



Executive MBA

*Kari Matalone,
alumnus 2004, explains
how it shaped her
future.*

Interview

WHAT IS YOUR CURRENT JOB AND POSITION?

I am the **Director of CEO Communications at Splunk**, a nearly \$1B software company that is making machine data accessible, usable and valuable to everyone.

In this role, I am responsible for helping manage our CEO's "voice" – his speeches, presentations, announcements, etc – as well as ensuring his time is spent in the most effective way across a range of audiences including customers, partners, board members, employees, investors, journalists and analysts.

CAN YOU SUMMARIZE YOUR PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE AND CHALLENGES?

My entire career has been spent in the Communications field across a range of organizations including agencies, lobbying firms, and multinationals.

One major challenge professional Communicators often face is not having enough business context or knowledge in order to become a truly valuable and trusted advisor to a business unit or executive. Understanding the market, competitive landscape, customer requirements, business operations, and resource allocation – to name a few – is imperative to becoming an effective business Communicator.

Biography



Born and raised in San Jose, CA, I moved to Brussels to attend Vesalius College where I earned my undergraduate degree in International Affairs & History. I stayed in Belgium after university, not necessarily because I loved the weather, but what I did love was the diverse mix of people and cultures that came together here in the heart of Europe.

I spent the next decade of my career in Brussels, mainly supporting EU advocacy efforts on behalf of the agrochemical industry. During this time, I had the opportunity to travel most European countries and meet so many bright and interesting people, from whom I learned so much.

Kari is a 2004 graduate of the Solvay MBA.

WHAT DID YOU LEARN FROM THESE CHALLENGES?

Having witnessed how business understanding is often a “blind spot” for Communicators, I decided to proactively address it by pursuing an MBA at Solvay. The MBA made me better rounded and significantly expanded my realm of potential career paths. In fact, my hiring manager at Cisco told me during the recruitment process that they were explicitly looking for experienced Communicators with MBAs to support their most senior leadership

HOW WOULD YOU DESCRIBE YOUR MBA EXPERIENCE AT THE SOLVAY BRUSSELS SCHOOL?

I was part of the first-ever Part Time program at Solvay, which was both exhilarating and exhausting. Exhilarating because I met some of the smartest, most compassionate people in my life, and to this day we are **all bonded like family** from the sheer amount of time we spent together. Exhausting because of the intense scheduling demands of working a full-time job, attending classes or study groups during evenings and weekends, and somewhere in between trying to fit in family, a network of friends and social life. I’m very happy to learn that it has been revamped into an [Executive MBA](#) delivered in block format, it is more “user-friendly”.

Having come through an American education system my entire life, I also had to learn to adjust to the Belgian education system that Solvay was aligned to, i.e., grading scale of 20, exam process, the mysterious grading council. I had a pretty intense couple of days while waiting to find out if a low score in a Finance class would jeopardize the overall MBA...luckily my strong performance in other areas helped ensure I passed (with honors, even!).

DID THE MBA SHAPE WHO YOU ARE TODAY?

The MBA shaped me in so many ways, personally and professionally. If I had to list the top 3, I would say:

Grit: I set a goal for myself to earn an MBA via a 2-year program. There were many times I considered quitting because of the demands on my time and intellectual capacity, but I forced myself to follow through with my commitment. And I’m so glad I did. It stretched me beyond what I thought was capable and made me into a more resilient and empathetic person.

The People: I studied, worked, laughed, and cried alongside the 30 other students in my program and consider each one like family. If someone had a business trip, death in the family, or other thing that forced them to miss classes, the rest of the class would band together to ensure they got the info they needed for the assignment. An added bonus is that we have helped each other out professionally, making introductions, giving job referrals, or being a sounding board for an idea. I may have since forgotten the fundamentals of Activity Based Costing, but I’ve never forgotten how wonderful each of my fellow students treated each other.

Career Opportunity: Not only did having an MBA make my Communications-focused CV better rounded, but it was also **a way to differentiate myself** in case I decided to return to the workforce after taking a break to raise a family. For many female professionals, starting a family and seeing your career start to take off often happen around the same time. **I considered the MBA as a bit of an insurance policy to help make my profile more relevant and marketable** in case I wanted to re-

enter the workforce after a few years. Ultimately, I decided to go back to work about 5-6 months after having each of my daughters, but having the MBA gave me the peace of mind of having more options. It worked!

DO YOU HAVE ANY ADVICE FOR PEOPLE WHO WANTS TO START AN MBA / FOR STUDENTS WHO ARE STARTING THEIR STUDIES AT SBS-EM?

The MBA program and classes provide such a **rich platform of knowledge and discussion**, but nothing beats real-life experience. If you get the opportunity, do an internship in a business setting. Or if you are already working at a company, ask if you can meet with or even shadow a colleague in a group you want to know more about.

Also, **collaboration** is such an important skill to have in the business world, so use your time in the MBA program to really hone it. The other people in your program are going to become your friends and network for life, so work well with them and then make every effort to stay in touch after graduation. In just the last 6 months, I’ve welcomed 2 fellow Solvay MBAers at my home. (Mind you, we graduated 12 years ago!) And a few others are organizing a reunion in London this coming May...my husband and I are already starting to look at flight options.

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