

BUS 1002 The Foundation Course The Foundation Course

By Daniel L. James

MBA Research Paper for Rushmore University

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Executive Summary:

Dan James has been a musician since age eight, and a computer professional since college; the latter supporting the former. Armed with a combination of technological expertise and a sense of humor, Dan has been able feed his “music habit” while providing clients with usable information from their data systems. That is, until mid-2000, when he faced an impending high-tech meltdown, forcing him to refocus his strategic career plan. This document provides both the chronological events and the major influences that have led Dan James to his latest epiphany: the need for an MBA. It also describes his professional and personal goals and his current MBA strategy to achieve them.

Daniel L. James: The Foundation Course

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Section 1: Profile of Major Influences

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Introduction

Winston Churchill said in a speech once that, “The farther backward you can look, the farther forward you can see.”¹ That quote has influenced me profoundly, both in stressing the importance of personal introspection and in making a business decision only after careful review of the subject’s long-term history. The rewards of applying such wisdom to my personal and professional life, however, have been realized late in my own history, leading me to wonder at times whether my mother was correct in thinking I was a “brain damaged” child.

After *my own* “careful review” and “introspection,” I can more-objectively describe Dan James: What I *am* is a musician; what I *do* is information technology, which I must *do* well, because what I *am* can be *very expensive*.

In this profile, I will identify the events and influences that, in my opinion, have shaped my character, personality, motivation, and direction. As for the “brain damage” question, I will let *you* decide.

Early Influences

I don’t remember my birth, although the State of Oregon insists that the incident occurred in February of 1953 at St. Anthony’s Hospital in the city of Pendleton. To this day, my Mother contends that one of the Sisters in the delivery room tried to delay my emergence into the world, resulting in possible “brain damage.” This possibility has been used more than once during my upbringing as a plausible explanation for certain acts of rebellion and stupidity. Frankly, I never bought the argument, although, as I became old enough to perceive my atmosphere, I developed the impression that, compared to my older sister, my parents considered me “a punishment from God.”

My father was an X-Ray Technician in those days, and we moved around the Northwest a lot, from hospital to hospital. By the age of four, we were living in Oceanside, Oregon, which was a sleepy little beach town of a few hundred residents nine miles west of Tillamook (where that great cheddar cheese comes from). Our home was a stone’s throw from the breakers at high tide. One day, shortly after a storm, my mother was walking me down the beach looking for shells when she noticed a large tidal wave² about to break. Grabbing my arm, she pulled me toward the nearest embankment, clutching a tree limb with her free hand as the water rushed around us. At least, that’s how my young brain stored the event.

¹ James C. Humes, ‘Churchill: Speaker of the Century’ New York: Scarborough Books, 1982.

² Well, it was “tidal” to *me* – I was only four!

One fact that I do remember clearly from my childhood is the music. My father played the trumpet; my mother played piano and marimba; my older sister played just about anything; and we all sang. The family often performed at church and school functions. Although my parents tried desperately to teach me piano at a young age, I was not motivated to practice and, so, did not progress quickly.³ Nonetheless, music was key “nourishment” at home – when the family wasn’t playing, the record player was.

The Amazon Experience

In 1960, my family moved to Brasil⁴ as medical missionaries, settling at the mouth of the Amazon River, just 70 miles south of the equator in the port city of Belém.⁵ While my father worked as resident radiologist and lab technician (among other duties) at the hospital, I became a “native.” Within a year, Portuguese became my primary language,⁶ and my free time was spent playing soccer (“Pelé”⁷ was every child’s hero back then), flying kites and knocking ripe mangos out of trees for snacks. These were the extreme tropics, meaning 100% humidity on the “good” days. In the Amazon basin, it was too hot to grow hair, so I wore a “crew cut” during the entire six-year Brazilian adventure.

And then, there was the music. New music - beautiful, passionate, and rhythmic - played in nearby villages all day and all night. When I was eight, a well-known guitar player, Orlando Texeira,⁸ introduced me to Brazilian folk music, which motivated me to learn an instrument. Against my parents’ preferences (guitar was associated with hippies and “evil” rock-n-roll music back in the U.S.), I began guitar lessons with “Señor Texeira.” Before long, I was accompanying my sister, and her accordion or flute, as we visited nearby villages and entertained the other children, and the entire family arranged new music to play in church, “despite” the guitar. If you have formed an opinion by now that I was destined to become the “black sheep” of the family, you are correct!

Brasil provided my first exposure to “Distance Learning” – I studied by correspondence with a U.S. church-based institution until the 7th Grade, when I attended a local private school run by other English-speaking families. By then, I had been fully “absorbed” into Brazilian culture, considering myself a bi-lingual native – I even *dreamt* in Portuguese.

We returned to the States in 1966. There I was, with a crew cut, discovering that the Hippie revolution had fully bloomed and that all the other teenage boys had shoulder-length hair. “Groovy, man.”

³ To this day, I can play piano only “by ear,” which can be painful – hands are more effective.

⁴ The correct spelling – ask any Brazilian!

⁵ Pronounced “Beh-léng”

⁶ I knew all the “bad” words in Portuguese before I knew their English equivalents.

⁷ “Pelé” led his soccer team to more championships than any other in Brazilian history.

⁸ Pronounced “Teh-sháy-rah”

The Real Education

Los Angeles in '66 offered new challenges. To start with, my exposure to English composition was limited, and my social and communication skills were grossly under-developed. To compensate, I began growing my hair out and learning – in English – all those cuss words I had known only in Portuguese.

My parents enrolled me in a private day school, and I entered the 8th Grade with only two assets: guitar playing and soccer. However, I didn't know any American popular songs and most American kids didn't even know the *rules* to soccer.⁹

My 8th-grade English teacher was "Miss Bieber." To this day, I do not remember her first name, but she changed my life and I'll always be grateful. For the first 15 minutes of each class, we had to take out a special "composition book" and write - just write - about anything we wanted. We could make up stories, write poetry, comedy; it didn't matter. All Miss Bieber corrected were spelling, grammar, and sentence structures; the content was completely up to us. I discovered comedy, radio scripts and poetry, the latter evolving into song lyrics. In early 1967, I wrote my first song, complete with lyrics taken from that composition book. I recall that the girls started hanging around after that but I was too shy to do much about it.

In 9th Grade, I was assigned to an ex-Nazi scout pilot, Mr. Yarschke,¹⁰ who taught German, Flying and English (if you wanted to learn it with an accent). By this time, I was campaigning for "class clown," probably as compensation for my social insecurities. Mr. Yarschke had had his fill of my antics one day and handed me a book, *101 Elephant Jokes*,¹¹ which he demanded that I memorize and recite in its entirety the next day. I think his exact words were, "If you want to pass this year, you will not miss a zingle eleph'nt joke, yah?" The next day, I told exactly 101 elephant jokes, but slowly enough to take up the entire class period (with the help of exaggerated laughter from my obliging classmates). This was my first official comedy gig.

Mr. Yarschke later became my flight instructor, helping me make that painful transition from "normal" flying to using airplanes. I learned a real seat-of-the-pants method of piloting; Mr. Yarschke purposely created an "emergency" each time I flew with him, which I assumed was punishment for the elephant joke thing. The ploy worked – I learned the proper procedures for handling in-flight emergencies.

The Awakening

I switched to a private *boarding* school, north of L.A., for my senior year. None of the kids knew my background – especially the part about having once been a "square." At first, I allowed them to see only a musician, songwriter, and part-time comedian. Within a month, I was elected Senior Class President (an impossibility

⁹ The United States and Canada are the only countries that do not call the game "Football," which is interesting since the game actually features kicking the ball!

¹⁰ Mr. Reinhold Yarschke had defected to the U.S. during the first year of WWII.

¹¹ Author and publisher unknown.

at the prior school). The guitar playing attracted girls at this school, too, so now I started thinking about being an entertainer.

Early in the second semester, a local business donated a *Bendix G-15 Control Data*¹² computer to the school, and I was immediately intrigued. The ability to “program” this clunky, loud machine to obey commands was a unique experience. I found myself spending every available moment working on this system. Shortly, I was introduced to a new label: “nerd.”

