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Martin Burt: A Conversation with a Social Entrepreneur

Martin Burt is a self-described social entrepreneur and innovator. His record of accomplishment since returning to his native Paraguay in 1985 invites one to add the modifier “successful” to his claim as a social entrepreneur. Martin founded Paraguay’s first nonprofit development foundation, Fundacion Paraguaya, and began providing micro-credit and other services to the poor. Martin has moved from those humble beginnings to world-wide attention for his work in helping the poor lift themselves out of poverty. **Exhibit 1** provides a list of Martin’s many awards and accomplishments.

A conversation between author Paul Godfrey and Martin follows this brief introduction. The interview provided Martin with the opportunity to explain how he became a social entrepreneur, how he pursues his work, and his expansive vision for the future. Edits to the conversation have been minimized in order to provide readers with “direct access” to Martin, his thinking, and his vision.

Early Influences

Paul: When I began teaching the Fundacion Paraguaya case in my MBA class, students loved the case; at the end of the discussion they said, “We want to learn more about Martin.”

Martin: That’s humbling.

Paul: Students’ really want to understand how individual people go about doing the work that they do. It’s all well and good to talk about projects like the school [San Francisco Agricultural School] but they also want role models. They want to know what makes social entrepreneurs tick and how they work.

I was fascinated to learn that at age ten you were already developing a passion for helping the poor. Can you tell me about some of the incidents and early influences that set the course of your life?

Martin: My parents formed a group to set up a private bilingual American school in Paraguay so that we would have access to a bilingual, US type education. (My dad had gone to high school and college in the US). It quickly became apparent to my brothers and sisters that we were among



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