



# ADMISSIONADO

50 ESSAYS THAT WORKED (VOLUME IV)

## POP QUIZ

Why did we pick that as our Cover Page image?

[a] That guy won. To earn an admit to a top business school is kinda like winning. What a metaphor!

[b] It's Volume IV. We phoned it in and picked "the very first image we could find."

**Answer: Don't worry about it!**

## A SPECIAL THANKS...

In fact, a lot of hard work, long nights, and even longer Saturdays went into making this book happen. First and foremost by our kick-ass clients who pushed themselves further than they ever thought they could (with killer results to prove it). And by our incredible team at Admissionado HQ for turning that work into a tool for future applicants.

Special shout out to some moderately special people: Head Consultant Yaron Dahan, Managing Editor Alex Collazo, Executive Editor Sach Orenstein, and Honorary teammate Roger Federer for general, indirect inspiration. Without them, this book would not be possible. Nor would future Volume V, which will be graced with yet-to-come winning essays from folks like you, reading this sucker now. So, for the sake of being polite, thank you, future gentlemen and gentlewomen.

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# WELCOME

... to the fourth volume of Admissionado's *50 MBA Essays That Worked*.

Saying no to a paraffin wax upsell during a Mani/Pedi is hard. Writing a good MBA application? **Just as hard.**

Conveying the sum total of your life's biggest achievements along with your life ambition along with your reasoning for pursuing an MBA along with a host of other things within a few hundred words can seem pretty damn impossible. We know because we've been there. Many times over. Our goal with our "**50 Essays That Worked**" series is to show you how the impossible can be realized, year after year. A big chunk of the book includes final drafts of essays so you can quickly get a sense of what a winning essay looks like. But on occasion, we have included some of the first drafts along with the final versions, so you can also see that those final drafts never start out that way. It always takes tons of work, and tons of patience.

A quick word about Admissionado: We are (amazing)(ly humble) admissions consultants. Our clients - like all of us at Admissionado - are afflicted with the overachiever gene. Each client works one-on-one with an Admissionado MBA consultant (who is also a graduate of a Top 15 MBA program but, more importantly, an expert on the admissions process), along with an essay specialist. This "power couple" guides the process from start to finish, balancing strategic insights and applicant profile positioning with making sure those insights come through in clear, well-paced, well-organized prose. Draft after draft, we pound and slash and kick and shred and shape and reshape. The result? Essays that frickin work.

The following are 50 sample essays from recent applicants now cavorting with other MBA seekers at places like Wharton, Stanford and HBS. Each of these essays was successful, and as you'll see, there are many paths to admission. We provide quick insights on each essay's strengths: a high-level diagnosis from our MBA strategy experts on WHY the essay turned heads, and a structural breakdown from our essay specialists highlighting specific examples straight from the page. In our "**First to Final**" examples, we take it one step further by showing you the final draft, including commentary from our MBA experts and essay specialists.

We know how trying this process can be, but we survived it, and we're here to tell you that you can, too. Hopefully this book provides some inspiration that will help you ~~move~~ **leap** closer to your goals.

**Note:** To protect the privacy of our clients, we've made small changes to the identifying details in each essay – names of places, companies, specific products, etc. For instance, we might have changed an essay about Kazakh pear farming to one about Mongolian apple farming. However, we've preserved the style, meaning, and impact of each story on the whole.

**And of course, a disclaimer:** While essays play a big part in the application process, they're not the only factor admissions committees consider. Each of the essays in this collection was evaluated in the context of the applicant's other essays, test scores, academic and work history, demographic factors, and school-specific considerations.

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STANFORD GSB

# PART 1: STANFORD GSB

## The Toughest Application of Them All

Stanford has been asking “What matters most to you and why?” for almost a decade, and for most of that time, it’s been the hardest prompt in the MBA world. Why? Because it’s about meaning, personality, values, character—the vague, hard-to-define qualities that even skilled artists struggle to convey. It’s not enough to have clear goals. Or to be successful. Or to have an interesting back story. You have to provide all those pieces and connect them together in a clear, compelling narrative about who you are and what motivates you. That’s a lot to fit into 750 words or so.

