

Stu 1



FRB/BE - Interview Notes

[REDACTED] (7/26/17)

- [REDACTED] first interacted with BE in exec program for media managers, asked BE to teach. BE is not impressed with our teaching norms, created special slides, was a disaster.
- Is amazed he's never been able to put an MBA course together, hasn't been able or willing to teach using our pedagogy
- But in LCA has been super successful, is enjoying it, students love the course and teaching ratings are increasing. [REDACTED] has interacted with BE re: "adjusted" teaching ratings (controlling for superstar teachers in other sections, courses that in general score more poorly, etc.) - he seems to have discovered a subject that's close to his heart, [REDACTED] is happy it's happened
- BE sits on IT/MBA/faculty steering committee, [REDACTED] has seen both the good and the bad of BE.
 - Good: is engaged, cares about the outcome, highly knowledgeable about IT.
 - Bad: Incapable of seeing why his preferred solution can't/won't be implemented, but doesn't come from a bad place, he really believes his way is the right and only way. But he can't see why some things are just not feasible for the IT group, or are not best for other EC instructors. Displays really limited judgment; doesn't understand the consequences of his own actions, unable to be reasonable.
 - Recent example: There is overwhelming demand by faculty to be videotaped, but IT faces capacity constraints. But BE has a particular view, doesn't understand why all faculty and classes can't be videotaped given technology that's available to support this (could videotape every class continuously, edit later). IT argues [REDACTED] agrees) this is not practical, yet BE pushes back, not empathetic to other side or point of view, can't relate to others. In conversations, BE is abrasive, arrogant, stubborn
- [REDACTED] has never seen BE change his mind in any conversation that he's ever witnessed
- Mind boggling to [REDACTED] that BE can't develop his own EC course given how relevant his expertise is re: current issues (technology/legal)
- Is not obvious to [REDACTED] that BE's success in LCA will be maintained
- No lack of engagement whatsoever, can go to BE with anything and ask for help
- The world is B&W to BE.
- Unable to restrain himself. Comes from a good place, but no sense of what's appropriate. Is unable to see other side's point of view (contrary to HBS, where the case method is based upon finding common ground, trying to understand the perspective of those who disagree with you)
- [REDACTED] is concerned that BE's approach harkens back to the "older model" of faculty/staff interactions (I'm smarter than you are, you are inferior), has no sense that BE can/can/will change, risk of creating a bad environment, fostering heightened fear of failure
- [REDACTED] should be having this kind of discussion at the Associate review, not when someone is coming up for Tenure

7/26/17)

- BE is an unbelievably moral and caring person, but can come across as lawyerly, blunt an almost disrespectful
- Has learned from Chinese Restaurant (CR) episode: BE has viewed this as getting more "data" (Mr. Spock as opposed to Captain Kirk), has learned that what/how you say things, when you push back or just let it go - these matter. Obvious to the rest of us, but he is wired differently. Has cognitive disconnects similar to children on the "spectrum": doesn't read body language, sense cues, know what's inappropriate to say. Has poor social skills
- But is the least manipulative/Machiavellian person on the planet
- Acts very nice towards, tries to help to the victims/weaker/disadvantaged (so when I pushed [REDACTED] whether this extended to his interactions with HBS staff, he responded: with the incident around reducing # of clicks to enter class participation, BE may rebuke staff who disagree with him, but in his mind he's working to help other staff who are "victimized" by having to do the extra work)
- To understand him, need to factor in 3 important contexts: (1) he's trained as lawyer, as were both his parents, (2) he comes from a very justice-oriented family (aunt Marion Wright Edelman was a black civil rights activist, knew MLK), (3) 1/3 to 1/2 of his research is about bad stuff on the internet (Sheriff of the Internet), so he has an activist mindset
- In CR case, his immature perspective was based on his view that the owner was ripping off customers who would never know. BTW, he never identified himself as a Harvard professor, owner figured it out and played BE brilliantly, he is no babe in woods (was on GC)
- Jan Rifkin's advice to BE was to repeat back - aloud - the argument of the other person before you state your own view, so you better understand what the other person's perspective is - [REDACTED] says BE told him this was incredibly helpful
- Blinkx incident:
 - BH's response was much less confident to my question about the Blinkx incident, and how he [REDACTED] would explain that in terms of cognitive disconnects.
 - [REDACTED] rationale/defense of BE: He could have made a gazillion dollars by shorting Blinkx's stock, but chose not to do so; Blinkx's stock has stayed low since, suggesting that BE was right about the company; he only accepted a speaking fee of \$10K which is small potatoes to BE, he might not even have noticed it given how much income he makes (i.e., it was not about the money - and, in general, it's never about the money with BE, he lives modestly and will probably give most of it away at the end); and this episode was a wake up call for BE that this was not appropriate. (SG: less charitably, he got caught).
 - BE's response to Blinkx incident has been to set up a series of filters to prevent this from happening again (more discipline, report more to the Dean, will be more transparent, will become more consumer focused, with think more in advance about potential conflicts of interest) BE doesn't think like other people, he is totally unique/one of a kind

- [REDACTED] believes the incident "was all legally and ethically ok" and BE wasn't trying to do anything sleazy, now recognizes this created "the appearance of conflict"
- Going forward BE's focus will be on class actions where individual consumers are being screwed a small dollar amount, but across lots of consumers it amounts to a lot of money
- Is incapable of being two-faced, couldn't fake it
- BE isn't desperate to stay at HBS, has lot of options (other top business schools, private practice/doing his thing full-time)
- BE makes a lot of his money bringing class action lawsuits (with several partners) against companies that screw individual consumers by a small dollar amount, so they wouldn't bother to sue, but across all the consumers who are being victimized the dollar amounts at stake are huge.
- Has no charm, won't try to charm his way out of anything
- Is principled, but needs to learn to respect other (principled) people's points of view, that you can't argue them to death, but sometimes have to agree to disagree
- Persists in fighting people because that's the right thing to do

