

If Not Now, When?

How to Take Charge of Your Career

by Jane Barrett and Camilla Arnold

There was a time when gaining an MBA guaranteed promotion and riches in the worlds of business management and consulting. Nowadays, an MBA has become more of a right of passage, the trophy without which you aren't even considered for an increasing number of roles in the business world. But the process of working towards the final qualification brings its own rewards. Looking back on my own MBA studies, there were a few key people, experiences and books which made all the difference to my thinking and career planning, and which ultimately enabled me to achieve my own 'dream career'. One of those key books would certainly have been *If Not Now, When? How to Take Charge of Your Career*, a newly penned guide based on the combined experience in executive recruitment and talent development of career coaches Jane Barrett and Camilla Arnold.

If Not Now, When? provides the structure, the tools and the encouragement to think deeply about what we want from our career now and over time (vs. what an employer wants from you). Using a structured process and a series of tried-and-tested exercises, the book guides us to look within and discover what is really important to us in our work and personal life, what our true values, passions and interests are, and to find or create the career options which will enable us to work in alignment with these. Ultimately the book helps us to manage our career more proactively so that we get the best return for us on the money and time we have invested in education and work, in preference to leaving things to chance or trusting in the vagaries of shifting corporate agendas.

Perhaps unexpectedly, *If Not Now, When?* begins with an exploration of all the negatives which can so easily prevent us from going for what we really want. Fears of all kinds, often fanned by the latest recession-obsessed news stories, limiting beliefs about our abilities or the existence of 'ideal' career options, worries about money or the well-meant but unhelpful 'advice' from friends and family, and many other commonly perceived obstacles are all discussed, with the aim of helping us to resolve them in advance. As the title suggests, there may never

be an absolutely 'right' time to take charge of our career – so now is as good a time as any!

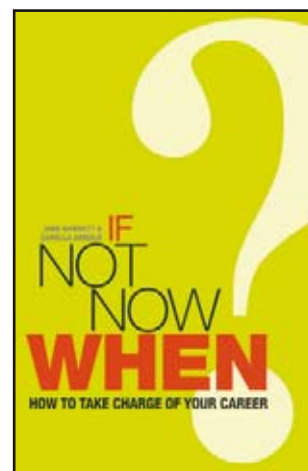
The next step is to understand yourself and what you want from your career. As an MBA student, you may have rock-solid ideas about your career and how the MBA will help you to get there. Or you may see the MBA as a passport out of a situation which no longer works for you. Whatever your level of career clarity now, the activities and suggestions in this part of the book will undoubtedly help you to broaden your future career options, based on a greater depth of information and self-understanding. It might even help you realise that your current career ladder is leaning against the wrong wall!

Of course, knowing what you want is a vital first step. Making it a reality is a potentially far more daunting matter, involving venturing out into the real world, researching possibilities and sharing your plans with others. Here too the book provides a structured process for moving forward and exploring all the possible avenues open to you – including working with a career coach if the book alone is not enough for you.

Finally, the book breaks down the job search strategy into a series of manageable and easily achievable chunks complemented by some very sound tips and advice gleaned from the authors' years of experience of being on the recruiting side of the table. I particularly like the tips for handling the trickier interview questions and for having an impact in the all-important first 100 days.

If Not Now, When? is peppered with varied and inspiring real-life case studies about people who have made significant career shifts, how they have done it and how they feel about their choices now. Their examples make it clear that career management does take consistent time and effort, but also that it really is possible to bounce out of bed in the morning, eager to get to work... Well, on most days, anyway! For my money, *If Not Now, When?* is the most concise, inspiring and constructive guide to managing your own career I have read. It is a timely and invaluable resource in a world where the MBA alone can no longer make all your career aspirations come true.

Review by Mark Walker



Mark Walker completed his MBA at Henley Business School in 2002. He now works as an independent business consultant, specialising in leadership and organisational development. He can be contacted at mark@passionomics.com