Soon after I graduated from high school, my parents announced that they were moving to Angola, a west-central African colony controlled by Portugal. A small mission hospital, established 40 years earlier by an American pioneer, Dr. Roy Parsons,¹³ needed help. I did not know if I would ever see my parents again – they said they would remain in Africa “for life.” I decided to stay in America and go to college.

College Interferes with Education

Pacific Union College (PUC) is located in California’s Napa wine country, which is ironic since the College is a private religious institution that, in addition to outstanding academics, teaches that drinking alcohol – in any form – is a sin. After being counseled by my assigned college advisor that the highest and best use of my abilities would be “Civil Engineering,” I realized I had a problem: PUC didn’t offer Civil Engineering, so I would need to switch schools. I spent my freshman year taking general courses, forming a new band, and hacking into the campus *HP-1000*.¹⁴ Shortly, I was introduced to yet another new label - “geek” - but the girls still liked the guitar music.¹⁵

During my year at PUC, I was deeply influenced by Professor Elton Wallace, who taught communications, and I was privileged to attend his speech class. I learned from Dr. Wallace that there is nothing to fear in speaking to an audience, and that shyness is a “wall” we place in front of our own minds. By the end of the course, I was no longer afraid of making a complete fool of myself in public, which, of course, is the *root* of comedy. I took this new confidence with me to Washington the next school year.

¹² The Bendix G-15 had 16K of rotating drum “core” memory (what passed for “RAM” back then), and punched, paper-tape storage media. The unit was the size of a refrigerator, weighing over 600 pounds, and was accessed via teletype machines. Programming was accomplished through “Octal” (base-8) machine code instructions.

¹³ The “Bongo Mission Hospital” was renowned throughout Central Africa as the place to go if you wanted American-style medical care. To overcome bureaucratic obstacles in Africa, all you had to do was mention “Bongo Hospital” or “Dr. Parsons” and every door would open.

¹⁴ Hacking at PUC was easy – the department manager used words found on the keys of his teletype keyboard as system passwords. There were only about a dozen possibilities.

¹⁵ What is this mystique about guitar players, anyway?

Walla Walla College's School of Engineering¹⁶ was renowned for producing high-caliber architects and civil engineers, and, at first, I was very optimistic. The campus computer was a *Dec PDP 11-40*, which I soon learned to employ for all sorts of mischief,¹⁷ and later realized that programming the computer to help solve my engineering problems was far more fun than doing the actual engineering.

In the meantime, my funds were low, private college tuition high, and my parents were not available to help me financially.¹⁸ The solution was to find part-time computer programming jobs in the surrounding area and to drive a delivery truck for a local nursery. Predictably, I formed another band and toured around the Northwest; plus I did voice-overs at local radio stations. Among my activities, studying and homework ranked low on the priority list, and I missed many classes – my grades suffered.

Summer Discovery

In the summer of 1973, I traveled to Angola to visit my parents. At Bongo Hospital, Dr. David Parsons, the eldest son of the pioneer-founder, was chief surgeon and administrator.¹⁹ My father did radiology and pitched in as anesthesiologist during the long surgical sessions. I spent one day in surgery, gowned, capped and masked. Dr. Parsons' 18-year-old daughter, Cynthia, was acting as surgical nurse that day. All I could see were her bright green eyes through the mask and medical garb. I couldn't put my finger on it at the time, but there was something special about that girl. I only saw her for a few days that summer, and after returning from Africa, had no contact with Cynthia for four years.

Misdirection

Meanwhile, back at Walla Walla, my new advisor, observing the time I spent on computers, suggested that I change my major to "Computer Science." Unfortunately, in 1973, there were only a handful of colleges in America offering bachelors degrees in Computer Science, and – you guessed it – Walla Walla College was *not* one of them.

Epiphany Number One: I realized my three years of college were generally wasted due to poor execution and lousy direction. I could either start over at another school or enter the workforce.

¹⁶ Walla Walla is located in the southeast corner of Washington State, coincidentally, just an hour north of Pendleton, Oregon (my birthplace). Walla Walla is often one of the Northwest's hottest spots during summer and coldest spots in winter (the city fathers liked the place so much, they named it *twice*).

¹⁷ The PDP-11 series could be completely halted by toggling octal '054' with control switches on the front panel. Using the "RSTS Basic" language with its infamous "SYS()" commands, one could do amazing "God-like" acts and wonders.

¹⁸ Medical missionaries in Africa were paid a couple hundred dollars per month (if that).

¹⁹ The natives paid with chickens and goats if they had no money, and most didn't. The medicine practiced at Bongo was unsophisticated, but expertly administered and holistically complete.

I spent the rest of my “junior” year planning, praying, and reflecting on my apparent schizophrenia: “I’m a musician; no, a computer geek; wait, I’m a radio announcer; don’t be silly, I’m a comedian.” Such inner conflict raged for weeks.

The Search for Me

I left Walla Walla at the close of the 1974 school term and returned to southern California. A large university medical center hired me as a junior programmer, writing COBOL²⁰ programs and supporting existing payroll and personnel systems. While the job lasted only eleven months, I learned to write efficient programs and – most importantly – how to get along with other “children” in a professional environment.

Shortly after my return to the smog capitol of the Pacific, some local recording studios offered me “session gigs”²¹ allowing me to earn extra money doing what I liked best: playing guitar. The contacts I gained helping others make records also led me to broadcasting. A Los Angeles FM-radio station heard me audition some comedy bits – wacky commercials and fake newscasts – and took a chance on me. On Sunday nights, rather than playing Top-40 tunes, I would spin comedy albums and, between cuts, would just be myself.²² Here’s one from the audition:

“This program is brought to you by the makers of Pluto Dog Food. Pluto’s not for your dog; it’s made from dogs. Tired of steak every night? Open a can of Pluto, a doggone good dinner.”²³

Before starting my part-time broadcasting career, the producers at the station strongly suggested that I change my name. My birth name was “Daniel James Holder” and Hollywood felt that “Dan Holder” was not suitable, not catchy enough, for the world of radio. They reasoned that, “If *Marion ‘Duke’ Morrison* and *Eugene Orowitz* felt it necessary to change their names to *John Wayne* and *Michael Landon*, respectively, in order to succeed in show business, then maybe it would work for *Dan Holder*.” The producers liked “Danny James” – my first and middle names - so I made the change. Over time, I found that *Dan James* was indeed more “marketable” in other endeavors, so I formalized the change, picking a new middle-name from my ancestry: *Larkin*.²⁴

²⁰ COBOL is a verbose, but highly structured, programming language used, at the time, to develop large business applications on mainframe computers.

²¹ Session gigs are short contracts to perform in other artists’ recording sessions. I became a “hired gun” for guitar playing and vocal harmonies. The experience both improved my “chops” (musicianship), and taught me the art of contracting my services.

²² During my radio “career” (you can count the months on 9 fingers), I created dozens of voices and characters that I used to spice up my shows. Did I mention I was schizophrenic?

²³ I’ve got dozens of these, but space allows only a sampling.

²⁴ Like the late *Morrison* and *Orowitz*, I have used my birth name only in family settings, for obtaining official documents from my past, and for enforcing copyrights on music written under my birth name. As far as my “post-college” world is concerned, however, I am *Daniel Larkin James*.

News From Africa

Amid the fun and self-realization, I heard frightening news: tribal war had broken out in Angola between three factions, two backed by Marxist or Communist countries, and the other backed (unofficially) by the United States.²⁵ Bongo Hospital was surrounded by a triangle of mortar fire, but remained neutral, treating the wounded from all factions. As the war progressed, the native tribes were indoctrinated to believe that, if they simply killed all the white people, they could divide the wealth of the slain and would never need to work again. My parents were forced to flee Angola, taking only what they could pack into one vehicle, eventually returning to California.

Touring the World

In 1975, while working in a recording session, I met *Alan Pierce*,²⁶ whom I considered at the time to be one of the ten best guitar players in America. We became close friends and found ourselves jamming²⁷ long after recording gigs were over, often quitting at sunup. It wasn't long before Al and I were writing songs together, and, by 1976, forming a band, recording an album, and hitting the road. For the next three-and-a-half years, we zigzagged across the U.S. and parts of Europe. Between each tour, I did whatever computer programming work I could find to help finance the next road trip. We didn't make much money from our tours or recordings²⁸ but my guitar-playing abilities reached their peak.