[REDACTED] (8/3/17)

- Lives close to BE, sees him walking around the Brookline reservoir
- On whole BE was an excellent colleague in LCA, saw no behavior that was akin to what he did with the local Chinese restaurant (David Scharfstein also lives in area, confirms the restaurant has been doing that for years)
- [REDACTED] was alerted to the issues, kept his eyes open
- Thought BE was between "very good" to "exemplary" colleague: agreed to do case writing, got better snacks for the teaching group meetings, got along with everybody
- Only slight flaw: Is on the spectrum, sometimes when in one-on-one, eyes will stop blinking and he'll go on and on (but could describe a number of our colleagues)
- Sat in one class, had very good rapport with students, wasn't too tough, challenged them and pushed back, didn't put anyone down
- BE turned out to really like LCA, students liked his approach, he would like to teach LCA indefinitely, was willing to teach 2 sections (even though not required to)
- [REDACTED] was aware why BE was put in LCA, did wonder if BE would try hard to exhibit his best behavior. Did seem that BE was trying to be careful (who wouldn't in that situation?), but [REDACTED] had the sense that he wasn't seeing a "performance," was just seeing Ben. Feels that way with a "fair degree of confidence."
- Gives a "green light" on this.

[REDACTED] (8/8/17)

- 2nd/3rd hand: knows BE to be "indelicate," understands he might treat an assistant differently from how he treats a superior [REDACTED] doesn't like that). [REDACTED] believes it's not done out of disrespect, but rather BE is not good at being delicate - if he thinks something is unfair or wrong, he can come across as harsh at times
- With his superiors he has more of a filter (as we all probably do)
- This aside, this is not a person who's looking out only for himself, or who is trying to cut corners or pull a fast one; rather, he will waste a tone of time b/c he believes what is "right" should be pursued over what is "wrong" - even if it's what we would consider to be a trivial issue
- He's just wired that way
- [REDACTED] believes BE's intentions are good, which is the most important thing in [REDACTED] view
- Had interaction with BE within last 3 years regarding his key role in developing a new system to allow students to "raise their hands" electronically (motivated by vision-impaired students, [REDACTED]). Great idea that [REDACTED] will even try, allows instructor to collect data on whose hands went up, identify bias in calling patterns. BE spent way too much time building this thing, went out of his way to develop this based on a conversation or two that he had with people; [REDACTED] interactions with BE over this, providing feedback (while [REDACTED] was on leave), could not have been better
- [REDACTED] has no problem with BE being tenured as long as his intentions are good, and [REDACTED] is extremely confident that BE is coming from the very best place
- One risk of tenuring someone is not an issue with BE, i.e., that the "real you" will come out after you get tenure. With BE, the "real you" is already out there. [REDACTED] views this as a strong positive.

[REDACTED] 8/10/17)

- Wonders if we've considered if BE has a behavioral dysfunction (has heard lots of tech CEOs like Bill Gates are "on the spectrum"), must be other examples of this at Harvard
- Her sense is that he sees the world differently, really is something going on here, best route could be a really, really good therapist who knows about this in high-performance individuals
- This is not something he can self-correct (as with a jerk who is told he needs to stop being like that). There's something here in the wiring, in the cards he was dealt, it's not just about "clean up your act."
- BE seems lonely, isolated, carries it with him
- Is he a Ted Kaczynski or a John Nash?
- [REDACTED] believes he wants to be helpful and to engage, but she's also seen enough of the oddness that it's not just typical bad behavior, rather a disability of some kind - and if it's a disability, should we deal with this any differently from how we deal with physical disabilities (like vision impairment) - the school has gone out of its way to accommodate and support faculty who are going blind; should the same flexibility be shown to someone suffering from a mental disability? Does this raise certain legal issues?
- [REDACTED] is really torn: she really likes the guy, and found him to be really helpful
- THE FOLLOWING SHOUD NOT BE CITED IN REPORT B/C WOULD IDENTIFY [REDACTED] Taught FIELD with BE in the year it was announced it would be cancelled, so [REDACTED] suggested having a party for the teaching group to celebrate their time together at a lunch/party/etc. So BE took ownership of organizing this, created a dedicated Wiki for people to sign up, and then he unilaterally announced the date/time/place the event would be held. However on this date Jill and Tony (who headed the course) couldn't make it, which [REDACTED] thought was awkward and inappropriate b/c the event was obviously meant to thank them (it should have been obvious that their attendance was a given). [REDACTED] was struck that this nuance never occurred to BE, rather he picked the date based on maximizing attendance. So he was very well intentioned, but didn't occur to him that you wouldn't just add up the number of attendees. Jill later said to [REDACTED] "I'm not surprised, given that BE was in charge." (This was not said with any anger.)
- [REDACTED] takeaway: Hope we can accommodate quirks; I like him as a colleague, like his helpfulness and generosity; I like talking to him. She wants her comments to be taken as a net positive. He contributes in a whole variety of ways to the School.
- BE invested a lot in FIELD, was very generous with [REDACTED] in sharing notes, insights
- Re: Chinese restaurant episode: the restaurant owner was no dummy; after this happened, [REDACTED] own local Chinese restaurant adjusted its posted prices to eliminate inconsistency with online prices - so BE had an impact!
- [REDACTED] Would "give me the creeps" if this would be a barrier to getting tenure
- Worries that junior faculty at HBS are overly obsequious to senior faculty (relative to other schools); are too worried what senior faculty think. So if BE is fired over the Chinese restaurant episode, what will this do to junior faculty paranoia over senior faculty?