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A techie goes corporate

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Why a well-rounded MBA experience is important

I still remember the day I walked into Infosys' Disneyland-like Mysuru campus as a trainee software engineer. It was late 2005, and for a mechanical engineer who loved programming, a job at Infosys was the ultimate prize. A Forbes article published shortly afterwards stated that getting into Infosys was harder than getting into Harvard! These thoughts came rushing to me, a decade later, as I sat in a Harvard Business School class on online economy, rehashing my structured query language (SQL) skills. My professor wanted to have some fun by giving future managers and consultants a taste of the techie life. This was yet another validation that a business graduate with technology chops can add tremendous value in an increasingly technology-driven world.

Cornucopia of possibilities

It was this belief that drove me to apply to Great Lakes Institute of Management (GLIM), Chennai, after coding for two-and-a-half years at Infosys. The flagship postgraduate programme in management (PGPM) is a full-time, one-year accelerated MBA programme that accepts applicants with work experience. It was perfect for me because I could return to the corporate world faster, and reduce both my opportunity and tuition costs. Shortly after graduating in 2009, I joined Wipro as a business analyst and achieved my goal of transitioning from a pure technology role to a predominantly business role. Mission accomplished? Not quite.

After five years of travelling across Europe and North America for exciting assignments, I wanted to understand better how technology trends are shaping our world and what it means for the future. The Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy at Tufts University is a pioneer in the field and

has helped students “know the world” for more than 80 years. While still a school of diplomacy, students today come from a variety of backgrounds for a truly interdisciplinary learning experience.

I studied digital economy and political economy, and explored how the forces of business, politics, law and technology interact and influence our lives. While the political economy part was mostly at Tufts, I took advantage of the school’s close association with Harvard and cross registered for a quarter of my courses. At Harvard, I studied design thinking, cyber security and internet law to develop a multidimensional perspective about the digital economy. The culmination of all this knowledge is a product idea for Twitter called Twitter SOS that enables local communities to become resilient in the wake of natural disasters such as the Chennai floods of 2015. I hope to soon pitch this idea to Twitter and see if I can transform ideas to action on the ground.

Graduate education — especially at universities abroad — is like playing sport at the highest level. There has to be a strong motivation to pursue a certain path and the perseverance to stay in the course in the face of challenges — financial, emotional and academic.

In addition to hard skills, MBA aspirants must invest in soft skills because companies value professionals who thrive in collaborative and cross-functional environments. An MBA is a life-time investment and its value is best assessed over a five to ten-year horizon. It is acceptable to take your time to find your true calling — don’t rush into a B-school simply because someone you know is.

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