Introduction to Heuristics

In 1976, a group of doctors and dentists, informally called "The Equus Group," approached me with a contract proposal. Apparently, the group had been pooling their excess earnings to wager on thoroughbred horses at California's largest tracks.²⁹ They wanted their handicapping methods automated, but they wanted the computer to "learn from its past mistakes" so that each new selection would be more accurate than past selections; in essence, they wanted *Artificial Intelligence*. After considerable research, I determined that the solution was both *possible* – using a heuristic data model - and *expensive*. I worked on this project, between tours, for nearly two years, and learned four valuable lessons:

- 1) it is possible to design a database whose contents are self-improving;

²⁵ Historians often call these conflicts "civil wars," but like America's "War Between the States," there was nothing "civil" about Angola's war. The conflicts in Angola have continued to this day.

²⁶ Alan Pierce had played both country and jazz, and was associated with names like Eddie Arnold, Hank Cochran, Buck Owens, Glen Campbell, Johnny Cash, Waylon Jennings, and many others. Alan had also played with the Grand Ole Opry stage band. When he played, if you shut your eyes, you'd swear you could hear *two* guitar players.

²⁷ "Jamming" is a term used by musicians meaning "playing for fun."

²⁸ The record label we had signed with went out of business in 1979, leaving unpaid thousands of dollars in royalties.

²⁹ Santa Anita Park, Hollywood Park, and Del Mar.

- 2) all the raw data in the world is worthless without methods to extract useful information;
- 3) any project undertaken without sufficient analysis will miss its deadline and be over-budget; and
- 4) there are simpler and cheaper ways to make a profit at the racetrack.

Re-acquaintance

In early 1977, while back in L.A. following a tour, I was surprised to run in to Cynthia Parsons (remember her -- the green-eyed girl from Africa?). She initiated the contact, and has reluctantly admitted tracking my career and whereabouts since meeting me in Angola. By now, Cynthia had a B.S. degree in Nursing but much preferred computer programming (I *told* you there was something special about her). After a six-week European tour in the spring of 1978, my band broke up³⁰ and I returned to studio work, solo concerts, and computer contracts. Cynthia and I dated the rest of that year and were married in January of 1979. Cynthia has been, and is, my soul mate.

Entrepreneurial Influences

The early eighties were highly instructive in my development. More of my time was spent consulting, and I began to understand the value of *Risk Management*. An entrepreneurial attitude was forming in my mind, which fostered a willingness to take business chances. As most successful entrepreneurs will attest, the key to winning is to expect failures and then to learn from them. I began to associate with industry colleagues who had similar ideas, and these interactions would significantly affect my future decisions.

In March of 1983, I was subcontracted through an agency³¹ to join a select team of developers for *Carter Hawley Hale Stores, Inc.*³² The intent of the project was to create a paperless payroll system integrated among all of the stores owned by the client. Paychecks would be deposited automatically in each employee's bank account, saving millions of dollars in overhead. Today, such technology is commonplace, but in '83 we were on the "bleeding edge" of innovation. The system was written in COBOL on IBM mainframes, and was the most tightly structured and efficient solution I had ever seen. Although the subcontracting money was excellent, the experience convinced me that I could establish an agency of my own, eliminating the middleman. But then, I got an urgent phone call from my past.

"Consultus Interruptus"

It was Alan Pierce, my former music partner, with news that his brother, Kenny, had been in an auto accident, breaking his neck, and that his country group, *The*

³⁰ Al Pierce remained in Europe as a studio player and record producer.

³¹ XXCal, Inc., Los Angeles, CA.

³² CHHS, Inc., in Fullerton, CA, was a retailing conglomerate that included The Broadway, Neiman-Marcus, Bergdorf Goodman, Sunset House, and Walden Books.

Kenny Pierce Band,³³ needed help until he recovered. Alan asked, “Would you be willing to come up to Modesto for a few months and help us out?” Since I was wrapping up my contract with *Carter Hawley Hale*, I decided to take a break from programming and play some guitar. I commuted to Modesto from San Diego each week, by train, playing five nights per week. I had to learn over 200 country songs, and take a 78-percent cut in pay (compared to my last contract). By the time I left the *Kenny Pierce Band*, nine months later, my wife and I had depleted our financial reserves and we realized that we could no longer rely on others for our living. I am certain that, at this point, Cynthia was beginning to wonder if I really was “brain damaged.”

Epiphany Number Two: Short of writing a hit song on the popular charts, the only way I could continue to support my “music habit” was to put the computer business first.

Birth of a Corporation

On February 12, 1985, together with my wife and a few of my colleagues, a new consulting agency was founded: *Larkin Industries, Inc.*,³⁴ with headquarters in Carson City, Nevada, a tax-free state with the fewest regulations in the country. Having no formal training in administration, I learned how to operate and market a corporation the “hard way.” To keep overhead down, we instituted a policy whereby nobody but the receptionist had a “desk job” – all officers and board members were required to work in the field and generate revenues for the company. That policy is still in effect at [Larkin](#).

One of my early contracts, under the new corporation, was with the publisher of *California Grower* and *River Runner* magazines.³⁵ In order to solve both management and computer problems for the client, I was required to completely immerse myself in the business, eventually becoming co-publisher of the magazines. All of the writing and speech skills I had learned to this point were brought to bear, and were further honed during my tenure.

How to “Simulate Life”

In 1988, *Larkin Industries* was approached by a laser-physicist from *General Dynamics*, who wished us to assist him with a private project to “simulate life” in a science fiction role-playing game. It is not every day that one is offered the chance to play games for a living! The logistics required that Cynthia and I relocate to Texas. Little did we know that the project would suffer from massive

³³ Kenny Pierce had played bass and done backup vocals with Buck Owens for about 12 years, and had then formed his own band, playing in country-western nightclubs in northern California.

³⁴ There were two of us with “Larkin” in our names, hence the corporate name.

³⁵ California Grower was a trade magazine dedicated to orchard crops, primarily avocados and citrus, and was distributed globally. River Runner was a picture-rich canoeing and kayaking magazine.

“scope-creep”³⁶ and would be grossly under-funded. I take full responsibility for this problem, of course, since I allowed the client’s initial designs to be the blueprint for development of the system rather than insisting on a comprehensive analysis phase prior to the commencement of any programming. The *financial* lesson I learned from this project was a personal loss of over \$290,000 in cash and stock. The *professional* lesson was much more positive.

The final program required over 600,000 lines of TurboPascal™³⁷ code, and was written by a team of five programmers. These were the days before “object-oriented” programming methods, however, we wrote an event-driven solution that forced *Borland* to continuously upgrade their Pascal language in order to keep us from “busting” the envelope.³⁸ The solution utilized both scientific and heuristic modeling allowing a “parallel universe” to exist exactly 3,000 years in the future, complete with thousands of solar systems, alien species, planets, eco-systems, economics and the natural laws of biology, chemistry and physics. By the time our client announced that he could no longer obtain financing for the project, the game – called “The Orion Nebula” - had already accumulated hundreds of players and had won an award for “Best Play-by-Mail/Modem Game of the Year.”

Hitting the Dow Jones Top 30 Industrials

In December of 1995, while finishing a contract in southern Oregon, I received a call from a competing agency seeking a systems analyst for a “three-month contract” with a division of *3M Corporation*, a member of the *Dow Jones Top 30 Industrials*.³⁹ By this time, I was President and Senior Systems Analyst at *Larkin Industries*, and so, having the pick of any proposed jobs that appeared, I chose to take the contract personally. The division was *3M Unitek*, an orthodontic supply manufacturer headquartered in Monrovia, California, with offices in 20 countries. The job consisted of providing technical support and upgrades for a Sales Automation system, called *UniTrack*™,⁴⁰ used by the client’s remote sales force on laptop computers.

The contract expanded to nearly four years, and the influences derived from my association with *3M Unitek* were many, especially in the areas of Customer Resource Management (CRM)⁴¹ concepts and in sales processes focused on

³⁶ Scope-creep occurs when the requirements of a project are expanded after development is underway. Since the business world is never “static,” the only way to minimize scope-creep is to thoroughly analyze the needs of the product’s users before any development begins. Such analysis costs more up-front, but saves both time and money later on.

³⁷ Trademark of Borland Corporation.

