

## START WITH YOUR BRAIN

JULY 15, 2009

Considering business school? If so, now is the time to start thinking about your application, even if you don't want to apply until 2010. Perhaps that seems like a long way away, but sometimes really good ideas take a long time to hatch.

Please note—I wrote “thinking about your application.” I'm not one of those admissions consultants that say you have to be rigorous with your timeline: if it's mid-July, then you must be half-way through the GMAT quant section. That's not me.

What I do to suggest, though, is to start thinking about starting to think about business school. That's not a typo. Start thinking about thinking.

By putting even a fragment of an idea into your head, you are inspiring your brain. And it's your brain, that big mass of grey matter that nobody quite understands, that is going to get you into the school of your choice.

Indeed, it's your brain—with a little push from that part of you that knows how to meet deadlines—that's going to make your application stand out from a competitive pool.

Getting into business school is competitive. Kirsten Moss, Director of Admissions at Stanford's Graduate School of Business, told me that applications at that school have risen 50% over the last three years. “The bar is getting higher,” she said.

To put yourself firmly in the running, start thinking about what the admissions committees want to know about you. They want to know about your career history, your goals, your achievements, and your character. So why not give your brain a little exercise, and let it mull over what you think you might want to say?

Here are just three approaches to turning things over to your brain

### **1. You can ponder**

You've heard that some people get their best ideas in the shower, or while running, or even by meditating. Researchers at the University of British Columbia have found that daydreaming is a great tool for creativity. Think of these next few months—or years—as one long meditation session. But make sure you feed your brain the problem, for example, “What do I want to say about my brilliant career?” before heading off to that monastery in Tibet.

## **2. You can open yourself up to new ideas**

Have you ever had someone talk about something, say neuroscience, for example, and suddenly it's everywhere? If you read through the school websites early, explore the curricula, and start talking to current MBA students, you give yourself the chance to bump into some new concepts while you are doing your research. The more time you allow yourself to open yourself up to new experiences, the more you will be able to differentiate yourself.

## **3. You can brainstorm**

Throw ideas out there. Go crazy with thoughts like "I'm going to take Digital Anthropology at Sloan" or "I'm going to apply to INCAE in Costa Rica because that way I can study sustainability up close" or even "I'm going to meet my girlfriend's brother's uncle's neighbor who just graduated from Columbia and is excited about working in Mongolia next year." That way you might discover something about a course of action or about yourself that you hadn't even thought about before.

The brain is working all the time. If you give it information to process, it may very well surprise you with its brilliance. If you open yourself up to your own brain's genius, you might very well be surprised and delighted at the results.

Imagine that.