MBA PROTOCOL

APPLICANT GUIDE · 2026-27 CYCLE

How to Choose Your MBA Coach

How to tell a good one from a slick one in a single call. Ten questions to ask, the answers to listen for, and a test drive you can run on any coach (including us).

SHOPPING FOR A COACH?

Ask us all ten questions

A free 25-minute call: where you stand, which schools make sense, and a straight answer.

REQUEST A CALL →

Coach or consultant?

Top performers in every field have coaches. If you're about to spend four or five figures on one for your MBA applications, here is how to tell a good one from a slick one in a single call. Two words first.

CONSULTANT

Tells you what to do.

You leave with instructions, and the answers are theirs.

COACH

Helps you find the answer yourself.

And grows you in the process. You want this kind, and you can tell which one you're talking to within ten minutes.

What you should get for your money

1 Results you can check

A success rate with the method behind it, not just the number.

2 A plan for if it doesn't work out

Real support to reapply if you don't get in anywhere, and a way out if your coach isn't the right fit.

3 A process you can see before you pay

Tools, a timeline, a platform.

4 Their full attention

A small client load and a clear answer on how often you'll talk.

5 Your story, not a template

A way of getting to know you before anyone writes anything.

6 You in the driver's seat

Honest odds, delivered without making you feel smaller.

7 Something that outlasts the application

Interview, scholarships, recruiting, the skills you keep.

8 Good company

It's months of work. You should like talking to this person.

Ten questions to ask every coach (including us)

Ask them all in one call. Any coach worth hiring will enjoy them.

ASK	A GOOD ANSWER SOUNDS LIKE	A RED FLAG SOUNDS LIKE
1 How do you calculate your success rate, and can I see the method?	Who's counted, who isn't, over what period, and a page that shows it.	A round number and a change of subject.
2 What happens if I don't get in anywhere?	Specific terms: what support you'd get to reapply, and what you'd need to have done to qualify.	"That's never happened."
3 Can you show me your process and tools before I sign?	A platform, a timeline, a sample of what you'll work from.	"Every client is different" with nothing to look at.
4 How many clients do you take at once, and who exactly will I work with?	A number, a name, and how often you'll talk.	"A team of experts."
5 How do you get to know me before we start?	Something structured that happens before any essay is touched.	Straight to the essay prompts.
6 Who writes my essays?	You do. They coach, you write, every word is yours.	Anything that sounds like "we'll take care of it."
7 Do you review my recommendation letters, and what's your role with my recommenders?	A clear yes or no with a reason, and a process for choosing and briefing recommenders.	Silence; they hadn't thought about it.
8 What do we do if I disagree with your feedback?	A way to explore your idea before deciding, and examples of clients who were right.	"Trust the process."
9 How will you tell me my honest odds?	They already did, on this call, with numbers, and you still feel like trying.	Either flattery or a verdict.
10 Does the work end at submission?	Interviews, scholarships, post-decision choices, and something about the career after.	"We can discuss add-ons."

ON THE CALL · THE FASTEST TELL

The test drive

The fastest way to tell a coach from a consultant: pick one real prompt from a school on your list and ask one question.

SAY THIS

“How would you start with me on this?”

Coach asks you questions.

Consultant tells you what to write.

Six prompts you can use

Stanford GSB

“What matters most to you, and why?”

650 WORDS

Harvard Business School

“What experiences have shaped how you invest in others and how you lead?”

250 WORDS

Wharton

“Taking into consideration your background, how do you plan to add meaningful value to the Wharton community?”

350 WORDS

Chicago Booth

“Upload an image and explain its significance to you.”

300 CHARACTERS

MIT Sloan

“A cover letter seeking a place in the MIT Sloan MBA program, with professional examples showing you meet their criteria.”

300 WORDS

INSEAD

“Give a candid description of yourself as a person and a leader, emphasising the strengths and weaknesses you recognise in yourself.”

500 WORDS

What you’re listening for: whether they get curious about you, or start pattern-matching you to “what Stanford wants.”

2026-27 cycle, from the schools’ own pages; check the live application for exact wording.

AFTER THE CALL · DECIDING

After the call, ask yourself

1

How did I feel about myself when we hung up: bigger, or smaller?

2

Did they see something in me I hadn't said out loud?

3

Did they tell me the truth about my odds, and do I still want to try?

4

Would I want this person's voice in my head for the next four months?

If a coach makes you feel bad during the sales process, it only gets worse after they have your money. If you like the firm but not the coach you spoke with, ask for another; a good firm will say yes.

SKIP THESE

Three questions that sound smart and aren't

SOUNDS SMART

"Have you worked with someone exactly like me?"

That makes your demographic the point. Your application should be built on what makes you unlike anyone, which is the one thing a coach who's seen a thousand profiles can actually find.

SOUNDS SMART

"Did you go to my target school?"

Being good at something and being good at helping someone else do it are different skills. Ask how they coach, not where they went.

SOUNDS SMART

"Were you on an admissions committee?"

Judging and creating are different jobs. Food critics aren't chefs. You want the person who helps you make the thing, not the one who used to grade it. (We have both on the team, and the second one is the one we hire for.)

MBA PROTOCOL

Take it for a test drive.

Ask us all ten. We'll answer every one on a free 25-minute call, tell you where you stand, and say what we'd do first. Nobody will push you to buy anything.

REQUEST A CALL →

mbaprotocol.com/mba

Ask all ten

Every question in this guide, answered on the call.

Where you stand

Honest odds for the schools on your list.

What we'd do first

A straight answer on where to start, whether or not we work together.