³⁸ Borland’s TurboPascal progressed from Version 3.0 at the beginning of the project to Version 5.0 by the end. We were on the phone to the technical support guys at least twice per week. TurboPascal went on to become “ObjectPascal” and later, “Delphi.”

³⁹ Every day, the stock market news includes the results of trading for the “Dow.” Although there are thousands of publicly-traded companies in America, the Dow represents the 30 largest “brick-and-mortar” companies.

⁴⁰ Trademark of **3M** Unitek, Inc.

⁴¹ The new industry “buzzword” for “Sales Automation.”

increasing market share. I also improved my presentation skills, making many appearances before both administrative personnel and the sales force. Finally, much of my day-to-day work at *3M Unitek* was spent in “data mining” tasks, assisting management in acquiring *useful* information from the raw sales data. When I left *3M Unitek*, I took with me friendships that have endured to this day.

Partly as a result of landing the *3M* contract, and partly because I had accumulated sufficient *Larkin Industries* stock to warrant such a move, in mid-1996, the Board of Directors elected me Chairman and Senior Consultant of the corporation (all I was missing was the “CEO’s” job).

Contrarian Thinking

In 1997, a few of my fellow *Larkin* consultants requested that I research the feasibility of establishing a corporate stock portfolio as a precursor to a future retirement fund. Having only a “surface” understanding of market forces, I undertook an exhaustive statistical analysis of over 30 trading techniques, in many cases employing my old heuristic data models to find the most effective investment method. To prove or disprove a trading system, I would accumulate actual market statistics as far back as the 1930s,⁴² then work the system forward to the present in order to ascertain consistency and long-term profitability.

The results of these studies proved to me, without a doubt, that the public is *wrong* 95-percent of the time, and that a “contrarian” approach to the stock market is far more profitable. One technique in particular that deserves mention is the “Investolator” method, developed in the 1930s by Ted Warren,⁴³ which has consistently produced net annual returns, since the Depression, in the 50- to 80-percent range.

The “contrarian” manner of thinking does have its detractors: every broker and professional market analyst with whom I shared my early strategies disagreed vehemently. I would then ask whether they believed that traders should, “buy low and sell high.” They would always answer “Of course.” Now firmly in my trap, I would declare, “My method causes me to buy at the bottom, and sell at, or near, the top. Call me when you have a better plan.” For some reason, I never got called.

The “contrarian” perspective also proved useful in predicting general economic trends, and helped me anticipate warning signs in the high-technology sector that were largely ignored by the financial media, until it was too late. Despite my “enlightened state” on matters economic, I did not accurately predict my own difficulties resulting from the technology meltdown.

⁴² Fortunately, such statistics are readily available over the Internet.

⁴³ Although Ted Warren died in the early 70s, his estate published a book, “How to Make the Stock Market Make Money for You” (The Ted Warren Corporation, Grants Pass, Oregon, 800-711-8734), edited from a rough manuscript, which describes the method. Ted Warren coined the term “Investolator,” defined as “buying like an investor and selling like speculators wish they could.”

The “Dot.Bomb” Era

Warning signs were clearly evident in 1999, as billions of venture capital dollars were invested in companies promising nothing more than “clicks” on web pages. While I continued to invest in high-tech companies that actually produced tangible products, by the end of the year I had shifted all “dot-com” holdings to cash or “brick-and-mortar” stocks. *Larkin’s* portfolios averaged nearly 130% net returns in 1999.

The technology-laden NASDAQ index hit its peak in the spring of 2000, and my statistical studies revealed an alarming figure: the *average* price-to-earnings-ratio⁴⁴ of all NASDAQ stocks exceeded 850-to-1. The bubble was going to burst - it was only a matter of “when.” I cautioned all my colleagues and fellow “Investolators” that they should take profits and get rid of all tech stocks.

In April of 2000, I took a contract with a national crop-insurance company in Austin, Texas, to convert their legacy data to a new web-based environment. The project managers seemed oblivious to the fact that, simply moving raw data, without first normalizing⁴⁵ it, would result in propagation of the same “bad data” to the new system. After starting the work, I discovered that I was one in a long series of data analysts who had shared my exact frustration: all the evidence of impending doom, but nobody to listen. I terminated the contract in November.⁴⁶

The “Techie” Flood

With my ego securely intact, I was now ready for a client who would accept objective advice. I began daily searches on all the contract and employment websites. I called all my old recruiting contacts. My fellow *Larkin* consultants began asking me for help finding *their* next jobs, and while we were able to place most of them in December of 2000, some of us faced a new reality: there were about 160,000 I.T. professionals out of work, all competing for the same jobs.

For instance, *Sun Microsystems*⁴⁷ advertised for a new “Chief Information Officer.” I dutifully applied, confident that my 26-plus years of experience would raise my résumé to the top of the list. Within a few days, I received an e-mail from the employer stating that, having been flooded with over 60,000 applications, the minimum standards of candidacy for the position would be raised to require a masters or doctorate degree. Day after day, I saw similar trends with other companies. My ego began to wilt a bit.

⁴⁴ Price-to-earnings-ratio (P/E) is calculated by dividing the price per share by the net earnings per share. The result indicates how many years an investor will wait to recoup the entire investment – the lower (sooner) the better - thus a P/E greater than zero, but less than 10 is considered by most to indicate a “healthy” company.

⁴⁵ Data normalization is the process of ensuring the consistency and format of database structure, content and usage. Removing “widowed” and “orphaned” data records is a common normalization task.

⁴⁶ It has been nearly one year since I terminated, and the new web-based system is still not operable – I am told that “data conversion” efforts are continuing. I rest my case.

⁴⁷ Orlando, Florida.

Until now, I had never given much weight to college degrees at any level in the Information Technology business. Colleges taught theories and obsolete curricula, while our clients considered hands-on, field experience to be “golden.” Besides, I reasoned, if *Bill Gates* could rise to the chairmanship of *Microsoft* and become the richest man in the world – without a college degree – why couldn’t *Dan James*? Moreover, I was now Chairman, CEO and Senior I.T. Consultant at *Larkin Industries, Inc.*; didn’t that count for anything? I pressed on, cocky, confident (and technically unemployed).

Retooling the Factory

During the first four months of 2001, my daily routine consisted of searching the current job listings, studying the stock market and making trades as needed, and writing a symphony.⁴⁸ Then, in May, I was elected (unopposed) to the city council of Annetta, Texas, population 1,129, earning the maximum salary even *national* politicians deserve: zero dollars. The daily routine remained the same with the exception of a few hours per week in civic duty.

In June, I noticed an even more disturbing trend: the unemployed I.T. labor force, still over 100,000 strong, was willing to work for less and less money. The industry was now a “buyers’ market,” willing to hire laid-off dot-com’ers (with their failed theories) at the lowest rates in years.

Epiphany Number Three: Despite my title, skills and experience, without a post-graduate degree, I was no longer marketable.

I had to “retool” the factory. The first step was to renovate my website (www.DLJames.com), which had served me well since 1998 but was bringing *no* business in 2001. Taking a cue from the new “virtual officer” trend emerging in the industry, I re-branded myself a “Virtual CIO.”⁴⁹ The second step was to find a distance-learning program capable of providing me with a “virtual post-graduate degree.”

Fighting Back

In my effort to be more competitive and marketable as an I.T. professional, I had to consider the probability that I could be out of work for an extended period of time while obtaining a degree. If I did find contract work or other employment during this period, would both the job and the degree program be flexible enough? Additionally, I was aware that most post-graduate programs would first require me to complete a bachelors degree, which could extend my education for years. Finally, I wondered if there was a degree program that would allow me to customize my curriculum to fill my “intelligence gaps” without forcing me to rehash subjects I already knew.

⁴⁸ You thought I was all finished with music, didn’t you? The work is called “Symphony for Celtic Cello,” a complex piece written in four movements and intended to (someday) be played by renowned cellist, Yo-Yo Ma – perhaps because he’s likely the only cellist who could play it.

⁴⁹ Virtual Chief Information Officer – a person who performs the duties of a permanent CIO, but on an as-needed, contract basis, and often from a remote location.

It was beginning to sound like “The Equus Group” and their demand for an *Artificial Intelligence* solution. I could either develop another heuristic data model or I could search the Internet; I chose the latter. After a few days of unsatisfactory searches, I decided to give it a rest and do some “industry reading.” Opening a July, 2001 issue of *PC Magazine*,⁵⁰ I saw an ad for a “Distance MBA” program offered by *Rushmore University*⁵¹ and a web address (www.rushmore.edu).

