

TO COMPETE OR NOT TO COMPETE

THE IMPORTANCE OF BUSINESS COMPETITIONS



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At least once in your life as a university student, there comes a time (or several times for that matter) where you fall into serious self-doubt. Your mother's voice rings in your ears, the times she'd said "Just a little bit more effort on your next exam and you'll be as free as a bird." But in the end you just realise you're never truly free; you're either stuck in a cage that keeps getting bigger, or a cage within a cage within a cage. The lock is complex, constantly evolving, changing, putting in one worry in your mind after another, offering the ever so brief glimmer of hope to drive you on but never opening completely. Sort of like the friend-zone, isn't it?

At the end of the day, we all want approximately the same things: a good job, a good relationship, peace of mind, and happiness. And inadvertently, in our daily struggles, we all vie for this end state. The life of a university student is centred on the constant struggle to succeed, to compete and somehow one up the others. We do what we can to embellish our resumes – whether with a 1st place at an international competition or an impromptu speech competition. Who knows what will make you stand out when it comes to landing that dream job?

This is where the innumerable student competitions come in? Do they help us distinguish ourselves in a sea of potential employees? Or are the trophies just meaningless trinkets in the real world?

To the less informed, student competitions might seem to be just 'extra' – an unnecessary burden to add to a list of other activities like studying for that course you can't wrap your head around, teaching that spoiled little brat 6 times a week because you want to buy a PS4, internships, exams, projects, assignments, family responsibilities. To some, competitions simply don't add value – a good CGPA, some work experience, and extra-curricular activities and they feel set.

Some, however, feel that these competitions do add value, and can

make a difference, but they deem themselves incapable of winning and never participate. Some feel pressured to participate because their friends are or their family thinks they should; some participate just out of curiosity; and finally, some participate with a 110 percent focus to win, convinced that the win is worth the effort. And of course there are those who feel there's a trade-off between CGPA and winning competitions.

To have a better grasp of the situation, we asked around a few questions, and although the answers are somewhat inconclusive, they do shed some light on the value of competitions.

Mastura Tasnim, winner of BizMaestros 2016 says that winning competitions might land you an assessment or an interview, but the job itself depends a lot more on your own capabilities and your attitude. Business competitions can help you get an idea of how to behave

in the corporate environment, but the real world is way more daunting. "My advice? Compete, because you want to learn from business cases and the significance of teamwork. Whether you get the job is a completely different matter."

M. Samiul Hoque, winner of BAT Battle of Minds 2015 believes something similar, that one can never truly expect to land a job based on past accolades in business competitions, but he feels that they add value in the sense that they help hone skills like cracking cases and delivering pitches. Admittedly, however, there are those who also get jobs without having won a single competition, because they have the necessary inherent skills. "Ultimately for a fresh graduate, it comes down to his/her performance on the day of the assessment, and a bit of luck."

For most, competitions are a valuable pool of experience that an

individual can learn from. In the words of Ifteker Mahmud, winner of Brandwitz 2014, "You'll definitely be able to directly translate some of your experiences from business competitions to your job, if you're exploring industries such as consultancy or advertising. Apart from that, it helps you become a better decision-maker, team-player, speaker, time manager, and overall a more confident person, which subsequently helps to land a job, and also perform well."

Ishmam Chowdhury, winner of Unilever Future Leaders' League 2016, describes his experience with business competitions as a 'roller coaster ride' – the struggles of case-solving, the gruelling ordeal of facing a panel of judges who were not exactly kind, etc. "During those times, it was the sheer passion for competitions that kept me and my team going." The constant pressure, presentations and effort to con-

vince the occasional adamant person gave him the confidence to tackle adversity in professional life.

For some, it is all about the thrill of competition. In the words of Ayman Rahman Arghyo, winner of SocioCamp 2014, "The adrenaline rush, the fear of failure and the desire for success still remain the same. The only things that change are the stakes. In the real world, every single moment, every single decision you take is you competing with someone else. And nothing has prepared me more for that."

From an employer perspective, companies want individuals who align with the values and culture of the company itself and the ability to face the complexities and challenges of work. Sajeed Alam, also a winner of Unilever Future Leaders' League 2016, believes that business competitions prepare people for the real world on that end. The real business scenario might be different but business competitions provide that extra mileage for the mental acumen to tackle and manage all sorts of situations. He feels that the returns from investing time in participating in such competitions are quite high and everyone always learns and benefits.

Shabab Ishmam, winner of ISCEA PTAK prize 2014, feels there is no simple 'yes' or 'no' answer when asked about the direct correlation between business competition victory and landing a job. To him, some recruiters may value positions attained in reputable competitions, but that value is less than that attributed to one's CGPA or behavioural characteristics – the latter which competition experiences help improve. However, he adds that competitions do offer some chance to network, a sentiment shared by Samid Razzak, champion of Masters of Ideation 2016, as corporate figures attending these competitions often offer internships or job interviews if the participant is able to project his/her potential. But a competition will never be the sole reason for you to land a job.

To sum everything up, competitions might not be directly responsible when it comes to landing your dream job, and they will certainly not act as substitute for an unimpressive CGPA, or a bad interview. In fact, several organisations have minimum CGPA requirements for their entry-level positions, and no matter how many competition wins you have under your belt, you wouldn't even be considered. As hard as it may be to strike a balance between participating in competitions and maintaining a decent CGPA, it's a winning balance that will take you far in terms of personal success. Instead of looking at competitions as 'achievements' that add value to your resume, a better perspective would be to look at it as a source of learning, ability-building, the opportunity to network and learn teamwork. A resume should not be looked at as a check-list where you try to meet the minimum criterion, but rather as a holistic image of the person we are, our interests, abilities and competencies.

At the end of the day employers buy into that holistic image of us; the personal brand which is YOU.

