

The stories you tell ... tell a lot about you

Why it is not a smart idea to copy admissions essays



A recent article in Bloomberg Businessweek has stunned the MBA community. MBA admissions essays, of candidates successful in securing admission in the top business schools of the world are now available for sale. So, all that you now have to do is go to the right website, pay and download winning essays of the school(s) you are applying to, submit your application after marginally customizing the downloaded essays, and boom you get to be in the flight to Boston to join Harvard or MIT. Congratulations!

We all wish that life would be this easy. Unfortunately, it is not. If you copy these essays directly with minimum customization, then you definitely have a high chance of getting caught by anti-plagiarism software(s) used by most schools. If you get caught, you will most

probably be banned for life from that school (and even from other schools as it is rumored that business schools share data related to plagiarism).

Even if you just take inspiration from the essays and try to format your own essays accordingly, there is still a big chance of missing out on a deserving admission and a life changing education at a world class institution. Let me explain why –

The tendency to copy essays or take inspiration from other people's essays stems from a very skewed idea of the MBA application process. The general belief in the applicant community is that – there is a formula for admission to the best business schools of the world. People have developed a check list - A good GMAT score, good educational and professional pedigree, relevant work experience, managerial experience, history of social work, etc, etc. After all this , all that remains are the essays which also then can be prepared as per a set format (taking inspiration from how other people have done it) and then that will be it. The fact is – there is no such formula. Had there actually been such a formula, then the whole process would have been highly predictable and the top business schools of the world would never have gained the mystique, aura or value that surrounds them.

This is not to suggest that good GMAT scores and pedigree are not important. They are highly important, and increasingly so now, with the commercial pressures of MBA rankings. But, having said that, the top business schools of the world value your uniqueness more than anything else. They give you points for your ability to formulate your own stories in your own distinct way – stories that best describe your abilities, achievements and thinking process. You have the best chance of winning when you bring yourself to the table, not when you try to become someone else and in the process you lose yourself as well. And, this is exactly what happens when you look at the essays of others.

Subconsciously you internalize the format and the contents and without even being aware of it, you try to fashion yourself accordingly.

If you want to be accepted to a top business school, you will have to trust that your own stories are good enough to get you there. Yes! By all means, discuss your stories with people or get help in formulating them or editing them, but they still should be your stories. You

bring a unique set of skills, perspectives and background to the table. And, the admissions committee wants to evaluate you, not someone else disguised as you.

Remember that the stories you tell ... tell a lot about you. So, don't miss the chance to tell your stories. The fact that you chose to tell a particular story about yourself (and not some other story), indicates what you value and what you think is important about you. It shows your mindset and your attitudes, abilities and perspectives. Be yourself ... and be proud of it. You are certainly more capable than you think you are. If you work hard and put rigor into developing your essays, then your stories will be quite captivating, and the admissions committee would certainly be impressed after reading them.

You are good enough. And, you better believe in that yourself first, before you start expecting an unknown group of people sitting in the admissions office to believe it.