The Rushmore Balance

My first impression of *Rushmore University’s* website was rather lukewarm. The site was simplistically designed (but responsive, which was the whole point), and did not have that “post-graduate institution” appearance: you know, stuffy and snobbish, with pictures of a lush-lawn campus, majestic old ivy-lined buildings, and smiling but politically-correct students. By the end of my visit, I found the site, in short, refreshing. I wanted substance, not symbolism, and I found all the information I needed to make a decision. There were no pictures of a campus because no campus existed. This was a truly *Virtual University*.

The best news was that *Rushmore* offered a balanced approach to obtaining an MBA or DBA degree. Cutting to the chase: I could work on my degree from home (or anywhere); at my own pace; with professors who were actually in business, not tenured theoreticians; without having to first obtain a bachelors degree; with a customized curriculum that considered my career experience; and at a fraction of the cost of most post-graduate programs.

My MBA Strategy

Once I had selected the right University, my task was to formalize specific objectives. My forte being analysis, if not comedic verbosity, I felt qualified to develop the following strategy: I shall pursue a *Master of Business Administration* degree with primary emphasis on *Information Technology Management*, and secondary emphasis on some of my “intelligence gaps.”

For example, since early August (2001), I have been acting as “Virtual CIO” for an entrepreneurial venture in “Natural Language” technologies. One short-term objective is the development of a strategic plan capable of obtaining venture capital, and eventually leading the start-up to a public offering. I will, therefore, choose courses in line with both these client needs and my own.

Conclusion

I am still a musician. I am still a comedian, although some might disagree. And I am still an I.T. professional who, with a pending MBA degree (early in 2002), will be more competitive and better equipped to serve my clients, and, thus, better able to support my music habit. As for the “brain damage” issue - you tell *me*.

⁵⁰ PC Magazine is published by Ziff Davis Publishing Inc., Boulder, CO.

⁵¹ Rushmore University, Dakota Dunes, South Dakota.

Section 2: Statement of Goals

Introduction

My goals are unapologetically ambitious and pro-capitalist. There is no “box” around my head (that I have noticed). This section identifies my financial, professional, and lifestyle goals and the reasons behind them. A few of my goals are already nearing fulfillment, but I include them for purposes of completing the *big picture*. I believe in the old adage: “If you help enough people achieve their goals, yours will be met automatically.” This strategy requires that I both mentor, and invest in, others (individuals and companies) to achieve my goals.

Rather than follow a straight narrative approach, this section is structured as an interview, with questions and answers. You are invited to answer the same questions to determine if there is a “box” around *your* head.

Financial Goals

Income

How much you want to earn?

It is not a specific amount of earnings that matters, but what I am able to do with it. My earnings should exceed, by at least 20%, all living expenses, gifts to others, donations to church or charity, education, recreation, healthcare, maintenance and repair, taxes, insurance, transportation, investments, mortgages, and other obligations. The amount required to accomplish this goal in 2001 will be considerably different than the amount required in 2021, thus, stating a specific dollar amount here is irrelevant. The “Goal” is to earn what I need, plus at least twenty percent.

What are your education goals for your children or others in your family?

Both my wife and I would like to continue our education sufficiently to remain competitive in our industries, to satisfy our curiosity, and to fulfill our desire for constant self-improvement. It is highly likely that I will seek a DBA after completing my MBA degree.

Wealth

How wealthy do you want to be?

I make no apologies for any measure of wealth I may wish to accumulate. Since I have no children, building an estate is less important than the enjoyment of life now, while health allows. That said, my goal is to accumulate sufficient wealth to be able to work if I *want* to, not because I must; to invest capital I can cheerfully afford to lose; to be free of debt; to live comfortably both in the United States and abroad without fear of

depletion through taxation or inflation; and – most importantly - to generously provide for relatives, friends, and charities at will.

When do you want to retire or reach financial independence?

I shall achieve financial independence by age 55; and will “retire” when my chosen profession has peaked or it ceases to be enjoyable.

What would you like your new worth (wealth) to be in...[see notes]

10 years? Net assets of \$2 Million (in 2001 Dollars).
20 years? Net assets of \$5 Million (in 2001 Dollars).
30 years? Net assets of \$25 Million (in 2001 Dollars).

NOTE #1: In the early 1800s, an ounce of gold would buy you a rifle, some ammunition, and some clothing. In 2001, an ounce of gold will still (barely) buy you a rifle, some ammunition, and some clothing. It is the unbacked “Dollar” that is constantly devalued through inflation. Inflation will cause the purchasing power of \$1 Million in 2001 to be worth \$550,000 in 2011, and worth only \$290,000 in 2021. One must gain nearly 20% per year to simply stay ahead of the accumulated loss in purchasing power, progressive taxation, and other factors. For purposes of calculating my goals, the *true* inflation rate is the actual increase in money supply from year to year, not the “indexed” rate the government uses in their official reports.⁵²

NOTE #2: The “super wealthy” in this country follow the principle: “own nothing, but control everything.” This makes them virtually tax-exempt and judgment-proof. The wealth figures listed above are, therefore, the aggregate value of all assets “controlled” and “owned,” here or offshore.

Career Goals

Employment

Where do you want to go in your career?

Chairman or high-level corporate executive of a Fortune 1000 company, or equal status in a start-up venture with at least “Mid Cap” potential.

What is the logical step to advance your career with your present company?

Since I am already Chairman and CEO of a closely held corporation, simply achieving a “title” of corporate boss is meaningless. To advance, I must assume larger and larger responsibilities; manage larger projects,

⁵² The money supply, known as “M1” by the Federal Reserve, is comprised of all currency, coin and “electronic money” (existing only in bank computers). The current M1 numbers are published in the Wall Street Journal and other periodicals. By comparing M1 on December 31st to the M1 published a year earlier, one can calculate the annual rate of change in the money supply, which is the “true” inflation/deflation rate in the United States.

motivate larger groups of people; accomplish larger milestones; globalize; and produce larger profits for the shareholders I represent. I must also face the reality that, to advance, I may need to “demote” myself into a larger company and work my way back up.

Entrepreneurship

Where do you want to go in your career?

My career must innovate and create wealth or it will stagnate. In my opinion, “new wealth” is created in only a few industries, such as Mining, Drilling, Manufacturing, Farming, Ranching and Construction. My career should be linked to, or provide service to, such industries. Other “service” industries merely circulate *existing* wealth around, and do nothing to grow the GDP.⁵³

I believe in the following truth: “If you see things you’ve never seen before, you can do things you’ve never done before.” I enjoy analyzing a company’s business vision and recommending how to align business processes in order to achieve the vision. If a company has no vision, or lacks the appropriate processes, I enjoy performing the necessary “gap analysis” to complete the package. Thus, my career must be on the cutting edge of technologies that support the above goals.

Do you want to have your own business?

Yes. Technically, I already do, just on a smaller scale than I desire. Having controlling interest, or being a substantial shareholder, in a Fortune 1000 company is of definite interest. Leading a new venture into the public market, selling out, then repeating the process, is *also* a stimulating prospect.

Lifestyle Goals

Retirement

What do you want to do when you retire?

What is retirement? In Portugal, for example, people do not “retire,” they “reform.” In other words, they do not stop working, but merely redirect their efforts toward new goals. I prefer this “paradigm shift” to the traditional American definition of retirement.

My “reformation,” therefore, will consist of (in no particular order): continuing to compose music, managing stock portfolios, writing relevant industry documents, traveling to countries I haven’t seen yet, spending quality time with my wife, continuing to study, being a Professor with *Rushmore University*, pursuing other artistic hobbies, and playing golf.

⁵³ Gross Domestic Product

When do you want to retire?

I will continue working until it ceases to be enjoyable, or ceases to be a challenge. I do, however, wish to be financially *able* to “reform” by age 55.

Where do you want to retire?

If “where” is defined as “career status,” then I would choose the peak of my career to “reform.” If “where” is defined as “physical location,” then the question (to me) is irrelevant.

Where do you want to live?

We presently own a small forest ranch at 9,000 ft. elevation in the Rockies of southern Colorado, where we intend to spend at least five months per year in a log house we are planning to build. Between Texas, Colorado, and Portugal, we will be happy “living” near our friends and families.

