

## MBA PORTRAITS

### MBA Portrait

Christian Peter Blom-Stokstad

MBA 2007, Norwegian

Christian Peter Blom-Stokstad is from Norway. He did military studies at the Royal Norwegian Naval Academy and worked as an executive officer in a submarine. At the beginning of the MBA program, Christian, 29 years old, moved to Milan with his wife and his newly born child.

Why did you choose to attend an MBA?

Although I very much enjoyed the experience in the Norwegian Navy, both out of personal and professional reasons I was looking for a career change and I knew an MBA could help me reach this objective.

Why at SDA Bocconi?

The School's reputation and good position in international rankings were primary criteria which made me look more closely at SDA Bocconi MBA. In addition I wanted a one-year program. The program structure very well responded to my needs and the relatively small class size as well. I was looking for an environment providing high interaction and I couldn't see myself in a program with hundreds of students.

Has the location of your MBA had an impact on your choice?

Yes, my wife and I love Italy : we had holidays in Tuscany, enjoyed the culture, the food, the nature, and the open attitude of the people here. So when it came to choose the location for my MBA, this was also a decisive factor.

You have a rather unusual background for an MBA student. Do you think this was an obstacle or an advantage in your MBA studies?

Definitely both. In the Navy I was very well trained in areas such as teamwork and leadership ability. Being in charge of a submarine implies high responsibilities and hard work under time constraint. All this has helped me face the challenges I encountered in the MBA. But of course in terms of subjects, almost all of them were new to me, plus I lacked an understanding of the corporate world.

To what extent the fact of having your own family with you has influenced your MBA studies?

It has been one more variable in terms of time management: obviously I spent some time with my wife and my child, so I had to be more selective in the choice of social events. However for instance I, for instance, managed to be an active member of the Ski Club.

I feel I haven't missed anything important, and having my family with me has given me stability and joy.

Has anything at Bocconi exceeded your expectations?

For sure, my classmates. Before joining the MBA I was afraid to find a very competitive environment, strongly career-focused people, meeting a kind of MBA cliché. To my great surprise, I found myself in a very cooperative environment, with a truly diverse class mix.

In terms of personal growth, how do you feel you have changed in these months?

I highly value the very international environment. It has helped me develop a better understanding of cultural differences, which is very relevant in my future job as a consultant. I have also improved my problem-solving ability, too.

And of course I was looking for strong contents, which I got.

I know you consider empathy an important skill for a leader. Can you explain why?

In my view, the key to become a successful leader is to function well in teams. Not only as team leader, but also as team member. To achieve this, I believe empathy is a key skill, making you able to put yourself in the shoes of other people. This will make you see things from different perspectives and it can help you motivate other people.

In terms of life experience, what have you enjoyed most in the last months?

The people. Getting friends. You build a sense of belonging, of shared values.

What are your plans for the future?

I'll soon start working for Booz Allen in Oslo . I did my internship there and I was then offered a position. I feel lucky because my initial plan was to work as a consultant and to move back to Oslo, where my wife and I have family and friends. I was also open to other options, but finally I got exactly what I was looking for.

One reason why you would recommend Bocconi?

There are plenty! Reputation, academic excellence, location and ideal class size, just to name a few. For me it's a truly challenging and fun experience at the same time.

December 2007

MBA portrait

Sebastian Gründer

MBA 2007, German

Sebastian Gründer, from Germany, started his international study path joining a boarding School in Switzerland, moved then to the US where he got a double bachelor, in economics and in computer sciences. After working a few years as a consultant at Porsche Consulting, in Germany, he decided that SDA Bocconi was the right place where to pursue his MBA.

Why did you choose to attend an MBA?

I've been studying in the US, where everybody thinks of doing an MBA as the next step after taking business studies. So the idea has always been in my mind. After working for 5 years in a consultancy company I realized that I had learnt a lot - I had 2 promotions in 4 years - but that many of my decisions came from a mix of experience and intuition, and I really didn't know why that decision was the right one. So I wanted to understand the principles, and to learn also through the experience of other people, as it happens in the MBA. I'm a very practical person and I thought this was for me the best way to learn.

Why SDA Bocconi?

I was looking for a 1-year program, in a new country - I've already been living in Switzerland and in America. Then I was looking for a program with top academics and ranking.

But I was also looking for a place which could offer me not only education but also a life. The SDA Bocconi MBA met all these requirements. In addition, there were two Bocconi Alumni working in my company and one of them was an MBA graduate: they both spoke enthusiastically about their experience.

What are the most valuable aspects of your MBA so far?

Top academics. Very knowledgeable people with real-world background. Then the class mix, students with on average five years of work experience: this is the environment I was looking for. And Milan. I've never been living in the city centre and here we're at 20 minutes' walk from Duomo. I love the many small, reasonably-priced good restaurants, the fact that I don't need a car to move around, all this means quality of life for me. And Milan is a very lively city. For me, the environment is important, you study hard but then there is always something nice you can do, even if you have little time. The only thing I miss is the opportunity of daily sport practice as you can have in a US-style campus...

Has anything at Bocconi exceeded your expectations?

All the three aspects I already mentioned.

In particular, my classmates: great personalities, all of them worth meeting. It's a highly challenging class, but with a positive, supportive atmosphere. What really strikes me is that students are genuinely interested in other's experiences and in building relationships, not just in networking for professional reasons.

In terms of personal growth, how do you feel you have developed?

I think I have matured a lot with regards to understanding the nature of problems and to making the right decision.

Is work/life balance a relevant topic for you?

Yes. When applied to the MBA, it reminds me of a say: you have to pick 2 out of 3: friends, grades, or sleep. You cannot manage all of them. This well reflects my experience in the MBA: there is always more to do than you can handle.

In a broader perspective, it's very important for me to have a personal life to balance the professional one.

In terms of life experience what have you enjoyed the most in these last months?

Taking a year off from work and studying for the MBA was certainly the best thing I could do in my life.

This year is worth 5 years of "normal" life, in terms of learning, maturing, making friends etc...

Regarding specific situations, I very much enjoyed the SKI Cup, as I was a member of the organizing team. It was great, also, to have so many participants from SDA Bocconi partner Schools.

Any plans for the future?

At some point I'd like to have my own company. And a family. In the end, we all want to change the world, but now I want to change it in the Bocconi way....

Why would you recommend Bocconi?

For sure I can recommend Bocconi to anybody who's ambitious, who wants to enlarge his/her horizons and who's willing to let go of the comfortable working life for a change.

May 2007