

Get Hired!

A simple, no-nonsense guide for ambitious professionals who want to impress MBA recruiters and accelerate their career success!



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Introduction

Even Better Consulting helps ambitious professionals *impress* MBA recruiters, interviewers, and employers. You need to prove that you have the qualifications and special skills to push organizations forward, and we give you the tools you need to express yourself.

As a graduate of the Darden School at the University of Virginia I understand the MBA process. I understand how to earn MBA admission and how to leverage the academic experience into meaningful employment. As a result of my experiences, I've created a process that simplifies your success as you work through the MBA process.

My success wasn't due to extreme business experience or expertise. Instead, it was due to my absolute clarity in my unique value proposition. I understood how I was *Qualified, Different* and *Relevant*.

This ebook will help you create your own confident, and compelling professional story. Soon you will see that it is your story that gives your career guidance and impresses people along the way. Without a clear professional story, you may find yourself just "going through the motions". With a clear professional story, you will find your career taking on new meaning.

Thank you for your interest in Even Better Consulting, and I hope you enjoy the ebook!

Sincerely,

Alzay Calhoun

CEO and Founder

Even Better Consulting

<http://www.EvenBetterConsulting.com>

What is the Value of This Ebook?

This ebook is will help you clarify your professional story and use it to guide your professional career. No matter where you are in the MBA process, your STORY fuels your professional success.

Who is This Ebook For?

The ebook is for ambitious professionals interested in maximizing the value of their MBA experience.

This applies to

- ***MBA applicants.*** Create your best MBA application. Learn to impress MBA programs with your unique, clear, and targeted message.
- ***MBA students.*** Get the most out of your MBA degree. Learn to impress classmates, recruiters, and employers with your sharp career plan.
- ***MBA graduates.*** Ignite your MBA career. Learn to impress employers, colleagues, and business associates with your strong sense of direction.

What is a Professional Story?

Your professional story is a unique, personal expression of your career goals. It identifies the impact you will have on business and the special skills you offer to see that impact carried out.

The more sincere your story is, the easier it will be to express it. You won't have to remember any buzz words and you won't need to get into character. When your story is real and true, it comes out in a clear, concise, and impressive manner.

This ebook is going to introduce you to the PROCESS of creating a professional story. It is an opportunity to evaluate and sharpen your current career path.

What are the Elements of a Professional Story?

- ***A Goal.*** A clear end result, idea, or intention. This is the reason you work so hard at what you do.
- ***Proof that you are Qualified.*** A clear understanding that you have the aptitude to do the work required.
- ***Proof that you are Different.*** A clear understanding of your professional uniqueness.
- ***Proof that you are Relevant.*** A clear understanding of how your goals align with those of the organization.
- ***A Simple Summary.*** A verbal or written platform to express yourself. This could be an application essay, email introduction, interview, networking conversation, or elevator pitch.

MBA Applicant, Student, and Graduate...The Common Thread

This ebook is targeted at MBA applicants, students and graduates because all three share a common thread.

- ***You Have a Desire to Impact Business.*** You aren't just looking for a job, your goal is an impactful career. You want to lead teams and affect business in a positive way. To do this, you need to put yourself in environments that maximize your potential. Only a clear, concise professional story can describe the environments that suit you best.
- ***You Have Impatient Ambition.*** Some people spend 20 years in a career before they figure out what they want to do. That career path is not of interest to you. You chose to go to MBA school to accelerate your career. A quality professional story will clarify and focus your ambitions.
- ***You Have to Impress an Evaluator.*** Whether it is an MBA recruiter, prospective employer, or current employer you have to impress an "evaluator" of some kind. As a future business leader, your challenge is to consistently impress evaluators as quickly as possible. Your professional story is your platform to impress any evaluator at any time.

Getting Prepared

Be Qualified, Be Different, Be Relevant is a simple method for creating a professional story. It quickly captures your uniqueness in a way that impresses evaluators and increases your chances of business success. The points below will help you get prepared and make the most of this method.

Who You Are...Who You Are Not

One of the first mistakes made when preparing a professional story is spending too much time defending against weak points. Here are a couple of common phrases.

“My GPA and GMAT are too low.”

“I wasn’t involved in enough extracurricular activities in college.”

“My professional background isn’t robust enough.”

“I don’t have enough leadership experience.”