Work Life

Do you want a second house?

In addition to the planned log home in the mountains of Colorado, we also have access to, but plan to own outright, a flat in North-central Portugal.

Do you want to live in more than one country?

Yes - Portugal and, possibly, Brasil.⁵⁴ I grew up in Brasil, and my wife grew up in the Portuguese colony of Angola. We both speak Portuguese and have friends in countries around the world. We especially enjoy the Portuguese people, culture and food.

Do you want to work at home?

I already do a lot of work at home, and enjoy it immensely. I will, however, work wherever I can be most productive or contribute the most toward achievement of my goals.

How much do you want to work?

The *amount* of work I expend is irrelevant. It is the *intelligence* of my work that determines how successful I will be. I want to achieve my stated goals in the least amount of time possible. If this can be accomplished in 40-hour weeks with “average” intelligence, then I shall endeavor to increase my level of intelligence to accelerate that achievement.

Other Questions

Are you willing to make changes in the lifestyle you have today to make time and money available to make the necessary changes to reach your goals?

⁵⁴ The correct spelling is “Brasil” – America spells it “Brazil” because that’s how it’s pronounced.

Yes. I already have – more than once - and will do it again, if necessary.

What specific activities are you willing to give up now to make time to change your life to reach some or all of your goals for the future?

I am willing to give up any activity that wastes time better used in achievement of my goals. The following activities could be reduced or eliminated to provide time:

- Time spent watching, or participating in, sports (I'm involved in auto racing);
- Time spent on the internet, except for portfolio management, or legitimate research;
- Time spent "playing" rather than sleeping or family time; note that this would be a temporary sacrifice, because playing is as important to mental health as nutrition is to physical health; and
- Time spent in local government as a city councilman.

How many hours a week can you commit to taking steps toward reaching your goals?

Time availability depends entirely on current professional demands, however, I should be able to commit a minimum of 10 hours, Monday through Friday, and at least 10 hours on weekends, toward the completion of my MBA. If I must eliminate my city council activities, I could conceivably add another 5 hours weekly to the cause.

Do you have an idea of what you would like to do for work that would help you reach your goals?

I presently perform Information Technology (I.T.) consulting services for our corporate clients. I plan to continue this work. In addition, I intend to launch one or more online enterprises designed to increase cash flow and reduce earnings pressures while attaining my degree. Further, I am acting as "Virtual CIO"⁵⁵ for a technology start-up in the "Natural Language"⁵⁶ field. Plus, I am willing and able to give speeches, lectures and presentations on topics in my areas of competence.

What experience, contacts, skills or other assets do you have that you could use to help you earn the income you need to reach your goals?

Skills? (Gained from work, hobbies, and other activities)

- **Administration** – able to develop, communicate, budget, staff, manage and achieve a "corporate vision."

⁵⁵ CIO is "Chief Information Officer." A Virtual CIO is one who performs the duties of a CIO for a client on an as-needed basis, and often from a remote location, saving the client money.

⁵⁶ The ability to query databases over the Internet or corporate network by using plain-English questions rather than structured, rigid syntax rules.

- **Computers** – systems analyst, project manager, data administrator, programmer, web-master and consultant.
- **Portfolio management** – averaging over 70% net returns annually.
- **Politics** – city councilman, can deal with corporate political climates.
- **Motivation** – capable of influencing and selling ideas to audiences large or small, and motivating subordinates to achieve goals.
- **Writing** – proficient with the English language and composition.
- **Negotiation** – skilled at finding common ground at the center of disputes, diffusing conflicts at their source, finding the price, and closing the deal.
- **History** – well read in American and European histories, especially in the areas of constitution, economics, warfare, and freedom.
- **Flying** – private pilot (not current).
- **Graphics** – computer-aided graphic artist.
- **Music** – professional songwriter and musician.
- **Voice** – former radio deejay, voice-over artist, and comfortable speaking in public.
- **Comedy** – humorist, which can often be dangerous.
- **Illusion** – skilled at slight-of-hand with small objects (like other people's quarters), and, especially decks of cards.
- **Language** – fluent in Portuguese, conversational in Spanish.

Contacts? (Work and personal contacts)

I have many contacts in the I.T. field, however, most are in the same situation as I – so many professionals chasing so few positions. Other contacts include those for whom I manage successful stock portfolios.

Knowledge? (Gained from formal and informal education and work experience)

My knowledge and training in mathematics, logic, statistics, law, heuristics, and investments should be useful and marketable. My recent knowledge of Sales Automation and CRM⁵⁷ systems should also be valuable to firms with large remote sales forces and global customer bases. I have extensive knowledge and experience in database design and data conversion, which are especially important to companies in transition to newer technologies. Finally, my accumulated experience in corporate management and consulting has been invaluable.

Other assets?

My wife is a computer programmer/analyst and a nurse, and assists in the organization and accounting of all our activities. She is my most valuable asset, and has been since 1979. I plan to keep her.

⁵⁷ Customer Resource Management

Do you have the self-image/confidence that you can reach your goals and change your life for the better?

Absolutely – without question. Failure is not an option.

“Resistance is futile.”⁵⁸

⁵⁸ From TV series, “Star Trek: Next Generation” (Paramount Studios); an alien race “The Borg” used this statement to intimidate their prey into early surrender.

Section 3: MBA Curriculum Analysis

Introduction

Due to many years of professional experience in the Information Technology (I.T.) industry, and my consulting associations with large multi-national corporations, I have been exposed to many of the “Core Areas” associated with typical MBA programs. It is my intent to highly customize my curriculum in order to emphasize only the areas that will help me achieve my published Goals (see Section 2); skipping those subjects that will add little, if any, value while “doubling-up” on topics that will make me more competitive in the short term. This strategy is based on the presumption that I may be returning to *Rushmore University* to pursue a Doctorate in the future, wherein I can explore areas skipped for the MBA.

What follows is an analysis of each Core Area of Business and the courses I propose to take, if any, along with the logic behind my reasoning. This curriculum is subject to revision along the way should my goals, or circumstances, change. Wherever possible, I have chosen *Rushmore University’s* “Recommended/Top Courses,” and courses authored by *Rushmore* Professors, ahead of other applicable programs.

Marketing

It has been said that nothing happens in this world until someone sells something. Sales and marketing skills are, therefore, vital to every business. These skills are also necessary if all one has to “sell” is an idea. During my 26-plus years in the I.T. industry, I have had to sell both ideas and products, negotiate contracts, engineer computer solutions for sales forces and marketing departments, and appear before corporate directors to convince them of the benefits of one solution over another. My knowledge in this area has been gained primarily from experience and observation, although much has been gleaned from periodicals and courses on Negotiation. That said, some “formality” to my marketing prowess would be helpful, which I will pursue with the following, comprehensive course:

2225 Kennedy on Marketing (3 credits)

The following books by Daniel S. Kennedy will be used to improve my sales and marketing knowledge: *The Ultimate Marketing Plan*, *The Ultimate Sales Letter*, *No B.S. Sales Success*, *How to Make Millions With Your Ideas: An Entrepreneur’s Guide*, and *No Rules: 21 Giant Lies About Success and How to Make It Happen Now*. During this course, I will contribute to a marketing plan for my present client, who intends to take a corporation public in the near future.

Finance

My experience as CEO of a consulting firm has been instructive in the area of finance, and my I.T. work with a few large clients has exposed me to a broad

range of financial subjects. Since one of my present clients intends to go public soon, and requires additional expertise, my need for further financial study is evident.

2070 Lipman on Capital Generation (3 credits)

I will use *The Complete Going Public Handbook: Everything You Need to Know to Turn a Private Enterprise into a Publicly Traded Company*, by Frederick D. Lipman, to help guide my present client to closure of either a total buyout or an initial public offering.

