exhaustive? By no means; a sensible list might be two or three times this long. Don’t assume that your chosen topic is inappropriate simply because it is not listed here.

Does it matter which topic you choose? The answer to this is, yes and no. It matters that you choose something that strikes admissions committees as being quite important—at least after you have explained why it is important. But what is likely to matter more is how you discuss the topic you have chosen.

When discussing any of these topics, remember to follow good essay writing practice. Be specific when possible, referring to events in your own (business) life when you can. Be upbeat rather than defeatist. For example, if you are discussing globalization, do not wallow in the possible future demise of the “American-ness” of baseball (or whatever). Instead of looking just at the negative side of change, look, too, at the opportunities and challenges that will come in its wake. You should be able to give a sophisticated treatment to your subject, but this is likely to be the case only after you have done some reading. Has *The Economist* written extensively about this subject? If so, you should know its position, as well as that of other sophisticated journals, and provide relevant quotations to demonstrate your awareness. Look at the examples in

the Appendix to get a feel for ways to be a sophisticated commentator without sounding vague or jaundiced.

ADVANTAGES OF THIS APPROACH

This topic should be a godsend, in that it allows you to do so much to further so many of your positioning efforts while ostensibly discussing an abstract concept. You can show, for example, that you have a real need to learn much more about organization design and development, thereby necessitating an MBA. At the same time you will show that you have given real thought to a complex issue.

QUESTION:

WHAT DO YOU DO IN YOUR SPARE TIME?

WHY THE QUESTION IS ASKED

Good managers tend to be able to make friends and to socialize easily. This is all the more important in a non-hierarchical, manage-by-influence rather than power world. This question is designed to reveal more about you and to see whether you would fit into the school’s social life (and perhaps add to it). This is likely to be much more important for small schools than for large ones, for isolated schools than for urban ones, and perhaps for stand-alone business schools than for those that are part of a university. The reason is that a smaller, more isolated school will tend to have a very close-knit student body, so someone who does not fit well may have a miserable time.

A person with balanced interests, who is not consumed by business to the exclusion of other things, will be able to survive the ups and downs both of business school and of a managerial career.

THE TYPICAL APPLICANT

Many applicants treat this question too lightly and end up simply listing five or ten things they enjoy doing. This does nothing to help their cases.

A BETTER APPROACH

Start by thinking of the things you really enjoy. You probably have a pretty good-sized list. Choose one or two to talk about. Your selection criteria should include the following:

* The activity matters to you.
* You know a lot about it.

* You can make it interesting to read about.
* It aids your positioning effort.
* The activity’s *distinctiveness* (will 90% of the applicants write about this?) is apparent.

The appropriate activities to discuss are those that will help your positioning. For example, if you have been a corporate librarian, you may want to reassure schools that you are a very tough and determined person. If you enjoy technical mountain climbing, by all means discuss this rather than your chess-by-mail games. The former shows you to be a highly unusual librarian whereas the latter suggests an all too stereotypical one who prefers solitary, contemplative pursuits. Topics to avoid no matter what include watching soap operas or situation comedies on television, sleeping, drinking with the lads, hanging out in pool rooms, etc.

The next step is to write the essay in an appealing fashion. Since your spare time is indeed your own, any activities you pursue should inspire you with real *enthusiasm,* at least if you are a basically enthusiastic sort of person. Given that business schools want enthusiastic students, you are obligated to sound enthusiastic even if you are not.

The other key to your essay will be to show that you are *highly knowledgeable and* *sincere* about the activity. These characteristics are desirable on their own and,equally important, they show that you really do participate in this hobby, sport, or activity This essay lends itself to “hypercreativity”; make it clear that you are not simply claiming to climb mountains or whatever you discuss.

One way to sound enthusiastic, knowledgeable, and sincere is to go into detail in describing what you do. If you are a mountain climber you may want to discuss one of your best climbs. Why did you choose to tackle this particular mountain; why this particular route? How did you choose your team? What criteria did you employ, and why? What were the major challenges that you faced? How did you handle them? What was the aftermath of this climb? Describing these and other matters will also *individualize* you, because even someone choosing the same topic will have hadentirely different experiences.

The other quality you should strive to communicate is that you are a very *likeable* person. You want to be regarded as interesting and pleasant company. This is especially true for people whose positioning is that they are number- crunching accountants, or otherwise relatively isolated.

Should you discuss one or two activities? This depends upon the number of activities you pursue that meet our criteria and how much space it will take you to describe each one appropriately.

ADVANTAGES OF THIS APPROACH

Choosing only one or two activities to discuss shows that you know how to prioritize and makes your discussion seem focused while giving you the opportunity to interest the admissions committee in what you describe. Discussing unusual activities will also help the committee to remember who you are.

Choosing activities that further your positioning effort has an obvious payoff. Discussing them enthusiastically permits you to build enthusiasm *for you* on the part of the committee.

QUESTION:

TELL US ANYTHING ELSE YOU CARE TO

WHY THE QUESTION IS ASKED

This question is asked for three reasons. First, it gives you a chance to add important information that other essays may not capture. Second, it gives you a chance to explain a weakness or gap in your record, or why your boss did not write a recommendation for you. Third, it will ascertain whether you are able to weigh the value of the additional information you are giving the admissions committee versus the effort required for them to read another essay.

THE TYPICAL APPLICANT

Many people write something, but few benefit thereby. Too many complain about what happened long ago or make excuses for their own failings (or substitute an essay from another school).

