

Transcript of Manage-A-Bull Podcast Episode featuring Tyler Penberthy

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Vish Gopalakrishnan:

Hi, I'm Vish Gopalakrishnan and this is Manage-A-Bull Podcast where we have in-depth conversations with students, faculty, staff, and alumni, to give you a comprehensive picture into the life at University at Buffalo's School of Management. In today's episode, we speak with Tyler Penberthy, a recent alumnus of UB's full-time MBA program from East Amherst, New York. In our conversation, we talk about his experience at UB and how the MBA program helped him chart his career progression. Tyler, welcome to the show.

Tyler Penberthy:

Great. Thanks for having me, Vish. Super excited to talk with you.

Vish Gopalakrishnan:

Hey, I think it's going to be a great conversation. Tyler, before we get into the interview, I wanted to ask you about an interesting thing we learned about you in our research for this podcast. You are a beach volleyball player who's passionate about this sport, and you even worked as a statistician for the State University of New York at Oswego's Women's Volleyball team. I didn't realize that volleyball teams had statisticians. Could you describe that role to us?

Tyler Penberthy:

Sure. Yeah, so that was one of my favorite jobs I've had to this day. I helped out with the Women's D3 Volleyball team at SUNY Oswego as an assistant student coach to where I would attend practices, go to tournaments, help track stats, and just like anything in the business or sports worlds, statistics, data analytics is super important and is only becoming more prevalent. So knowing where to hit the ball, where to serve the ball and how to help the team win, was something I was really passionate about for my undergrad.

Vish Gopalakrishnan:

Well, that's fascinating. It's interesting how the UB MBA attracts people from all kinds of backgrounds

and a wide variety of interests. On this show, we have had people who are entrepreneurs, musicians, artists, and now sports personalities. It's a testament, I think, to the strength of the program that it attracts people from such diverse backgrounds and turns them into business leaders and leadership, it's something that you're quite familiar with. Before coming to UB, you spent four years as an internal operations consultant for a company in Syracuse, if I'm correct. What was your role there and what prompted you to get an MBA?

Tyler Penberthy:

Sure. I got my degree in Human Resource Management from SUNY Oswego and also had coursework in information systems. And after school, I got referred into this great job at Brown and Brown Insurance where I was working on their internal audit team, auditing human resources practices for insurance offices across the country. And after two years in Syracuse, I ended up moving down to sunny Orlando, Florida. Being from Buffalo and moving out to Syracuse in Oswego, I was kind of sick of the snow and decided to make a bigger move down to Orlando with the same company and where I was working in employee benefits operations auditing, and so we were helping our retail insurance offices improve their operations, become more efficient and drive more sales across the country.

And so when COVID hit, we stopped traveling and I kind of felt like my career was at a crossroads, to where I wanted to get more into the information systems, data analytics side and get into management. And I felt like transferring back up to snowy Buffalo and the University at Buffalo to get my MBA was the right choice at the time. And reflecting back almost two years from that point, it definitely was the right decision.

Vish Gopalakrishnan:

So, you have a job. It's going great. For an experienced professional like yourself, what made the UB MBA program a good fit?

Tyler Penberthy:

I think the in-person classroom experience that we had, the experienced professors, especially the younger professors that are now joining the UB MBA program and the alumni network of UB is really what made it the perfect fit for myself. Personally speaking, my dad was an executive MBA grad back in 2000, and also had some of the same professors I did, such as Frank Krzystofiak, who's a legend in the UB MBA community, same as Phil Perry, who taught finance. And my dad even offered me up some of

his old notebooks from Phil Perry, which was pretty cool. But really the tradition and the experience that I've heard from others that went through the MBA program, really made it seem like it was the best fit for me along with going to a great business community back in Buffalo, New York.

Vish Gopalakrishnan:

And you mentioned Phil, Professor Perry gets mentioned on this podcast probably more than any other individual. His methods of teaching are certainly unique, but you're right in saying that the professors here are certainly subject matter experts who know the things that they talk about in great detail. But classwork is just one aspect of the MBA experience that UB has to offer. Out of class learning opportunities also play a very crucial role. Now, I know that you were part of the UB Consulting group. What is the UB Consulting Group?

Tyler Penberthy:

Sure. The UB Consulting Group is a select group of individuals from the full-time MBA program who conduct pro bono consulting engagements for companies in Western New York, whether they're for-profit or not-for-profit, with the hopes of not only getting students experience working in the real world with real world problems, but also helping out businesses that have those challenging problems and really providing value. And I believe that the UB MBA Consulting Group was one of the most valuable experiences that I had in UB, and I had a few great projects and even better teammates that I had the opportunity of working with in the group.

