

Ryan Patterson's

The 7 Secrets to Creating Harvard Business School Applications that Get You In !

A Free eCourse

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Lesson #4

"How to Use Your Weaknesses to Improve Your Chances of Getting Into Harvard"

Harvard Business School applicants often ask me how should they address their weaknesses.

They wonder what they should do with their **failures, low GPA or GMAT scores** and other weak points.

Should they mention them? Should they be ignored?

Before we dive into the specifics, let me make two general statements you may want to keep in mind.

- 1) **Nobody is perfect.**
- 2) **If you come across is perfect, nobody will believe you.**

As a general rule, you'll come across as more believable if you have some flaws. If you have the courage to address them in an open manner, the reader will be more likely to believe you when you talk about your strengths.

Okay, now lets talk about specifics.

Let's say you have some glaring weakness in your application – a long period of unemployment, you were fired from an employer after only 3 months, you have a lousy GPA, or you scored poorly on the GMAT.

What should you do?

As I mentioned before, **if the weakness is obvious, you MUST address it**. If you're hoping the reader won't notice the weakness on your application, you're dreaming. Address the problem head on.

So the next question, is...

HOW should you address such a weakness?

To be honest, it's a very fine balance.

You need to discuss the weakness enough to explain away the weakness... or at least show how it is not as bad as it sounds.

If you can show how you've overcome the weakness – that's even better.

Similarly, you do NOT want to DWELL on the weakness.

If you go on and on about the weakness, you'll come across as insecure and defensive... and the reader will assume the weakness is as bad as they feared if not worse.

Here's one quick example of how to do it right.

Lets say you were unemployed for 6 months due to a family crisis.

In one of your essays, you can "mention" that one of the toughest decisions you made in your career was to forgo a promotion at employer X to take care of your family for 6 months (which happens to be exactly how long your resume shows you being unemployed).

Notice how you aren't EMPHASIZING the weakness, but you are explaining it in the course of communicating something else. Essentially you're sneaking the information in somewhat casually. This method works really well.

Now that you understand how to handle a weakness, let me make the following argument:

Your weaknesses are (almost) completely irrelevant to Harvard Business School

Now I've worded this last statement fairly strongly... more to get your attention than anything else. The reality is I think that many applicants worry way more than they need to about their weaknesses.

I'll explain why in a moment.

First let me ask you a question:

Is an applicant that has a few weaknesses a weak applicant?

Think about this for a moment.

Is an applicant that has a few weaknesses a weak applicant?

I'll bet many of you instinctively responded with "yes".
Let me give you a different perspective entirely.

A good applicant is someone who lacks weakness

BUT....

A great applicant is someone who has a great strength.

It is very possible to be a "great" applicant without being a "good" one.

The lack of a weakness does not get you into Harvard Business School. The presence of a strength gets you in.

I'm living proof of that.

When I applied to Harvard Business School, I had a number of weaknesses that I was worried about. I did not go to a top tier college (Idaho State). I had a bad GPA one year... a 2.9. My first job was as a UPS package handler. Later in my career I got passed over for a promotion.

I don't think that my profile screamed Harvard Business School material.

Like many other applicants, I obsessed over my weaknesses.

How could I possibly get into Harvard with a poor GPA from a little known college? Why would they ever take me? How could a UPS package handler really get into Harvard Business School?

BUT, I made one mental shift during my application process that **made all the difference in the world.**

**I stopped worrying so much about my weaknesses and ...
started worrying a lot more about my STRENGTHS.**

Here's what I did...

I explained away the 2.9 GPA in 1 sentence... I was a slacker that year. I then shifted the focus to a strength... how I discovered my passion for school the following year (and my grades the following year were much better).

I also talked about my UPS experience with pride... and didn't apologize for it. I discussed how I moved packages around in 110 degree heat with back breaking work... but later ended up managing a crew of 50 really disgruntled package handlers.

I showed how this group had a ton of morale and teamwork problems before I led them. I demonstrated how these problems slowly disappeared within a few months of my taking over.

In the end, Harvard accepted me.

In hindsight, I realized it was my strengths that got me in... and not the lack of any weakness (after all I have plenty of those).

This is not to say well rounded people don't get into Harvard, they certainly do... especially if they excel in one or two areas.

In my view, what makes Harvard different from many other schools is the **EXTENT to which they're willing to overlook a weakness** in order to admit someone with a strength, no matter how great that weakness is.

In the next lesson I will show you why Harvard often rejects applicants that would make great MBA students. You will learn why this happens, Harvard's rationale behind this trend, and how you can use this to your advantage whether you're a great student or not.

Stay tuned for the next lesson. You'll receive it in your email in box in the next few days.

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