

A New Dean with a New Vision

Roger Martin has returned to Canada to turn the Rotman School into one of the world's top ten business schools. As he explains, "The Rotman School is going to dream a big dream, because to dream a small dream is to sell itself short."

by Carol Sevitt

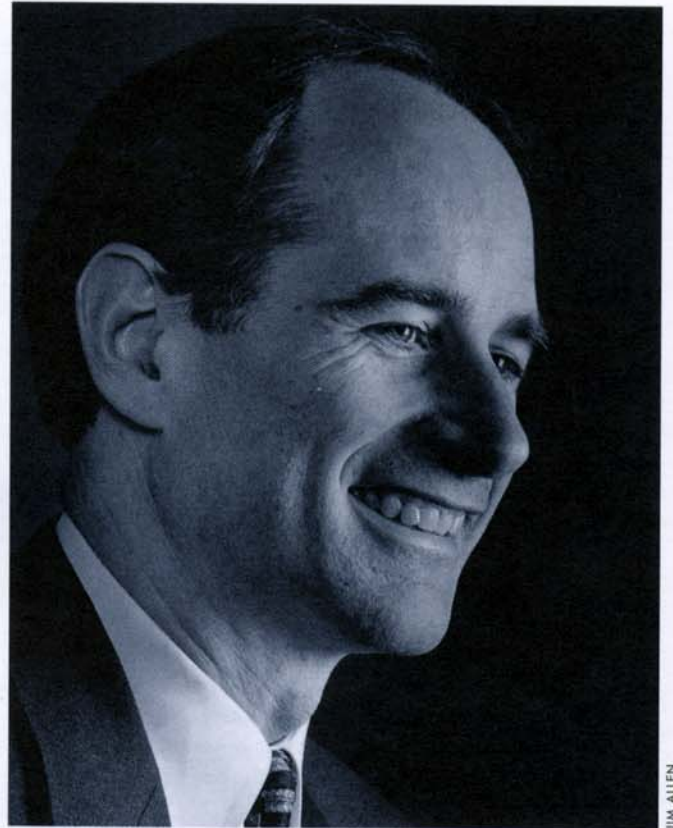
Dean Roger Martin, the new dean of the Rotman School of Management, is a smart, young powerhouse on a mission: to make the Rotman School one of the top ten business schools in the world. This Dean Martin, unlike his namesake, is not a crooner nor a silver screen idol, doesn't sport a cravat, nor sip a martini. However, he is a rising star who's only just arrived, but is already being noticed. "If talent is what it takes, University of Toronto president, Rob Prichard has scored in luring Roger Martin—Harvard Business School, class of '81—back to Canada," wrote Ann Dowsett Johnston in a recent *Maclean's* article. U of T has not only scored with Martin, it has picked a winner!

Before joining the Rotman School in September, Martin, 42, was a director of Monitor Company, an international strategy consulting firm based in Cambridge, Massachusetts. He founded Monitor's Toronto office in 1987 and has consulted extensively with major national and international clients including Procter & Gamble and *New Yorker Magazine*. He works in the area of strategy and how you make change happen. Martin has written for the *Harvard Business Review* and is currently working on his first book, *The Responsibility Virus*. Not bad for a small-town Mennonite boy from the Kitchener-Waterloo area.

Martin spoke candidly about his formative years in Wallenstein, Ontario, growing up in a family of five children. Proud of his Mennonite background, Martin feels it shaped the person he is today. Unlike the stereotype, he did not come from an Old Order Mennonite family, nor did he travel by horse and buggy. "I was blessed by having a radical maternal grandmother and radical paternal grandfather, so I grew up on the very liberal fringe of the spectrum," he revealed.

Martin related his dislike of fighting to the Mennonite philosophy of pacifism. "I look for solutions to problems rather than fight. I try to think of win-win situations," he said. In seeking to improve the Rotman School's ranking, he says he is not trying to fight with the business schools at Western, McGill, UBC, or Queen's. Rather, he is trying to create an environment in which they can all prosper and benefit from one another prospering. "That I think of as being Mennonite," he added.

Mennonites are raised to believe that it's important to work hard, and Martin is undaunted by the tremendous effort it will take to achieve his goals. "I'm not expecting great changes immediately. If we all put our noses to the grindstone and work at it, things will happen," he said.