Why does Stanford ask this question? First of all, not everyone develops business ambitions for the right reasons. It’s tough to fake authenticity here, so simply by asking you to grapple with such a fundamental question about what’s truly powering you, they’re able to winnow out many of the folks who might only have their sights set on fame, glory, cash money. But it’s even better than that. Of those who possess honorable, inspiring, interesting, compelling reasons for pursuing whatever it is they’re pursuing, very few have really thought about it deeply, and are able to articulate it clearly. The ones who can pull this off exhibit a special kind of clarity in thought and vision that tends to correlate with likelihood of success. Clever bastards, these Stanford guys.

It’s an application that drives most people insane and is incredibly hard to get just right. Hard... but not impossible.

## ESSAY #1 – STANFORD

### CLIENT'S FINAL DRAFT

**KEEP THIS IN MIND:** Difficult personal or professional circumstance often serve to make a story more dramatic or exciting. This candidate’s story of overcoming stigma is a perfect example; the icing on the cake is that he was able to transform that stigma into a business opportunity.

#### **Essay A: What matters most to you and why? (750 words)**

Sixteen - that’s the number of rejections we received from banks when trying to finance my brother’s surgery after a major accident at the factory where he worked. My father had to turn to a private lender who asked for an insanely high rate. My brother’s legs were finally saved, but a 12-inch suture and several implanted metal plates forced him out of the workplace. My mom, after years as a stay-at-home mother,

decided to leave our rural village and seek a job in the city to pay the loan and afford both my younger brother's and my education. As an eleven-year-old kid, I was not aware this single decision would give her and my family a label: migrant worker, just like 270 million others in China.

Throughout my entire adolescence, my mom worked multiple restaurant jobs in the city and could only visit me for three hours each month at school. She seldom conveyed the gravity of her workload; instead she kept telling me that hard work and education could take me anywhere. I pushed myself harder in academic and extracurricular pursuits, becoming the first person from my village to attend college. However, at college in Shenzhen, I started to realize that my background as a migrant worker's child could be a hurdle.

In my second year, I witnessed migrant builders, working 15 hours every day to paint our college meeting hall, being shouted at by students because of their "stinky smell" and groundless rumors that "they rob and rape." That was the first time I felt the deep-seated prejudice towards migrant workers. I panicked and hid my background, because I did not want to be defined as one of them. But hiding transformed me into a person of silence and indifference. This cycle was broken in the next semester when I teamed up with six other classmates to start up our own coffee shop. All the banks rejected our loan request because none of us were "registered as city residents." Thanks to donations from our professors, our cafe finally opened and offered job opportunities for students suffering financial difficulties.

This experience revealed to me how financial insecurity keeps migrant workers at the lower rungs of the socioeconomic ladder. Only by stepping up can I make a difference. I am determined to break the paradigm, change the vested rules in established financial institutions and connect migrant workers and their children to equal financial resources.

My experience with financial services at Sbarro consulting paved the first step towards my ambition. During a case for a big financial group in Vietnam, our client intended to rebrand itself as more inclusive. I led our team to formulate new value propositions when an idea popped into my mind: students who share my background are desperately in need of inclusive financial services. In the following eight months, I led a 14-person team consisting of the clients and vendors to build a digital platform, through which USD 325 million loans have been granted to over 40,000 college students and 1,200 start-ups. This case inspired me to believe that the Internet could be the real "bridge" to connect migrant workers with financial resources.

To further explore the digital space, last year I co-founded Spirit Sustenance, the very first online-to-offline company providing high-end catering services in Beijing. Our digital platform resolves the huge gap between waiters' workload and their slim income that my mom experienced. After four months, we launched our website and app and allied with 50+ foreign business associations, international schools and expat communities to promote our services. Our company proved to be a hit and is

recommended as the best caterer in Beijing by the *BeijingBeat* website. But the achievement that we are proudest of is creating 18 full-time and 32 part-time job opportunities for migrant workers and increasing their income by 65%, which stimulated me to dive deeper into this field.

My eleven-year-old self wouldn't believe how far I have marched today. I am thankful that the label stamped on my family did not victimize us, but rather motivated me to make a change. I am committed to expanding the intersection of Internet and finance to provide more tailored and inclusive financial services for migrant workers and their children in China, and eventually smash the stigma against my class.

