

## Book Review

### MBA at 16

Author: **Subroto Bagchi**

Publisher: Penguin Books India

MBA at 16 by Subroto Bagchi is a must read not only for teenagers whom it is targeted at, but also the various stakeholders in making a teenager decide what he really wants to do in life. The primary focus of the author is to open the young minds to the world of business. Mr Bagchi is of the opinion that parents should not wait till the child enrolls in B-School to open his mind to the world of business. Catch 'em young and show 'em how business impacts their everyday lives and then watch how they want to explore the world of business. In his own words, Mr. Bagchi has worked with thirty-one amazingly bright young students from National Public School and the International School Bangalore who have greatly impacted how the book has been written. In a program titled 'Business with Bagchi,' he has worked with them over several weekends to discuss the world of business.

Mr. Bagchi engaged young-adults, all of age 16, in intense classroom and off-classroom interactions. He has probed the young-adults on what exactly they want to know of the world of business. He goes on to add that the content of the book was, indeed, determined by them. So, what we end up with is a book where all these young men and women appear as characters, though the situations, contexts, and conversations are fictitious.

The book unfolds with the Mr. Bagchi's own anecdote of how his educated middleclass family frowned upon the idea when his brother said, "When I grow up, I want to be Somalingam." Somalingam was a grocer in the small town where Mr. Bagchi grew up. Decades later, his brother became an army officer, whereas Mr. Bagchi went on to become what we all know him for today. It is through the experience of this small-town educated, middleclass Indian perception of business that he feels many families do not understand how

business works and as a result, many young-adults are as unfamiliar with the world of business as the Bagchi household was in the 1950s.

There are various situations thrown in, like the time when Manisha Krishnan, one of the interns of 'Business with Bagchi,' gets out of the bed, bleary eyed who couldn't care less about the toothbrush and the toothpaste she is about to use and Mr. Bagchi then goes on to educate you on her Oral-B toothbrush; its Californian designer, Dr. Robert Hutson; and its voyage to the moon aboard the Apollo 11. The book is replete with such situations where the characters, mostly the interns are unaware of the kind of businesses involved in making their breakfast cereal, Kelloggs, to the Chinese Pear they are biting into; their ignorance about the home loan their parents raise to purchase the house to the several businesses that converge to create the house; their inability to see their school as a business to their ignorance about the businesses behind their computer, router and Internet service provider that helps them access their Facebook account.

The young interns are taken on a road trip to Chickmagalur where they are hosted by Café Coffee Day and thus begins the students' quest about the men behind the businesses. The likes of Coffee Baron V. G. Siddhartha, Biocon's Kiran Mazumdar Shaw, Steve Jobs, Bill Gates, the legendary Verghese Kurien, Social entrepreneur Harish Hande, Grameen Bank's Mohammad Yunus, Capt. Gopinath of Deccan Aviation has become topics of presentation by the students to the Chairman of the Institution they study in. The 4 chapters devoted to entrepreneurs and their unique qualities narrate fascinating stories about the journey of each of these eminent personalities. The reader is also educated about the lesser known Narayan Manepally, owner of India's leading

microbrewery Dr. Devi Shetty of Narayana Hrudayalaya, Anita Shah of garden accessories company called Hybiscus, Lalana Zaveri of print-and-bind stores chain named Printo and their stories of grit and determination.

The chapter on Angel Investors and Venture Capitalists makes a compelling read if not through narration of two weird characters he introduces namely, Fly High, the golden hawk; and Polar, the bear. He narrates great, real-life stories through these two dull, fictitious characters out of the blue. The author tries to force humor in this part with situations where there isn't any and one gets tired of reading the names of fly high the golden hawk, polar the bear and over and over again. Imagine this, just when one is immersed in the intriguing story of Google and how its founders Sergey Brin and Larry Page met Ram Shriram, how he wrote them a cheque for 5,00,000 dollars and how the duo did not even have a bank account to deposit the cheque, your intrigue is cut short by intermittent interruption of the fictitious narrators, Fly High and Polar. This chapter could have been better handled is saying the least.

Likewise, the chapter titled, Mother Goddess and the Enterprise is a totally misleading title for what it entails. Mr. Bagchi goes overboard describing the Great Bengali Matriarch and the conversations in Bengali in that chapter are avoidable; however, Production, Inventory, B2B, Finance, Corporate Governance are discussed in a very simple language, which is great. Further, he puts in hilarious situations where a lecture on the HR functions in an IIMB class is eavesdropped by an intern along with a person unknown to him only to find out that it actually is Professor Pankaj Chandra, The Director of IIMB himself. Having said that, he throws you a hard bone to bite when he on the one hand describes a teenage daughter giving her dad gyan on Core competence, Vertical Integration, C.K. Prahalad, Gary Hamel, Michael Dell and on the other coming across as an irritating teenager when asked to write on her Interests in Life.

The chapter on The Case of the Missing Homework is

an informative discourse on Supply Chain Management and is narrated rather funnily through a Golden Retriever, by name Cyber. And before you are flummoxed, he describes how Cyber chews up an entire book, except for the cover which reads Course work on Supply Chain Management and the entire thing makes for a very humorous read.

Marketing, Product positioning, Brand, TQM, 7 Quality Principles are all beautifully covered in the narration. There is an entire chapter devoted to Innovation and how India's time has come to innovate. The book very aptly concludes with the students debating, Is Business good for the World?

The book is a must read for all teachers at B-schools, because in a few years down the line the interns of Business with Bagechi kind and the readers of such educative and informative books will soon be looking up to you for information, concepts and stories that are far more engaging and challenging than what their alma-mater, MBA at 16 has given them. For a young-adult reader of MBA at 16, it is sure a benchmark for management-related reading.

**Reviewed by :  
Divya Rai**

She is an Assistant Professor at PES Institute of Technology, Bangalore. She can be reached at [divya.r@pes.edu](mailto:divya.r@pes.edu)