Vish Gopalakrishnan:

Great. Talk to us about some of these great projects that you worked on.

Tyler Penberthy:

Absolutely. In my first semester, so that would be the fall of 2021, I believe, we were accepted into the MBA group by the previous cohort, and I was elected onto the executive board as well as the Director of Learning Development, alongside some great alumni who are operating in consulting with Phil Schneider, who was our president. We had Jack DeMarco, who's now in New York City as well, Anna Zefli, myself, Bjorn Peterson. We had a really rockstar group as with the executive board. And so I worked with a contractor in Buffalo called CNR Housing who works with low income housing to improve energy standards. And they were looking at getting into the electric vehicle charging, which is being

pushed by New York state right now, and trying to get more into renewable energy and doing a market analysis of what does that look like in Buffalo, how many customers are there, how many electric vehicles are there, and what is the demand for charging stations?

That was a really exciting engagement to get on the front lines of cutting edge technology and also benefiting the local community as a whole. And then for the second project in the spring, I led a team to work with the International Institute of Buffalo, and they are a historic nonprofit that has been around for about 100 years and provides refugee services for individuals that come to Buffalo and aren't acclimated to the conditions in the US whether they don't speak the language or are unfamiliar with the culture, and they help them get assimilated into the welcoming community that Buffalo is.

So that could be providing them clothing, housing, translation, or interpretation services, and that the latter is what we focused on. The International Institute of Buffalo offers interpretation and translation services, and we were helping them out with their pricing model, making sure that they are competitive in the Western New York region, but also across New York State as well for some larger projects. And we were super pleased with the results that we had from that engagement. And hopefully that continues on. And it's just another example of the UB MBA Consulting Group, which has been around for about 10 to 15 years now in the program, providing value to local organizations around Western New York, completely free of cost while also benefiting the students that are working on those engagements.

Vish Gopalakrishnan:

Right. That's fascinating. The breadth of leadership experience that you had with the consulting group, working on electric charging infrastructure as one client, and then working with a nonprofit on solving an international refugee crisis, almost more humanitarian leadership and then business leadership. So if I asked you to mention, let's say two ways in which taking on these leadership positions changed you as a professional during your time with us at UB, what would they be?

Tyler Penberthy:

That's a good question. I'd say time management is a huge consideration. The UB MBA consulting group is an extracurricular, so it's outside of the normal coursework. However, there are really valuable consulting courses that I took as well, but the ability to manage the coursework through the program, and then additionally being responsible for other engagements outside of that, takes a lot of planning and effort along with teamwork from the excellent peers that I had to work with. And I'd say that the ability to deliver value and work with different stakeholders is extremely important in any position that

any individual would hold graduating from the MBA program.

And so that could be communicating with the secretary of an organization or the president. How are we speaking to them? How timely is that communication? How valuable is their time that we are asking for in return, and then how much value can we provide to them? So understanding those dynamics with working with clients, especially in a consulting position, is extremely important. And then being able to manage your workload, that goes for the MBA program, but also in life, all of us have different commitments outside of school and work, and it's really important to be able to manage those to be the best that you can be.

Vish Gopalakrishnan:

Speaking of different commitments, consulting group wasn't the only thing that you were busy with outside of classes. You also held several GA positions during your time here with us. What is a GA or a graduate assistant?

Tyler Penberthy:

Sure. The graduate assistant helps out the professors with the coursework in the MBA program. My position was with Dominic Salito, who is teaching the IT for managers course, which would be for second semester, first year MBA students in the full-time program. And so my role was to hold office hours, help with tutoring for students, assist with some grading as well, and participate in the coursework to the point where I could provide feedback on the lessons and the structure of the course and making sure that it's as effective as possible in communicating the material that's being delivered.

And I really enjoy that. It's a great opportunity to separate yourself and really stand out on a resume or as a subject matter expert. And so previously I mentioned that my career was at a crossroads working in insurance and human resources. And so having the ability to be a graduate assistant and become the go-to person for IT in this case was huge for me and allowed my career to develop and opened up so many more doors, not only through Dominic and the extensive alumni network that we have, but also for the skills that I was able to demonstrate to future employers.

Vish Gopalakrishnan:

And this was the only GA position that you held, or were there others?

