

# Introduction

## Something's Broken

***“Success is more a function of consistent common sense than it is of genius.”***

**- An Wang**

I hung up the phone and ticked off the evening's final ding call. This last conversation had been rough. The candidate was one of twelve I had interviewed that day. On paper, he was an outstanding prospect: before entering graduate school, he had spent three years at an investment bank; he had a bachelor's degree in mathematics from Northwestern; and his GMAT score was 720. In person, he was even more impressive: thoroughly professional, very friendly, and obviously intelligent, he seemed the perfect consultant.

There was only one problem: he bombed my case. He couldn't develop a good approach to the case, which involved a large travel agency losing corporate clients. He tried to apply a well-known business framework, but it wasn't appropriate for a company in the service sector. The interview wasn't all bad—he shone on the quantitative aspects, speeding through the calculations and projections that had tripped up several other candidates that day. But when our time was up, he couldn't pull together a solution, let alone outline any clear recommendations for our “client.”

When he asked for feedback over the phone, I tried to be as specific as possible without further discouraging him. Most consulting firms were finished interviewing on his campus. I knew his chances of getting an offer from one of the top firms were dwindling. What could I say that would help him improve his chance for next time? Would there even be a next time?

I wondered why he had such trouble with my case. I'm sure he had prepared for his interviews using the various case interview guides and practice cases on the market, and like most other students at top MBA programs, he was accustomed to working hard and achieving results. Why should preparing for a case interview be any different?

The answer: it's not. With the right tools and the right kind of practice, you can learn to solve the toughest business cases like a seasoned consultant.

**Crack the Case** is the result of my firsthand experience interviewing MBA and undergraduate candidates at the top business schools in the country. It is the result of nine years in consulting, serving thirty different companies across a dozen industries. And it's the result of solving complex business problems side by side with some of the brightest minds in management consulting.

## My Philosophy

The focus of **Crack the Case** is the business case interview. Why? Because business cases now comprise the majority of case interviews given to MBA candidates. The top consulting firms tend to focus most of their energy on giving business cases with some market sizing integrated into the case. Brainteasers (e.g. how many golf balls fit into a blimp?) are even less popular now. Here's why:

- As a stand alone case, market sizing problems are less complicated than business cases and therefore don't sift out the star candidates as effectively as business cases do.
- Brainteasers alone do not showcase a candidate's general business knowledge.
- Candidates are, across the board, improving their performance on brainteasers due to the existence of several good study guides on the topic.

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A complex business case naturally includes a quantitative element. The firms expect you to have an aptitude for crunching the numbers. But they want to see you do it in the context of a business problem.

## My Passion

Teaching is my passion. I love showing people new and better ways to do things; I get excited about making complicated concepts easy to understand. Training has been a common thread in my career, even predating my years in consulting. During college I moved to Japan for two years and supported myself by teaching English. At Arthur Andersen, I mentored and trained many new hires in a department that grew from five consultants to fifty during my time with the firm. At Bain & Company, in addition to my role as a consultant and eventually a manager, I helped lead my office's training programs for new consultants, instructed new hires at global training sites, and held the role of Chicago Knowledge Officer.

**Crack the Case** reflects my passion for teaching. I developed the Maximum Value Model™ and the FRAME™ Method to equip you with the tools you need to succeed in your case interviews. My approach to solving business cases fills a critical gap in the resources available today. Other case guides say you should solve cases by applying well-known business frameworks—the exact opposite of what the top consulting firms are saying.

**Crack the Case** shows you how to solve your cases like a seasoned consultant. I have designed ten comprehensive practice cases tailor-made for mock interviewing. My common sense approach, One Model/One Method™, is easy to understand, easy to remember, and easy to apply under the pressure of an interview.

## My Promise

**Crack the Case** reinvents case interview preparation. You will not find the tired old frameworks in this book. Nor will you find practice cases with “Hollywood scripts” for solutions. You will not find “short” lists of ninety-plus questions to memorize.

Instead, you will find:

- Mental roadmaps and a few key questions to help you drive through your cases with direction and confidence
- A structured approach that keeps you logical and focused on the data
- Ten tough practice cases coded by difficulty level
- A firsthand account of the interview and selection process
- Insights gleaned from interviewing scores of candidates

Are you ready to raise your game to the next level? Welcome to **Crack the Case** and my web site [www.MBACASE.com](http://www.MBACASE.com). We are constantly adding new content to help you with the interview process. I invite you to check it out and I look forward to working with you.

**David Ohrvall**