

MBA = Useless??

Here's my two cents on the MBA editorial ("Management by mythology," Nov. 19). If I am not mistaken, the MBA degree was developed in response to desires of the business community. The MBA was designed to assist or prepare those with a technical bachelor's degree to move up into department-head or senior-management positions within their organizations. An MBA program consists of one or two core courses in basic business management, accounting, marketing, human resources, sales, information technology, and finance, along with other business-related electives. It exposes students to the general terminology and basic functions of different departments within a normal business, thus enhancing the technical person's ability to understand and communicate with counterparts.

The MBA was designed to im-

MBAs get no respect from engineers

It seems bench-level engineers don't put much faith in anyone with an MBA after their name. MBAs say engineers are just jealous and envious. The battle between workers and management continues.

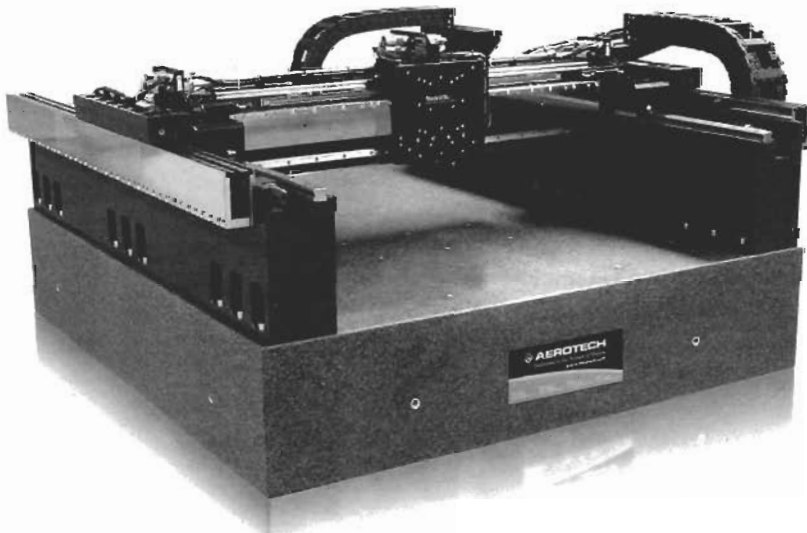


prove a technically educated person's ability to lead other technical people, and not to destroy companies. It appears that over a period of time the MBA has become synonymous with the word "leadership" which may be the root cause for the opinion your editorial and other readers denounced. Corporate America is looking for leaders, and regardless of whether applicants are qualified or whether it seems fair, at the present time, an MBA seems to signify leadership.

The editorial and one or two respondents touched on shareholder value. As I recall, in business, it is the prime objective of all employees to increase shareholder wealth. If shareholders are happy, then it is logical to assume customers are happy.

Robert LaMarsh, MBA

I think you'll find that a lot of engineers agree with your premise that business managers and MBAs are sometimes worse than useless.

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RS# 111

In the 80s I worked for Autodesk where the highest position or title you could attain was engineer. Needless to say, the group who started the company were almost all engineers. The founder of the company, John Walker, sometimes said that the biggest mistake he made was taking the company public and, thus, opening it up to management by people who didn't know and refused to learn anything about CAD.

You won't make many friends of managers with those rebellious words, but, I suspect, you'll have the admiration of many engineers, like myself.

Gareth Scott

While I share Mr. Teschler's assessment of consultants, I must take exception to his discouraging engineers from earning a "three-year night-school MBA." "I are one" and have found the engineer/MBA de-

gree combination to be extremely useful over the past 30 years in managing manufacturing companies.

There were three specific things the MBA program taught me.

1. I had always thought engineering was all there was to business. The MBA program opened my eyes to the fact that engineering was a vital, but small part of business.

2. I picked up some business tools to add to my technical toolbox. So today there isn't much that goes on in business for which I don't have at least a reasonable level of competence.

3. And finally, the degree demonstrated to upper management I was willing to do more than say, "I'd like to get into management, someday," a line I heard from many recruits and potential employees we interviewed. Try going to night school for three or four years if you want to make a statement. And in my case, I was fortunate to receive a major

promotion a week after graduation, suggesting that luck is where preparation meets opportunity.

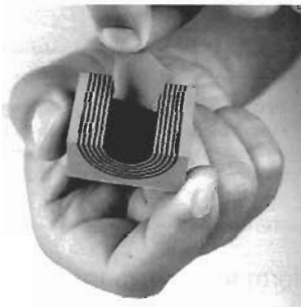
Since then, I have enjoyed combining the tools of both business and technology to solve customer problems and grow our business. And I'll be the first to admit that I have encountered quite a few duds with MBA degrees who would be hard pressed to spell it correctly. I am of the strong conviction that there is no better educational preparation for managing a manufacturing company than earning an engineering degree, followed by a few years on the job, and then getting an MBA.

Steven K. Smith

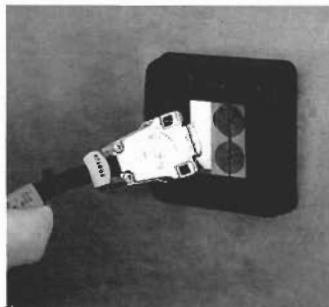
I've been saying most of the same things said in the editorial for years regarding MBA's. In fact, many of the issues you raise were responsible for so many of our society's problems. Managements make choices

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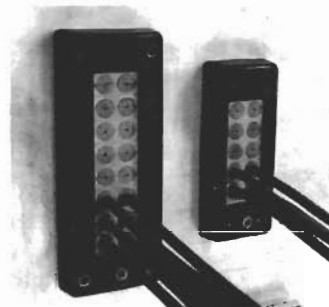
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that often seem like a roll call of bad decisions made in cavalier fashion with basically no accountability and end up getting paid handsomely for failure. I have said for years that any MBA degree is basically worthless without a working background in a field where the MBA skills can be applied. In fact, MBA programs should not even be able to accept students unless they have served a certain amount of time in industry and are recommended, just as with an apprenticeship, fellowship, or programs of this nature.

Remember this: We have the only government in the world where high-level leaders are salesmen or lawyers. This is and has been our problem and has only gotten worse. The house of cards is crumbling and they all are exposed. But they still argue defiantly in favor of their past behaviors.

Mike Korkowski

My experience is that MBA grads are frequently wrong, but seldom in doubt.

Rick Graham

Or as we use to say of the Navy's admirals: Always in command, never in control.

Maybe if our highly paid executives would actually talk to their customers and their own employees, they wouldn't need MBAs and consultants to tell them what to do.

Jeanne Schweder

I am disappointed with your take on MBAs. Sounds like someone is bitter about not going to business school. But more technical people should understand business. An MBA program is a good way to do that. I advise engineers to go ahead and get your MBA — it's never too late to better yourself.

Kevin A. Alexeff

Sorry to burst your bubble Mr. Alexeff, but I do indeed have an MBA (from Cleveland State Univ.). As I alluded to in my editorial, I found the accounting and economics classes to be the most valuable. As Mathew Stewart implied in his book, the classes on strategy were essentially worthless, filled with unfalsifiable assertions and devoid of anything that could be used to plan or predict winning strategies in the marketplace.

I would also have to say that of the classmates with whom I've kept in contact, those who have advanced in their career used their MBA degree mainly as a "ticket punch." In other words, the MBA was something they had to have on their resume to get to the next level. I still feel that if knowledge, rather than credentials, was the point of the MBA experience, most people would get farther ahead by just picking up a few key business courses rather than going for the full-meal-deal degree. — Leland Teschler



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