

# Confessions of an MBA Grad: Life in the Real World

Dorothy Binkley and John Vail

It's a feeling we all remember: crossing the stage on graduation day. You were a *somebody*, and a new chapter of your life was about to begin. Your degree in hand, you headed to the real world to make your mark. For us, time has moved at warp speed since our MBA convocation in 2010, and this felt like an appropriate "anniversary" to reflect on our first two years as young MBAs working in healthcare.

Once you've secured your first job, Corporate Orientation marks your initiation into the world of your new employer. It is like taking a warm bath before being thrown into the ocean – the messaging is inspirational, you feel rosy cheeked and bright eyed, you get your name badge and computer login – it's all painless. Then you realize that being employed in healthcare means living in an alphabet soup, where everything (and everyone) has an acronym. You get called to your first meeting on 3T with an RN, an RT and a PCM, and you realize you haven't a clue where the meeting room is, you can't remember anyone's name and you don't know who "Suzanne" is to get the briefing materials from. Thankfully, those three magic letters M-B-A after your name will carry you through, won't they?

At some point, your presence will be discovered, followed by the statement, "How could you understand? You're not a clinician." Even if you're only at the meeting to observe, some may think you're there with a certain agenda: A spy for administration perhaps? Or maybe even for the College of Physicians and Surgeons! But you soldier on – working toward deliverables that will help improve patient care and building relationships to help guide you on the journey.

In time you begin proving your worth, and opportunity knocks – you are asked to join a corporate committee. You salivate with excitement. This is your big break. You're ready to facilitate important discussion and help make the big decisions. And then you realize your role is in a support capacity – assisting with the agenda setting, taking notes at the meeting and being the resource. Not as high flying as expected, but you enjoy the perks of being a fly on the wall. In no time, you are watching new programs take shape, seeing strategy translated into action, listening in on lively discussion and posturing. The process in action!

Experiences such as the ones described above have taught us that the expectation that an MBA would immediately vault us to senior positions may have occasionally caused us to lose focus on the opportunity that lies within every assignment. Regardless of the perceived significance (or insignificance) of a task, there are always chances to learn, gain experience and move into roles with more responsibility. To the new graduates and young leaders out there, our advice is to get involved, work hard, listen and be dependable. In time, stretch opportunities *will* present themselves. Your biggest assets are a positive attitude and the energy and capacity to come in early *and* stay late. New leaders are not expected to have all the answers and need to leverage the knowledge of others to find solutions, so invest time building relationships across the organization. Time management, unfettered focus and a willingness to try new things and learn from experience enable you to search for answers when and where no one else might.

As we look to the next steps in our career, we realize now more than ever that there are opportunities available to be seized, and we have the energy and talent to contribute to system change that will benefit patient care. But remember, life is not only about the career path. Relish your youth. Take time for yourself, and savour the moment – you're only young once. **HQ**

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