



## Refresh Your Skill Set

You already have an MBA—what else do you need to learn? Experts weigh in on the best skills for experienced business professionals to add to their repertoires. **BY HEATHER SKYLER**

Every time pharmaceutical executive Cindy Whitehead sent a box of a testosterone drug to a Harvard researcher who had worked on its development, she included a toy lizard in the shipment. The professor's original research on testosterone and sex had been done on lizards, so Whitehead thought it would be fun to include a plastic one with the drug—but she didn't know if this small, silly detail had

any effect on their working relationship.

Then one day, she visited his office and saw a row of plastic lizards sitting along a windowsill. "We're all looking for an emotional connection," explains Whitehead, now CEO of The Pink Ceiling, an incubator for women entrepreneurs based in North Carolina. "That's a lesson I learned 100 percent from Zappos."

Whitehead knew the pharmaceutical industry wasn't the best at customer service, so when her

former company, Slate Pharmaceuticals, was in the unique position to sell a drug directly to doctors, she decided her team was in need of extra training. A big believer in learning from other industries, Whitehead decided to take her company to learn at the feet of Zappos, the shoe company known for its whimsy and great customer service.

"From Zappos, we learned that the experience is everything," says Whitehead. "And inviting others into your fun makes all the differ-

ence. It helped us think through that personal experience for all of our customers.”

Using other companies and individuals as mentors is something Whitehead has found useful throughout her career. In fact, since selling her other company, Sprout Pharmaceuticals (the creator of Addyi, otherwise known as “female Viagra”), to Valeant Pharmaceuticals International Inc. for \$1 billion in 2015, she’s dedicated herself to investing in female-owned businesses and helping women entrepreneurs connect and find the networks and mentors that can propel a career.

Earning an MBA is a great start toward enjoying a long and prosperous career, but successful business executives are continually learning and refreshing their skills. Whether it involves studying how another industry tackles problems, meeting with a networking group or mentor or going back to school for targeted courses, today’s MBA grads are learning new skills for

the modern workforce.

Where might you be lacking and how can you gain the knowledge you need? Here’s a look at a variety of industries and innovative programs.

#### BIG DATA IS KING

You’ve likely been hearing about “big data” for a couple of years now, but if you think this business trend is going out of style, you are mistaken. Analyzing extremely large sets of digital data to reveal patterns, trends and associations is still the most in-demand skill across all industries.

In recent years, the tools for analyzing large data sets have expanded and made the information that can be gleaned quite useful. Businesses can use these sets of data to their advantage, automating processes, gaining insight into their target market and improving overall performance.

John Kogan is CEO Of Illumeo, a company that provides online, on-demand education for corporate, white-collar professionals. He

agrees that data analytics is hot. “Big data is the elephant you’re trying to eat and analytics is how you do it. It’s good for every function from HR and marketing to finance.”

Kogan adds that mastering Microsoft Excel is in demand because it’s a great tool for analyzing data. “Most folks know basic Excel, but for meaningful analytics most people need to know more,” he says, adding, “The computing power available at low cost now allows you to do more with Excel. In business school you might get one class on this, but you will spend years analyzing data in the professional world.”

Other schools that offer specialized on-demand courses are also seeing the need for courses on data analytics. Liz Simon is general counsel and vice president of external affairs at General Assembly, a global education company. Simon works directly with policy makers to help develop policies and education models that address the dynamic requirements of employers. She says

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## SOFT SKILLS WEAVE TOGETHER LIFE AND EDUCATION BY KATE GAMMON

Employers are looking for graduates with the ability to understand the context of their education as much as the content. Dr. Nido Qubein, president of High Point University in High Point, North Carolina, explains the importance of integrating soft and hard skills.

**WHY IS IT IMPORTANT TO TEACH LIFE SKILLS?** There is a measurable difference between training students

in a discipline and educating students both with a discipline and about the demands of life itself. Companies today are looking for graduates who understand the context of their education and the realities of a global marketplace.

