



**‘Skills can be acquired, but a bad attitude is far more detrimental’**



**Navigating an intensely competitive environment at a B-school strengthens your competencies in many ways**

Nivedita Krishnan, an MBA from Great Lakes Institute of Management and engineering graduate from Anna University, is a marketing professional now.



She has over eight years of experience in building digital platforms, digital marketing, customer acquisition, customer communication and consulting in the financial services sector. She looks back on how her engineering degree and MBA helped in her career

**As an electrical and electronics engineering graduate from Anna University, how did you decide to pursue management studies?**

I always knew that I wanted to get an MBA after a few years of work experience. I chose to pursue engineering as my undergraduate degree as it was a logical extension of my high school focus in the science and mathematics

Engineering gave me a solid foundation in understanding processes and systems and strengthened my analytical skills. These skills took me a long way in my first job in consulting and continue to be relevant.

### **Did you have work experience before you enrolled for an MBA at Great Lakes?**

Yes, I did. After my engineering, while the norm on campus was to get an IT job, I decided to start my career in consulting in the IT Risk Advisory space with a Big 4 consulting firm. While it seemed to be going against the grain, it was one of the best choices I made. Although, I was not able to apply my core electrical engineering knowledge on the job, my strong process orientation and analytical background in engineering helped me come up the curve very quickly in a new field.

Combined with this, consulting also gave me the opportunity to build on other much-needed skills such as business communication, presentation, critical thinking, and thinking on the feet. Skills that set me up well for an intense one-year MBA programme at Great Lakes Institute of Management. My time in consulting spanned three years prior to my MBA.

### **What does your role as a digital marketer entail? The pandemic has opened up new doors for digital marketing, has it affected your job in any way?**

Post MBA, I went on to work for a UAE-based financial services company that offers credit cards and personal loans. Over the past six years in the company, I have focused on building digital assets such as mobile app and on-boarding platforms in an effort to digitise customer interactions. Once these platforms were ready, in my digital marketing role, I worked on driving traffic to these platforms with the main focus of customer acquisition.

With Covid, online customer behaviour changed. We noticed a lot more response to our digital campaigns due to increased consumption of online content during lockdowns. But people were hesitant to apply for the product given the uncertainties. At the same time, internal policies for sourcing were tightened because of the higher market risk. So, all the data and information we had collected over the years about prospects and customers were no longer relevant in the pandemic. The key was to be able to rapidly adapt, faster than competition. This required a different approach to planning, selection of channels, and the messaging itself.

### **Looking back at both your engineering degree and your MBA, how would you say that it is helping you in your work life and career now?**

The skills acquired in both engineering and MBA definitely came in handy. We had to re-engineer our acquisition fulfilment process which required a strong process orientation, make quick enhancements to the automations associated with the on-boarding platform during the pandemic. This required working efficiently with technology teams, analysing the new funnel metrics and acquisition data to run a responsive campaign, and decipher consumer behaviour in the pandemic to tailor our campaign and communication strategy accordingly.

### **What are the B-school learnings that you are applying in your work?**

Besides the academic knowledge gained at B-school that you may be able to relate to at work, the experience of working in teams, communicating ideas effectively, thriving in an intensely competitive environment, networking and connecting with a diverse set of people have definitely helped me at work. Here are some of the learnings from B-school that I apply at work even today:

## · **Managing teams**

B-school study groups comprise diverse individuals with different working styles and motivations. There was usually that one natural leader who brought the team together and got the assignment/project done on time and well. Managing a team in the workplace is no different and the skills gained working with a diverse group at B-school is definitely a good way to get a glimpse into what it takes to manage and motivate a team.

## · **Leadership and initiative**

B-school gives people plenty of opportunities to build and demonstrate leadership abilities outside of academic coursework. Whether it is being part of a consulting club or placement committee, showing initiative to go beyond academic coursework goes a long way in your professional life. It builds key leadership and execution skills that are helpful in the workplace.

## · **Standing out**

I think of the crowd in B-schools as a bunch of ‘alphas’ where the competition is intense. Over the course of the programme, you learn to or observe people standing out in a crowd, making an impact in a high energy, competitive environment. Leaving just academic excellence aside, this includes nuances such as interaction / participation in the classroom, presentation skills and personality and engagement with peers that makes you stand out. In a corporate environment, these nuances are equally, if not more important than just being able to deliver on your job.

## · **Attitude versus competence**

In a B-school, the general competence of peers is on par with yours, so what really sets you apart is your attitude. In a competitive environment, there were plenty of challenges that brought out differences in the attitudes of people. At the workplace, I have learned that having a good attitude is sometimes more important than your competence. Skills and competence can always be built up, but a bad attitude is far more detrimental.

## · **Networking**

MBA programmes are often residential and force you to buddy up and connect with a very heterogeneous crowd in a short span of time. These networking skills are very critical for a successful career. More so, when you work abroad and work with a diverse team from across geographies and cultures.

## **Do you think there was something missing when you did your engineering and MBA that you feel should have been included/taught? And which would have helped you in your work life?**

While I did my MBA, Great Lakes was one of the few institutions which offered a specialisation in Business Analytics. Relating to my specialisation in Marketing and Business Analytics, while the fundamentals in marketing are important, including more coursework/certifications that are relevant to today’s workplace would help, such as courses on AI/machine learning, digital marketing, data visualisation, and analytics.

### **What would you like to say to students looking to pursue an MBA?**

I would definitely recommend pursuing an MBA only after gaining some work experience. You would be able to extract a lot more value from the programme if you have already been in a business environment.

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