Worrying about weak points is a challenge that affects every business professional and is present throughout the entire MBA process. Let me address this challenge now to be sure you get started on the right foot.

Good evaluators know you are human and they expect to see strengths and weaknesses. Still, you greatly increase your chance of success by competently expressing who you **are** instead of cautiously defending against who you **are not**. I realize this is easier said than done. In this ebook we will take things one step at a time and keep the process manageable. We’ll use *Be Qualified, Be Different and Be Relevant* as our guide.

The Brainstorming Process

First, understand that *Be Qualified, Be Different, Be Relevant* begins as a brainstorming process. In order to express yourself clearly you have to brainstorm, prioritize, and then evaluate for clarity.

Once your thoughts are clear, you can use repetition to sharpen your thoughts. Your professional story needs to express one single, potent, impressive message to your evaluators. Begin the process with good brainstorming.

Please resist the temptation to...just get started. As intelligent, established professionals, we believe that we know enough about ourselves already and we can “sit down and do it.” This is where our professional prowess actually becomes a hindrance to our success.

Take Time for Yourself

You are who you are today because of your action oriented nature and the fact that you “get things done”. People give you tasks because you complete them quickly and at a high level. But it’s that fact that creates a very unique imbalance:

You have spent more time doing work for others and their projects than you have for you and your own projects.

So when someone asks you about your pursuit of your career goals those answers are typically underdeveloped. It’s not that you don’t know. It’s that you haven’t spent the same amount of time thinking, talking, and writing about these things. Now is your time to use your skills and expertise for your own personal benefit. *Be Qualified, Be Different, Be Relevant* is your framework.

The Best Brainstorming Tool Ever!

Since we agree that brainstorming is the important first step, let me remind you about the best brainstorming tools ever created. They are *pencil and paper*. Without a doubt, hands down, these are the best tools to ensure an excellent professional story. The further you take this process, the more you

are going to think about, and you won't be able to store all of the thoughts in your head. Pencil and paper is *the* most convenient way to document those thoughts so you can organize them later.

What you will find is that at random parts of the day, a light bulb will go off and a certain part of your professional story will come clear. Maybe it's a new career direction that you hadn't thought about before. Maybe you remember a certain story that summarizes your professional background. Maybe you think about just the right phrasing to capture a professional strength. Whatever that great idea is, do yourself a favor and write that idea down *right then*. Your professional story is a collection of your best professional thoughts. Give yourself every opportunity to store them so that you can later express them.

If you don't have pencil and paper in front of you now, please take a moment to get some...you will be glad you did.

This brainstorming is invaluable. These are the thoughts that feed your resume, cover letter, MBA essays, interview, and every other part of your professional development. This information will prove its worth over and over again.

Introduce the Process: Be Qualified, Be Different, Be Relevant

Okay, so now you're ready. You have a goal: Impress your evaluators. You have an action plan: *Be Qualified, Be Different, Be Relevant*. Plus you have the tools, the awesome pencil and paper. You are ready to create your professional story. *Be Qualified, Be Different, Be Relevant* is your guide. Here is a brief overview and then I'll take each part in more detail to show you how they all come together.

First, your evaluator needs to know that you are *Qualified* for the opportunity you are targeting. *Be Qualified* helps you show that you have the academic aptitude and relevant professional experience to perform the job well.

Secondly, your evaluator needs to know that you are a unique professional with specific skills. *Be Different* helps you pull out the special something you bring to the table. This is about being a business professional that is interesting, refreshing and adds value. In this section you will differentiate yourself from your competition.

Thirdly, your evaluator needs to know how your success contributes to the success of the organization. *Be Relevant* helps you express how you can help the organization accomplish its goals. This is where you connect your skills and ambitions to the skills and ambitions of the company. In the end you will make the point that by accepting you, the organization will see value in the short and long term.

How does it all come together? *Be Qualified, Be Different, Be Relevant* is a guiding philosophy that helps you tell an evaluator that you can do the work in unique way that benefits the organization. When you express these things in your distinct voice, using your own experience, you make a very, very strong case for any opportunity you target.

Be Qualified

Okay, finally with all the introductions aside, we will break down the Even Better Consulting philosophy and create the backdrop for your professional story. We're going to begin with the very first part: *Be Qualified*.