Dean Roger Martin

Martin, attributes part of his decision to leave the corporate world and join the public sector to the Mennonite belief in public service. "I was raised to think that it is part of who you should be, part of your role in life to give back and serve the community," said Martin. As a businessman in the U.S., he always believed that he would turn to more substantial public-oriented work.

Martin feels that with the globalization of business, it's essential to compete with the best in the world in all fields.

Another major influence in Martin's life was studying and working in the United States. His Harvard education and experience at Monitor taught him about the importance of global competitiveness. "I learned by being in such a competitive environment about global competition. It changed my views about what it means to be a businessman or businesswoman in Canada, or a CEO in Canada," he said.

Martin firmly believes that it's essential to compete with the best in the world in all fields. He gave Zellers as an example of how global competitiveness is affecting Canadian retailers. Zellers didn't count on having to compete with the best discount retailer in the world—Wal-Mart. "Wal-Mart decided to come to Canada, and now Zellers is in big trouble. It's hard for Zellers to adjust because they were always playing a different game—how to win in the Canadian discount retailing game. Today, it's not a relevant game. It's only a game you can play and win as long as others cooperate," he explained.

Martin is passionate about the need for Canadian businesses to tackle the problem of global competitiveness, and says it is one of the reasons he has accepted this position at the Rotman School. As dean of a business school located in this country's financial capital, he hopes to play an influential role in convincing companies and institutions that being leaders in Canada is not enough.

Being Canada's top business school is not enough for Martin either. Moreover, he says, "It's not even relevant; it has no useful meaning for me. I couldn't care less about being Canada's number one business school. I'm striving to be one of the top ten business schools of the world." He isn't saying number one globally because business schools are not like retailers or manufacturers. None of the business schools is so big that it can take all of the customers, like a Wal-Mart.

"To reach the top ten, the Rotman School will have to develop its niche."

Not only does Martin want the Rotman School to be a member of that elite group of the top ten business schools, he says the school must stand for something unique. He feels that there needs to be some segmentation at the top echelon of business schools. For example, some students may want to go to the University of Chicago because of its strength in business economics, to Kellogg because of its strength in marketing, or to Stanford for its high-tech orientation. Each of these schools stands for something a little bit different, and that is Martin's goal for the Rotman School. One of Martin's priorities is to work with the faculty to identify where the Rotman School's niche will be.

When, with typical Canadian meekness, I asked Martin how far a Canadian business school could realistically go in this competitive business school market, he answered with typical American brashness: "As far as it is willing to dream it can go. Canada will be constrained only by its lack of willingness to dream big dreams. The Rotman School is going to dream a big dream, because to dream a small dream is to sell itself short—something in which I will not participate."

It's going to be tough for the Rotman School to dream these big dreams, because the home of business education is the U.S. Vigorous competition among the key American business schools drives each of them forward. That intensity of competition has not existed among Canadian business schools. Martin sees one of his jobs as spurring more beneficial competition among Canadian schools. "Raising the bar will make it better for everybody. The more vigorous the competition in your home market, the better your chance of being globally competitive."

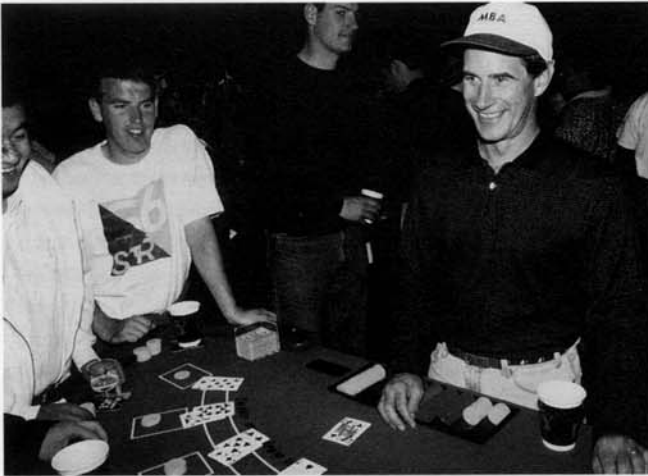
With a seven-year appointment as dean of the Rotman School, Martin believes it will take at least that time to reach the goals he's set. "I think it will take seven years until the cognoscenti, the real business school watchers, the big recruiters, and the academics in the field see us in the top ten. In the wider world, it will take another three years after we achieve that to be widely recognized as one of the premier schools in the world," Martin predicts.

