

THE
HISPANIC **Outlook**
IN HIGHER EDUCATION

*Hispanic
Renaissance
Man*



A Message from Charles P. García

Successful Entrepreneur and Impassioned Education Advocate

by Tony P. Martínez and Alison P. Martínez

Have a clear vision or dream. Create a reasonable plan. Then, most importantly, take massive action to implement the plan. And persevere. Never, never quit."

The principles behind Charles P. García's business success apply equally well to his second love, education.

"The fact of the matter is that 50 percent of the children in K-12 schools cannot read!" García exclaims. "I can't emphasize enough how important reading is. It is the basis for everything students will learn in the future.

"It is imperative that reading instruction programs become more effective," the advocate says, because the major reason why students don't graduate from high school or college is poor preparation. "They don't have the tools. The schools in the earlier years have failed them." García calls it educational malpractice.

At age 42, García is founder and CEO of the nation's fastest-growing privately owned Hispanic business, Sterling Financial Group of Companies, Inc. Before founding Sterling (named after his son), this multi-talented "renaissance man" graduated from the U.S. Air Force Academy and Columbia Law School and earned a master's in public administration. He was a highly decorated military officer and a White House fellow.

Now an entrepreneur, philanthropist, family man, author, and frequently invited speaker on public affairs, García devotes 20 percent of his work time to service on a dozen volunteer boards. He believes that as our Hispanic population grows, for the good of the whole country, we need more Hispanic leadership. Through his work for community development,

youth, and education today, he hopes to contribute to the development of tomorrow's Hispanic leaders.

Born in the U.S., García went to school in Panama, where his father was surgeon general and his U.S.-born mother an award-winning science teacher. He spent summers with his grandparents in Daytona Beach, Fla., surfing and absorbing the family philosophy of public service.

"My grandfather was very involved in the community," García recalls. "He had been a doctor in World War II. He was forced to leave Mississippi in the 1950's because he tried to integrate a hospital there. When he moved to Florida, he created one of the state's first integrated hospitals and helped to start the local Red Cross chapter, so there was a family tradition of being involved in the community."

García does high-profile policy-making, but he works in the trenches as well. For example, he serves on the board of the Florence Fuller Child Development Center, which provides preschool and after-school care and enrichment to 600 disadvantaged children per year in the Boca Raton, Fla., area, where García lives. He also serves on the board of Together Against Gangs, which mobilizes the local community in actions targeted to disempower gangs.

Florida's State Board of Education

"The world's most revolutionary ideas have met the most resistance," García observes, writing in the *Palm Beach Post*. "But change should be embraced, especially when the system is broken."

In 1998, voters amended the Florida constitution, reorganizing public education in the state from kindergarten through doctoral programs. Three statewide chancellors are now responsible for public schools, community colleges, and baccalaureate/graduate institutions, respectively. Goals include high student achievement, seamless articulation K-20, work force development, economic development, quality, and operational efficiency.

The chancellors report to the new state Board of Education, to which Gov. Jeb Bush has appointed Charles García, the only Hispanic among seven members. Florida is now the first state with "an accountability-based, student-centered, K-20 educational structure," García writes in the *Post*.

Although there is controversy, García calls the Board's accomplishments "revolutionary." The state has begun assigning "grades" to public schools. In the first year, 78 schools got F's and 203 schools got A's. In the second year, only 4 schools got F's (all different from the year before—no repeaters) and 551 schools got A's, a 171 percent increase.

President's Advisory Commission

In October 2001, President George W. Bush established the President's Advisory Commission on Educational Excellence for Hispanic Americans, appointing García and 19 other Hispanic leaders as commissioners. They worked hard for more than a year, crisscrossing the country and hearing from over 1,600 students, educators, parents, experts, and concerned citizens. (See *Hispanic Outlook*, July 14, 2003.)

García chaired the Commission's Working Group on Public Awareness and Motivation, in support of the Commission's number one recommendation: "Set new and high expectations across America."

"The Commission believes that low expectations can become self-fulfilling prophecies," states its final report. "Teachers' and parents' expectations have a long-term, pervasive influence on children."

The Commission recommends a "motivation campaign" to change attitudes, intentions, and behavior, and to raise Hispanic attainment at every level, from preschool through higher education. It points to the United Negro College Fund's successful campaign on the theme, "A Mind is a Terrible Thing to Waste," and calls for a public-private partnership to fund and carry out the Hispanic effort.

