

Learning by Degrees

This article is an anodyne for those who aren't in the IIM's, or (in case of the 'further sighted') the Stanfords and Harvards of the world (and that is a pretty big chunk!). In which case, this is a write up for the masses who aspire but fail to make it to the hallowed grounds of wisdom and reverence.

We live in a world of accreditation. The glory of 'Institutionalization of Education' is a facet you have been touched with. There's always that element of 'fame-name' that's been missing in your resume. You wonder, "Is my GPA of 9.1 of no use at all! I may not be from the IIM's, but studied hard nonetheless to score as much, maybe more." So are you losers, as you might think you are (because 'they' made you believe so). I guess not!

A Different Light

Harvard slashed its fees, so did Yale and many more (you all read it). You all saw it as the greatest act of philanthropy (just one fine morning, eh?). But what you didn't see is the precedent to this 'benevolent' act. The applications to many such top rung universities have slumped. People across the globe have begun to prefer education in their respective homelands to the heralded 'Mecca's' of education. Add to the list 'India' wherein previously a chance to garner foreign education was lapped up like caviar in honey, but now things are beginning to change. And if you have been quick enough to cut me by pointing out stringent visa regulations as the reason; well, think again.

Try to See, What I See

Why was Stanford, Stanford; or the Harvard, Harvard (Hope the discerning few noticed the use of past tense being deliberate). These institutions provided you knowledge like none other because they boasted of faculty like none other, an enviable library, and a sprawling campus to capture in a click and impress (or suppress) people you knew. But more than all this, it provided the getting together of the best brains, the confluence of ideas, the synergy of talent, the accrual of positivists. In short what these institutions provided were 'pockets' of knowledge, knowledge whose sole bearer and imparter were only they. And so they charged a premium for this lopsidedness of information. Anyone who yearned (and could pay) for such plum erudition had to be there and nowhere else.

The present has made all of this a past. And the future shall force more such acts of 'kindness' out of these monuments of knowledge. How? Compare yourself, wherever you are right now with the academia of the best B-school you have in mind. How much time would it take you to prepare a presentation on 'Peripheral Marketing' or 'Counter Intuitive Branding' or 'Divergent Marketing Strategy' or any god forsaken topic under the sky! Just about the same time as any scholar in your 'Dream School' anywhere on the expanse of earth. You have not fifty (as in case of Harvard) but fifty thousand professors with their knowledge spilled out there on the internet. And the confluence of great minds and the synergy of ideas takes on a much greater dimension. There is no library as expanded and as frequently updated and reformed as the web. Information is no longer the 'keep' of these diwans of learning. It's yours and it's for free. The little (maybe big) problem is to sieve out the relevant from the information clutter that exists. But then, that's no bargain when you weigh the thousands of dollars you would spend otherwise. All in all, you are no less equipped!

The Alternative

“Fine, I get the knowledge. It’s all around me. Not just in the US. Why the heck doesn’t it still sound safe? What about the accreditation then? How do I make known that I know so much, if it isn’t an embossed degree from some dandy B-school?”

I don’t blame you, if you think so. Because you’ve been made to. It’s been a ‘Snake and Ladder’ education pattern for you all along (for me too). Unless you have ‘managed to’ (pun intended) clear your higher secondary, you are still a matriculate. You aren’t a graduate until you’ve cleared the entrance examination and subsequently each one of the subjects (which again, aint absolutely your choice but some ‘rabadab’ instead) and so on and so forth you’ve to climb the rung one by one and if some ‘snake subject’ gets to you, then you are back again to the previous rung. No one really cares for what knowledge you gathered “between the rungs”. It’s always these milestones of degrees that’ve daunted you and have been your assessment parameters. So how is it different now?

You know what knowledge is of relevance, you know where to get it. So go ahead, get it! And then lots of great universities are beginning to offer online education and degrees (Many more will. They don’t have a choice). Log onto one of these universities and give your exam online. Get the venerable degree in your hand and then show it off like some self professed management pundit who got his, amid the high stonewalls and mowed campus thousands of kilometers away spending thousands of dollars more.

One last reference to the unsung heroes of middleclass management colleges. If you still think you are middleclass then its not something you can help, because you were born with it! As for the rest, polish your resumes by doing what you are worth (assuming it wasn’t a fudged 9.1 GPA that you moaned). A great idea isn’t the blue blood of the thorough bred. So isn’t today’s media. Create ideas, workable ideas, helpful ideas and make it known. Post it. Propagate it. The media will do it for you. I challenge you to take part in every possible event that challenges you.

Final say

Why do so many people tend to feel so virtuous in debasing themselves? Why is it that they feel rosy to herald someone famous or feel honoured to quote some celebrity? Why do they feel anxious to celebrate their stuntedness and feel a sense of humility in doing so. You must have heard “ Of course its correct! I met this guy from MIT who said....” (and a group of semi sedated people nod in unison).

Grasp all that is requisite. Evaluate yourself. Compete. Make your presence felt (and there are many avenues to do that today). Be networked. Be a part of online or print forums, polls, debates, and blogs. Think a lot. Think fresh. Vocate.

Why do I believe in this school of thought? I know some people who did just this. Came from an average B-school and defeated the likes of ‘ The’ B-schools of India in a big B-school game event in yet another revered B-school. So can you. You have heard many advices and I know it can be confusing. Trust your instinct. Instinct never lets you give up. It goads you to search for alternatives. What I offer here could be one worth considering.

Want to know if you are going in the right direction? Type your name in Google and see what (and how much) crops up. If it’s something that makes you pleased, well it’s just the start.

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