"Today's business needs the best people and knowledge."

Martin is striving to help Canadian competitiveness by turning out the business world's best people and knowledge. The business world has changed since the early to middle of the 20th century when the defining assets were physical and financial assets—lots of equipment, raw materials, money in the bank, and a strong balance sheet. Today's companies are recognizing that human assets—the people you have and the knowledge they produce—are the critical elements for success.

Martin believes that the success of countries will be based on which ones have the best knowledge and human assets. "Standards of living are going to be defined on that basis. It's a battle—a global war of who's got the best people and knowledge," he stressed.

As dean of the Rotman School, Martin sees his role as establishing a premier, human-asset-creating and knowledge-asset-creating institution. A top business school contributes through its research to breaking new ground in the thinking business. Martin feels that in order to be globally competitive, Canada must provide first-tier academic institutions for our best thinkers. "Those premier institutions are going to be at the forefront of creating the next kind of knowledge assets. If we don't provide a top-level business school, we'll be a backwater.



Roger Martin joins MBA students at MBA Orientation Casino Night.

We have to create an environment in which we are producing the best people, giving them opportunities to grow, and giving them a reason for staying in their country," he said.

Because it is Canada's biggest, best-endowed university, Martin feels University of Toronto has to play a critical role in creating Canada's future human and knowledge assets. Financial support of the business school is a key component in achieving this competitive edge. Martin feels that he must convince Canadian businesses to increase their support of Canada's top university. "We have to do this. If we don't do this Canada will fade from prominence, from the Group of Seven. We will sacrifice our standard of living 50 years from now. It is a deadly serious game we're playing in trying to compete globally," he warned.

Martin wants the Rotman School to improve on Harvard's teaching methods in order to produce graduates who are skilled at integrative thinking.

An integral part of Martin's vision for the Rotman School is that the School become distinctive for teaching MBA students to be more broad-based integrative thinkers. Sometimes MBA's are typecast as people who think narrowly, but Martin doesn't want to turn out people like that. Martin envisages MBA's who think things through on a variety of dimensions. "I don't want students to just think about the big picture. Rather, they must consider a number of separate things that come together to form the big picture. So it's thinking about the money things and the people things and how they relate to each other. This

requires the art of integration—holding in your mind information about marketing, finance, cost, values and other things, and then creating linkages to understand them together," he said.

When I asked him if it is really possible to teach students to think integratively, he smiled, tossed back his head and insisted, "We *will* teach that here, and I don't mean maybe! Am I being clear? That's the next frontier, and it isn't taught anywhere, at any business school."

Teaching the theory and concepts behind integration is quite different from the traditional Harvard Business School approach of teaching students through actual business cases. Martin, a graduate of the Harvard Business School, says there's a difference between giving students many practical situations and assuming that they'll learn the theory of integration and actually teaching students a theory of integration. "When business schools use the case-study method, in many respects they're defaulting. They're saying the only way you can learn this is by us giving you these cases. That's one of the reasons I was so disappointed with Harvard. They'd give you 52 cases in a marketing course, and, at the end, assume you had extracted from that a theory of marketing. Cases are written by people in a particular field, and most cases are taught from a narrow perspective. They're not written by people thinking in general terms," he said.

In Martin's opinion, Harvard's downfall is not paying enough attention to how you link the principles of different areas such as marketing and finance. "I think Harvard Business School is the best business school on the face of the planet, but it's not good enough," he added.

Martin wants the Rotman School to improve on Harvard's teaching methods by teaching students how to become reflective practitioners. He wants MBAs to recognize that building the skills of reflection is a lifelong learning journey, that they must learn from everything they do, and that they must always move forward.

