

## Ryan Patterson's

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

A Free eCourse

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### Lesson #6

## "A Recent Shift in Harvard's Application Criteria ... and What it Means for You"

In the last lesson, we discussed why the Harvard admission board often rejects applicants that would make great MBA students.

In this lesson, we will discuss a **recent shift in admissions criteria** at the Harvard Business School and the implications this has for you. Harvard is now actively looking (more closely than ever) to eliminate applicants that lack integrity.

In the application "game", it doesn't matter if you do or do not have integrity. What matters is what you can demonstrate to the reader of your application.

So if you're tempted to gloss over this lesson... by saying to yourself, "Oh, I've got the integrity issue covered... no big deal", you would be making a mistake.

Let me explain the cause for the recent shift and why the shift is so incredibly revealing about how Harvard Business School operates.

I promise you this will open your eyes by giving you a behind the scenes look at Harvard Business School... the machine.

I'll start by sharing a personal story.

During my very first year at Harvard Business School, we had the pleasure of having a lot of **high profile visitors** come to campus. They came to campus and actually visited my section. One of them was the CEO of Enron and another one the CFO of Tyco.

It's not everyday that 80 Harvard students get the chance to ask questions of people who control billion dollar enterprises. Both high profile executives had come to Harvard to **teach** the next generation of business leaders about the key to successfully running a large enterprise.

Several months later, these two companies were tarnished with tremendous accusations of accounting irregularities, money laundering, tax evasion and other ethical and legal scandals.

Both men I mentioned earlier have been accused of playing major roles in these unethical and maybe even criminal activities.

Now, you are probably wondering what that has to do with yourself, a Harvard Business School applicant?

After all, you are reading this very lesson to learn how to write successful applications, and not to learn about the Enron and Tyco scandals, right?

The answer is... everything.

And I'm not joking.

**You see these two individuals were Harvard Business School graduates.**

**Exactly... ouch!**

Both were students with great potential. Both of them graduated from Harvard and become top leaders in today's economy.

One of them became the **CEO of Enron**.

The other became the **CFO of Tyco**.

Both were guest speakers in the Harvard classroom and were **touted as executives we should all emulate after we graduate**.

Let me talk about why this is important and more importantly what it reveals about how Harvard Business School does things and the implications it has for future applicants.

To be it modestly, **Harvard Business School was quite embarrassed** about the behavior of some of these graduates.

The connection between scandals such as these and Harvard Business School have had a large negative impact on the reputation and status of the school and caused quite some uproar in the boards.

Here's why.

Whenever there's an article about Jeff Skilling, former CEO of Enron. They inevitable mention Harvard Business School.

Here are a few examples:

"Jeffrey Skilling, the former Enron Corp. chief executive who resigned less than four months before the company shattered in scandal, surrendered Thursday to face expected criminal charges related to the company's collapse... Skilling...earned an MBA from Harvard Business School"

### **CBS News, February 19, 2004**

#### **Jeff Skilling HBS Section-Mate Blames Harvard Business School for Enron Collapse**

"On January 10, 2002, John LeBoutillier (MBA '79, Section A) wrote an article in the online newspaper NewsMax.com identifying the historical absence of ethics from the required curricula of HBS and other business schools as the root cause of the "gross ethical blind spots" responsible for Enron's collapse. LeBoutillier cites the alleged comments of a sectionmate during a Production and Operation Management class in the fall of 1978.

The case discussion involved the decision facing a company selling harmful-potentially fatal-products, LeBoutillier's sectionmate recommended that the company should continue to manufacture, adding "it's the government's job to step in if a product is dangerous." LeBoutillier attributes the comment to **Jeffrey Skilling (MBA '79, Section A)**. In February 2001, Skilling became Enron's President and CEO, before resigning in August 2001."

### **Harbus, January 22, 2002**

Harvard knew that had a problem with at best being associated with unethical leaders and at worst being associated with downright criminals... and they are pretty determined to fix it.

They have been doing everything... and then I literally mean EVERYTHING they can to ensure that there is not another graduate that is ever involved in this type of behavior.

This embarrassment and damaged reputation are two drivers of why there is an **increasingly big push on evaluating honesty and integrity** in the Harvard Business School application process. This is a new factor playing an increasingly important role in the selection of students.

While Harvard had always stated they look for applicants with high integrity, now they are requiring that you prove it. If you've followed the changes in the Harvard Business School application over the years, you'll see subtly but **noticeable shifts** in essay and recommendation questions that reflect this change.

In addition, I understand that Harvard is expending more effort to verify grades, transcripts and TOEFL scores (English proficiency test scores).

Think about it.

**If someone is willing to lie about their resume or background just to get into Harvard Business School, what's to prevent them from fabricating \$1 billion in revenue 15 years later as a Harvard alum?**

Like I've said before, Harvard Business School doesn't admit students. It admits future alumni.

I'll say it again... this is THE key to understanding Harvard Business School and what it does what it does.

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Harvard Business School doesn't admit students. It admits future alumni.</b></p>
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So how should you communicate your integrity?

This is a difficult question to answer specifically. After all the application changes from year to year and the examples one can use to demonstrate integrity range from childhood experiences to recent career experiences.

Here are two suggestions and a tip on what mindset you should adopt when tackling this issue.

If Harvard continues to ask you or your recommenders specifically about your integrity, be sure to **address the issue head on**. Make sure you and your recommenders are ready with specific examples.

If Harvard at some point doesn't ask the question explicitly, you should know that they are still evaluating you in this area. If you can use an "integrity" example in one of your other essays, consider doing it.

Finally, **keep in mind the following mindset** when tackling this issue and evaluating your application for "integrity".

Imagine it is 15 years from now... you're running a division of a major corporation. It's December 31<sup>st</sup> and you're about to finalize your revenue numbers for the year. You discover magically a way to boost the revenue numbers artificially.

Doing so would prevent hundreds of employees from losing their jobs (including your own). Your own bonus would increase by \$1M instantly. And best of all, you **KNOW** it would be impossible for you to get caught.

(I did say imagine didn't I?)

In other words, you are **staring the ultimate temptation in the face....** Huge benefit for your employees, tremendous benefit for yourself, no chance of getting caught...

And yet you turn down the opportunity.

You know that layoffs will ensure the following month and that in all likelihood you will be fired. Yet, **you decide it's the right thing to do...** and you report the numbers as they are.

**Now... ask yourself two questions:**

- 1) What kind of person passes up the ultimate temptation?**
- 2) When you read your own application in its entirety (essays, likely comments by recommenders) does it portray "that person"?**

**THAT's** your goal.

If you happened to have had experiences where you've been faced with temptation, but decided to do the right thing anyway... use it.

If it happened to be a childhood experience... definitely use it... especially if you can also cite a more recent experience too. This approach shows a long-term trend (which is always good) of lasting integrity.

In the next lesson, we will discuss the secret to how seemingly average applicants (such as myself) can get into Harvard Business School when strong applicants get rejected.

Whether you think your profile seems "average" or "stellar", you will not want to miss out on this critical lesson as there are key insights for applicants in either group.

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