García vigorously affirms the Commission's emphasis on improving primary education as the necessary foundation for better outcomes in higher education. With the poor schools attended by so many Hispanic students in their early years, "even if they make strides in later years, often it is not adequate."

Affirmative Action

The inequality of basic education, and his belief that diversity is a compelling state interest, are the main reasons why García signed an amicus curiae brief, along with 64 Fortune 500 companies, siding with the University of Michigan in *Gratz v. Bollinger* and *Grutter v. Bollinger*.

"We need a level playing field. If the K-12 system was great, and it was educating all children equally across the board, my viewpoint might be different," he explains.

However, García's experience on the board of the Association of Graduates of the U.S. Air Force Academy has taught him the necessity of affirmative action programs. The Academy, like the University of Michigan, is a highly selective, publicly funded institution. Qualified applicants vastly

exceed places in the freshman class, so only a small percentage of the qualified applicants can be accepted.

"If you have candidates equally qualified in every respect, and you can't consider race, what are you going to do? You need to let in African American, Hispanic, and American Indian students because the Air Force has certain needs, and because it is a government program, and you have to make sure it's fair.

"I believe as a businessman that a well-educated, diverse work force, composed of people who have learned to work productively with individuals from a multitude of races and ethnic, religious, and cultural backgrounds,

will maintain America's competitiveness in the increasingly diverse and interconnected world economy," García declares.

He had accepted the Advisory Commission appointment from the president, and the position on the state Board of Education from Gov. Bush, so when they both challenged the University of Michigan, it was not easy for him to speak out against their position. "But there comes a time when you have to follow your principles," García states. "If you are not willing to walk away from power, you have no power."

Bilingual Education

As a speaker and writer with an impressive command of both English and Spanish, García supports bilingual education programs that have been successfully implemented. "Children may need that extra step in their own language," he comments, "to help them understand in their new language."

Schoolteachers who speak Spanish are of special value, the advocate continues. He cites studies showing that when the percentage of bilingual teachers in a school increases, excess special education referral of Spanish-speaking students is reduced, as is truancy and other problem

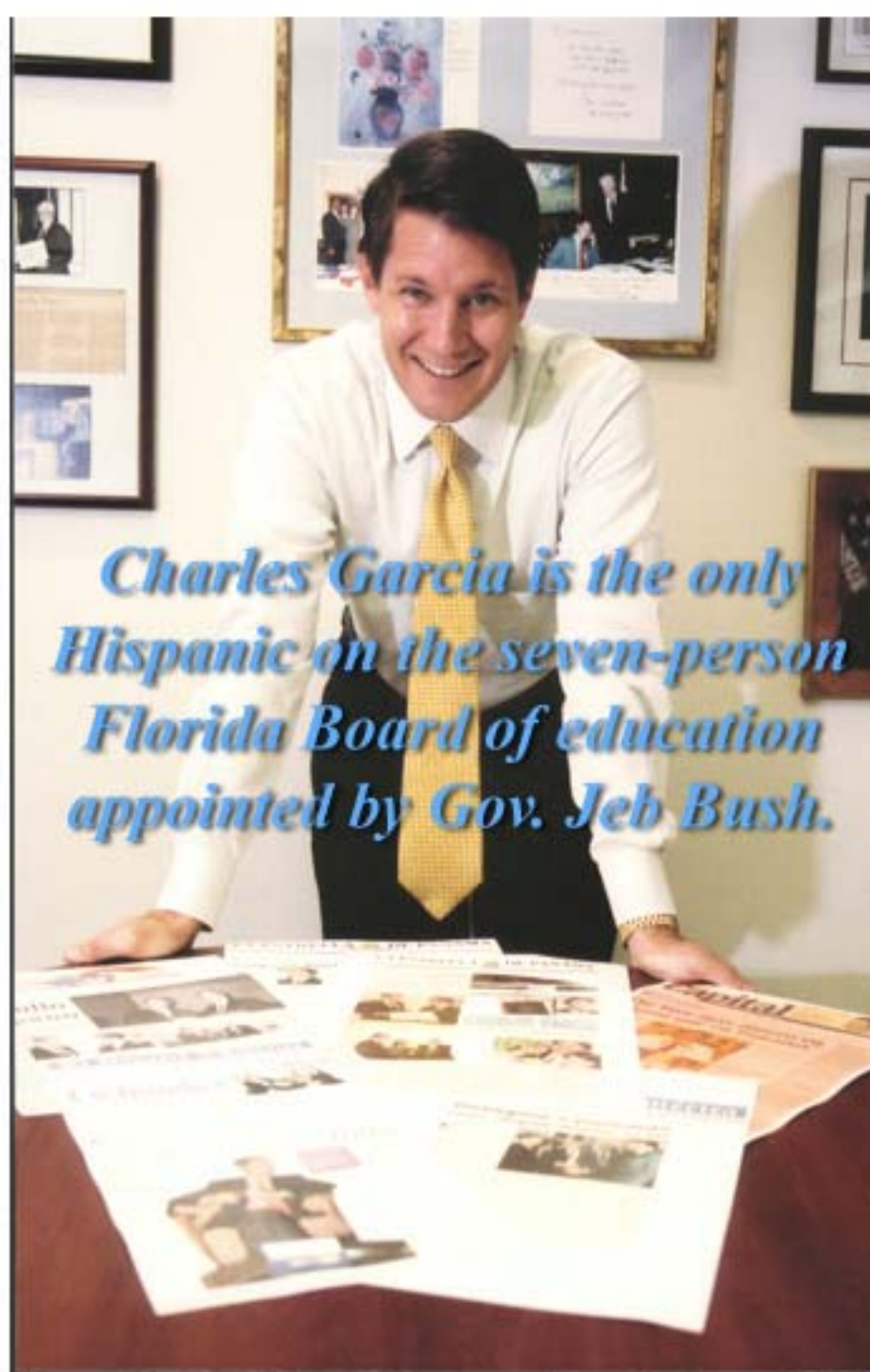
behavior. Better communication and understanding create the improvement.

