

Persistence pays

Gaining admission into a top-notch school does not boil down to academics or generalised scores, but on the story that you are telling

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Epitomised by Malcolm Gladwell's 10,000 hours rule, success eventually boils down to 'persistence'. If you pull in efforts over a period of time (called rigor), you will succeed – get into a college of your choice, learn a new skill, make your business successful, and so on. I have seen this principle manifest itself in pretty much all situations. Given that all people have a certain basic intelligence, and the IQ variation for most is within 10%, success (or lack of it) can only be attributed to rigor and resilience.

Here are some student experiences to elaborate upon this point. A student was sure that the only school that he wanted to study at was the Harvard Business School (HBS). A laudable objective, but with acceptance rates well under 10%, HBS was not going to be easy! Further, he was an Indian male – one of the most over-represented demographic at HBS. To make matters worse, he was average – no spikes in academics, nor in sports or extracurricular activities and a fairly average professional experience at an IT services firm. His GMAT scores were also just about average – at about 710/800. The first time he applied, he could not get in. He applied for the second time but could not make it then either. The third time, he did not want to apply (and had already secured admissions from some other great MBA colleges) but eventually put in an application. His story, this time, was unusual. He talked about his resolve of getting into HBS at any cost. He talked about his past attempts and his failure to make it to the coveted institution. He also talked about the impact that it had on his career and personal life. And he capped it all with a dare – that HBS should consider itself lucky that someone is so persistent about getting there. Not taking him would be their loss and not his. He got an early decision admit at HBS with 50% tuition waiver. This is a story of persistence. Of not giving up.

Perseverance is the key

Often, youngsters come to me with a clamour that they want to do something new in life. These are prospective



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Stand out: Build a compelling narrative

college applicants, young entrepreneurs, people who are trying to develop a new hobby or interest, and so on. My usual response is a question – 'How long have you been at it?' The answers have always surprised me and hold the key to their lack of 'success' in their ventures. Most tell me that they have been at it just for a couple of days to a few months. Unless you have spent time at a particular vocation, you cannot succeed.

Another student came to us in the first year of her undergraduate studies. She had more than two years before her MIM application was due and she wanted to build a narrative that was powerful and representative of who she was. Over time, we realised that she was passionate about smells – she was particularly captivated by the smell of the 'first rain.' She chose to explore her interests in that area and went on to research and develop deeper skills and understanding of the subject. She travelled to the narrow by-lanes of Old Delhi, explored the process of 'holding a smell in a *ghara*' in the suburb of Kannauj,

learnt to mix oils with Hyderabad artisans in Begum-Bazaar, and explored a design-thinking approach to build out bespoke smells (more western method) in Bengaluru. This is an adventure of persistence woven through more than two years of labour. Her narrative was on 'smells', and in her application, she expressed an intent to be a part of luxury and leisure industry. She got into the best European colleges and is currently pursuing her master's in luxury management.

A student wanted to be a soccer player. He kept coming back to it – as a player (he was a national level soccer player), possibly a coach (briefly he flirted with the idea), event management at local events and even soccer entrepreneurship. However, none of those turned into a durable career. However, over the course of three

years that he spent at these soccer related vocations, he matured as a soccer enthusiast and in the process, built a 'love for soccer' profile that was unparalleled. He later applied to one of the most coveted programmes in sports management – the FIFA master's (International master's in management, law and humanities of sports) jointly conducted by three universities in England, Italy and Switzerland. This became a stepping stone not just for a promising career with Real Madrid as an assistant team manager, but also for realising his passion. Persistence eventually paid off.

You need to spend time in building your narrative to get into a top-notch school. Eventually, it does not boil down to your academics or generalised scores, but on the story that you are telling. And the only way that this story can become potent is by building this narrative over a period of time. Evidence-based inputs which give credibility to this story are a prerequisite to make it powerful and realistic.

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