Tyler Penberthy:

That was the full-time graduate assistant, and then I also helped out with some PMBA, which is our professional MBA coursework in the winter with a digital leadership course that was being taught for the first time. And that was a really exciting course at the time during COVID when everything was online and digital leadership was at the forefront of, how do we manage the culture of an organization? How do we manage change remotely? How do we be effective leaders, which is what the MBA program is all about, developing effective leaders, and now especially more in the virtual environment.

That was a really, really great opportunity that I had. Again, involved helping out with coursework, the curriculum, and also helping out grading as well. So these graduate assistant positions are fantastic. I was also a second year mentor for first year students, which was a really exciting opportunity to work with first years in their team setting, talk them through some of the day-to-day problems and struggles

that you have going through the first year of the MBA program, and provide some feedback and insight on effective methods to get through the coursework, really get the most out of the MBA program, and how to develop your time at UB.

Vish Gopalakrishnan:

All of this sounds incredibly fascinating and what's wonderful to me is how, you were able to connect all of these experiences to where you wanted to take your career, but it also sounds very, very demanding. You mentioned time management was one of the things that you got better at during your time here. How did you manage your time? I'm sure balancing the demands of work and all the classes would not have been easy.

Tyler Penberthy:

It definitely was not easy, I can say that. It involved lots of late nights and long hours. I also worked a couple internships as well. So at some points, I felt like I was doing almost too much. And now I really live by my Google calendar. That's how I operate on a day-to-day basis. That was one of the tricks that I developed during the MBA program, was really to structure out my time, whether I was working certain hours for my internship, working certain hours for a graduate assistant or booking time on the calendar for a weekly meeting with my UB MBA consulting group. So always coordinating, constant communication, having open lines of communication with stakeholders on my projects, but also with our clients as well, was very important, and that helps manage the time.

And then also asking for help if you need it. A lot of the work in the MBA program comes down to group projects, and it's not always feasible to always be the leader or always take on the majority share. And so relying on my peers to help out when I needed to was huge. And that involves surrounding yourself with excellent individuals in the MBA program that are extremely capable and do outstanding work. By leveraging the strengths of others and managing my time through the Google calendar, I felt like I was able to balance all these demands and get the most out of the program.

Vish Gopalakrishnan:

Yeah, I think that's a great suggestion, calendarize, put everything in a calendar so that you know exactly how every minute of your day is going to be spent. It's a good way to make sure that you don't drop the ball on assignments because there will be times when you feel like there's not a lot going on, but then there will be other times when there's so much happening, that it gets difficult to keep the wires from crossing in our heads. You mentioned earlier some of the professors who were important and a big influence. What were some of your favorite classes during the two years that you spent with us at the UB MBA program?

Tyler Penberthy:

That's always a tough one. I got to say, I had to take the data modeling class with Frank Krzystofiak, and he is the guy for everything Excel, so that had to be one of my favorites. But alongside of that, I really enjoyed digital product management with Sandy Dito, who is a product manager in the Buffalo region with a startup, so getting real world professionals to come into the classroom at UB and take time after work at night while she has two kids is so amazing. To have that experience in real life, professor, just for a subject matter expert is awesome. I also took M&A, mergers and acquisitions, which was fantastic, with Professor Dunbar, learning about how deals are structured, how do you pay for them, how do you

evaluate them, all that stuff was fantastic. There were so many great courses in the program as tough to choose a couple. But I'd say that those are my favorite.

Vish Gopalakrishnan:

Right. And what's fascinating to me about your answer is you mentioned data modeling, which it's analytics, primarily Excel. Then you mentioned M&A, which is largely finance. You mentioned the class in product management, which is, I'm guessing more IT, you have such a wide breadth of interests. I'm guessing that was one of the reasons why you ultimately decided not to do a concentration. You essentially picked and chose classes that be of interest to you. Am I correct in that assumption?

Tyler Penberthy:

Yeah, that's exactly right. And I believe that's a majority of the value from the MBA program is being able to pick and choose those electives while you're going through the two-year program and mold your future job that you're going to get after school. All those choices and steps that each student takes along

the way is only going to set you up for the ideal position. As I mentioned before, that crossroads and going from human resources and insurance over to IT, consulting software development is not usually an easy transformation, but the graduate assistant positions the consulting extracurriculars, and then the coursework, all kind of beefed up my resume to the point where I am viewed as valuable to employers along with the MBA in having the business knowledge and also the IT knowledge as well, really provides a lot of value and stands out to employers.