Essentially, *Be Qualified* is about proving you have the academic aptitude and professional background to be considered for the opportunity. Because the first step is to brainstorm, I'm going to challenge you to remember as much as you can about your academic and professional history. Remind yourself of all the good work you've done to this point. This section has four major questions and I'll pose some supporting questions to help jog your memory. Please be sure to write down the good thoughts as they come.

Be Qualified...4 Main Questions

Question #1: What is interesting about your academic background?

Start by listing your high school, undergraduate college and any Masters program you may have started or completed. Think about how you performed as a student. Were you Valedictorian, Salutatorian, or Phi Beta Kappa? Were you in the honors program? Was there a certain class or topic that you did very well in?

What was your entire academic experience like? Were you a solid student that performed well in certain categories or did you perform well across the board? Did you enjoy researching a certain topic, formally or informally? Did you partner up with a professor and spend additional time working on a certain industry, topic, function or expertise?

Question #2: What is interesting about your professional background?

Start by listing the places that you've worked, whether it was cashier at a local fast food restaurant or in the executive suite at a Fortune 500 company. Remember those experiences. Which parts did you

enjoy? Which parts did you not enjoy? In which roles did you take on the role of teacher? In which roles did you take on the role of student?

As you continue to reflect on your experiences, take note of your strongest, clearest memories. Did they leave a positive mark or a negative mark? What did you take away from those experiences? Did you get any recognitions or awards for your quality work?

Question #3: What is interesting about your extracurricular activities?

Did you start an organization? Did it flourish or did it struggle? Why was that? Were you active in a social organization, church, or after school program? Were you an athlete, musician, or thespian? Why did you get involved in these activities? What did they do for you? How did they round out your experiences?

How do you think about leadership? Does leadership require a title or have you found yourself leading without having any formal title at all? Reflect on the activities you've been involved in, why you got involved in them, and the value they had to you.

Question #4: Is there anything else?

Is there anything else that you've done, seen, felt or been a part of that has value to you? Did you raise a younger sibling? Did you help a friend through an illness? Are you recovering from a personal situation or illness? Think about those things that have contributed to your refined character.

It is important to spend time here, because when someone asks you if you can handle the rigor of a top-tier professional environment, you can reflect on these thoughts and answer with a confident "Yes." You know that you are *Qualified*.

And Why did You do That?

If you feel like you haven't gone deep enough here ask yourself... "Why?" Why did you choose to spend time studying one topic over another? Why did you choose to go to a high school across the city or go to college across the country? Why did you perform so well at work? These are the things that shaped your academic and professional experience.

Do Not Judge Your Own Experiences

Remember to have patience. Be careful not to judge any of your professional experiences. Be careful of saying “This is a *serious* business environment and they don’t care about my niche experiences.” *You do not know that yet.* Take the time to reflect. Take the time to brainstorm. Take the time to list all of the things that make up your professional experience.

Finally, remember that this is not a resume. Be careful of refining thoughts or trying to categorize them. At this point, have fun remembering all the experiences you’ve had to get to where you are today.

Be Different

This next segment is the *Be Different* segment. This is all about celebrating your individual uniqueness. This is the segment where professionals go from “I am smart enough to get an MBA” to “*I offer something special, as an MBA*”.

You may have found the *Be Qualified* segment pretty easy. Since you think of yourself as a goal oriented person, you have a high level of awareness about your professional accomplishments. That is certainly a plus, but let me offer you a warning. Simply being *Qualified* is not good enough.

No...Being Qualified is Not Good Enough

Each year, there are many professionals who think that their long list of accomplishments automatically earns them a spot inside their organization of choice. They spend an immense amount of time on their resume and their interview is filled with war stories about the last project they worked on. On the surface, this might seem like a very arrogant person, but actually, this person has fallen victim to a very common misconception. Many professionals believe that a strong professional background impresses an evaluator. You must do more than prove you are *Qualified*.

You've Got to Be Different

Use your uniqueness to your advantage. Use it to distance you from your competition. Very soon you will find out, if you haven't done so already, that you are part of a huge pool of people that have done good work. You are going to have to find other ways to differentiate yourself besides your work quality. That brings us to the importance of the *Be Different* segment. Let's take some time to brainstorm on the elements of your individual uniqueness. This section has four major questions and I'll offer some supporting thoughts along the way.

