

Opinion **MBA blog**

Defining my plan B

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My story prior to studying for an MBA was that I had been trying to escape the familiarity and complacency brought about by doing something habitually for four and a half years in the middle office of the banking industry.

I am not saying that I disliked it. I am thankful for every second I spent learning about how this business works, and for every drop of blood, sweat and tears I shed developing much of the skills and work ethic required. However, eventually I just felt professionally stagnant. Coming from a non-finance, non-marketing, non-business academic background, I felt that my flexibility was constrained if I wanted to make some big career changes. I started to question whether it was time to do something drastically proactive with my life.

So – fast forwarding through many tough decision-making scenarios – here I stand, roughly two-thirds done with the first term of an MBA.

Entering into this new phase of my life, I have had ‘Front Office’ practically engraved in my mind as my goal after graduation. This is the career shift I have been longing for – priority number one. Every ounce of energy I have remaining after the rigorously demanding MBA courses and activities is spent on keeping up to date with career postings and recruitment events, working on applications, and making good use of networking opportunities. Of the career events organised by large financial companies so far, for example, I have only been interested in participating in those which focus on sales and trading.

However, today was unique. Today, I was fortunate enough to have the opportunity to be invited to a workshop held by one of the largest banking institutions in the world. Why was this unique? For the first time since my MBA has started, I have gone back to my ‘roots.’ Indeed, this event was actually a business challenge workshop tailored specifically to the middle office functional groups within the bank. The incident actually made me realise that I was not working on a plan B when I should be. There is extremely stiff competition for front office roles here in Hong Kong after all.

I have now decided that an openness to middle office related roles will be my plan B. It might not be as appealing as plan A, but I think it is the practical thing to do since I already have the potential to deliver immediate results due to my extensive experience within the functional area. It is not about lacking confidence in my capabilities to do something new, it is about understanding circumstances beyond my control, such as job market conditions, and being realistic in dealing with these facts.

The workshop itself was a great opportunity for me to jump-start my plan B by revisiting the business and building new contacts in the middle office network. Starting plan B only if plan A fails might already be too late and doing so would squander away a lot of precious time. I will dream big and reach for the stars with plan A, but at the same time be practical by having a plan B.

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