



# MAKING THE **CASE** FOR EMPLOYEE SPONSORSHIP

**CHICAGO BOOTH** 

Executive MBA  
Program

CHICAGO | LONDON | HONG KONG



**“My company values me as an employee. They want me to stay, they want me to grow, and they want me to be prepared for the future. So I positioned the EMBA as a way to support those goals.”**

—CHICAGO BOOTH EXECUTIVE MBA STUDENT

Gaining your employer’s support is one of the most important steps to starting an executive MBA program. You can’t enroll without it, and the process will go much more smoothly if your employer has a clear understanding of what to expect. Make a strong, compelling case for how your Chicago Booth MBA will bring value to your company. This preparation will go a long way toward securing your employer’s sponsorship—and possibly their financial support.

We’ve put together this guide to help you make your case for support. Drawing on the experiences of a number of current Executive MBA students, the guide offers tips and strategies on everything from demonstrating the ROI of an MBA to explaining why Chicago Booth is the best fit for you.

## STEP 1: PLAN YOUR APPROACH

**“It’s important to think about who you need to speak to and who the decision-makers are. There’s a lot of strategy that goes into it.”**

—CHICAGO BOOTH EXECUTIVE MBA STUDENT

The process of getting your employer on board can take time, so it’s critical that you start working on it before you want to actually start an MBA program. This strategy is particularly important if your company limits the number of employees it sponsors for this kind of program. As one current student put it, “I talked to my boss about an MBA one year before I applied, because a lot of people are queuing for support.”

It’s equally important to be strategic about your approach. Who are the key decision-makers in your company? Who should you approach first? Are there additional stakeholders you can get on your side?

The answers to these questions will vary from one company to the next, though in most cases a fundamental first step is to find out what your company’s HR policy is with regard to training and development.

One Executive MBA student got buy-in on the general concept of an MBA from senior management before approaching his direct manager. Others started by approaching their current managers directly. “You really need to know your company and how to navigate the political landscape within the firm,” one student said.



## STEP 2: BUILD YOUR CASE

**“I made the case that it was also beneficial to my company because I can bring what I’m learning back to work. So it’s bringing value to my organization as well.”**

—CHICAGO BOOTH EXECUTIVE MBA STUDENT

Most students create a written proposal outlining their case for support, though in some companies the process is less formal and managed through conversations. Whichever approach you take, the points you make will be the same. Here are some of the topics you’ll want to address.



## DEMONSTRATE YOUR VALUE AS AN EMPLOYEE

**“Show what contributions you’ve made so far and what you expect to contribute over the next few years.”**

—CHICAGO BOOTH EXECUTIVE MBA STUDENT

Remind your employer that you’re a valuable asset to the company and worth the investment of time and/or money. You might create a list of specific accomplishments, for example, or compile testimonials from colleagues or clients. As one student said, “Investing in education means cultivating the future leaders of an organization.” Make the case that you could be one of those future leaders.

## SHOW HOW AN MBA WILL BENEFIT YOUR COMPANY

**“We hired somebody from the Executive MBA Program through my connection to the school. So there’s been a net benefit overall to my organization.”**

—CHICAGO BOOTH EXECUTIVE MBA STUDENT

You’re asking your employer for time away from work (and possibly for financial support as well), so you need to make a strong case that your company will benefit from your education and your degree. Be specific about the skills, knowledge, and connections you expect to develop and how they will create value for your company. For example:

- **Leadership development.** Booth’s LEAD program, one of the first experiential leadership programs at a major business school, augments your classroom learning with action and insight skills. LEAD helps you build self-awareness as a leader and strategist, preparing you to integrate those insights into your day-to-day work.
- **Business insights.** At Booth, you’ll build a strong foundation in the fundamental tools of business and learn to apply those tools to real-world business challenges. Our curriculum will help you generate new business insights and create game-changing impact in your current role. “I’m having ideas I wouldn’t have had before, and connecting dots that I wouldn’t have connected before,” one student said. “I think there’s something really valuable



about pairing education outside of the office to actual application in the workplace.”

- **Specific knowledge or experience.** If you have gaps in your education or professional background, the MBA curriculum can help fill them in. For instance, if your role includes marketing but you’ve never studied the subject, MBA-level classes will help you do your job better. In addition, our wide-ranging electives can allow you to study a topic specific to your organization.
- **Access to a global network.** With campuses in Chicago, London, and Hong Kong—and alumni and students who represent a diverse set of nationalities—our Executive MBA Program connects you with experienced professionals around the globe. Many students find that this powerful community helps them take on new perspectives and
- enriches their ability to solve problems at work. Access to this network can serve as a business resource for you and, by proxy, your company. “The people in my program are very diverse,” said one student. “When something comes up at work and I’m wondering how to solve it, someone might actually have that skill set. So the program is helping me solve problems and answer questions by tapping into the varied skill set that my group brings.”
- **Company projects as case studies.** As a student at Chicago Booth, you’ll have opportunities to bring real-world company projects to the classroom. You can tailor those projects to work on areas that need analysis, and your company will benefit from the insights and input of senior leaders from across different functions and industries.

## EXPLAIN 'WHY BOOTH'

“There are many ways to learn corporate finance, but there’s an important element of who’s teaching it to you—and who you’re taking that class with. Because you’re going to learn from the other students as well.”