### Here's why we want this applicant at our business school based on this essay:

He shows how to overcome adversity and, while experiencing that adversity, identify business opportunities which will give people from disadvantaged backgrounds improved financial access. Facing adversity is not sufficient by itself, but facing adversity *and succeeding* is a powerful combination.

### Structural Breakdown:

- **Intro** - This applicant has a story to tell, and he starts at the logical place: the beginning. He hooks us with a dramatic, high-stakes anecdote that grabs our attention while also laying groundwork for the discrimination he will personally face later in the essay, when he seeks funding for his coffee shop. Equally important, the applicant has clearly established the essay's topic—what it means to carry the “migrant worker” label—by the end of the first paragraph. Mission accomplished!
- **Background** - Next, the applicant gives us some background about his childhood and college experience. Notice how laser-focused he is on the ways being a migrant worker influenced his experience: there's no fat here, no unnecessary stories. Every sentence builds his argument that being a migrant worker is tough because of financial insecurity.
- **Revelation** - Now that the applicant has identified the PROBLEM, in paragraph four he introduces his SOLUTION. Because of the extensive personal experience described in the preceding section, we trust the applicant when he tells us that financial institutions could break this vicious cycle. The solution comes at exactly the right point: if it came earlier, he wouldn't have the necessary credibility; if it came later, we wouldn't understand the significance of his later work.
- **Actions Taken** - The applicant uses the last three paragraphs to show us that he knows HOW to achieve his vision. He isn't coming to business school so that he can *start* helping migrant workers—he's coming to business school so that he can *continue* helping on an even larger scale. The experiences the applicant describes check all the B-school boxes—team leadership, big impact,

international networking—but they don't sound forced or braggadocious because they are all in service of a cause that the applicant clearly believes in.

**And here are some SPECIFIC examples in the essay of how he does this:**

- *“This experience revealed to me how financial insecurity keeps migrant workers at the lower rungs of the socioeconomic ladder. Only by stepping up can I make a difference.” - This is the “moment of realization” in the essay where he discovers the injustice that will later cause him to act.*
- *“I led our team to formulate new value propositions when an idea popped into my mind: students who share my background are desperately in need of inclusive financial services. In the following eight months, I led a 14-person team consisting of the clients and vendors to build a digital platform, through which USD 325 million loans have been granted to over 40,000 college students and 1,200 start-ups” - The discrimination against him was inspirational for him and led to a business idea that not only helped others, but also allowed him to deliver a great achievement at work, one that is supported by the concrete results he brings to the forefront.*
- *“I am committed to expanding the intersection of Internet and finance to provide more tailored and inclusive financial services for migrant workers and their children in China, and eventually smash the stigmatized label.” - This mission statement which concludes the essay not only makes a very convincing argument that this is truly what matters most to him, but also infuses his essay with an aggressive energy that makes us believe he can accomplish what he has set out to do.*

## ESSAY #2 – STANFORD

### CLIENT'S FINAL DRAFT

**KEEP THIS IN MIND:** This candidate does two things rather well: [1] The candidate shows a REAL need for a Stanford education, and [2] The candidate shows that he is already “in” with several other GSBers.

#### **Essay A: Why Stanford? (400 words)**

It is 2020, and Fre-e-cycling, the social enterprise I launched at Stanford GSB, is growing quickly as it tackles California's e-waste problem by collecting, refurbishing and processing used electronics. Our online platform, developed at Stanford, enables consumers to sell us their electronics via a network of mobile collectors. Fre-e-cycling

reduces hazardous waste, creates employment, and sells brand name electronics to aspirational consumers. Longer term, I am eyeing international expansion.

Back to today. Though I've already led a Californian waste management social enterprise similar to Fre-e-cycling, I haven't built a successful venture from the ground up. I've never conceptualized a business from scratch, attracted a first investor, or recruited a co-founder. To achieve my vision, I need support in three areas. First, while as a manager I'm relatively strong at organization and execution, I still lack interpersonal management skills - specifically, mentorship and the ability to inspire a team. Second, coming from finance, I seek to build my creative muscles. Lastly, resources and an ecosystem of social entrepreneurs and classmates will help to build my idea.

