



## On an MBA hard-earned and earnestly employed

By Anne (Turchi) Ruybalid (MBA 2007)

Dean Jiambalvo, cut the umbilical cord. It's an MBA!

Okay, I'll admit it. This is an odd metaphor. And, well, *yuck*. But, true: we conceived, committed, cringed and climbed our way from Jumpstart to job, from "You want me to learn to do *what* with that balance sheet?" to "Let me explain how I used demand curves to analyze the result of your proposed pricing decision." We have challenged and surprised ourselves. The curriculum, the network, the degree itself: An MBA, my friends, is more than the sum of its parts.

I've spent the summer cutting my MBA teeth at the YMCA of Greater Seattle's Association Office. My colleagues have been gracious enough not to mistake my puppy-like exuberance for arrogance. Being the only MBA (who will admit it, anyway) at the association office of this particular Y, I've spent some time helping others decode that secret MBA language I had originally found so odd but now use at an alarming rate. ("Yes, I *know* 'incentivize' isn't in the dictionary, but that doesn't mean it's not a word!") I have had a few grand moments already. Like the day a colleague brought me flowers for showing her how to turn Excel's Solver loose on a particular decision analysis.

The truth is, these first months at work have provided me with a little wedge of perspective. We alumni understand that the Foster School of Business provides us with knowledge, tools, skills and opportunities. That's why we attended. We read this *Business* rag either because it's available waiting-room material, or because we want to know who, and how, the Foster School is impacting now. You're this deep into my article because either you're sitting in the lobby of Mackenzie, waiting for your admissions interview and trying to look engaged, or because you are getting a bit of the "who" and "how" that you're looking for. If you're the former, good luck. If you're the latter, you probably want more on this "perspective" thing. In true MBA form, I've broken it into two succinct parts: Academia and Privilege.

### Part 1: Academia

I remember MBA Guru Dan Poston telling us on one of the first days of orientation, "Yes, employers actually expect you to *know* and *apply* what you learn here." For you engineers in the audience, this is old news. For me, an English major, it was a bit frightening. See, any value-add that the "English" tag on my resume provided was just that: a nice surprise for my *employer du jour* that I could reference Shakespeare and knew which "its" to use. But Dan was right: the amount I use my MBA at work is surprising. The thing is, this degree has fundamentally changed the way I approach business problems. This becomes more apparent in my new role at the YMCA, an organization where I worked for 5 years pre-MBA, too: I'm different now.

### Part 2: Privilege

My post-MBA career has given me the opportunity to recognize the exponential value of this degree, and the support that has allowed me to be here. Privilege, like interest on an investment, compounds itself. As we learned about the nature of compounding interest in business school, the earlier it comes to you, the higher it lifts you. The timing and amount by which this privilege compounds has made it difficult for me to calculate how much of my success has been a result of hard work, and how much it has been a result of compounding privilege. Yes, the work was hard, but I had an unparalleled support system.

The triteness of using this piece as a blanket "thank you" to the faculty, staff, neighbors and friends of the University of Washington has not been lost on me. To the people who offered me their wisdom, influence, scholarship money, teaching ability, faith, patience, honesty, knowledge and time, I can offer back two promises: 1) I won't let you down, and 2) I'll seek, in my life, ways to help others in the same way that you have helped me.

To read two years of Ruybalid's musings on the MBA experience in *BusinessWeek Online*, visit [businessweek.com/bschools/mbajournal](http://businessweek.com/bschools/mbajournal).