A BETTER APPROACH

First, ask yourself whether anything important to your positioning has been left out. If there is an important credential or overcoming of a major obstacle that you have not been able to discuss, and it will substantially help your positioning effort, then use this essay to bring it to the admissions committee’s attention. Resist the natural inclination, however, to gild the lily. Do not tell a third story showing how politically astute you were on the job. If you have explained how well you analyzed a production problem, and a recommender is describing another such effort, do not even think of describing a third one here.

What sorts of things are most likely to qualify for inclusion here? With some schools you will not otherwise have the opportunity to discuss your community activities or other things you have pursued outside your proper job. For example, you might wish

to describe your managing of the political campaign of a friend who ran for office in your city. Or you might wish to describe what you did in setting up a successful business that you ran on weekends. You may have a specific skill you wish to demonstrate that will not otherwise come across, or you may have rectified a weakness in your record. Perhaps you did poorly at math during your university studies but have since been sufficiently motivated to learn enough math to understand Einstein’s general theory of relativity

If you have found something that will be important enough in saying good things about you and furthering your positioning, by all means use it, but what if you think you have six or eight such items? In this case, follow the usual approach and select one, or at most two, of these. This essay is meant to augment the basic application, not substitute for it. You do not want to risk overwhelming admissions officers with too much material, nor do you want to fall into the trap of just listing items.

Do not worry about adding to an application that is already complete. If you do need to write more, be sure that it is only one or two items of clear importance. Do them justice by discussing them sufficiently to make their nature and value clear.

ADVANTAGES OF THIS APPROACH

Lists are seldom of value. It is far better to choose one or two things and then describe and discuss them in sufficient detail as to make them believable and memorable.

BRIEF NOTES ON ADDITIONAL ESSAYS

QUESTION: WHAT HAVE YOU CONTRIBUTED TO A RECENT GROUP EFFORT?

1. Focus on your contribution, rather than the group’s accomplishments, although it is useful to show that you helped the group succeed.
2. One of the requirements is that you made a major contribution to the effort.
3. Consider also:

* what difficulties were presented
* what skills you employed
* the group dynamics
* how you influenced people or managed them

* how you got others to contribute
* how you reduced conflict
* how your efforts complemented those of others.

1. What was the result?
2. Would the skills you expect to add from an MBA program have helped in this project?

QUESTION: WHAT DOES DIVERSITY MEAN TO YOU? HOW WILL YOU CONTRIBUTE TO THE DIVERSITY OF OUR PROGRAM?

1. You can define diversity in terms of nationality, language or culture, job history, age, educational background, political opinions, sex, aptitudes, or any of dozens of other matters. Your choice is likely to reflect your own experiences and, of course, ways in which you are different from the norm at the program to which you are applying.

* You should certainly have already asked yourself what this school is looking for and how you can appear valuable to it, so to be asked what diversity you can add should really just be making explicit something you have already had occasion to consider.
* 2. The second part of this question is largely a repeat of the “how will you contribute to the school” question, so refer to the discussion of that question.

QUESTION: DISCUSS A PROFESSIONAL PROJECT THAT CHALLENGED YOUR SKILLS

1. Start by determining what your professional skills are.
2. Look at the most challenging professional project you have faced, preferably one that was successful for you, or one that taught you valuable lessons.
3. After trying to remember it in real detail, abstract exactly which skills you used (or should have used, but have only come to appreciate since then).
4. Remember the attributes your readers are looking for: analytical ability, interpersonal skills, leadership ability, dedication, integrity, and so on.

5. Which of these attributes can you illustrate via one of your projects? Which are most important to your positioning effort? Which will be the most interesting to read about? Which can you get someone else to back up in a recommendation?

QUESTION: DESCRIBE A REPRESENTATIVE WORK DAY

1. This is most important for people in jobs that are not run of the mill where business schools are concerned.

z For auditors at a major accounting firm, for example, this is not as critical as for someone who is a political liaison person.

2. Do not load into one day every important thing you have done in the last two years.

z Be sure to show a reasonable range of your typical activities, however. If possible, these would include research and analysis, leading meetings, supervising the work of subordinates, influencing colleagues, negotiating, and so on.

3. Show teamwork, leadership, analysis, communication skills, etc.

QUESTION: COMMENT ON THE ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES OF ATTENDING OUR PROGRAM

1. This is clearly related to the other questions about why you want an MBA, and what other steps you will take if rejected.
2. Discuss the school’s strengths and weaknesses in general.
3. By showing what you are looking for in an MBA, show which of these strengths and weaknesses are most relevant for you.
4. Be kind to the school, but not unrealistic in your evaluation of it.

* Schools want to believe that they do a generally good job, but they are not foolish about this.
* Do not, for example, pretend that a school that offers only a few manufacturing courses is blessed with a strength in this area.

5. Compare this school with the appropriate competitors, showing that you know what real advantages it offers.

RULES FOR APPROACHING OTHER ESSAY QUESTIONS

It should be apparent after reading the above analyses of essay questions that a *thoughtful* approach is required when confronting any essay. Remember that aquestion does not exist in a vacuum. Instead, it is part of the whole application and should be answered in the context of how you wish the whole application package to read.

You will have started by determining what themes you wish to emphasize and how you will maximize your reward-risk ratio. As part of this, you will have chosen the “stories” you want to tell about yourself. This initial effort provides you with the context for an essay. When it is not clear which story to tell, remember these general rules for selection:

* The story is interesting.
* It is unusual.
* It shows you to have senior management qualities.
* It reveals something not fully revealed elsewhere in your application.
* It is a story you should tell, rather than one a recommender should tell.
* It will aid your positioning effort.
* It can be backed up by a recommender.