Stanford GSB is the best school to help me fill these gaps and more. Franklin Mock, a former colleague and current GSber, explained "What's unique to Stanford is the emphasis on the human side to management, the softer side of mentoring and developing people," and suggested that *Finding Partners* and the Stevenson Retreat would greatly benefit me. Through offerings at CES and the d.School such as *Startup Garage* and *Affordable Design*, I would ideate, learn rapid prototyping, and pilot my idea. Resources such as MRT and the Firm Studio along with the community of entrepreneurs, classmates and an alumni network of innovators such as Harry Miller ('03) of Internon and Greg Smith ('10) of UNR, would enable me to leave Stanford ready to launch my startup.

I look forward to contributing to the community by leading a trip to Chinese e-waste processors, joining the Innoventing Club, and - ignited by the skier in me - starting a Skiing Club. I will bring a dual corporate and startup perspective, while also wearing my social enterprise hat to challenge classmates with hopefully-not-too-annoying questions about ecological justice.

Stanford alum Yael Fine explained to me, "If I had to define GSB's core values, it's the entrepreneurial focus, and secondly, a desire to make an impact." As an entrepreneurial garbage man with a social impact background and a passion to combat inequality, I would be thrilled to grow my impact further at the Stanford Graduate School of Business.

**Here's why we want this applicant at our business school based on this essay:**

The applicant has a real vision of what impact he could make on the world upon graduation, and because he is humble about the gaps he needs to address in order to get there. And of course, it sure doesn't hurt that he has networked thoroughly with several GSB alums.

### Structural Breakdown:

- **The Future** - The applicant opens the essay a few years in the future, a bold way of defining his goals. This strategy screams confidence, and it might have been viewed as overconfidence if not for the next section...
- **Gaps** - This is an excellent gaps paragraph. The specificity and honesty here is fantastic: This guy is just as confident about what he doesn't know as he is about what he will accomplish. His self-awareness makes his confidence more believable and his goals more plausible.
- **Why GSB** - What stands out most in this exemplary "fit" argument is the degree to which the applicant has engaged with the campus. Given the applicant's entrepreneurial goals, a relevant network is essential. He passes that test with flying colors.

### And here are some SPECIFIC examples in the essay of how he does this:

- *"It is 2020, and Fre-e-cycling, the social enterprise I launched at Stanford GSB, is growing quickly as it tackles California's e-waste problem through collecting, refurbishing and processing used electronics." - Although this is a vision of the future, the candidate writes his goals in such a concrete and precise way that it is easy for the reader to imagine this actually happening. From the get-go we buy his story. He also gives credit to our institution, which shows us that he understands the value of an education from Stanford.*
- *"Though I've already led a Californian waste management social enterprise similar to Fre-e-cycling, I haven't built a successful venture from the ground up. I've never conceptualized a business from scratch, attracted the first investor, or recruited a co-founder." - There's no beating around the bush here. The applicant just comes straight out and admits all the things he doesn't know how to do, thus establishing a true need for him to attend Stanford, and showing that he has a clear understanding of his personal weakness. Self-awareness is the first step to improvement!*
- *"Stanford GSB is the best school to help me fill these gaps and more. Franklin Mock, a former colleague and current GSBER, explained "What's unique to Stanford is the emphasis on the human side to management, the softer side of mentoring and developing people," and suggested that Finding Partners and the Stevenson Retreat would greatly benefit me." - Not only does he identify a gap in his profile which could be filled by his education at Stanford, but he also shows that he knows how to listen to those with more experience than him (good team player!), and that he has made efforts to build a network at the school.*

## ESSAY #3 – STANFORD

### FIRST-TO-FINAL

## CLIENT'S FIRST DRAFT

#### **Essay A: What matters most to you and why? (750 words)**

What matters most to me is doing justice to my late adoptive mother's social and business legacy by taking it to the next level while blazing one of my own.

My mother and I were quite the spectacle: me a 6'4", Vietnamese kid, and, she a 5'4", Hungarian Jew. She adopted me as a one-year-old who had been smuggled out of a remote Vietnamese province, taught me how to play a cutthroat game of Bridge, and insisted on bringing me hamburgers every Wednesday for lunch. But I wanted nothing to do with her real estate business, which I viewed as a sleepy one out in the suburbs, neither requiring nor inspiring much attention. In fact, I fled further and further from my family in New York with every chance I got - first switching coasts to attend UC Berkeley, then switching continents to obtain a Master's degree from Oxford, and finally choosing to remain in the UK to work in finance.