One area of Finance in which I have specific expertise is Investment. As described in my Profile (see Section 1), I have used heuristic data analysis to dramatically improve my return-on-investment percentages from the Stock and Commodities markets, and have successfully applied this knowledge in managing portfolios for myself, my company, and for clients. Since I have had little “formal” education on the subject, however, and since many potential clients have approached me with portfolio management questions, some “higher” knowledge is warranted. Specifically, I would like an anecdotal, rather than theoretical, approach, since my investment research has revealed that most popular theories are – to be kind – “inconsistent with reality.” Hence, the following course:

2076 Sincere on Investing (3 credits)

I will study the book, *101 Investment Lessons from the Wizards of Wall Street: The Pros’ Secrets for Running With the Bulls Without Losing Your Shirt*, by Michael Sincere, in order to compare “established” techniques with those proven through my own statistical research and real-life experience. By the way, have you observed this alarming trend among authors who believe it is absolutely necessary to summarize an entire book in its title? They’ve obviously consulted with marketing types!

Accounting

Over my professional career, I have written or designed numerous systems in support of accounting departments, including systems for my own ventures. While I am not an “accountant” per se, my knowledge of the subject is sufficient – in my opinion - to be conversant at a professional level. Knowing how to accurately report on that which has already happened, and to “mine” sales histories (for example) for useful forecasting reports, has allowed me to provide valuable expertise to my clients. Since a good manager will tend to delegate certain tasks to those better suited – accounting being just such a task – I do not intend to increase my knowledge in this core area. If, during this MBA endeavor, I find that further Accounting study is a prerequisite to other courses, I reserve the right to revise my curriculum.

Management

Management is a “loaded” subject, implying a myriad of sub-categories, from operations to personnel. In my practice, “management” has been synthesized to four basic elements: my people, my assets, my products and my customers. All other areas of management have tended to support one or more of these elements. Upon reflection, the issue of “Quality” has been of paramount importance to my style of management, even though I never really thought to call it by that name, instead choosing “Service.” Regardless the label, my knowledge of quality management could, and should be refreshed.

2003 Crosby on Management (3 credits)

I will use the following books by Philip B. Crosby to improve my efficacy as a consultant in the area of quality management: *Quality Is Free: The Art of Making Quality Certain*, and *Quality Without Tears: The Art of Hassle-Free Management*. Pursuant to this course, I will develop new “quality” guidelines for my own company as well as my present clients, where applicable. As supplemental reading, I will include Crosby’s *Quality & Me: Lessons From an Evolving Life* (Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1999).

Another skill I would like to enhance is “Project Management.” While my present techniques have been successful, my intention is to work with larger and larger clients or employers, which will require expertise in managing and budgeting potentially very large projects. My current method for Information Technology projects involves reiterative cycles through the following sequence: Discover, Design, Develop, Debug, Document, and Deploy. This method may or may not be effective in much larger projects, thus I would like to benefit from further input.

2160 Kharbanda on Project Management (3 credits)

Since we usually learn more from mistakes than we do from successes, I am intrigued by the approach to project management in the book, *What Made Gertie Gallop? : Lessons from Project Failures*, by O.P. Kharbanda. I intend to either validate or improve my present project management techniques from this course. To supplement my study, I will draw on the expertise of Bob Lewis, (consultant with Perot Systems), and his very practical book, *I.S. Survival Guide: Changing CIO from “Career Is Over” to “Change Is Outstanding”* (Sams Publishing, 1999).

Legal Environment of Business

Like with Accounting, I tend to delegate Legal matters to those with the competence and temperament for the subject. Mind you, I am not exactly a “novice” at the legal side of business. My experience includes the formation of corporate entities, composition of contracts, collection of debts in Civil Court, paralegal research in real estate and taxation matters, and – most importantly – educating lawyers on the difference between “realities” of business and mere “theories.” For this reason, I believe that my exposure to the Law at this stage in my life is sufficient and further study of this core area would be counter-productive, especially in light of the abundance of lawyers at my disposal. A little-

known statistic: at their present rate of growth, the number of attorneys in America will soon exceed Elvis impersonators.

Business Ethics

This core area has been employed in my life since I was young, instilled by my missionary parents, my church, the private schools I attended, and the ethical colleagues I have chosen as my associates. The subject of “ethics” is a philosophical one, with little substantive source material. One’s ethics is usually determined by upbringing and environment, and, outside of religion, is rarely taught. In my opinion, you either know right from wrong or you don’t; the “moral relativism” that today passes for ethics in most liberal circles is neither “moral” nor “ethical.” As Steven Silberger stated, “The purpose of ethics in the MBA curriculum is not to make students model corporate citizens. Rather, the intention is to make students aware of the ethical implications of business decisions.”⁵⁹

Throughout both my musical and consulting careers, I have attempted to live by and reinforce the ethics of my upbringing, and do not feel the need for further study in this area. At my age, it’s a little late to start changing my ethics, good or bad!

Economics

My first important exposure to “macroeconomics” was in 1973 with the release of a booklet by the Federal Reserve Bank of New York entitled *Modern Money Mechanics*. From this single booklet, I learned the history of the early “moneychangers” and “goldsmiths,” the *true* causes of inflation or deflation, and the largely-unheralded fact that banks routinely create money out of “thin air” by lending many times their actual cash reserves. I also learned that the Federal Reserve was (and is) a *privately* held bank authorized by Congress in 1912 to control the nation’s money supply. Needless to say, these were profound revelations to a college kid. If most Americans knew the truth about what constitutes our “money supply,” how it is manipulated, who controls it, and how inflation robs them, the Central Banking system in this country would likely be eliminated. Predictably, the Fed’s little booklet was not reprinted and, by the end of 1974, had been removed from the official list of Government publications. I, however, still have my copy, and will not surrender it – it is a confession of “American Economics” that is far more valuable than any “Keynesian” or “Monetarist” tome I have seen since.

I have already studied the works of John Maynard Keynes and Milton Friedman, as well as theories from authors outside the two most common economic philosophies. I can sum up most such advice I have heard or read as follows: Even if *one thousand* economists say a foolish thing, it is *still* a foolish thing.

⁵⁹ Silberger, Steven, *The Ten-Day MBA: a step-by-step guide to mastering the skills taught in America’s top business schools*, William Morrow and Company, Inc.; revised edition, 1999, p. 55-56.

In my opinion, as long as the United States retains the Federal Reserve, and keeps The People ignorant of the truth, the “laws” of economics will remain generally the same. I believe that my existing knowledge of economics, both domestic and global, exceeds that of most MBAs, and I will, therefore, skip this core area. I further believe that there is a dire need for high-school level economics courses that – in plain English – better educate kids on how sound economies work. Upon retirement, I may develop such a course, but for now, I have an MBA to finish!

Global/International Business

The company I presently manage, *Larkin Industries, Inc.*, is “global” in the sense that our consultants are multi-lingual, we make investments in the international markets, and we serve clients who are multi-national. Within this tight definition of a “global” business, I have been exposed to – and have designed technological solutions for - multiple currencies and multiple languages. A further component, “global customs and cultures,” is also familiar to me, having grown up in Brasil and having spent time in Africa and Europe. While this exposure does not make me an “expert” in Global Business, it has equipped me to be open, flexible, and aware of global constraints and opportunities. I reserve the right to revisit this core area prior to completing my MBA, should the need arise, but I choose to defer this topic in favor of my desired emphasis: Information Technology Management.

Information Technology Management (MAJOR)

Many people, I assume, would pass by the core areas in which they have the *most* experience. With all the years I have invested in the Information Technology (I.T.) field, you might think I’d had enough! While writing my “Profile of Major Influences” (see Section 1), I wrestled with the idea of emphasizing all subjects *except* I.T. in order to fill other “intelligence gaps.” Since my future career will most likely pass through the “Chief Information Officer” or “Chief Technology Officer” pathways, in order to move quickly down that path, and be taken seriously, I must be considered an “expert” by experience *and* education. For that reason, I have decided to spend a considerable amount of time further enhancing my I.T. Management knowledge, making it a “Major” or specialization within my MBA degree.

2255 Gates on Business (3 credits)

I will use *Business @ the Speed of Thought*, by Bill Gates, to explore the vision of future corporate systems from the perspective of the wealthiest man in the World. While I do not agree with everything Microsoft has done, or is doing, I cannot argue with the success Gates has brought his company. I will explore and clarify my own vision, philosophy and style of I.T. management in light of Gates’ vision.

2260 Kempis on Information Technology (3 credits)

For further management-level I.T. knowledge, I will study *Do It Smart: Seven Rules for Superior Information Technology Performance*, by Rolf Dieter Kempis (Editor), Jurgen Ringbeck, Ralf Augustin, Gun Bulk, Berthold Trenkel-Bogle. I have read many such books in pursuit of answers to client questions – just not *this* book. I will use this book to recommend improved I.T. performance guidelines for my current clients, or to compare my existing expertise with that of the authors.

