

MBA Shelf Life?



*If you think your MBA will have a 'shelf life',
you may want to re-think getting one...*

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Will my MBA have a Shelf Life?

As an MBA Career Counselor, students sometimes ask for my thoughts on whether or not their MBA will have a short 'shelf life' upon graduation. They are concerned that if they don't change jobs within 3 months of graduation, that the timer starts ticking and their MBA's value starts to decrease. The three months post grad marker may have something to do with "End-All-Be-All Rankings", which is fodder for another article entirely, but certainly not a 'shelf life'. Let me tell you, having worked with nearly 2000 MBA student and alumni for well over a decade, (and many on their third or fourth career changes at this point!), I've seen firsthand how long the MBA 'shelf life' can actually be!

MBA's learn tangible business skills, yes, but it goes so far beyond that. If chosen wisely, a master's program will be an experiential odyssey that transcends academia and shapes people in ways far deeper than they could ever imagine. And as with anything in life, the more of yourself you put into it (energy, attention, and focus; passion, conviction, and love; blood, sweat, and tears), the more you will get out of it. You will reap what you sow, for a life-time, not just three months post graduation. But how YOU perceive your program and degree is what matters most, it all starts with you. Your MBA will be just as valuable in a decade as the day you got it, but if you don't embody this and live this truth, therein lies the challenge.

Should I get an MBA? (The Right Reasons)

This is why any master's program needs to be entered into for the right reasons (a solid mantra for anything you undertake in life), which takes brutal honesty with yourself before embarking on anything that will consume so much of your life. Before you start looking into an MBA program, ask yourself WHY you want an MBA. Do you want a graduate degree to satisfy somebody else's dreams for you, as opposed to your own? Do you think you need an advanced degree to be a 'better' in other people's eyes? If so, you will need to get to the root cause of these negative career self concepts and what is contributing to these faulty beliefs.

Beware of academic or admissions counselors whose job is to sell you on a program. Only you can decide if the program would be the best decision for you, personally, professionally, and financially. Speak with people who have gone through programs that interest you to see which, if any, may be the right program for you. Don't rush through this process either. If you know that you want a master's degree right after undergrad, but can't seem to find a program that feels as if it were *made just for you*, then take your time, as many years as needed, until you find "the one". Don't force it, it should feel 100% right, be a 100% 'yes!' and 'this is it!' The more time spent between degrees will give you greater insights into who you are and what will be best for you. You need to be certain that your time and money will be well spent no matter what. Create a strategic plan as to what you intend to learn in a program and how you will leverage every part of it to get the most from the program.

Okay, so I've decided to get an MBA, (for the right reasons), how do I make it count?

If you want to get the most from your MBA program and extend its 'shelf life' indefinitely, the most important thing you can do is to make networking a way of life, both personally and professionally. This means become close with your cohort, work closely with your professors, get to know your school's program manager and operations staff. Keep your word, do what you say, be reliable, under-promise and over-deliver. Help people, think of people, thank people. Forget the golden rule, don't treat others the way *you* want to be treated, get outside of yourself and get to know others so well that you then treat them the way *they* want to be treated. For more on this, explore MBTI and the 16 different personality types. Make connections so strong that both you and your connections will be able to leverage and benefit from now and in the future. This is how you will make it count.

So I've graduated (that went fast!) now what?

Upon graduation, you'll be shocked at the amount of free time you have, especially if you were in a "Working Professionals" program. Time you previously spent on coursework can now be spent on furthering your professional and personal development. If you do not yet have a job when you walk at graduation and want or need one ASAP, then you will spend all your energy and efforts or trying to land one. Leverage the career center resources at your school if you haven't already. Job market exploration and networking are best when done continually, not just in an active job search. Networking should be viewed as a long term endeavor, a way of life, and every MBA who has gone through the career development process should now live and breathe this. Perhaps you would like to take a break for a while and regroup while figuring out your next steps, that's perfectly okay too if you have the means. There is no one way to live your life, every move is up to you.

If you did land that job right after graduation, or are still in your current job, an awesome way to network (that also keeps your MBA fresh) is to take on a project at work that involves cross-functional collaboration with another department. Branching out to explore other functions of interest will add to your toolbox and keep your MBA skills relevant. Take on side projects or volunteer opportunities that will leverage what you learned in your MBA to broaden and deepen your overall transferable skills. Experience always leads to growth, whether it's in your paying job or a volunteer opportunity; you can use every situation in life to use the breadth and depth of both your experience and your education.

Destinations can be exhilarating: graduation day, landing the new job, taking time out to have a family, re-entering the workforce with a new perspective. But life is about the journey and your MBA program is just one of many of life's journeys you will go on. So, if you believe your MBA degree is super valuable, you're right. If you believe your MBA degree doesn't help you at all, you're right. If you believe your MBA has a short 'shelf-life' it does. If you believe your MBA will be valuable for a lifetime, it will. Whatever you believe about yourself and your life will match the way your life plays out in every present moment. So stay present and choose your beliefs wisely.