**WHAT IS THE FUTURE OF WORK LIKE FOR TODAY’S BUSINESS SCHOOL GRADUATES?** Employers—whether in profit sectors or other

sectors—are looking for people who can enhance the success of the organization, not just do the function of the job. Every bit of research we see is that employers do care about soft skills. You have to know how to be persuasive, write a memo or lead a meeting.

**HOW CAN STUDENTS BUILD SOFT SKILLS?** I teach a life skills course to freshmen. The purpose of the class is to enlighten students

with skills that go beyond a typical college class. We cover topics such as presentation skills, energy management and fiscal literacy. At High Point, we also have the Sales Education Center and the Professional Selling Club, where every student has access to resources on selling. Students must develop the skills necessary to attract the interest of a potential buyer, no matter what the product is.

## HEALTH CARE + BUSINESS = ADVANCEMENT

Based on data from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, medical and health services managers rank No. 7 on *U.S. News & World Report's* best business jobs for 2017. Health care executives and health care administrators are key when it comes to ensuring that health care organizations are operating efficiently and

adhering to changes in health laws and regulations.

Western Carolina University in Cullowhee, North Carolina, offers an online master of health sciences. The program is designed for students with backgrounds in health care administration and business, health-related education or clinical

practice who want to advance to leadership roles in the industry.

Brian Raming, program director of the MHS program, emphasizes the benefits of this degree: "Our students leave us ready to take on virtually any supervisory or administrative position within almost any health care organization."

data science and data analytics are the area of biggest growth for her school right now.

"Companies are realizing they're sitting on so much data. They need people to interpret and analyze it and they have to have the technology and infrastructure in place in order to make use of it."

Amazon analyzed its massive database of customer information to improve customer relations. American Express has used its data to predict consumer behavior. National accounting firm BDO USA L.L.P. has put its data to use by employing it to identify risk and fraud during audits. General Electric uses data from sensors on machinery to figure out ways to improve processes and reliability.

Jayan Zaman saw the need to know more about data and tech, so he went back to school at General

Assembly in order to get up to speed. He completed GA's web development immersive and currently works as a consultant at Capgemini Financial Services in New York City.

"Using various data analytics tools as well as machine learning algorithms and artificial intelligence is going to be key for many industries," he says. "There are some skills that are basic to most development, such as [technology tools] Git or Apache Subversion. Understanding how these technologies work will allow someone to jump into a development team and contribute quickly."

Bree Olivari, senior category manager at Johnson & Johnson, concurs. "Data continues to be king," she says. "Those who are able to derive meaningful business insights backed by reliable data tend to shine in the procurement industry. With more

than 200 internal courses available, data analysis is central to many roles at Johnson & Johnson."

### SOLUTIONS FROM SCRATCH

If you're a business executive, you don't necessarily need to know how to code or use all of the programming and development tools available—you most likely have an IT department for that. However, you should be able to see how your IT team can solve a problem using technology.

Kogan describes it this way: "[Employers and employees] need to be facile and conversant with technology. . . . Most logical, repeatable processes can now be automated and corporate professionals need to understand how that can work."

This is where younger generations are ahead of the game. Because

millennials are digital natives, they "have a kind of technology vision," says Kogan, "that allows them to see their way through problems using technology."

If you're not a digital native, what can you do to get up to speed? There are courses offered on just about every type of technology, but Kogan says it's more of a mindset. "It's about having an inquisitive mind and inundating yourself with technology as much as you can. Learn what integrates with what. Something that can help is encouraging your people to look for their own technology solutions. If you give them freedom to find their own solutions, they'll begin to feel more comfortable with technology." To take technology know-how to the next level, consider adding another course or series of courses to your MBA.

