

## Keep Your Eyes on the Prize

Building a Consulting Career in a Post-Recession Economy

BY KATIE SLATER

As an eager beaver MBA student beginning my second year, there was one thing, and one thing only, on my mind—finding that perfect job. That ideal first step out of the gate. That leap in to the “real world” in which I would quickly sink or swim. Graduation day was my goal line, after which I would be home free. The only problem was...my graduation was on May 15, 2009, right in the middle of arguably one of the worst economic recessions in history.

Needless to say, the attitude around the business school was fearful and anxious with each of my classmates finding themselves in the same discouraging situation. History tells us not to worry, that the economy will bounce back eventually, but no one *wants* to graduate in the midst of all the chaos. According to GMAC (Graduate Management Admissions Council), 2009 employment of new MBAs is down 50% from 2008. As if that wasn't bad enough, nearly 10% of companies that hired MBA graduates during the 2007-2008 recruiting season did not hire any in 2008-2009.

Given the tough circumstances, I knew that I wanted to start my post-MBA career in consulting, and no economy was going to stand in my way. I knew that I wanted to work for a firm that valued personal development, would encourage creativity and innovation in the workplace, and whose culture fit me well. For someone who could not afford to be picky in my job search, I was putting in a pretty tall order.

After attending Kalypso's on-campus presentation, I knew that I had found a winner.

Now that I had identified my ideal firm, I had my work cut out for me in order to land the job. With the help of the school consulting club and career management center, I crafted a five-step plan to meet my goal:

1. **Networking.** In the weeks before and after my interview with Kalypso, I followed up with each and every *Kalypsonian* I had met. Usually, this meant sending short, politely persistent emails to ensure that my name was as visible to the firm as possible. Social media proved to be a very strong lever that not many students think to pull in a professional setting. Facebook isn't just for stalking exes and looking at pictures of your friend's new puppy.

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# VIEWPOINT

2. **Due Diligence.** Before putting myself out there too much, I made sure that I was familiar with Kalypso's service offerings, history, and clients. Doing my homework on the firm further assured me that this was where I wanted to be. And, when I did get the interview, I actually had something meaningful to talk about.
3. **Flexibility.** Consulting requires a lot of travel, especially with a virtual firm like Kalypso. Communicating my flexibility and willingness to travel was the first step, but proving through past experience that traveling was something I wanted and expected was a bit more challenging. I had to show that I truly knew what it meant to live the consulting lifestyle.
4. **Study.** Every industry has unique hurdles for those who want to break in. For consulting, that hurdle is the case interview. Unfortunately, the only way to master a case interview is to practice. I reached out to classmates who shared my interest in consulting and, together, practice made close to perfect.
5. **Know the Culture.** You can practice a million cases and have a 4.0 GPA, but in the end, if you can't "pass the pizza test," you're not going to get the job.

I am happy to report that this plan worked for me. Kalypso offered me my dream job and I started with the Firm last September. The last six months have been a whirlwind and I have learned more in a short period of time from consulting than I ever did in a classroom. For instance, I have learned to live out of a suitcase, to avoid people with metal body parts in airport security lines, and that sleeping is overrated. I have also learned that breakfast at a fancy restaurant is nothing compared to smothered, covered, diced, chunked, peppered, capped, topped hash browns at the Waffle House. Oh, and I have already made it to elite status on two different airlines. A dream comes true.


Despite what they say on the news, you can still land the job you want in a bad economy. For me, these five simple steps kept me focused and made the goal seem achievable. What are the five steps on the roadmap to *your* ideal career?



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