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Martz. INTRODUCTION You are inspired, hopeful, accomplished and eager. You are looking for personal and professional promotion via an MBA that will prepare you for leadership challenges in any business area. You are aware, however, that Harvard Business School receives about ten thousand applications annually, and you are unsure how to make your application stand out. We understand. We've been in your shoes. This book aims to demystify the admission process for applicants by providing a selective but robust selection of HBS essays that have successfully survived the admissions committee in the past. We strive to show you a variety of writing styles, essay answers, and applicant backgrounds that have been successful in the past, but there are no foolproof recipes, shortcuts cuts, or magic formulas. There are probably as many perfect application essays as there are applicants. The selected essays highlight ordinary applicants who have shown potential, vision, integrity and leadership. While the MBA search pool can often swarm with people with business backgrounds, we are positive that this book will also inspire non-traditional applicants because they will realize that there is no such thing as a standard applicant at Harvard Business School. We encourage you to keep in mind that your profession is not what makes the essay special. What makes you special is how you make the big (or small) decisions in life and how they have led to your growth. The only common strain in the successful essays is that applicants have clearly described why each experience is challenging, educational and transformative. We hope this book motivates you to write great essays by revealing who you really are. Be captivating. Be truthful. Be yourself. When you sit down at an empty computer screen, you may be tempted to believe that your experiences so far have been quite pedestrian. You're neither an Olympic gold medalist nor a Pulitzer Prize winner. We hope that the examples in this book will save you from this fear. Many of the essays contain simple anecdotes with routine settings that show the applicant's maturity, awareness, and potential. Use anecdotes from your life to offer an astute insight into your personality, humor, values, thoughtfulness and all other attributes that will contribute to your success in life and business. Even the most prestigious achievement will be flawed if you don't explain why it was important, what you learned from it, and how you've grown because of it. First, make a mental list of the most influential and meaningful events and experiences of your life and start mapping them out in your essays, but avoid repetition. While you may want to weave some over-arching themes into all your essays, use essays to show different aspects of your emotional, and moral fiber. For example, if choosing to prove your ability as a competent project manager in one essay, you may want to discuss a more personal issue as your relationship with your parents or partners in the next. Reach inside yourself for examples of strength, confidence and performance. Ultimately, your basic goal is to prove that you are greater than the sum of your individual application parts like your GMAT score, academic transcripts or professional laurels. While the parts of the application are significant, your essays will allow you to bring your charisma and individuality to life. So, avoid cut-and-paste jobs from resume. When you map the essays, you will find the word limit excruciating. Even if an obstacle, the word count can help you tell your story more selectively and concisely. After all, does your employer want you to be unnecessarily long-winded and out of focus? Probably not. The essays included in this book will convince you that you can be poignant in few words. We suggest that you create the first draft without a strict word limit. In the subsequent draft, ask yourself repeatedly: What is my core message? Does this sentence improve or clarify that message? By doing this, you will be able to distill the main anecdotes and interpretations from a pool of exaggerated descriptions and unnecessary details. The essays in this book will help you assess and celebrate your most important experiences in a robust way. In the analyses, we consider each author's motives, achievements and shortcomings and assess whether they communicate them convincingly and credibly through their choice of content, structure and style. We have chosen essays that deliver the author's message in a way that stood out from the packaging—your ultimate goal as an applicant. To do the same, concentrate on the candid analysis that follows each essay. The constructive suggestions, embedded in the analyses, allow you to avoid common pitfalls and turn a good set of application essays into a remarkable one. We think you will find the sixty-five essays that follow to be useful examples, but remember to treat them only as examples. Let your unique shine through your own essays and not by imitation of the essays in this book. We can't promise you that this book will get you to Harvard Business School. There are books, websites and admission consultants who promise such things, falsely. We're not going to do that. With this book, however, you will have the tools to get the job done and really own your business career, so good luck! Aastha Gurbax Publisher, Harbus News Corporation, Class 2008 On behalf of Harbus News Corporation I. DEFINE MOMENT Discuss a defining experience in your leadership development. How did this experience highlight your strengths and weaknesses as a leader? This question may seem quite daunting. By default, many first think about their most significant achievements. If you have led troops in battle or started a nonprofit, you may think you have this essay in the bag. It is the first trap in this subtle question. A defining experience is not necessarily one that results in performance in relation to peers. In fact, some of the strongest essays focus on monumental failures. Sometimes focusing on a failure actually allows you to answer the question more easily. Many people fail to reflect on their weaknesses and to delve deep enough into the lessons they have learned. I assure you, you don't have to be Superman to get into business school. Reveal a bit of your Clark Kent page. In doing so, you will not only address each component of the essay subject but you will also, and more importantly, become a more interesting applicant. There is no particular calculus behind the type of anecdote to pick. Just dig deep. Be introverted. Find an anecdote that describes what makes you unique as a person and leader. Find that story that tells you how you evolved into who you are today. Then tell that story with passion. Explain both your actions and thought processes. Leave the reader with a deep understanding of your motives, character and goals. If you decide to focus on an achievement, this essay can be a great opportunity for you to add color to something that doesn't drop out of your resume. Fixed while adding color, make sure you lighten it with humility. Arrogance is a trait that admissions staff will not appreciate. —Zachary Surak STACIE HOGYA A great leader strives to do more than just achieve his goal. Until I offered to lead a team of skeptical engineers and accountants to develop a marketing department, and to actively participate in business development, I didn't recognize how valuable the more could be. I started the project at a disadvantage; the owners had already spent three months and \$20,000 with an advertising agency, but developed no useful material. I wanted to inspire my team's confidence as I led them into the unknown world of marketing, so I took several strong, decisive steps. I fired the agency and hired a more contemporary group whose personality was a closer match to what my firm wanted to broadcast. I established a marketing committee and presented them with a vivid vision of our goals and my plan to achieve them. Although confident, these decisive actions had an undesirable consequence: I discouraged my team from giving their views. My actions showed that I had already made all the decisions, and that the team's proposal would not weigh any weight. I had to change my leadership to focus on facilitating collaboration rather than dictating an approach. As our consultants present information in a systematic and analytical way, communication with our clients, I will present this familiar approach in my communication with my team. Instead of presenting my strategy and looking for feedback, I coached the team through the process, and we developed strategies together. As a result, the consulting team took responsibility for the project and became more involved. We worked with the new agency to create an identity that highlighted our unique personality. Meetings of the Marketing Committee were well attended, and the members were active participants; the planned business development initiatives under the theme, Growing business is everyone's business. Most importantly, many of the consulting team members personally thanked me for making participation in business development so easy. Through this experience I matured as a leader and learned that leading is as much about achieving your goal as it is about keeping your team together. I learned the value of guiding my team to define a common vision where we could all be stakeholders rather than just presenting a strategy. I was most effective by leading strongly enough to instill confidence but not so strongly that I prevented interference. ANALYSIS Stacie experience can look very similar to your experience. Don't worry about it. Her essay is traditional in both her anecdote and style. Many applicants will discuss lessons learned when enusing changes from an advisory role. More still will begin his essay with a thesis statement, followed by an example, and concludes with more detailed reflection on the example. That said, Stacie still manages to stand out for several more

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