2261 Gascoyne & 2262 Schulman on Internet Strategy (4 credits)

In order to assist a present client in developing a successful Internet solution, requiring proofs-of-concept and prototypes prior to receiving first-round financing, I would like to combine the knowledge of multiple courses to increase my expertise on the subject. I will therefore use *Corporate Internet Planning Guide: Aligning Internet Strategy With Business Goals*, by Richard J. Gascoyne and Koray Ozcubukcu, as well as *The Internet Strategic Plan*, by Martin A. Schulman and Rick R. Smith, to help me recommend an Internet solution for the client. I am aware that four credits will require a much larger course paper than usual and am willing to pursue it to fulfill the 10-credit requirement for a *Major* in this core area.

Quantitative Techniques/Statistics

Quantitative Analysis and Statistics are very important subjects to an “I.T. guy,” especially one who is often required to perform quantitative calculations on vast databases for his corporate clients. The ability to turn raw data into useful information is a skill I have devoted most of my career to perfect. Beyond simply programming mathematical formulae into management computer solutions for clients, my work has included “heuristic” data analysis, extracting profitable, “decisionable” information from seemingly mundane datasets. These solutions have included some very profitable stock market investment systems. Therefore, rather than take a course in this core area, I propose to display some of my “quantitative expertise” in a course paper developed under Finance (2076 *Sincere on Investing*).

Business Strategy/Policy

The thought has occurred to me that, if I truly understood good business strategy, I’d already be “filthy rich.” A corollary could be that, if I was smart enough to provide successful strategic advice to my clients, why didn’t I heed my own advice? The answer, of course, can be found in my Profile (see Section 1), and is evidence for the need to improve myself in the core area of Business Strategy. Combining an overt recommendation by *Rushmore’s* Director of Graduate Studies with a “subliminal” recommendation from my current *Rushmore* Advisor, I have chosen to improve my “profitability” via the following course:

2002 Hargrave on Strategic Planning (3 credits)

I will use the book, *Plan for Profitability! : How to Write a Strategic Business Plan*, by (Professor) Lee E. Hargrave, Jr., as a guide to developing strategic business plans for at least two clients: myself and the client mentioned earlier who plans to go public. Since this course employs other MBA skills (such as Marketing, Finance, and Quantitative Analysis) to formulate plans, I will additionally benefit by filling “intelligence gaps” not served by other courses.

As supplemental reading on the subject, I will include *Start Where You Are: Matching Your Strategy to Your Marketplace*, by William B. Rouse (Jossey-Bass Inc., 1996).

Entrepreneurship

In my Profile I offered evidence of emerging entrepreneurship starting in the early 1980s. Forming consulting businesses, incorporating, and other related activities were influential in developing an entrepreneurial spirit. Some of the client relationships I have enjoyed since that time, along with successful investment endeavors, have further contributed to this tendency. Over time, I have accumulated a large library of books, anecdotal and theoretical, on the subject, including (but not limited to): *The Millionaire Mind*, by Thomas J. Stanley, Ph.D. (Andrews McMeel Publishing, 2000); *How to Wake Up the Financial Genius Inside You*, by Mark Oliver Haroldsen (Marko Enterprises, 1976); *A Declaration of Financial Independence*, by John Grandbouche (Spencer Judd, 1983); plus books by Anthony Robbins, Napoleon Hill, and many others.

Has my personal and professional experience, supplemented by a solid library, prepared me to be a successful entrepreneur? Perhaps; but it has certainly made the authors of all those books richer! The key lesson I have learned through reading and life is that one must take risks to expect rewards. To put it in simpler terms: “cows don’t give milk – you must take it.” Entrepreneurship is taking enough educated risks to allow opportunities to reach their potential. That is the message in most books and courses on the subject; that is a message I understand and agree with; thus, there is no need (in my opinion) to earn credits toward my MBA attaining a “firm grasp of the obvious.” As with previous core areas, however, I reserve the right to revise my curriculum or defer to a future DBA program.

Foundation Courses

In addition to the “Core Areas of Business” discussed above, *Rushmore University’s* requirements for an MBA include two foundation courses, the product of one such course presently before your eyes. These courses are as follows:

BUS 1000 The Capstone Course (3 credits)

This course spans the entire curriculum by containing a journal of all activities and reading materials used to obtain the MBA. Thus, the course is the first thing started and results in the last course paper submitted for credit.

BUS 1001-1002 The Foundation Course (6 credits)

The Foundation Course culminates in the document you are presently reading, but not before a tremendous amount of studying and self-analysis. The self-analysis is primarily contained in the Profile and Goals sections of this document. The studying has included books on writing, clear thinking, doing research, self-improvement, and – most importantly – gaining a clear insight into what an MBA really entails. This last topic was deftly handled in the book, *The Ten-Day MBA: a step-by-step guide to mastering the skills taught in America’s top business schools*, by Steven Silberger (William Morrow and Company, Inc.; revised edition, 1999). Essentially, an MBA is as much a means by which executives communicate and make decisions, as it is a collection of knowledge. Realizing this in advance of pursuing the degree allows the student to approach the education with both eyes open. Mine are.

Summary

According to the *Rushmore University* requirements for an MBA degree, I will need a total of 36 credits. Based on the foregoing curriculum analysis, the table below lists the distribution of proposed courses and their associated credits (with one extra).

Core Area	Course	Credits
Foundation Courses	BUS 1000 The Capstone Course	3
	BUS 1001-1002 The Foundation Course	6
Marketing	2225 Kennedy on Marketing	3
Finance	2070 Lipman on Capital Generation	3
	2076 Sincere on Investing	3
Accounting	n/a	--
Management	2003 Crosby on Management	3
	2160 Kharbanda on Project Management	3
Legal Environment of Business	n/a	--
Business Ethics	n/a	--
Economics	n/a	--
Global/International Business	n/a	--
Information Technology Management	2255 Gates on Business	3
	2260 Kempis on Information Technology	3
	2261 Gascoyne & 2262 Schulman on Internet Strategy	4
Quantitative Techniques/Statistics	n/a	--
Business Strategy/Policy	2002 Hargrave on Strategic Planning	3
Entrepreneurship	n/a	--
Total Credits:		37

Table 1. Summary of MBA Curriculum for Dan James

Section 4: Schedule of Course Completion

Overview

The remaining variables in my strategy to achieve an MBA are: 1) In what order to arrange the courses, and 2) When each course will be completed. The answer to the first variable is relatively simple; I will take the courses in order of the highest need by my current clients. In other words, knowledge I need soonest will be studied ahead of other topics. The answer to the “when” question is more difficult and rather subjective. Being mindful that “life” often gets in the way of scheduling, I have designed an extremely aggressive schedule for obtaining my MBA, one that requires nearly a full-time commitment. While most students may require a year (or more) to fulfill all 36 credits, I intend to do it in six to seven months.

The schedule below reflects – as they say in the Air Force – an “Intentions Are High” attitude that should produce an MBA degree before May, 2002. Should my client demands or other forces draw upon my time, certainly the degree will be delayed a bit, however, I am determined to make up time as I progress through the courses, and will be relying on my professional experience to help me achieve my goal.

Schedule

BUS 1001-1002 – The Foundation Course	17-Oct-2001
2002 Hargrave on Strategic Planning	9-Nov-2001
2225 Kennedy on Marketing	28-Nov-2001
2070 Lipman on Capital Generation	12-Dec-2001
2076 Sincere on Investing	31-Dec-2001
2003 Crosby on Management	16-Jan-2002
2160 Kharbanda on Project Management	31-Jan-2002
2255 Gates on Business	15-Feb-2002
2260 Kempis on Information Technology	28-Feb-2002
2261 Gascoyne & 2262 Schulman on Internet Strategy ...	29-Mar-2002
BUS 1000 – The Capstone Course	15-Apr-2002

Conclusion

There is only one conclusion: With or without “brain damage”⁶⁰ I will be obtaining an MBA degree from *Rushmore University* so that my personal and professional goals can be achieved.

⁶⁰ See Section 1. This is the end, so you should have decided the matter by now!

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