Martin Curiel Interview Transcript

1. What was your greatest challenge as a college student?

 Being away from my family for an extended period of time. As a migrant farm worker, one of the great advantages of the "career" is the fact that families stay together and work together constantly. When I went off to college, I felt lonely, out of place, and very insecure about being there. I often questioned if I had made the right choice in leaving my family. In the end, I was able to see the big picture, specifically that college was a worthwhile investment for myself and for my family.

2.      What would you say to current college students who aren’t sure what they want to do with their careers, or whether they even want to finish college?

I have been a farm worker, engineer, entrepreneur, investor; have gone through 7 years of post-secondary education, obtained a CFA charter, and I STILL have trouble “knowing what I want to do when I grow up”. Bottom line, don’t worry about studying for the “right” career or job, cause it will most likely change / morph into something you never imagined.  What I do recommend is that you get good grades and build relationships with people that can help you down the line – the key is having as setting yourself up for as many options as possible in the future.

I don’t mean to insult those that have studied liberal arts in college, but I recommend studying something that is considered “technical” such as Math, Engineering, Finance, and Accounting. For better or for worse, the market demand for those jobs is relatively higher than non-technical degrees. It’s also much easier to become a social worker after graduating with an engineering degree than the other way around.

3.      What would you say to people who work in colleges, whether as counselors or instructors, that would help them understand how they can help students who come from non-traditional backgrounds?

 For instructors, I would recommend NOT giving special treatment to students that come from “non-traditional” backgrounds – it will just make things worse. In order to be prepared for the real world, students must learn to adapt to people, situations, and environments different from what they are accustomed to. They should get some practice in college.I am not sure what I would recommend to the counselors. Maybe set the students up with mentors that can broaden the student’s horizons. Don’t jump into

4.      You studied engineering, at first. How did you decide on your first career path? What made you change your mind?

I had a friend and mentor who introduced me to the field of engineering. I had a friend and mentor who opened my eyes to business. The moral of the story for students is: **have lots of friends and mentors** – the more different they are from you, the more likely you will learn something new and useful that you would not get from others in your community. Resist the temptation to always be around people that make you comfortable.

5.      How did your family feel about your wanting to leave the fields and get serious about school?

 My mother and father were always supportive, but they would have been so regardless of my path – that’s the good and the bad of our culture. If I would have stayed home and continue my work in the fields, my family would have still been supportive and loving. My mom did not really understand the meaning of attending a school like Harvard until her doctor one day explained the caliber of the school. She has a pretty good idea now of the importance of education, but this happened AFTER I went through the process.

6.      Tell me about the Dream Fund you started and how it fit in with getting yourself established in your field while also giving back to the community. How do you balance your time and energy between the demands of your philanthropy work and your career?

 The mission of the Rising Farmworker Dream Fund (RFDF) is to improve the lives of the farm working community through the power and resources of business. The idea is that the more investors, entrepreneurs, and executives that have a link to the farmworking community, the more resources will flow back. I have launched several initiatives around the mission, including what is called The RFDF Exchange, which is a platform that enable students to raise money for their own education, to take control of their destiny (see: [www.rfdf.org](http://www.rfdf.org))

I balance my commitments by following a 10/10 strategy – 10% of my free time and 10% of my salary goes to my foundation. It is challenging at times, but I try to stick to that religiously. I also do not contribute to or volunteer at any other charitable organization or effort – I don’t care about building out my resume, I only care about executing my mission.

7.      Of all your successes, what are you proudest of, and why?

 My son was born in 2011. I now have a home, stable income flow, and a lot of perspective to provide to my young one. He is named after his late grandfather, Francisco. I am proud that all of my efforts have come together to enable me to provide for him and my family.

8.      What are your plans for the future, in terms of your career and the Dream Fund?

 To get rich. Very rich if possible Money doesn’t drive my happiness ( I was just as happy when I was a farm laborer), but I am out to prove a point with my accumulation of wealth – capitalism and business can be an enabler of social change. The Latino community and the farmworkers, in particular should embrace business to help themselves and help others.

9.      Do you ever give inspirational talks on college campuses? Would you consider coming here to speak?

I could. My time is obviously very limited. We can discuss more. As I said previously, I only focus my free time on the farm worker population, so it might be challenging.