Ask a Mentor

Kyle Allen (BBA Marketing & Advertising, 2014) asks EOC Mentor Hide Harashima about getting an MBA versus a job, smartphone apps, and how the advancement of technology is changing the job market.

Kyle: With my graduation soon approaching I’m facing a very difficult decision: should I venture out into the real world and look for a fulltime job, or continue my education and pursue an MBA. Based on your experience what would you recommend?

Hide: There are many articles and blogs written about the topic of getting an MBA versus getting a job. So I won’t go into the practical pros and cons of getting an MBA degree. My story is a personal decision, so whether or not to pursue an MBA degree depends on your situation. This is a question I’ve asked myself many times. I was a medical student who decided that I had a real passion for using data and technology to create a positive impact for others. Most MBA graduates told me they did not have regrets going to B-school, but I decided that I had to learn for myself if being in business would hold my interest for the rest of my career before committing two years, tuition payments, and opportunity cost of not being in the work force.

I decided to join a small tech company to gain real world experience. I learned programming and created a product. After launching the product, I had to learn how to market and sell it by targeting the right people. I loved building something that provided value for other businesses. I also found that I needed to continue learning aspects of business where I had no experience. While some will say that you can launch a company while getting an MBA, I can’t imagine giving 110% to your business while studying for classes. I believe the two years at the startup businesses gave me a much better focus on my career while getting real practical experience.

I knew that I wanted to continue building technology products but I had to learn how to create financial arguments that legitimized my decisions as an entrepreneur. I decided to continue my focus on technology management with an executive education in management for technology professionals at Columbia University (the program became a Master of Science degree the following year). This was the perfect program for me to learn about business processes, value chain analysis, and creating and managing P&L and cash flow statements while in the context of managing and creating technology. The education rounded out my skills as a business person.

If you get an MBA degree, you will have a better understanding of business models and processes, finance concepts, and accounting. On the other hand, getting real work experience will give you more context around your interests. Either way, after two years, with motivation and curiosity, you’ll come out with a better self-awareness and be on the right trajectory for your career. It’s true that starting or running your own company is a decision you make with your heart. Going to business school is a practical decision you make with your head.

Kyle: With smartphones dominating the cell phone market right now, tons of companies are developing and releasing applications for them. Do you think that a smartphone application can be a useful tool for every company, some companies, or is this just a trend that may soon pass?

Hide: According to a March 2013 study published by Econsultancy on mobile strategy, mobile usage is outpacing any historical adoption trend and companies are combing strategy with analytics and supporting mobile programs with technology resources to position them for success. However, most companies have responded to the growth in mobile with ad hoc development instead of a considered strategy. In most cases, this does not seem to be a symptom of “failing fast” and experimentation, but of a rush to “go live.” Companies are building out longer term planning as 45% say that their existing mobile strategy extends beyond 2013, according to the study. This tells us that a mobile development is not a trend that will pass but an important business strategy for the longer term.

One of the drivers for companies rushing to go live is the use of smartphones in the consumer world. A February 2013 Nielsan study examined mobile consumer behavior around the world (http://www.nielsen.com/us/en/newswire/2013/how-the-mobile-consumer-connects-around-the-globe.html). While the growth in the smartphone industry is happening globally, there are distinct differences in usage based on where the user is from. For instance, in the U.S. and South Korea, smartphone owners now make up the majority of mobile consumers. Is this a trend? I’d say smartphone use is becoming the norm.
Kyle: Digital downloads are rapidly gaining popularity in just about every form of entertainment and media, causing physical form to go the way of the dinosaur. Do you think there is a way that we can save these "physical forms", and are they worth saving in the first place?

Hide: There is certainly no doubt that consumer products that can be digitized have done so in the past decade - books, music, film, magazines, and newspapers. Apple, Google, and Amazon have brought us marketplaces that sell these things, but in a digital format. And we all hear that print is dead, but people are reading, writing, and sharing more than ever. The reality for the publishing industry is that they must adapt and complement online media and many have with e-readers, pay walls, and video apps. Content producers are a valuable part of our lives and will continue to be, and the ones that are adapting to a digital world will thrive.

Apple has been around for 37 years; Google and Amazon are still in their teens, at 14 and 19 years, so we’ll find out if they will evolve or if they just happened to be riding the digital wave. Dinosaurs couldn’t evolve quick enough to survive. I’m no gambler, but I would place a bet that they’ll figure out how to evolve quick enough to adapt to consumers in the future.

Kyle: Throughout your career how has the advancement of technology affected your position? How do you see this advancement effecting jobs in the future? And are these positive or negative changes?

Hide: The understanding that technology will always evolve has been a big factor in the way I think about the future of business. This fact will give you context on how technology has been applied to drive business forward in the past and how new technology can be applied to innovate going forward. Being able to determine which technology to apply in various situations is more valuable than companies realize. I often will ask my team if the tech can be tied to a business value or something that’s shiny and new. Be curious and learn new technology. When you’re a lifelong student, change is always a positive.

Hide Harashima is a senior level technology executive inspired to build purposeful technology products that engage customers and revolutionize how they work.

With a proven track record of taking products from vision to delivery, and value creation through revenue growth, Hide is a committed product owner who takes end-to-end responsibility through leadership and collaboration. The mission is the delivery of quality-driven design and development solutions.

Accomplishments include the conceptualization, design, build and launch of several technology products, including a data analytics software-as-a-service startup, an industry first clinical web portal, and clinical trial software that helped reduce the data collection efforts for pharmaceutical companies.

Hide’s leadership is driven by his ability to create high-performing, cross-functional teams through an environment of respect and collaboration that fosters innovation and a culture of continuous improvement. Hide has successfully launched new solutions with reduced overhead by the skillful integration of people, systems, and processes. The key driver for Hide is his relentless focus on customer service to ensure products and services developed are best practices that exceed customer expectations.

Hide is currently the CTO at engageSimply, a technology startup creating an opt-in social community network where consumers have a choice and brands have a relevant voice. Hide was CTO/Founder of nLytics, a software analytics company, CTO of The JAR Group, Head of Technology at Premier Research Group, SCP Communications and EarlyBird Capital.

Kyle Allen (BBA Marketing & Advertising, 2014) is 21 years old and currently resides in Staten Island. He is in his third year at Baruch College, majoring in marketing and advertising and minoring in graphic design. Besides attending Baruch, Kyle works at ToysRUs and enjoys amateur blogging, comics, video games, and comedies. As far as the future, Kyle is open to various experiences, but really loves the idea of starting and running his own company, and not just to turn a profit, but to do some good in this world.

If you have any questions you would like to ask an Executives on Campus (EOC) Mentor, please submit 3-5 questions to executivesoncampus@baruch.cuny.edu with the subject “Ask a Mentor”.

For more information about Ask a Mentor, email Karolina Novak-Choinska at karolina.novak-choinska@baruch.cuny.edu