# BLUE SKY

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In 2016, Angelo Brown was working as an accountant and driving for Lyft part-time. Feeling stuck in his accounting career, Brown was interested in switching his focus to network security. One of his Lyft passengers, who worked in IT, suggested going to a boot camp-style class for coding and software development. After doing some research,

Brown enrolled in General Assembly's web development immersive and is now a software engineer for Leidos in Springfield, Virginia. One thing he liked about GA's program was learning to build solutions on his own. "The skill that I've found you need today—a skill that I didn't necessarily get from my MBA—is the ability to build some-

thing from scratch, test and troubleshoot it, make it work and present it. As an MBA student, it was my responsibility to analyze the problem and business case to propose the solution. As a student at General Assembly, not only was it my responsibility to analyze a problem, I also had to be creative enough to build solutions."

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PRIORITIZING COMMUNICATION AND LEADERSHIP

In the age of tweets, texts and Skype, it's not surprising that in-person communication and leadership are much-needed skills. Olivari says, "Newer talent tends to be strong in using electronic channels. However, in-person influencing seems to be harder to come by. Getting up from behind the screen and making a human connection is a skill that is being neglected."

Zaman agrees that skillful in-person communication is lacking in the workforce. "Developers often have a belief that if you are good at coding, nothing else really matters. Coming from a business background, I can tell you that that's not true. How we present ourselves is often very important for career success. Sometimes a well-presented mediocre idea is better than a badly presented great idea. You might be the best coder in the world, but if you can't present your ideas clearly, you will be overlooked."

And if you can't get your ideas across, it will be difficult to lead a team or a company.

"Universities are good at teaching the general skills, such as finance, marketing, et cetera, but what I don't find in academic institutions is a good understanding of how to lead others," says Joe Carella, assistant dean for executive education at Eller College of Management at the University of Arizona. "The leadership piece is often cut out from the curricu-

lum or offered under the guise of extracurricular activities such as professional clubs that are student driven."

While soft skills are always essential, they aren't as simple to distill into a single course. This is where finding networks and mentors can come in handy. Carella also recommends getting together with a diverse group of colleagues and business associates.

"Otherwise, you're sort of stuck," he says. "There's not a good place to test your assumptions about leadership, and the higher you get in the organization, the lonelier it gets."

TARGETED COURSES

"I'm an MBA and I will freely admit that no matter how good a business school is, you come out generally not ready for corporate work," says Kogan, who has, as CEO of Illumeo, worked with several large corporations. "You've got tons of learning to do, all of which starts on day 1." Companies that want to be at the top of their game invest in further training for their employees and managers.

Extremely targeted courses can help. In the old days, companies bought learning management systems. Employees might have been offered a library of thousands of courses and been told to "go nuts," says Kogan. "For us, it's about helping companies discover what their people do and don't know. We have scalable competency-based assessments that highly automate finding expertise gaps and figuring out how to fill those gaps."

Some companies similar to Illumeo include Coursera, Udacity and Pluralsight. "It's a really vibrant space," says Kogan. "It has more market value than the old methods. It's highly targeted and saves a lot of time and money for the people and their companies."

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PUZZLE ANSWERS

Easy KENKEN

4	3	2	1
1	4	3	2
3	2	1	4
2	1	4	3

Hard KENKEN

4	5	3	6	1	2
3	2	6	4	5	1
1	4	5	3	2	6
2	1	4	5	6	3
5	6	2	1	3	4
6	3	1	2	4	5

Easy Sudoku

2	3	1	8	6	4	9	5	7
8	9	5	2	1	7	3	4	6
6	4	7	9	5	3	1	8	2
4	6	2	3	7	5	8	9	1
3	5	8	6	9	1	2	7	4
1	7	9	4	8	2	5	6	3
5	1	4	7	2	8	6	3	9
9	2	3	5	4	6	7	1	8
7	8	6	1	3	9	4	2	5

Hard Sudoku

3	9	6	4	8	1	5	2	7
7	4	1	5	6	2	8	9	3
5	8	2	3	9	7	6	1	4
4	2	9	1	5	3	7	8	6
1	7	8	2	4	6	9	3	5
6	3	5	9	7	8	2	4	1
2	1	7	8	3	5	4	6	9
8	6	4	7	1	9	3	5	2
9	5	3	6	2	4	1	7	8

