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Apr 17, 2018 by [Cari E. Guittard](#)

What MPDs and MBAs Can Learn from Each Other ^[1]

Earlier this summer I had the opportunity to teach *Corporate Diplomacy and Geopolitics* for the MBA School at the University of San Francisco. My students were part of USF's Executive Program—all working full-time while pursuing their degrees. Unlike my experience teaching this past spring at USC, where I had the luxury of a full semester, here I was given 6 weeks to *cover the world*.

In preparation for the class I delved deeply into MBA curricula, which have surprisingly few global components, as well as current research and writings on geopolitical trends and their implications for business. I also incorporated many PD resources as part of my own hope that some day we will have a cross-disciplinary approach and public diplomacy element as a core part of every MBA program. Through this process, I distilled out several resources and schools of thought that MPD and MBA students alike (as well as public diplomacy

practitioners) can benefit from.

First and foremost, Ian Bremmer's work should be required reading for anyone seeking to understand the world we live in today. When it comes to recognizing and explaining geopolitical trends, no one does it better than Bremmer. We used his books *The Fat Tail* and most recently *The End of the Free Market* as the basis for many of our in class discussions. For anyone seeking to get a quick read on what's happening in the world and where the world is going, these are the books to begin with. Bremmer is one of the few experts on the subject of geopolitics whom you can read, absorb and understand readily.

Second, I bundled and shared with the students some of the resources I use every day to keep a pulse on what's happening around the globe. I always begin and end my day with "Watching America" which has free, daily translations of the world's news coverage of the U.S. I am also a Drudge Report junkie and religiously read my subscriptions of *The Week*, *Economist*, *Foreign Policy* and *Foreign Affairs*. My increasingly favorite resource however is the *Harvard Business Review*. The *HBR* has a way of looking at the world that is unique and fresh from a PD point of view and distilling down key facts and figures that provide tools anyone can easily incorporate into their work. One example is this month's map of social media usage across the globe. Bottom line, *HBR* is written for a business audience and is geared towards people with limited time and attention span. For anyone outside of business wanting to understand business, especially as more and more PD practitioners are charged with building public-private partnerships and increasingly being called upon to influence and engage business, this is an essential tool.

Finally, I built on the teachings and themes of Clayton Christensen at the Harvard Business School whose work every MBA student has drilled into their psyche. Christensen is famous for his theory of *Disruptive Technology* and the author of *The Innovator's Dilemma*. I pulled several key insights from this work into my various lectures this summer, and while I don't have the space here to explore it in depth, there is much there that PD practitioners can borrow and leverage. What I would like to highlight is a recent article Christensen penned for the *HBR* this month when his MBA students, facing an abysmal job market and economy, asked him to apply his management lessons to life.

The title says it all: "How Will You Measure Your Life: Don't Reserve Your Best Business Thinking for Your Career." I truly appreciate this subject as I think too often many of us forget to take the time to think through the purpose of our lives. It is summer after all, and if there were ever an excellent time for such self reflection, especially given the state of the economy, it is now.

Don't worry about the level of individual prominence you have achieved; worry about the individuals you have helped become better people.

I am reminded of the old Thomas Jefferson axiom, *Never put off till tomorrow what you can do today*. It is a phrase that strikes fear in the hearts of many life-long procrastinators and A-type personalities, myself included, who despise being thrown off-course with wild philosophical

discussions on the meaning and purpose of life. Life has a funny way, though, of forcing the issue upon each of us, irrespective of schedules and time-tables, and in many cases much sooner than any of us were prepared to expect. Students are notorious for putting off such deep thinking as they invariably say, “*I’ll have the rest of my life to think about that or figure that out.*” I was heartened to see someone as deeply respected in business as Christensen raise this issue and even he admits that it was only upon a recent diagnosis with cancer—which is now in remission—that he began to fully evaluate his life and focus on sharing those lessons with his students.

My students have often asked me why I am so passionate about my work and life. They think it is some magical combination of Starbucks, Red Bull, Chinese herbal supplements and a natural propensity for being high strung. While those have certainly aided in my enthusiasm for life, my true purpose comes from losing my mother to a brain tumor when she was 46 and I was 21. As anyone who has lost someone close to them at a formative age knows, *life is short*. It can change in an instant, when you least expect it.

I get many strange looks when I share that there were countless positive outcomes from losing my mother. However, in so many ways, that period in my life taught me key lessons that I continue to use in my professional and personal life to this very day. Many of these I share with my students as part of what I consider a *Five Tool Executive*, and those skill sets that are essential to success in global business are also essential for success in life. Christensen similarly shares his key life lessons from business, and I’ve outlined some of those below which I feel should be of practical interest to anyone engaged in *Informing, Inspiring, and Influencing*.

Key Life Lessons from Business Strategy for Public Diplomacy

- Remember the Importance of Humility — Humility as defined not by self-deprecating behavior or attitudes but by the esteem with which you regard others. Good behavior flows naturally from that kind of humility.
- Create a Strategy for Your Life — Keep the fundamental purpose of your life front and center as you decided how to spend their time, talents and energy.
- Allocate Your Resources — Your decisions about allocating your personal time, energy and talent ultimately shape your life’s strategy.
- Create a Culture — Build a culture in your life that promotes the development of self-esteem and confidence in those around you. Like employees, children build self-esteem by doing things that are hard and learning what works.
- Choose the Right Yardstick — Don’t worry about the level of individual prominence you have achieved; *worry about the individuals you have helped become better people.*

Let me repeat that last point: Don’t worry about the level of individual prominence you have achieved; *worry about the individuals you have helped become better people*. If we each think back on those lives we’ve touched, on those we’ve helped become better people in some way, I hope our lists are lengthy, with too many names for us each to count.

There goes my idealism again. But it is summertime, after all. Shouldn’t we all take some time to do some deep thinking, seek to learn from one another in new and different ways and

broaden our own perspectives?