Then, in 2011, my mother was diagnosed with stage four cancer, and I went home to Westchester to step into her shoes because there was no one else willing and able to do so. She and I spent the next 11 months drinking cheap beer and enjoying the last days of an extraordinary life. Those 11 months changed everything. For almost my whole life, I had pictured my mother as a kind-hearted but unexceptional woman with a successful but unexceptional real estate business, but my conversations with her and the people she had worked with and cared for, as well as my searches through the business's old records, painted a dramatically different picture - one of exceptional innovation and impact.

I had no idea just how inventive my mother had been and how many lives she had touched. Even at her funeral, people were telling me stories about her that I had never heard. To this day, I still hear from people who never knew my mother, but were nonetheless impacted by the news of her death. I learned that she had earned her first millions as a residential developer paying carpenters for each roof they completed, rather than by the hour. It seems obvious now, but at the time it was an insight that allowed her to build tract housing more cheaply and efficiently than incumbent developers of that era, bringing homeownership to the middle class in a way that had not been available. Even more than her business dealings, I was struck by the magnitude of her philanthropic efforts. There was a Friedman Memorial basketball court at the local Jewish Community Center, and a Friedman Foundation that I had

never heard of. Less publically, she had sent her late brother's grandchildren to college and allowed multiple tenants to remain in their places of business and residence on what she recognized were below-market leases. I had naively dismissed my mother's business as unprofessional and non-elite, and journeyed half a world from home because I wanted branded prestige, for other people to look upon what I had done and be impressed. In my last 11 months with my mother, I realized that legacy lay not in what we build for others to talk about, but in what we are able and willing to contribute to the future.

When she passed away, I took over Friedman Enterprises and eight of its affiliated entities, worth \$80 million in total, and learned that while my mother was a beloved and respected local business magnate, her company had fallen into disrepair. The bookkeeping was done by pencil in a leather-bound journal, there were countless "handshake deals" with tenants and vendors, and it was unclear exactly how much money was supposed to be coming in and where it was going out. Over the next three years, I dragged the company into compliance with regulations and modern business standards. I replaced the entire infrastructure - from accounting and payroll to day-to-day operations. I have guided the business through multiple lawsuits and run from angry bees across an apartment building roof. I even spent four months at Spear Capital in Chicago, working on billion dollar deals, in order to learn how the biggest investors in the real estate investment industry operate so that I could bring those principles home to Friedman Enterprises. All this work brought the company back from the brink and culminated in the sale of a quarter the portfolio for 40% more than its valuation when my mom passed, a harried project in which I led a team of brokers, property managers, lawyers, and several different prospective buyers through a minefield of litigious constraints, lack of historical data, a compressed timeframe, and contentious opposition from a co-owner.

I have spent the last three years stabilizing my mother's legacy, and I want to now turn to creating my own. I started thinking about housing while working with my mother on her last deal - the sale of a strip mall to a non-profit housing developer that would have brought much-needed low- and middle-income housing to a suburb of Newark. It was a contentious project that ultimately fell apart, but in meeting with local homeowners, politicians, regulatory agencies, and developers, I began to understand just how divergent each groups' interests seemed to be, and I developed a first-hand appreciation for why America is facing such an acute and sustained housing crisis. It was an experience that led me to work with the Elizabeth Economic Development Agency on acquiring apartment buildings in the neighborhood to keep tenants from being evicted. I was amazed at how haphazard the process of securing a \$1.8 million acquisition subsidy from the New Jersey state government felt. The state did not come close to investigating our investment proposal with the same level of rigor as an investor in a Spear Capital-led project would have. I realized that private enterprises will always be better at raising and allocating capital than governments, not just for housing but across all social projects. In casting about for possible solutions, I have become more and more convinced that Social Impact Bonds, or Pay for Performance

projects, will bridge this gap. Just as my mother paid for roofs completed rather than hours worked, the government is starting to pay for measurable performance indicators like recidivism reduced, homes built, or children properly educated, rather than according to historical budget precedents or expenses outlaid. The idea is just starting to take hold in the US – the \$630 million Private Social Welfare Act is currently working its way through the House Subcommittee on Health – and I believe there is enormous opportunity to be seized in repositioning Friedman Enterprises as a leading social impact bond project manager.

