

# Cass MBA Studentship Essay

Wednesday, 07 June 2006

Full-time MBA Please describe an event from your personal or professional life which has had an impact on your development. What lessons did you learn from this event?[1000 words max]

As I ran frantically to my train, the sweat pouring, I knew I would be late. At that stage I had no idea being late would be of little consequence.

On the morning of July 7th, 2005, 52 people were killed in a series of terrorist bombings on tubes and a bus in London. If I hadn't been uncharacteristically late that morning I would have been on the train that exploded at King's Cross station. The enormity and the horror of the tragedy and of my lucky escape still prey on my mind.

Details of exactly who the terrorists were emerged over the coming days and, to my dismay, the perpetrators weren't that different to me. They were British Muslims. This fact had a profound effect on me. I decided then that as a British Muslim who did not believe in the ideals of the terrorists it was time to stand up and make my voice heard.

I became more and more determined to show that British Muslims can live in harmony and I vowed to make a difference to my local community.

As I looked into Muslim representation I found there was a distinct lack of it. When I talked to people in the shops and coffee houses in my local area I found people who were disenfranchised, living on the fringes because they felt nobody cared about their problems so they just put up with their situation in life or, in the case of the terrorists, decided to exact some kind of warped revenge. How could this happen in a democratic country like ours?

It dawned on me that my duty, as a young Muslim, was to become more engaged in politics. I met with party leaders, activists, council officials and volunteers and discovered that they were willing to listen. They also wanted to see change, more integration, harmony, ideals that I shared. The people I met urged me to step on to the political stage so I decided to stand in the local elections. It hasn't been easy decision. I've pounded the pavements for months and in all weathers talking to all and sundry about why drawing the disparate London community, I live in, together is so crucial. The social problems on my ward in North London aren't simply about ethnicity, of course, there are polarised communities, crime and a great deal of deprivation which I also hope to have a positive impact on through my campaigning work to help the poorest in our society.

At the same time as my local political work I also joined a voluntary organisation, the UK's largest and most representative Muslim organisation. I have focused on youth issues as this appears to be where the greatest problems are for the future. The challenge is to bring young Muslims who feel sidelined back to the mainstream. Not an easy task and one that's confounding politicians and thinkers across the world at the moment. My voluntary organisation is contributing to the debate and we have developed a strategy for moving a project team forward to help facilitate change. My experience in political campaigning has helped here as I have been able to describe the wants and needs of people from my ward to the young Muslims I have met, to impress on them how similar we all are. As a project manager I am developing a new skill set, namely, how to motivate part-time volunteers. This is challenging as most volunteers have multiple time pressures to juggle and I have discovered that sometimes it is better to suggest a team member deliver their work late rather than pressurise them to deliver on time. This maintains their enthusiasm for the team, the project and me without significantly delaying the project.

I am a regular contributor to the x Channel as a political commentator on a live prime-time programme that digests the week's major stories. My personal aim on the show is to put forward a mainstream, non-partisan point of view which will challenge the existing victim mentality of some of the viewers. The second half of the show allows viewers to telephone with their questions and comments. This is always challenging and I have to deal with quick-fire and unscripted questions and provide solid rationale for my opinions. I offer a modernisers perspective which often clashes with some of the more traditional viewers. But it provides active engaging debate and I've had some very positive feedback from my regular appearances. As the channel is viewed by a very mixed group of people I have to ensure that the language I use is both professional and understandable.

So in summary I have learnt a great deal since 7/7 and changed as a person, for the better I think. As well as proving I can conduct a political campaign I've also learned a humanity which has enabled me to change the views of one 16-year-old who felt the London bombings were a good thing. I've learned that old cliché that we're not that different is really true. Class, education, ethnicity and religions are not mutually exclusive and worlds do collide. That in itself is not a bad thing but it is when they collide without an understanding of one another that we see havoc. I have also learnt that if I do not like a particular aspect of life, I must be a player as the silent can only complain they can't make a difference.[Word count: 911]