—CHICAGO BOOTH EXECUTIVE MBA STUDENT

Once you’ve successfully made the case for an executive MBA in general, you’ll need to articulate why Chicago Booth is the right choice for you. Identify specific aspects of a Booth education that will be beneficial to your employer. Explain how The Chicago Approach™, with its emphasis on the fundamental scientific disciplines at the heart of business, provides a solid grounding in theoretical frameworks that will help you define problems, ask better questions, and develop better solutions for your organization. Another great way to gain the support of your employer is to invite them to attend a Booth information session.

Some strategies that current students have used include:

- **Articulate the value-add of a Booth degree.** One student faced resistance from a manager who wanted to steer her toward a less expensive program. She was able to win her case by emphasizing the stature of the Booth faculty and the high quality of the students that Booth attracts.



- **Enlist the support of colleagues with Booth MBAs.** Booth alumni are the best advocates for the program and can help you make your case. “The first person I went to in my company was someone who also did an MBA at Chicago Booth,” one student said. “I got him to support me, and then my line manager came on board as well.” If you need help connecting with Booth alumni in your company or industry, reach out to our Admissions team.
- **Highlight the global nature of the program.** In an increasingly worldwide economy, a global perspective is essential for success in just about every industry. Booth’s unique global footprint will provide you with just that. “Booth has a Hong Kong campus, so I can meet people who are more Asia-focused, while at the same time, I can also have exposure to people in Chicago as well as London,” said one student. “That’s pretty attractive compared with other programs.”

## DETAIL THE LOGISTICS

**“When you broach the topic with your employer, the time you’ll be taking away from work is probably the first thing they’re thinking about. Think about it from their perspective and mitigate their concerns.”**

—CHICAGO BOOTH EXECUTIVE MBA STUDENT

The 21-month Executive MBA Program is optimized to allow you the flexibility and space to continue with your professional responsibilities while ensuring you have time to learn the material, study with classmates, and network with the Booth community.

That said, it also represents a significant investment of time, and your employer will likely be concerned about the program’s impact on your time and performance on the job.

Use your case to demonstrate how you plan to make it work. Provide everything up front: a summary of the program timeline, the schedule of classes, and a specific plan for how you will manage your responsibilities. The goal is to create a shared understanding of what to expect.

In your plan, provide details about how you will manage and delegate responsibilities while attending classes. Make sure to address



any concerns your employer has about this by describing the team you have in place and how you will use them.

One student highlighted the importance of transparency in discussions about logistics. “I gave my manager the schedule up front and pointed out the weeks I would be out of the office, saying I probably wouldn’t be very available during that time,” she said. “But I also emphasized that I had done a lot of work to prepare my team to step into my shoes.”

Another aspect to consider is client relationships. If you are responsible for a number of client interactions, address how you will handle that. This might mean that you carve out time to check in with clients during class weeks, or identify a company representative who can do so in your place. Show that you have thought this through, and that any client interaction will be seamless.



In your proposal, formally ask your employer for that support. You should also indicate clearly how you will account for your time away—whether you will use PTO, unpaid leave, or another arrangement. It's a good idea to address this with your direct supervisor and the human resources department early on so that you have all the information you need to make the formal request.

**Financial.** Some Executive MBA students receive full support from their companies, while others secure a percentage of tuition funds and others don't receive any financial backing. Before you approach your employer for financial support, research your company's policies and find out what they've done in the past.

Next, give some thought to how much financial support you will need to complete the Executive MBA Program so you can provide an exact figure to your employer. You will want to lay out the most recent tuition costs and also factor in additional costs incurred such as travel expenses and accommodations for global weeks.

Be sure to take your company's fiscal calendar into consideration when planning this ask; for example, don't ask for financial support just after the budget for the fiscal year has been finalized.

This will likely be a negotiation between you and your employer to reach the best possible solution. With careful planning and thoughtful preparation, many students are successful.

## MAKE A CLEAR ASK

**“Before approaching my employer, I got myself comfortable with the idea of making the investment if I were to have to do it myself.”**

—CHICAGO BOOTH EXECUTIVE MBA STUDENT

Now that you have made your case, be clear about what you are asking for: support for time away from the office, financial support, or both.

**Time.** All entering Executive MBA students at Chicago Booth need to provide a letter of company support certifying that they will be allowed to attend class meetings. This is meant to provide a clear understanding between you and your employer about the time commitment you are making.





## **COMMIT TO AN AGREEMENT**

Finally, describe what your employer's support means to you. First and foremost, demonstrate your commitment to the company in return for their support. Some Executive MBA students offer to stay with the company for a lock-in period, while others come to an agreement about paying back their tuition funds should they leave. Still others negotiate part-time roles for the duration of the program or offer to forgo salary increases, bonuses, or paid holidays. Give thoughtful consideration to what long-term benefits you can offer to the company in return for their investment in you.

It's also important to emphasize how much you appreciate the opportunity to attend Chicago Booth for your MBA. Booth is known for its rigorous curriculum, and it speaks volumes about your eagerness to learn that you want to attend. We hope this guide helps you clearly demonstrate that you have the passion and the commitment to succeed in your MBA journey.