In the big picture, García says, with the increasing economic importance of Hispanic consumers and of trade with Latin America, a second language should be considered "a national treasure—not," he chuckles, "a handicap."

Yes, You Can Succeed

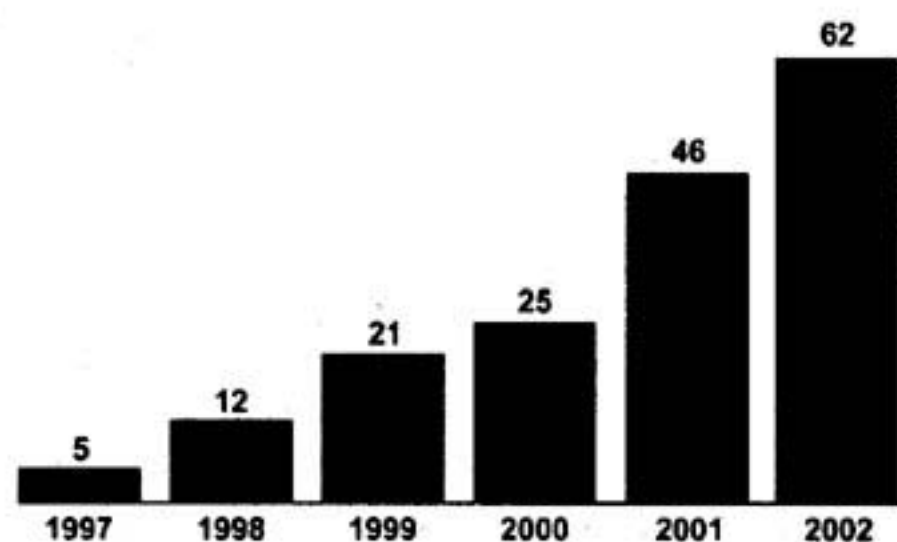
In view of García's outstanding accomplishments in many fields of endeavor, everyone asks him, How do you do it? "I require little sleep," the entrepreneur admits with a smile. "That's part of it. The other part is, I'm extremely organized. Before I leave the office today, I'll look at my list of 50 things I have to do, and I'll write down the six most important things I have to do tomorrow. So when I come in, my calendar will show the tasks that I'm supposed to do from 9:00 to 10:00, then from 10:00 to 11:00, and so on."

García believes in building on one's strengths rather than directing a lot



Charles García is the only Hispanic on the seven-person Florida Board of education appointed by Gov. Jeb Bush.

