



EXECUTIVE DIGEST

So, you want to be a business professor?

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Abstract Career transitions within the same industry are challenging enough, but transitions across sectors are even more difficult. Underlying cultural and operational differences between industry and academia present significant hidden obstacles for practitioners seeking to become teachers in higher education. To help expose these challenges, I recount—in this Executive Digest—my personal experiences leaving the consulting profession for a role as a faculty member at the Kelley School of Business, Indiana University. I offer comparisons between the two career models, illustrate specific examples of misaligned expectations, and conclude with practical suggestions to ease the transition and set forth a solid foundation for longevity in academia for non-researchers.

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1. From the boardroom to the classroom

After 13 years in industry as a management consultant, I was selected by my employer to participate in a leadership development program designed to prepare me to enter the firm's partnership. One of the program's core activities involved the development of a personal statement of my authentic leadership point of view, based on my unique professional journey. It was during this period of introspection that I realized what really motivated me. It wasn't the countless examples of successful client deliveries or the opportunity to contribute to the profitable growth of the firm that led to my job satisfaction. Rather, it was the intrinsic value of mentoring and

coaching others that brought about true fulfillment. Although the allure to join the partnership was strong, this explains why I felt compelled to pursue an opportunity to assist in the development of the next generation of business leaders as a faculty member at the Kelley School of Business, Indiana University.

While I had led numerous corporate training sessions throughout my career, I did not have any formal education in instruction. And though I fully expected the learning curve in the classroom to be steep, I did not anticipate the countless additional challenges awaiting me when I arrived on campus. Adjusting to the organization's cultural differences, understanding the critical success factors for my role, learning a new system of performance feedback, and resetting my own personal career goals all proved to be significant hurdles during my transition. For those seeking to make a similar move, this article offers a realistic account of my experience, as well as suggestions for clearing the hurdles.

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2. Faculty opportunities for industry professionals

U.S. business schools are grappling with growing enrollments and a shrinking pool of doctoral-trained professors. In 2007, there were close to 1,100 vacant positions globally for business doctorates. According to the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business International (AACSB), this deficit is estimated to increase to 2,400 by 2013. Given this trajectory, most business schools in the United States have turned to a new applicant pool of non-tenure track adjunct, clinical, and lecturer faculty to meet the demands of classroom teaching. In place of a terminal degree, business schools are seeking qualified candidates with an MBA from an accredited institution and a lengthy track record of success in industry. While many business professionals are drawn to the noble concept of guiding the next generation of executives, a transition from the boardroom to the classroom may not be nearly as rewarding or seamless as anticipated. Far too often, a peak of inflated expectations is quickly followed by a trough of disillusionment that leads new instructors to question their decision to leave the corporate world altogether. [Table 1](#) summarizes

these misaligned expectations. Through an in-depth examination of my experience, I hope to expose the challenges common to this transition and increase the success of fellow practitioners in the classroom.

As industry professionals, many of us begin our careers with the understanding that we are being measured and rewarded for our technical skills. Whether it is our financial analysis prowess, abilities in tackling design tasks for a new marketing campaign, or our know-how in redesigning an inventory management system, our success is dependent upon our ability to meet the demands of our roles through demonstrated proficiency of these skills. Upon evidence of our mastery in meeting the specifications of the more junior roles in the organization, many of us find ourselves being promoted to positions with increasing levels of exposure and responsibility. Along with promotion comes additional management responsibilities for which we may or may not have been sufficiently trained to perform. Management skills include communicating complex ideas, both written and oral; negotiating with others; and mentoring and coaching members of the teams we now manage. Collectively, they represent the soft skills that are intended to complement our sturdy foundation of technical abilities.

Table 1. Aligning new faculty expectations

Expectation	Academic Reality	Mitigating Actions
A high degree of collaboration exists with faculty peers	Faculty members are left to their own entrepreneurial pursuits	Embrace the inherent autonomy of academic freedom
Course materials will be provided from previous instructor	Faculty members view course materials as proprietary knowledge assets not to be shared	Trust your own subject-matter expertise when deciding what students must learn
Industry examples can be repurposed as show-and-tell lecture materials	Student learning requires active engagement in completing authentic tasks	Adopt a robust instructional design approach that aligns instructional materials with student-centered learning objectives
Curriculum remains relatively static from year to year	Students demand relevance and applicability of skills when selecting courses	Leverage summers to innovate course materials Aim to refresh 20%–30% of course design each year
Excellence in the classroom will be rewarded through recognition and promotion opportunities	Lack of formal career models for non-tenure track faculty result in ambiguous advancement opportunities	Seek opportunities to publish in popular press and practitioner journals Use service opportunities to refresh skills and enhance personal contributions Emphasize student interactions over influencing administrative decisions

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