P	E	C	S	M	E	T	R	O	H	E	R	A	
I	P	U	T	E	C	R	U	S	A	V	I	S	
G	I	L	A	D	O	U	B	L	E	B	A	C	K
S	T	R	A	I	T	O	X	I	D	E	S		
C	O	U	R	T	C	A	S	E	O	T	E	R	I
F	D	R	M	I	X	A	L	O	T	S	S	N	
L	I	A	M	T	H	A	I	S					
C	L	O	S	E	D	C	I	R	C	U	I	T	
S	A	R	A	H	E	H	O	W					
E	W	E	D	R	U	M	P	A	D	E	M	O	
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O	V	E	R	S	E	E	I	N	G	T	Y	R	O
S	I	N	E	M	I	M	E	O	T	O	O	K	
S	L	E	W	I	N	P	E	N	O	U	T	S	

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The specialized Global Energy Executive MBA at C.T. Bauer College of Business at the University of Houston helps students further their energy careers—right in the energy capital of the world. Steven Koch, assistant dean of graduate and professional programs at Bauer, explains why it was developed and what students can gain.

### WHAT INSPIRED THE SCHOOL TO CREATE THIS TRACK?

The University of Houston is Houston, and Houston is the energy capital of the world. As such, we have unique resources

with world-class, energy- focused faculty and facilities along with a university-wide commitment to energy. That makes Bauer College the best destination for the industry's current and future business leaders.

### WHAT IS THE PRIMARY GOAL OF THE GLOBAL ENERGY EXECUTIVE MBA PROGRAM?

To prepare midcareer executives for key leadership positions in the global energy industry.

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Most of the students in the Global Energy EMBA track are employed in the energy industry. They come from upstream, midstream and downstream, multinationals and small companies. They are engineers, scientists, geologists, project managers, land men, accountants, general counsels ... the entire spectrum. We also have students who are making a career shift to energy and see this degree as the perfect catalyst for that. It's the diversity of students—all focused on a single development objective—that makes it such a rich experience. And the lifetime network they

build is invaluable.

### HOW IMPORTANT IS BIG-DATA ANALYSIS IN THIS PROGRAM?

We have quantitative business analysis and information technology courses that blend well and augment courses such as Energy Corporate Finance, Energy Accounting and Project Management for Energy. Through this curriculum, students also get additional exposure in topics such as energy trading, energy derivative and capital markets—all designed to integrate large amounts of data into strategic and tactical business decisions.

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the UNC system, Western Carolina University offers several degrees and targeted courses for the post-MBA world. WCU's project management certificate is of particular interest to workplace professionals or military personnel looking for certification rather than a degree due, in part, to the online delivery of courses over an eight-week period. In addition, WCU offers several specialized leadership masters that can be great alternatives to the MBA or work as career-building add-ons: masters programs in construction management, health sciences, human resources, project management (the first program of its kind in the country) and sport management—all offered online. Students also have the option of earning a master's in public affairs, business administration, accountancy or technology at

the university's instructional site in Asheville, North Carolina.

#### YOUR BRAIN ON LEADERSHIP

Carella is a proponent of using brain research to develop his teaching methods. Through work done in the area of neuroscience, he says, "we've learned a lot through observing MRIs about the ways the brain reacts to stressors and opportunities."

He explains that people learn from failure and the brain is geared to turn that into an opportunity for change. "We want to see what we call 'empathetic failure.' This involves having executives try something out in a safe environment and finding out they're not good at it—then trying it out again. This works better than providing instruction and having executives

try it out back at work."

This idea also backs up the "70:20:10" model for learning and development, says Carella. This theory posits that people obtain 70 percent of their knowledge from job-related experiences, 20 percent from interactions with others and 10 percent from formal classroom education. Carella aims to create those job-related experiences in a controlled and safe environment.

The MBA remains a vital degree in many industries, but earning one is often just the tip of the learning iceberg.

As Kogan explains: "Companies hire MBAs because they're smart and will work hard. The presumption when you hire an MBA is, 'I've got a racehorse here that will move the company forward—and now I need to teach them to do their job.'" ▼



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