Sterling Offices



of effort toward the remedy of possible weak points. "When I was in law school, I took the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator. It's a personality test with nearly 300 questions," he explains. "I learned that I had leadership skills and that I enjoyed building things, creating things, like a company, for example."

With that, it is no surprise that García gravitated toward a career in business rather than law. He was already running his own business while in law school, a business later sold. He'd been an entrepreneur off and on ever since grade school, when he used to buy *pastillas* (sweets) for a nickel and sell them on the schoolyard for a dime.

"I'm a big believer in role models," García continues. "If you want to do something, find someone who's already done it. Work for them for two or three years—for nothing if you have to—and then go out on your own."

The CEO highlights John Whitehead, William Bennett, Gen. John Galvin, and business magnate Seymour Holtzman as important role models in his life.

"Holtzman had taken his first company public when he was only 26 years old—back in 1960, when it was really something to do that. He had run several public companies and owned banks and corporations in Europe and the U.S. For three years, I was his right-hand person. I learned so much about business!"

García's newest project is a motivational book entitled *Yes, You Can Succeed: a Message from García*, to be published by John Wiley & Sons in September. In this book, he spells out secrets of success that he has learned from working with some of the most successful people in government, business, and the military.

Yes, You Can Succeed first helps readers to discover their own personalities, talents, and preferences. Once readers understand themselves and their true, individual potential, it is possible to achieve the kind of success that comes only with being happy and passionate about one's work. For not only are all successful people good at what they do, they love doing it.

Next, the author introduces his formula to help readers excel in any aspect of life—as educators, as students, in business, or in family life. Drawing on his colorful past for humorous anecdotes about success, hope, business, leadership, and life, García explains how to realize dreams by using 14 "Success Beliefs" and four "Success Strategies." Each chapter concludes with "A Message from García" to the reader, paying tribute to Elbert Hubbard's inspirational story, "A Message to García."

"Once you have in mind where you want to go," in any walk of life,

García concludes, "and you have a plan, you need to just do it and persevere. A hundred obstacles will be thrown in the way. But once you have your mind made up, never, never quit."

Sterling Financial Group of Companies, Inc.

Charles P. García founded Sterling Financial Group of companies, Inc. in 1997—three people working in a cleaned-out utility closet. Now with more than 60 offices on three continents, Sterling has become *Inc.* magazine's pick as eighth-fastest-growing company in the nation for 2002, and *Hispanic Business* magazine's pick as the No. 1 fastest growing Hispanic company.

How do you grow a company thousands of percent per year? CEO García advises entrepreneurs not to try to be all things to all people, but rather to "focus on one particular niche in which you have a sustainable competitive advantage. Do one thing better than anyone else in the world."

"Our niche market is the U.S. Hispanic market and the Latin American market," García explains. Based in Florida, Sterling is expanding into selected U.S. locations and underserved markets in Latin America, where the CEO's lifelong immersion in language and culture smoothes the path. "When you say Hispanic, you're talking about 20 different countries," García observes. "Mexico is so different from Venezuela or Brazil or Chile or Panama, and most Americans don't quite grasp that. I think that we in our company understand the Hispanic and Latin American market very well. Having a focus on it has been very good for us," he concludes.

Sterling's motto is "Advice you can count on from people you can trust." The company provides financial services such as investments, investment banking, asset and cash management, financial and estate planning, insurance, and annuities; but it is Sterling's proprietary research methods and information products that drive the firm's success.

Sterling Research prides itself on providing action-oriented, unbiased information, boxed in by neither contrarian nor conventional preconceptions. The company has developed a valuation method that rates stocks by 10 measures:

- Sound business model and successful management team?
- Total share of its market
- How efficiently it is run
- Revenue stability
- Likely takeover candidate/survivor
- Interest rate sensitivity
- Market following
- Growth of core EPS.
- Is the market rewarding the stock appropriately?
- Any near-term change that will affect the stock price?

Sterling Research alerts investors to stocks that are not priced "right" relative to the 10 measures, so that investors may buy the undervalued securities or sell the overvalued ones.

More information about Sterling Financial, including links to a cover story in *Hispanic Today* and other articles and broadcasts, is available at www.mysterling.com. Information on García's upcoming book is available at www.yesyoucansucceed.net.

Tony and Alison Martínez are writers based in Santa Fe, New Mexico. Tony was an educator; Alison, a research librarian.