Be Different...4 Main Questions

Question #1: What are your proudest stories?

Where are you at your best...at home, work, in a cubicle or in the field? Are you better on the telephone? Are you better with in-person interactions? Are you better in front of small groups or large groups?

What is your single proudest accomplishment? What is the story you can't wait to tell? What is the accomplishment you always brag about? What situations are the most fun for you? Maybe you're not very good at something, but you enjoy it every time you do it. Maybe you are so good at it that you enjoy doing it all the time. What situations are the most fun for you?

Question #2: What are your unique talents?

What is the thing you do better than everyone around you? Here are a couple of fill in the blank questions to help.

If I put you in a line-up with 9 other people (10 total) you are certain that the other nine people cannot _____ like you can.

"Nobody knows I can _____." Name your hidden hobby or talent.

"Every time I enter an environment, I am always the _____ person." Name the role you comfortably assume every time you enter a new environment.

Question #3: What are your special interests?

What is the thing you just love to do? Here are a couple of fill in the blank questions to help.

"Once a year, I always _____ and I love it." Maybe you do it once a year or once a week or once a month, but you look forward to it every time you do it.

“I am at peace when I ____.” What is a “happy” activity for you?

“When I retire, I will ____.” When you get through working, what is that thing you are going to do every single day?

Question #4: What are your career goals?

What kind of businesses inspire you? What kind of business leaders inspire you? What markets, fields, technologies, or specialties interest you? What impact are you inspired to have?

What things bother you about business? What business topic engages you, no matter what time of day, no matter how many people are involved? What change are you prepared to make?

Find the Business In Your Interests

You may have noticed I brought up career goals last. That was *on purpose*. The first conversation needs to be about you, your individual interests, and the places where you perform well. Then, use your creative mind to apply those things to a business setting. Look for the business activities that surround your personal interests. That is where you are bound to perform your best.

You Should Feel “Different” Now

You now have a list of thoughts that are unique to you and you only. The chance of someone else having a sheet like yours is very, very small. If you take a step back and look at what you have done so far, you will start to see the process come together.

The list you created in the *Be Qualified* segment combined with the list in the *Be Different* segment creates a very unique mix of your personal and professional self. At this point, you should begin to see yourself as a much more dynamic and rich professional than when you began this process.

Be Relevant

Be Relevant is the third and final component of the Even Better Consulting philosophy. In this segment, you will attach your unique qualities as professional to the specific expectations of your target organization. Essentially, you're telling the organization what is in it for them. *This is a very important point.* Below is a common misconception of business professionals.

"I make myself relevant by explaining how much I need the opportunity."

A person with this misconception speaks highly of the MBA experience and goes into great detail about how an MBA from XYZ school will teach them valuable skills. Or if talking to an employer, the person will talk about how employment at XYZ firm will propel their career. This person never makes the switch to explain how what *they offer* gives value back *to the institution*. What you need is important, but that isn't the only ingredient in proving your *Relevance*.

Your evaluator is not just looking for someone with strong academics, but someone willing to lead, serve, and contribute to the organization's guiding principles. With that being said, let's brainstorm on some of the ways you can prove your *Relevance* to a top-notch professional opportunity. This section has four major questions with a few follow-up questions.

Be Relevant...4 Main Questions

Question #1: Why do you need the opportunity?

What specific experiences are you looking forward to as a member of the organization? Are you looking for breadth or depth of experience? Do you want to travel abroad? Do you want direct access to high level executives?

How will the opportunity enable your career? Are you looking to expand your network? Do you want a new professional position with a larger scope? Do you want profit and loss responsibility?

Question #2: What kind of organization is the best fit for you?

Do you learn better in formal training seminars? Would you prefer on-the-job training? Do you want to be part of a small team or large team? How about formal or informal mentoring program?

Question #3: How will you contribute as a member of the organization?

What leadership responsibilities are you looking forward to? What committees are you most excited about joining? What academic or technical expertise do you offer? Will you help create a pipeline for new professionals coming in?

Question #4: Is there anything else?

What specific insight do you have about this organization? Have you talked to a high ranking official or read a recent article about the organization? Where does the organization need help? How are your unique skills of benefit to them?

Connect You to the Organization and the Organization to You

With a good brainstorming session in the *Be Relevant* section, you can better explain the relationship and the potential give and take between you and your target opportunity. What parts excite you the most? What parts are you most concerned about?

