



CAREER CLINIC – ON COMPLETION OF YOUR MBA

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Behind the big promises of business success on completion of an MBA lurk some difficult questions. An expert panel composed of Stephen Bryan, director of KPMG People Services; Betty Thayer, chief executive of Exec-Appointments; and Carol Slesser, career coach at Slesser Maclean, gives the answers.

THE PANEL

Stephen Bryan is a director of KPMG People Services, Executive Search & Selection, and heads up the Non-Executive Director Recruitment Service. A mechanical engineer by training, he holds an MBA from Aston Business School in Birmingham, with a specialism in international marketing, and is completing a Doctorate of Business Studies through De Montfort University Business School in Leicester on a part time basis. Stephen's career in the automotive sector with companies such as GKN, AE Group, McKechnie, ITW Inc and Goodyear has included international sales and marketing roles, mainly in Europe and US, and board-level appointments.

Betty Thayer is chief executive of Exec-Appointments. Prior to this, she was a partner in consulting at Ernst & Young, where she advised boards of FTSE100 and European companies on strategic direction, programme management, shareholder value and IT. Betty has also been strategy and IT director at Lex Service, where she initiated a shareholder value programme which doubled stock price and managed a £250m merger integration programme.

Carol Slesser is a career coach at Slesser Maclean who specialises in giving MBA graduates the confidence to put the skills they have learnt into practice. Whether that's moving up the corporate ladder, setting up a business or a consultancy, Carol puts her 14-years' worth of experience into helping MBAs recognise their self-worth and areas of expertise.

Q: If I do a distance-learning MBA, will it really open doors to a new career in the future or simply reinforce my position in my current job?

Bryan: An MBA on its own will not allow your career to flourish, either within your present organisation or in a new job. What's important is how you apply the benefit of the new knowledge and experience that you have learned

during the MBA. Most people have a clear understanding of what they wish to achieve through their MBA and I would recommend that you choose the method of MBA delivery that fits in with your own personal circumstances and career plan.

Thayer: Any additional education, not just an MBA, runs the risk of not providing additional opportunities if it's not well planned. I would suggest that you first ask yourself what kind of new career opportunities you want to pursue. Think about what the employers who have these kinds of opportunities are looking for and whether they value an MBA or not. Doing your research well ahead will help to make sure you are really adding value rather than just reinforcing what you are already doing.

With distance-learning MBA, it's horses for courses. If your ambition is to get a position at McKinsey or Goldman Sachs then you need to attend one of the top full-time programmes (and your academics to date need to be first class from top institutions.) On the other hand, there are many companies outside of these firms that will value a distance MBA as long as you get top marks. Make the most of your educational experience and target the specific courses you take as relevant to the future employer.

Target firms you might want to move to, approach them about their hiring criteria, test their value of a distance MBA and then tailor your studies accordingly.

Slessor: What can you lose? I can only see how you and your employers will benefit. Your advice will be sought on a variety of issues and you will be able to put your knowledge into practice giving you an edge over other employers. Whether you stay with your current employers or look for alternative employment is irrelevant.

Q: Is "mediocre but arrogant" a reasonable description of MBA graduates?

Bryan: Certainly not. The MBA is widely recognised as a top management qualification. However, with an increasing number of providers, it is important to select an Association of MBAs-accredited school to ensure that your MBA meets the rigorous quality standards of the most valued courses. Increasingly, employers are being more selective about the MBA that you have and where you studied for it.

Thayer: I often find that arrogant people are proved to be mediocre, but would not tar all MBA graduates with this brush. Unfortunately, some MBAs believe that being arrogant is required behaviour for a lot of top jobs. The reality is that the arrogant people can get close but rarely make it all the way to the top - they claw their way there but are rebuffed at the end. This is often when their mediocre intelligence and capabilities are finally revealed to the relief of those they have stomped on in the past.

Slessor: What a sweeping statement — this description would only be used if the graduate is unsure what direction they want to go in and what their next

move should be. Before running around applying for jobs and going for interviews they need to take stock and only apply for jobs they are really interested in.