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Section B: 12:30 - 2:00, room 231

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1 Course Overview

First, let me welcome you to the MBA program here at the Goizueta Business School. You will find this to be a challenging couple of years, and you will also forge relationships that will follow you for the rest of your career. So please try to learn all that you can from your fellow students and to share the insights and experiences that you have brought to this program with them.

This course is titled “Structured Problem Solving,” but you should realize that you have been solving problems for most of your life. Just watch a one-year-old child in a high chair with a cookie: how do I get that thing I know tastes good into my mouth and not on the floor? Some of problems are easy to solve, and sometimes different solutions to a problem are more or less the same. In these cases, the decisions we come to are aided by experience and common sense, and often we don’t even think of ourselves as having made a decision (open the refrigerator and get something to eat).

In your professional life prior to Goizueta, you have witnessed decisions being made and attempts to solve problems. Perhaps you were on the receiving end of a problem solution, and thought to yourself that the solution was never going to work (if only they had asked you). Or perhaps you saw another solution, and wondered how someone came up with such an elegant solution. There are lots of examples of companies who have converted an ingenious solution into an amazingly successful business (Microsoft, Apple, E-Bay, Amazon, Wal-Mart, to name a few).

Chances are that the level of responsibility you have been given prior to returning for your MBA has been limited, though. You have not been asked for your solution to the the redesign of the Kindle, or the antenna problem on the iPhone4, or what to do about leaking oil in the Gulf of Mexico. Part of this is due to your lack of functional expertise (you have never drilled an oil well, for example). During your studies here at Goizueta you will take classes to gain new functional expertise, in marketing, finance or operations. You will learn about the basic theories that explain business outcomes and specific tools that are used in particular situations. Some of you will specialize in a very specific niche and accumulate a large amount of functional expertise.

But all of you will leave the MBA program with a new expectation associated with your degree: that you can solve problems, make decisions and see that those decisions are implemented in the organizations you go to work for. This is not necessarily true of other graduate degrees where the person is responsible for primarily for some specific knowledge (chemistry, electronics, aerodynamics). You, on the other hand, will not necessarily be the functional ex-

pert, but you will be expected to get things done, and your career will be dependent on the results you bring to the organization.

So how do you learn to do this?

How do you “solve the problem” of becoming better at solving problems?

What does it mean to solve problems?

What do good decisions look like?

This class is the first step in the curriculum here at Goizueta to develop your skills as a problem solver and decision maker that will be critical for the success of all types of organizations. We have five sessions together, so this is only a start, but many people have thought very hard about this activity, and we will look at some of their approaches.

Many organizations have turned to particular approaches that become a common language for everyone who solves problems faced by the firm. Toyota has the Toyota Production System, and the language of Six Sigma permeates GE, for example. Different consulting firms have refined particular methodologies to provide more consistent results for their clients, and Deloitte Consulting will join the class to discuss their approach. Depending upon the kinds of problems and decisions faced by the organizations, the methodologies are tailored to emphasize certain aspects of problem solving.

But there are commonalities, and what we will do in this class is build a generic framework for structured problem solving that will introduce you to these kinds of systems. In the casework in other classes during your studies here, you will see variations to this framework, but you should also begin to see the common threads of problem solving techniques and how managers make and implement decisions.

2 Learning Objectives

When the course is finished, you should be able to:

- Describe the central role of structured problem solving for your career
- Apply the two-pyramid model to different problem settings
- Understand the importance of careful problem definition and key questions
- Understand and apply tools to structure problems for teams to work on
- Understand and apply tools to synthesize the information collected and to persuade others to implement decisions

3 Teaching Methods and Course Material

I will teach this class with some time for me to present concepts, but my expectation is that this will be an interactive class with active discussions. You should come to each session prepared to offer your insights, experiences and questions.

There is no textbook for this course, but I will provide class notes for each session and a reading list for those who want to read more about this subject. Many of the books have a few interesting chapters, but none covers the material for this course at the level we will be working. There will be one case study for the class, Ti-Tech (A), that you can access via study.net. I will provide study questions for the case.

4 Course Requirements, Grading and the Honor Code

Grades for the course will be based on the following:

Class participation (50%). I will assess your participation during the five class sessions we have together. Higher evaluations will go to those who contribute constructively to our discussions, not just for how much you contribute. This can be in the form of providing clear insights for the rest of the class (you got the answer), but also in posing questions that indicate an attempt to more clearly understand the decision at hand. These "I don't understand" contributions should always include a description of why you have the question and what the answer to the question will provide.

Group case assignments (50%). There will be two written assignments for the class, due on August 16 and 23. I will provide further instructions for each during class. The group should prepare one report and turn in a printed copy before the class discussion begins on those two days. Effective reports can be done in five to seven pages of text. No late submissions will be accepted.

Please note that a minimum (i.e., passing) level of performance on each of these components is required in order to receive a passing grade for the class.

Also recognize that the MBA program at Goizueta has an official grading policy that limits the number of the highest grades. There will be sufficient work to allow me to implement this policy, but if you have any questions or concerns about this policy, please feel free to contact me at any time during the class.

Academic misconduct of any sort will not be tolerated and everyone should understand that I take this issue quite seriously. I will pursue violations of the honor code according to

University policies, and all students in this class must comply with the Goizueta Honor Code. Please make time to talk with me or someone in the MBA office if you are unsure about these policies.

Also understand that a student who knowingly assists another student in committing an act of academic misconduct will be equally accountable for the violation and will be subject to sanctions.

5 Course Calendar

The course only meets for five sessions, and here are the topics and assignments for each session. If there is the need to alter any of the details, I will communicate the changes both in class and on the FIRSTCLASS conference for the class.

August 9 I will introduce the course and we will discuss the problem solving models people in the class have used to make important decisions. We will survey the history of structured problem solving and then develop a framework to use in this class (and beyond).

August 11 We will begin to talk about specific tools used in structured problem solving and how they are used in the problem solving framework.

The first assignment for the class will be distributed and will be due on August 16.

August 13 Representatives from Deloitte Consulting LLP will present their Hypothesis Based Consulting session. All of the sections of the course will meet together in the Auditorium at 9:00. This session will give you a look at how Deloitte applies the tools we have discussed in consulting engagements.

August 16 We will discuss the case assignment and compare different group's approach to the open-ended assignment. This will provide further insights into problem definition and structuring.

We will then begin to talk about the project management aspects of structured problem solving and begin to look at how to bring the results of the investigation together to create persuasive arguments for the solutions discovered.

The second assignment for the class, Ti-Tech (A) will be due on August 23. Each group should evaluate the problem solving approaches of the two main characters of the case, Amy Meredith and Rob Wakefield. We will consider how the work they have done can be brought together to create a solution for Tim Stanley. I will provide additional study questions to help you prepare this assignment. Please keep in mind that the purpose of this case is not to “solve” it, but rather to evaluate the approaches taken so far.

August 23 We will discuss the Ti-Tech (A) case, and each group should be prepared to discuss their evaluation of the problem solving techniques used.

We will continue to talk about bringing together the various parts of the problem analysis process in order to discover solutions that are supported by the analysis. We will then start to talk about the tasks associated with implementing problem solutions.

August 25 We will conclude the course by talking about presentation skills and tools that are used in structured problem solving. Some of this will be useful for the case study method used in many of the classes here. This will also fit with the Professional Communications class you will be taking later in the fall.