

My MBA interview war story

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As I was sipping my morning coffee early one December morning, my mailbox alerted me to a new message. Overflowing with joy was probably an understatement for what I felt a split second later. I was invited for an interview with Dean Jeffrey A. Barks, then the Director of Admissions of the MIT Sloan School of Business. But not so fast. We are talking about MIT, home of the brightest of the bright, teaching grounds of the late Nobel laureate and legendary corporate finance theorist Franco Modigliani, and not to mention the origin of the almighty remote control. I must not expect the ordinary even with something as mundane as an interview.

Looking back the interview itself was perhaps as uneventful as being rammed head on by a train speeding off its tracks. Never mind the dean showed up in his Hawaiian T-shirt and we were asked to dress casually (everybody arrived fully clothed anyway as if they were headed to a gala dinner). Never mind that I already knew two other people invited for interviews that day (we live in too small a world). The shock came when everyone, all five of us vulnerable invitees, was actually asked to interview *at the same time*.

We were cornered into a group interview. Thai managers love arranging interviews where a panel of interviewers grills one hapless candidate. But when the tables are turned and a group of hopefuls are invited to show-down in a beauty contest, anything could happen. The scene could be rife with candidates upping the ante on each other as game theory models would predict. There was no easy way out. Or was there?

Fast forward a few years and the two people I knew then are now two of my best buddies and fellow alums of the prestigious school. How we managed to overcome such odds was a question we frequently kid among ourselves to this day. In fact, the probability for three friends to attend the same prestigious school is so minuscule that nothing short of a miracle may suffice as an explanation.

Did I say miracle? I personally am someone who reserves miracles for more personal events, like finding a cure for cancer or, more seriously, chancing upon your soul mate at a train station. After spending two full years with my two buddies, I don't have a doubt in my mind how we made it. And, no, I don't believe in geniuses since many people can testify back then that we were no better positioned than the average Joe was. The event was not a miracle but rather a matter of preparation and perhaps a little luck.

For those of you who are pondering about graduate school, my advice would be to do a little soul searching and try to discover yourself. Know your goals and find the school that best fits your style and supports what you intend to do. Everyone is unique and deserves the best he or she can achieve. Careful planning will lead you to this goal.

Finally, if you are headed for an interview, let me give you advice given to me by one of my memorable professors: "Be yourself." Good luck!

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