At the beginning of term, Martin sat in on a class in which MBA students were asked to do a business exercise to select a plant location from U.S., Europe, Asia, or the rest of the world. Many of the students thought that the U.S. would be the best place to put the plant. They were thinking of transportation costs, size of market, etc., but didn't think about what the seven other teams would do. Sure enough, six of the eight teams picked the U.S. If one team had picked Asia or the rest of the world, it would have had a huge advantage and domination of the market. "That is an example of not thinking integratively. The teams didn't consider that what was good for one team was also good for the other. They didn't look at competitive dynamics and competitive decisions before they made a decision. The teams needed to trade off what was good for them and what the others might do, and then pick something that works," said Martin.

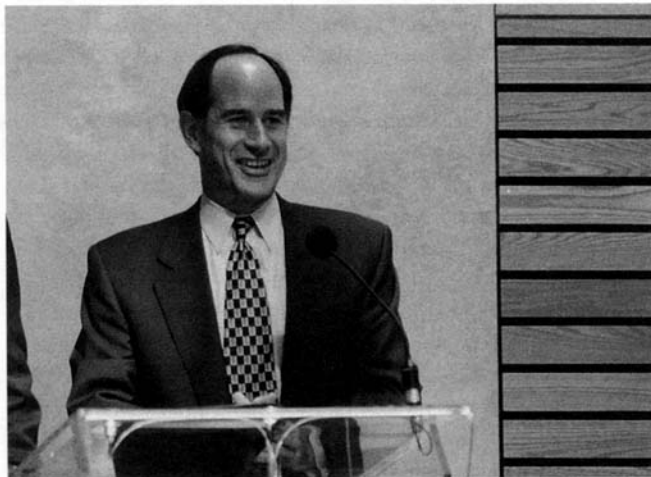
Martin feels the Rotman School must teach students how to reflect, how to access what's in their minds and say, "What was I thinking that caused me to make that decision? Now that I see

the results of it, what was missing? What wasn't I thinking about? How was I thinking that didn't make the most of it, but a medium amount of it?"

"If we produce reflective practitioners, we'll produce people who will impress the companies out there. They'll wonder how we could produce people who are so young and yet so wise," predicted Martin.

"Executive education, Commerce, PhD, and alumni programs will all be strengthened."

A great business school ties itself to, learns from, and contributes to the business community in which it operates. That's why virtually all the great business schools in the world are in major business cities. To increase its links with the Toronto business community, Martin would like to expand its executive education programs. "Our Executive MBA and Executive Development Programs are too small and not enough of a factor in this business community. We have new directors



Dean Roger Martin

of both—Eric Kirzner and Michael Hartman, who are trying to figure out ways of increasing the size and impact of these programs."

Martin also touched on the Rotman School's PhD program, which he feels is critical to building the country's knowledge assets. "We have a somewhat oversized, by relative standards, PhD program and I think that's great. If anything I'd like to make it even more so," said Martin.

Commerce, a program the Rotman School is jointly responsible for with the Faculty of Arts and Science, is an age-old, great program—a fixture in the business community. "Commerce has been the dominant undergraduate business program in Canada, and I want to make sure we keep the program revitalized and pointing toward the 21st century," said Martin.

Many alumni of the Commerce and MBA programs have lost their connection to the Rotman School, and Martin wants to bring them back to the fold. To reverse this trend, Martin is working on an idea of creating an ongoing program of update education for alumni. Theory and practice in the business world is changing at a tremendous pace, and people in business struggle to keep up. Martin envisages an annual program in which the Rotman School might invite alumni back for a week of targeted management lectures on important new learnings, key changes, and advances in thinking. He would like to create the genuine feeling among Rotman School students that their education will be continually updated. "Like my Hartman briefcase that is warrantied for life, I want people who attend the School to get warrantied for life. If we do that, we'll create a unique lifelong community of fellow travelers who are all in this together.

As my meeting with Dean Martin drew to an end, I was impressed by his quiet self-confidence, his passionate vision, and his disarming honesty. This is a man who wants to carve his niche in U of T history. He wants to be the dean who brings the Rotman School into the new millennium as one of the finest business schools in the world. He wants to make integrative thinkers of the students going through his programs. Finally, he wants to produce a group of outstanding business thinkers and a body of knowledge that will make Canada a force to be reckoned with in the next century. If anyone can do it, with his Mennonite values and American savvy, Roger Martin can!