

MY FIRST IMPRESSION AT IIMA

Submitted by Mr RavishankarIyer (PGP 2005). He is a Story Coach who enables leaders tell better work stories. After completing his CA, he did his PGDM from IIMA and joined a management consulting practice at Feedback Ventures. Later, he had stints in the skill-development space and co-founded a startup which built mobile audio guides for historical monuments. In 2017, building on all his experiences, Ravi founded 'Story Rules' - to train and coach people in better storytelling at work. Ravi lives in Pune with his wife, father and a story-loving 7-year old. Follow his website at www.storyrules.in

I started my career as a Chartered Accountant, and before IIMA, my impression of an MBA was a person who was articulate, could use the right management jargon and knew cool concepts such as the 4Ps of Marketing or the 7S model of Strategy. (In fact among CAs at that time, there was this oft-repeated belief: an MBA is a CA with better communication skills). (Which was cute but delusional).

On reaching IIMA (this is sometime in June 2003), our first session was a demo class on Marketing. We had to come prepared reading a small case. We were about 75 of us in the famous semi-circular classroom with all seats facing the professor in the middle, nervous yet excited. The Professor doing the honours was a rotund, genial-looking guy called Abraham Koshy.

My recollections of the class - especially the specific concepts discussed - are hazy. But I remember one crucial lesson. Prof. Koshy started the proceedings with a question pertaining to the case. Some bravehearts leapt into the ring with their points of view. They were articulate, used the right management jargon, and shared some cool concepts. I was quite impressed. This is why these guys belong at IIMA, I thought. Prof. Koshy *massacred* them.

He would strip down any concept to its bare bones, ask fundamental questions and leave the "word-warriors" scurrying for cover. No one could spout 'gyaan' on a topic without a basic understanding of the same.

In fact, a lot of people think 'storytelling' means enhancing or augmenting your understanding with fancy words and visuals to make it seem more strong and impressive. That is not the case! Good storytelling is written to express, not impress. The idea is for the audience to understand the answer with the least amount of time and effort. In doing so, complicated, jargon-filled language doesn't help.

Which is why, if you examine the writing of some of the world's most successful leaders - Jeff Bezos, Warren Buffett or Satya Nadella - they write clearly and simply, without depending on needless management jargon.

And so, that day at IIMA, we learnt two lessons. One, be careful, very, very careful before opening your mouth in front of a good prof.

Second (more importantly) - an MBA isn't a guy who spews jargon and fancy concepts. What is critical is a foundational understanding of business and the ability to express that in simple words.

Did we achieve that in those 2 years? Probably not. But at least we understood its importance.

And for that I'll always remember that brutal session by Prof Abraham Koshy.



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