Vish Gopalakrishnan:

Right. And now that you've graduated, did you achieve everything that you set out to through the program? What are some of the ways in which you feel like you've grown over the past 12 months?

Tyler Penberthy:

Sure. I'd say the one thing I don't believe I had time for, which provides a lot of value in the program is Leader Core. I know that that's an extensive leadership program that provides a lot of value to students who may not have previous work experience and allows them to strengthen some of their strengths and identify their weaknesses. And I've heard wonderful things about that program, so I didn't get a chance to be part of that.

But I felt over the MBA program, I did develop more as a professional. I'd say the teamwork and camaraderie and network of individuals that I have from the program was fantastic, and they've all made me a better person just by working with so many great people. And now having lifelong friends that I can go to, especially my guys over in Germany, Phil and Bjorn. Hi guys, how you doing? And Vee Gates. And so just having those connections is so awesome now. And so I don't think I accomplished everything that I wanted to, but I'd say that I set myself on the right path to be successful in the long term from the UB MBA.

Vish Gopalakrishnan:

Right. And other than not taking Leader Core, and this is usually a tough question for my guests to answer, but if there was one thing that you would've liked to change about your experience at UB, what would that be?

Tyler Penberthy:

Well, something that was out of my control was COVID and taking some classes online for a semester or two. So I'd say the in-person experience with the UB MBA program provides significant value, and I don't think that can be underestimated. I'd say that's probably be the one thing that if I had the control, I would've preferred to be in person for classes and writing on whiteboards and hanging out at [inaudible 00:22:20] for hours on end. But other than that, I was super thankful for all the experiences and opportunities I had coming from the MBA program.

Vish Gopalakrishnan:

Right. You have such a wide breadth of experience, a working professional, deciding to change career paths, coming to get an MBA, getting involved in doing so many other things outside of class. What's your advice to incoming students who are just starting their journey in the MBA program?

Tyler Penberthy:

I'd say have an end goal in mind. The MBA program is really what each person makes out of it. And it seems to be different for everybody because there is so much opportunity. There's GMA, the Graduate Management Association, there's the UB MBA Consulting Group, there's Leader Core, so there's several opportunities at every turn and coursework that people can take, that would benefit each individual depending on where they start their journey. Some come in with no work experience, others come in with 5 to 10 years of work experience.

And so I think understanding the end goal, where you would like to be at the end of the journey, whether that could be a job or starting your own company through Blackstone Launchpad or whatever that may be. If you have the end goal in mind, take the steps to get to that point, and that's going to be huge. So having the goal in mind and then constantly evaluating that goal and iterating on it and then making adjustments is really what's going to get people the most out of the program and help them develop as professionals.

Vish Gopalakrishnan:

Right. I think it's very important to know what you want to achieve from the program because FOMO is very real. There's so many ways to get involved, so many things that you would want to do. If you come in with somewhat of a concrete idea of what your end goal is, the experience certainly is a lot more fruitful. Tyler, you, you've graduated. What's next for you?

Tyler Penberthy:

Sure. Right now, I'm working in construction project management consulting and working with information systems and implementations for our clients that are all across California. So there's a really great opportunity for myself and going to continue to develop my skillset over the next 6 to 12 months. And then eventually I would like to get into a managerial or more senior position in the consulting world and see where that takes me. And then outside of that, I enjoy playing beach volleyball, so continue to travel across the US and play amateur and professional tournaments is something that helps me balance the time outside of work.

Vish Gopalakrishnan:

Well, Tyler, we wish you the very best with everything that you've planned for yourself. Thank you so much for taking the time to speak with us and sharing your experiences. I think it's going to benefit a lot of students. If our listeners want to follow your journey, where can they find you?

Tyler Penberthy:

LinkedIn, so [linkedin.com/tylerpenberthy](https://www.linkedin.com/tylerpenberthy), P-E-N-B-E-R-T-H-Y. That's where you can find me and feel free to contact me. I'm happy to speak about my experience with the MBA program and any other career opportunities outside of that, but this has been awesome. Thank you so much for your time, Vish. This was great.

Vish Gopalakrishnan:

Thanks, Tyler. Thank you for listening to Manage-A-Bull Podcast, produced by the Office of Strategic Marketing and Enrollment Management University at Buffalo. For more information on our programs and offerings, visit management.buffalo.edu. If you would like to be featured on the podcast or would like to share comments and suggestions, please write to us gopalak2@buffalo.edu. That's gopalak2@buffalo.edu. Hope you have a great day, and we will see you in the next one.