

# Martin: Wilful enough to make his way to top

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"And when we tried to do things, they encouraged us."

Martin's desire to succeed was aided by a stubborn streak that surfaces when he plays tennis or golf.

"I'm quite a good golfer," says Rick. "Roger plays just a few times a year. But just from sheer mental trying, he can shoot an 80 when he hasn't practised all year. That is just from the will to do a good job and compete."

The story of how Martin went to Harvard has a similar ring.

When he was in Grade 13 at Elmira District Secondary School, he asked a guidance counsellor what was the best university to go to. "He said: 'Well Roger, it doesn't really matter. They are pretty much all the same.'"

Martin, who figures the counsellor viewed him as nothing more than a jock, immediately decided to prove him wrong. He blurted out that he would go to Harvard. It was the first 'great' university that came to mind.

"And because I was wilful enough and because his comment was so upsetting, I wrote away to Harvard."

Martin's willingness to take on all comers served him well when he joined Monitor Group, a fledgling consulting firm in Boston, a few years after completing his Harvard MBA. He relished the opportunity to take on big, established competitors.

He brought that same spirit to Rotman when he was appointed dean in 1998. He vowed that Rotman would be ranked among the world's 10 best business schools within a decade.

## COMES IN AT 21

It was an outrageous pledge. Rotman wasn't even ranked, but likely would have placed in the 70s if the rankings went that low back then.

But Martin, who is paid a fraction of the \$3-million a year he earned at Monitor, never doubted it could be done.

"A lot of it has to do with simply setting aspirations high. We set aspirations too low historically, and we achieved those low aspirations."

When the Financial Times came out with the rankings last month, Rotman placed 21st, just edging out York's Schulich as the top Canadian school.

"I am happy with our progress," says Martin. "I think we have a good shot at getting to 10 in 10 or 12 years."

Rotman's success ranks some people at competing schools. More to the point, they are irked by Martin's celebrity status. A regular contributor to the Globe & Mail and Harvard Business Review, and author of a highly regarded book on leadership, The Responsibility Virus, he became a media darling, the favourite expert to quote on business issues.

Martin, who is married to artist Nancy Lang, and has three teenage children, set out to be the story when he arrived. He knew the media would latch on to the story of the Canadian returning to Canada, a sort of reverse brain drain. But now that the school has a sterling reputation, it's profs like Joe D'Cruz and Eric Kirzner who field most of the calls from reporters.

"I do not have the highest profile at Rotman," he says, his voice betraying his annoyance with critics who suggest he hogs the limelight. "It has been a long time since I have been No. 1."

## BEST BUSINESS SCHOOLS

Top global and Canadian business schools in the annual Financial Times ranking.

### Top five

1. Harvard Business School.
2. Wharton, University of Pennsylvania.
3. Columbia Business School.
4. Stanford University.
5. London Business School.

### Top Canadian schools

21. Rotman School of Management, University of Toronto.
22. Schulich School of Business, York University.
34. Ivey School of Business, University of Western Ontario.
39. McGill University.
55. Sauder School of Business, University of British Columbia.
75. Queen's School of Business.
81. John Molson School of Business, Concordia University.

Martin can't escape the spotlight, however. As chairman of the Ontario Task Force on Competitiveness, Productivity and Economic Progress, he is an oft-quoted champion of prosperity.

The task force says businesses, governments and individuals need to invest in equipment, education and infrastructure to close a "prosperity gap" that leaves Canadian households short \$15,000 in after-tax income compared to their American neighbours.

Martin enjoys the work, but fears that his plea is falling on deaf ears.

## 'FRONT ROW CENTRE ROGER'

But task force member David Johnston, president of the University of Waterloo, says Martin is making a difference. The argument in favour of higher tuition levels in Bob Rae's report on post-secondary education "is front row centre Roger Martin," he says.

"I have enormous admiration for Roger as an intellectual leader and as a person," Johnston says. "We are lucky to have him in Canada."

Martin hasn't officially started his second term as Rotman's dean (his appointment was renewed for five years in December), but already people are pegging him as the next president of the University of Toronto. He's flattered, but expects that he will have had his fill of university administration by the time the second term ends.

The idea of running a foundation that tackles big problems appeals to him. So does teaching, mainly because he would have more time for writing, "one of the great joys of my life."

One thing is certain. Martin won't stop working. Growing up in Wallenstein, the Mennonite idea that you live to work became deeply ingrained.

"I have never contemplated the notion of retiring," he says. "I couldn't imagine why I would want to do that. Work is fun. Work is what you should do. You should be productive."

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# Loop: Family support was there from the start

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His family gave him a hand with just about every aspect of the business, from renovations to emotional support. The night before Loop opened, Keshvani and his family worked until 4 a.m. His mom and dad went home, got a few hours rest, and were back in the shop at 7:30 a.m. to set up.

"They're incredible," he says.

His parents are an obvious source of inspiration for him.

Fida and Alnash Keshvani lived in Uganda until former dictator Idi Amin banished people of Indian descent in 1972. The Keshvanis left everything they had and fled to Canada, settling

first in Winnipeg and then in Kitchener.

Alnoor Keshvani says his parents inspired his own work ethic. He toiled at four jobs — including bartending, waiting tables and DJ'ing — for several years to save enough money to start Loop.

Even today, he works mornings for a local marketing company before opening his store around noon.

But after nearly three months in business, Keshvani has no complaints.

"I'm happy. I couldn't ask for anything more."

*Kevin Crowley is The Record's business editor. You can reach him by e-mail at [kcrowley@therecord.com](mailto:kcrowley@therecord.com).*

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