I am not equipped to lead that transformation today, which is why I am pursuing an MBA. I want to study social innovation, impact investing, and efficient management of organizations, and return to Friedman Enterprises, ready to usher it into the next era of innovation and impact. Like mother, like son.

### Notes From Our Essay Specialist:

- The first area for improvement here is FOCUS. We need to cut this essay in half in order to meet Stanford's word limit, and the applicant can achieve that by changing the main focus of the essay from his mother to himself. We use a lot of words here discussing work the applicant's mother did literally decades ago—there's room to cut there. We can use the space that's freed up to address our second point...
- The applicant should flesh out his own actions after taking over the company. What lessons did he learn? What exactly did he do to improve the company? How have those skills shaped his future plans? We want to dig deeper into the applicant's thought process and decision-making—those are the skills he will bring with him to the MBA.

### Sample Outline to Guide the Next Draft:

- **Introduction** - This applicant opens by directly answering the prompt—a great idea. However, as written, his stated “what matters most” seems limited to his mother's existing business. We will rephrase here and widen the scope of this concept so that it can serve as a strong through line from the applicant's adoption all the way to his long-term post-MBA goals.
- **Background** - Right now we focus on the background of the applicant's mother. In the next round, let's shift the focus to the impact his mother had on him. We can also condense a lot of this. This background context deserves a mention, but the story really starts in the next section...
- **Opportunity** - Here the applicant establishes the business opportunity he discovered when he took over the family business. He correctly highlights the innovative nature of his mother's work, but the fact that he has an innovative mom is not enough to prove that HE should get into business school. We'll help him focus more on the potential the business had when he took charge of it.

- **Challenge** - *What's stopping him from taking advantage of that opportunity? We want to clearly establish the obstacles the applicant faced, and then dig into how he solved them. The HOW is what's really lacking here—he needs to be more precise about what exactly he changed in order to make the business into a success.*
- **Results** - *Then we can show the results. The applicant does a good job establishing that the company was turned around, but we also need to show how this work changed him. We can dig deeper into the lessons learned. Those skills are what the applicant will bring with him to the MBA, so we'll want to really showcase them by giving some examples from the work the applicant has done since the turnaround, examples that show him applying these lessons in practice.*
- **The Future** - *The applicant's discussion of his future plans currently gets a bit too wonkish and policy-focused. We'll help him zoom out a bit and connect everything to Stanford and their mission.*

## CLIENT'S FINAL DRAFT

**KEEP THIS IN MIND:** In this incredible, emotional and transformative coming of age story, we see how the applicant comes to understand more about business, life, people, and giving back to his community through the dying moments of his adoptive mother. The emotional content and the intellectual maturity are what make this story shine.

### **Essay A: What matters most to you, and why? (750 words)**

What matters most to me is expanding my mother's legacy by deploying my capital, passion, and skillset where they can do the most good.

I've led an exceptionally lucky life, adopted into wealth after being smuggled out of post-revolutionary Vietnam. I'm 6'4" and Vietnamese, and my mother was a 5'4" Hungarian Jew. She taught me how to play a cutthroat game of Bridge and insisted on bringing me hamburgers every Wednesday for lunch, but growing up, I rebelled against my own blessings, desperate to be a product of my own efforts rather than my mother's.

This desire drove me to study economics across the country at UC Berkeley and obtain a master's degree at Oxford. I was then hired as the first native English speaker at Grumman Consulting, delivering a strategic road map that doubled a billion-dollar CPG client's revenues for my second project. Unfortunately, my mother's unexpected cancer diagnosis and passing in 2013 brought me back to New York, and I've spent the years since reconciling her legacy with my own.

As I took over my mother's business during her last months, I uncovered the story of a woman and a career far more innovative and impactful than I'd ever realized. Poring over microfilm of deeds going back to the 1950s, I discovered that she had made millions building houses and shopping centers on vacant farmland, perceiving possibility where others saw fallow fields. During one of our countless lazy conversations, I learned that she was one of the first developers to pay carpenters for each roof completed, rather than per hour, allowing her to cost-effectively build entire communities. I realized my mom's legacy was not in real estate, but in looking past superficialities and identifying unlikely opportunities for success and happiness - and it was this insight that prompted her to look at a one-year-old Vietnamese boy and recognize a son. For the first time, I embraced that legacy.

