

1st year at HBS

After three years of operational experience in the automotive industry, I started my MBA in September 2007 at Harvard Business School. With the MBA I hope to prepare myself for future leadership positions and gain additional expertise, particularly in finance.

The case method, and its related individual preparation of 2-3 cases per day, most impacted my first year experience. In my undergraduate studies of production management in Germany and France, and my previous work experience, I already gained solid understanding in operations management but most classes at Harvard Business School were very unfamiliar to me. In order to catch up in these new areas, I gladly used available online tools and daily learning team meetings. In retrospect, it astonishes me how often I came out of a class with a totally different understanding of a case and how much I learned from my fellow students. The real life experience provided by many guest speakers gave me further insights into many sectors and companies that I could have never realized without Harvard Business School.

Since our son Theodore was born in November 2007, the timing of my MBA could not have been more exciting for my wife Barbara and me. The outstanding health care of Harvard University was essential throughout the year, because Theo came 2 months premature and spent a month in the NICU (Newborn Intensive Care Unit) of Brigham and Women's Hospital until the very last day of the first term. My daily visits at the hospital were possible because of very appreciative and supportive fellow students and professors. During this period, I preferred to read my cases in a rocking chair with a tightly wrapped baby on my belly. It also emerged that the HBS Network even works in the Brigham and Women's Hospital, when I coincidentally met Brandon from Section E, who got twins with his wife and therefore shared my routine.

Countless events like the Newport Ball, the section retreat to Vermont, the moustache contest, the charity auction, the section Olympics and the intramural sports leagues assured that I got to know my Section C colleagues outside the classroom. In clubs like the Africa Business Club and Finance Club, I made further friendships that will last well beyond my time here in Cambridge. In Poker tournaments – when I played with Chinese, Indian, Lebanese, Mexican, Spanish, Turkish, Ukrainian and US-American section-mates – I vividly experienced the international diversity at HBS.

Equally important, Harvard Business School gives me time to think about what I really want to do and what I am passionate about. Many networking events, industry weeks as well as various career coaches were giving me invaluable insights. After a private equity internship in Frankfurt, I am looking forward to starting my second year. I am sure that it will be as exciting, intensive and enriching as my first year.

Frederic Dovi-Akue