



Helen Cline

University of Pennsylvania, '06



Helen Cline, who grew up in Mt. Laurel, New Jersey, has traveled some interesting cultural highways. A graduate of the University of Pennsylvania's School of Engineering and Wharton School of Business, she holds two degrees, in mechanical engineering and economics with a concentration in marketing. She studied in Hong Kong for a semester as an exchange student, and speaks Mandarin proficiently. On weekends, she plays the violin in a string quartet

and teaches Chinese dance to adopted Chinese girls in her dance troupe, which she founded in 2003.

Cline got her start with MBI in the summer of 2005, with an internship at the company's Danbury Mint division. MBI had experimented with internships in the past, she says, but did not launch a formalized program until that year, which happened to coincide with the summer between her junior and senior years at Penn. The experience proved to be educational and mutually beneficial, she says.

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During her internship, Cline recalls, MBI treated her like any full-time Assistant Product Manager. Among other tasks, she was given responsibility for working with media brokers to set up and coordinate advertising campaign schedules for product launches. Working with sports-themed products, she witnessed the various stages in a product life cycle and was

intrigued, she says. In contrast with the stereotypical errand-boy status that often characterizes internships in corporate settings, this was unusual. MBI's interest was sparked, too, and the company offered Cline a position as Assistant Product Manager, to begin following her graduation from the University of Pennsylvania.

A thoughtful business strategist, Cline took some time during her senior year to explore other opportunities as well. Having by now decided that she would pursue a career in marketing rather than engineering, she interviewed with other prospective employers in the field, garnering job offers from a retail marketer and a consumer goods company. She ultimately decided to return to MBI.

At work today for The Danbury Mint, Cline juggles multiple "To Do" lists. She currently has five or six lists, written on hot-pink paper (the color is more functional device than fashion statement — a beacon when the office becomes cluttered with white paperwork). Her universe is one of overlapping deadlines, largely of her own making. Cline's products comprise a roster of 20 to 30 sports programs, such as stadium replicas, player figurines, sports photos, championship trophies, and sports ornaments. As long as she continues to excel, she is free to

add programs as she sees fit, and to run them from start to finish. She enjoys the challenge inherent in the fast-paced nature of the job, she says, as it keeps every day different.

The starting-point for any newly developed program, she observes, is the writing of a marketing plan, incorporating strategic, logistical and creative fundamentals. The plan addresses key phases like analysis of previous market experience, product development, manufacturing, advertising, inventory management and order fulfillment. Cline is involved in every aspect of each program, including the creative decision-making processes at the root of product development, advertising, and direct mail promotions. Market research, she points out, is done to establish not only product appeal, but also pricing; both elements are critical for successful sales.

Unexpected, sometimes pivotal changes can come to light at any stage in a product's life cycle, Cline says. Working with sports products especially, she sees her share of eye-openers. No one predicted, for example, the inspired season the New Orleans Saints would have in 2006. After countless troubling seasons, the team rallied remarkably, and demand for Saints memorabilia spiked. When the success of some Danbury Mint Saints products in test marketing prompted MBI to rethink its strategy for the rest of the year, Cline's boss called her and amiably uttered the classic business-world cliché, "I need it on my desk by 3:00 P.M. tomorrow." "It" was a media plan for getting ads for MBI Saints products into New Orleans newspapers by their deadlines.

Cline derives a particular kind of job satisfaction from this dynamic. Dealing with the sports industry, she notes, means responding nimbly and decisively to marketing opportunities that arise concurrently with real-world events like championships. The excitement can be palpable, she says, just as it would be for any sports fan, but the correlation between a team's success and the sales of its licensed products can make victory sweeter still.