Despite my mother's successes however, by the time I took over Friedman Enterprises, the company was in disrepair. The bookkeeping was done by pencil, there were countless "handshake deals" with tenants and vendors, and cash flow was nebulous. I was shocked by the scope of the problems, but over the next four years, I dragged the company into compliance with modern business standards. First, I hired a young, hungry property management firm, eliminating complacency in daily operations and bringing clear financial insight into each property's performance. Then I outsourced payroll and tax services, bringing the company into regulatory compliance and saving more than \$450,000 in 2012 alone.

I consider this trial by fire my mother's greatest lesson, as I've faced challenges I'd never previously imagined. I've guided the business through multiple lawsuits and run from angry bees across an apartment building roof. I even spent four months at Spear Capital in Chicago, learning how the world's biggest real estate investors operate, and gaining a buy-side perspective that proved invaluable when all this work culminated in the sale of our family's biggest apartment complex for \$41 million, 40% more than its valuation when my mom passed.

Dealing with this litany of challenges while mourning my mother has been the most difficult and painful thing I have ever done. Relationships were destroyed, shouting matches with family members and business partners were a regular part of my life, and I spent countless sleepless nights questioning what truly matters to me. Now that I have secured my family's well-being, I realize that simply accruing and maintaining wealth would be doing my mother's legacy a disservice. For me, growing that legacy means not only preserving the wealth she created for future generations, but also, and more significantly, ensuring that my financial and intellectual capital is placed so that it can do good for others. Now I need to learn how to find and develop these types of impact investments and today, I stand ready to pursue my future at Stanford, where I will gain the tools to hunt my own unlikely opportunities and coax them into fruition. Like mother, like son.

### Here's why we want this applicant at our business school based on this essay:

He has a clear and precise vision of what he wants to accomplish in life, which is anchored in a profound personal experience in the final moments of his mother's life. And because he subsequently gained the experience necessary to accomplish this vision. It also doesn't hurt that the storytelling is fantastic.

### Structural Breakdown:

- **Background** - The background story here is sleek and streamlined. The applicant now focuses only on the details that are relevant to the rest of the essay, and doesn't get bogged down in his mother's biography.
- **His Work** - When describing his actions to save the company, the applicant now focuses more on his thought process and the specific leadership techniques he applies. Notice how he kept the juiciest anecdotes (the bees, the pencil bookkeeping) even while cutting the story in half. It's a natural instinct when writing to state the general idea before digging into a specific example, but it's rarely necessary—the specific story usually implies the general principle much more vividly than straightforward exposition. Also note the increased specificity about the leadership and process changes the applicant made.
- **The Future** - This section of the essay is a lot tighter, but it creates a great impact because the applicant paints a vivid picture of the conflicts he faced and overcame. We are convinced that this applicant has a mentality that will fit well with Stanford's MBA program, and that his goals fit with the school's mission.

### And here are some SPECIFIC examples in the essay of how he does this:

- *"What matters most to me is expanding my mother's legacy by deploying my capital, passion, and skillset where they can do the most good." - There's no beating around the bush in this essay. He is asked a question, and he answers it with confidence in the first phrase, allowing him to dedicate the entirety of the essay to the actual story.*
- *"I realized my mom's legacy was not in real estate, but in looking past superficialities and identifying unlikely opportunities for success and happiness - and it was this insight that prompted her to look at a one-year-old Vietnamese boy and recognize a son. For the first time, I embraced that legacy." - Here we have a real "Coming of age" moment in which the candidate shows us how he reaches intellectual maturity. This realization that "what one does is more about a legacy left behind than a simple business achievement" fits in perfectly with Stanford's vision.*
- *"For me, growing that legacy means not only preserving the wealth she created for future generations, but also, and more significantly, ensuring that my financial and intellectual capital is placed so that it can do good for others." - This*

*argument that business is about more than just business, but also a potential to improve lives, is very convincing, and sets up the candidate as earnest, thoughtful and driven.*

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**End Preview**

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