Your Unique Value Proposition

Slowly but surely, you should be coming clearer about your unique value proposition and how it contributes to organization. You may have noticed that *Be Relevant* is the clincher. It's how you close the deal. It completes the logic that you are *tailor made* for your opportunity of choice. Spend quality time here. Be clear here. When you know your value to the organization and the organization's value to you...you are well on your way to being impressive.

Conclusion

Congratulations on investing quality time on your professional story. You should be very proud of what you've accomplished. Whether you've written a lot or a little, you now have a blueprint for your success. You're much more aware of the things you know and the things you don't know. This is probably the most time you have spent sincerely thinking about the experiences you've had, the experiences you'd like to have and drawing a line between them.

You may have found this to be a very draining process or a tad overwhelming. If so, allow yourself to take a break and you can come back to the exercise one piece at a time. If you're energized by this process, that's good because now I'm going to take a moment to recap the work you've done and guide your next steps.

Be Qualified, Be Different, Be Relevant...Your Blueprint

You now have a blueprint for your professional story. Take a look at the questions you've addressed so far. You've basically taken a tour of all the major questions involved in the MBA process. You've addressed your professional and academic strengths, weaknesses, challenges, successes, interests, talents, career goals and you've begun to connect all of these things to the MBA experience.

Whether it is a MBA school, interviewer, or current employer, your professional story is your blueprint to impress any evaluator.

Your Professional Story Gives You Direction

As a result of your work, you've also scripted your new professional development plan. Your new resume, cover letter, interviewing content, and professional path is all inside your professional story. You may not have all the answers now, but you do have all the questions. You know where to focus your energy.

The Process Will...and Should Continue

Also know that this process is not finished. As you give your professional story more time, your thoughts will...and should change. You will be introduced to a lot of new information and you will continually revise your thinking as your awareness improves.

The good news is: You have a structure to come back to if you ever get confused, overwhelmed, or tired. Revisit your structure for *Be Qualified, Be Different, Be Relevant* and remember those parts of your professional path that are most significant to you.

Your Next 4 Steps

Once you are satisfied with your level of brainstorming, then what do you do? Here are your next steps:

--First, develop your personal themes--

As you went through the brainstorming process, there were certain thoughts that “jumped off the page”. Odds are, there were “A-Ha!” moments where you noticed core elements of your personality. All of us have *consistent* academic, professional and personal themes. Be clear about your themes and let them guide the opportunities you pursue.

--Second, articulate your career goals.--

With your personal themes clear, think about the careers that match those personal themes best. This thinking may take you outside of the typical MBA careers and that is fine. I was also a non-traditional MBA. Still, others of you may want to focus more on more traditional MBA careers and that is also fine. In either case, think about how your personal themes allow you to excel in those careers.

--Third, choose your opportunity.--

Since you are clear about who you are and what you are trying to do, now you can decide *where to do it*. What MBA school will unlock your potential? Should you look at different schools? Which career path will enable your leadership? Do you need to make a career shift? Reflect, then choose the opportunity that will maximize your potential. Making a solid choice here can do wonderful things for your career.

--Fourth, create your documents--

What do you do when you have clarity on your personal themes, career goals and target opportunity? Create all the necessary documents to express your professional story. Your new resume, cover letter, MBA essays, etc are all moments away. If you find yourself feeling overwhelmed, you can always go back to your *Be Qualified, Be Different, Be Relevant* brainstorming process.

Congratulations Again...and Be Prepared for More Good Stuff

Congratulations on taking the time to invest in yourself. You have taken a very sincere step toward your ambitious goal of business leadership. Upon finishing this ebook you will probably find yourself with one of three primary emotions:

Emotion #1 – Um...I am little overwhelmed by all of this and I need some help walking through this process.

Emotion #2 – Okay...I got part of the work done. But now I feel like I have more questions than answers.

Emotion #3 – Whoa...I came up with a lot of good information. Now I need help prioritizing everything so I can make some decisions.

Together we will figure out the best method to provide support for anyone wishing to clarify and sharpen their professional story. Thank you for your interest in Even Better Consulting. I wish you luck in your MBA career.

Sincerely,

Alzay Calhoun

CEO and Founder

Even Better Consulting

<http://www.EvenBetterConsulting.com>