



# OUTSIDE THE NORM

Though only mid-way through her second-year as a part-time MBA student at the USB, Brigitte Roediger has been exchanging ideas on global platforms. She tells SIERAAJ AHMED how she makes the most of her opportunities.

**You've been sharing your MBA experience on the *Financial Times* MBA Blog since mid-2011, halfway through your first year. How did you get chosen to write for FT?** I was googling MBA blogs and came across the *Financial Times* MBA Blog, which has MBA students from various countries blogging about their experiences. I believe in making the most of every opportunity, so I mailed the editor and said, "You don't have a South African blogger; can I write for South Africa?" The editor asked for a sample piece, and two days later I was representing South Africa on the *Financial Times*.

**What kind of feedback have you had from your FT blog?** Many people don't understand what MBA students go through, and I've received messages saying thanks for the insight. I've also had messages from fellow MBA students around the world – sharing a laugh when we realise no matter which country we're blogging from, we often share similar experiences and frustrations.

**You've never blogged before the FT gig. Are you enjoying it?** So much so that I'm starting my own blog, called Anomaly B. Because it means "outside the norm" or "something different", the title just felt right for me. Life is crazy-awesome and mine has changed a lot since starting my MBA – mostly for the better, but my life at the moment is definitely "outside the norm"!

**You've worked for the Spier Group in Stellenbosch for five years. How do you juggle a part-time MBA with your full-time job as Spier's assistant brand manager?** We're currently working on innovative food and wine experiences. It's a big job, and a fantastic job. When I go to classes three times a week after work, I sometimes feel bad for my classmates. The ones who come to class after a day in a corporate environment often look exhausted. I spend my day marketing a wine farm and a hotel and call it work, so I come to class in a different frame of mind!

**You were chosen from over 1 000 applicants to be one of 125 student participants at the Daimler Students World Dialogue at the Globally Responsible Leadership Initiative [GRLI] in Stuttgart, Germany, in October last year. Tell us more about the experience?** GRLI aims to develop the next generation of globally responsible leaders and each year it has an annual meeting with attendees from various business schools and companies worldwide. Last year GRLI extended the annual conference by two days to allow for an interactive dialogue with students. The dialogue focused on sustainability, a topic I am particularly passionate about, so I sent in my 1 000-word application essay and was extremely proud when I was chosen to represent the USB at the conference.

**What kind of events did you take part in?** The two-day student dialogue started with an inspiring talk by Dieter Zetsche, chairman of Daimler AG, who introduced the broader topic of globally responsible leadership. The students were split into small groups and encouraged to debate questions and issues related to sustainability and then gave their feedback to the other groups. We were 125 students from 60 countries, so you can just imagine the debates we had!

**What was the biggest lesson you took home with you?** It sounds clichéd, but it was the fact that everybody has a different view. I thought all emerging countries think the same, but they don't. There was a woman from Guatemala who said, "We must wait for the big countries to help us." But that kind of helpless attitude doesn't work for me or for South Africa. There were four South Africans there – one from USB, one from UCT, one from Rhodes, and one from GIBS – and even the four South Africans had four different opinions!

**What was the general feeling about South Africa among the participants?** Most had a positive opinion of South Africa.

I think the World Cup helped a lot: one woman couldn't speak English, but shouted "Waka Waka!" when she heard I was South African. It was nice to hear such positivity. World opinion on South Africa is turning around for sure.

**We hear you're gearing up for another busy year . . .** [Laughs] Yes, I've been chosen to attend the World Business Dialogue in Cologne, Germany, in mid-March. It's a convention where 60 top figures from economics, science and politics engage on future-oriented topics with 300 international students and 300 executives. I'm very excited about that. Then, in June, I'll be going to India to do a week-long international module in Business and Innovation in Hyderabad, India, which is a compulsory part of the USB MBA programme. The GRLI will have their next meeting at Spier in November, so helping to plan for that will keep me busy after India!

**Finally . . . Where do you get your inspiration? Do you read a lot?** At the moment I'm reading *The Five Levels of Leadership*, by John C Maxwell. [Laughs] Should I have said something more fun? I hardly read fiction any more . . . Even my magazine reading has changed. I used to read *Cosmo*, but nowadays I read *Fimweek* instead – and it makes sense now! <sup>a</sup>

### Top tips from Brigitte

■ **Network.** Go meet fellow students, meet your lecturers. Everyone wants to help. Make the effort and doors will open.

■ **Use social media.** When I look back, many of the great things that have happened to me since deciding to do an MBA were things that started from a tweet or networking via social media.



BRIGITTE'S FT MBA BLOG: <http://blogs.ft.com/mba-blog/author/brigitteroediger>

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