

# Disrupt Yourself Podcast

## EPISODE 370: ROGER MARTIN

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Welcome to the Disrupt Yourself podcast. I'm your host Whitney Johnson, CEO of Disruption Advisors, where we help you build high performing people and teams, -- because organizations don't disrupt, people do. Meaning, the fundamental unit of that disruption-it's you. week we've got a special episode, a longer one than we normally do. But when you have an opportunity to talk to the person who built the Rotman School of Management into the powerhouse it is today, you have to use every minute you get. Roger L. Martin was told that the Toronto's Rotman School wasn't worth his time, that it was a cesspool of intrigue. Roger himself will say that he didn't do much in his 15 years as dean, just tinkering and prodding. He's a bit of an understated enigma, as you'll soon find out. But when Rotman's prestige today ranks up there with Stanford and Harvard, you can't really argue with his results. There's so much to mine in this conversation, we thought it would be a shame to cut it down and fit it within our typical episode length. And, if you have the time, I'd love for you to give it more than just one listen. Anyway, let's get to our talk.

I hope you enjoy.

**Whitney Johnson:** You were actually warned against taking the Dean position at the Rotman School. And then you go on and you're there for 15 years. So why were you being warned? Question number one. And how did you know that it was still the right decision for you to take this job?

**Roger Martin:** Well, I mean, I was warned that, you're a nonacademic. They will never truly accept you and that getting any progress would be, like, like pulling, pulling teeth. But interestingly enough, there was one voice that actually kind of listened to it. My next younger brother's wife's father, late father, who was then the president of a university and a really nice, a really nice guy, Doctor Smith. She had me, my sister-in-law had me speak to her and he said, yep, being an academic administrator is tough. Don't fool yourself. It's tough for a president who is an

academically, he was a distinguished academic before becoming president. But it can be very important and very fulfilling. And so, I said, okay, I respect President Smith. And so, I'll always give him credit. He died of cancer, sadly, like about 15 years ago. But I will always give him posthumous credit for being the sensible voice that said, yeah, you think it's going to be easy? No, but if you want to make a difference, this is not a bad way Roger.

**Whitney Johnson:** And to make a difference piece it's interesting because we've seen that you have said publicly that you're from rural Ontario and taking on this role, this job, there was some element for you of public service.

**Roger Martin:** Yes. In fact, I think of it as entirely public service. So, I was raised with the idea that you should kind of do public service if you can and I had enough of a success in my career to sort of be able to do that. And it was in my home province because I do come from rural Ontario. So, it's my home province, my home country. And I wouldn't have done it because of that. And, you know, knock on wood, thankfully, I ended up being relatively successful at it. And I would get recruited by all these kind of universities to, to be the dean of their business school. And I remember, I remember when Stanford came calling, you know, I said, no, I'm not even going to talk to the search committee. The provost calls me up afterwards and says, sort of like, are you nuts? You're Rotman, we're Stanford, Stanford Graduate School of Business. And I said, you've got the wrong view of me. You think I'm in the business school deaning business. I'm not. I'm in the public service business. And you, I know it's a great university and it's a great business school. I love that business school. And I love a whole bunch of the professors there, but it means nothing to me. There would be no motivation for doing that, but making sure Canada has one globally relevant, business school is a quest. Yeah, for my home country and my home province. And so that and he was like. Click, you know, like, this guy's a nut or.

**Whitney Johnson:** Or he got it. I mean, it's interesting.

**Roger Martin:** I don't think he did. I literally, Whitney, it's like we're Stanford. Do you do you not understand, we're Stanford.

**Whitney Johnson:** Yeah. So, what I'm hearing you say is that you were, you had been successful as a consultant. And so, this was an opportunity for you to take on a really meaty challenge. And it very much aligned with your why, public service, your country. And so, it, you put those two together and then you had that very wise balanced advice from Doctor Smith. And you said, all right, here we go.

**Roger Martin:** Yes. Can I say there's another, if you're interested in this, there's another angle too.

**Whitney Johnson:** I'd love to hear it.

**Roger Martin:** Another, now long deceased, superstar academic John Lintner taught me an undergraduate course at Harvard College, and he was an economics professor there, but he was also a professor at the business school and ran the joint PhD in business economics, the same one that Mike Porter did and my beloved protege Jan Rivkin, among many, many others. So, he was convinced that I must go and do the doctoral, the joint PhD program, because I did well enough in his undergraduate course. And, you know, I applied because he said I had to and I got in and I turned him, turned him down and said, I'm going to do the MBA program. And he said, oh, okay, okay. But, you know, the first year of the MBA program and the first year of the joint PhD program are identical, like so you could actually start into the program after year two. And I said, yeah, yeah. And sure enough, I got sent without applying and acceptance the second year and I said, you know, no, I'm going to continue my MBA and then I got sent another acceptance without having applied for the following year, because he said, hey, you know, you can still do this.

**Roger Martin:** You've only sort of wasted one year, which is the second year of the MBA program, which isn't required for the joint PhD program. You sort of only wasted a year. And I said, you know, I've decided I'm going to go out and work and, and he said, Roger, this is a mistake. You were born to be an academic. I don't know why he thought that. And you'll never come back. And then, sadly, he had a heart attack at the wheel of his car and died. Great man. He and Sharpe created the capital asset pricing model. So, like, a really important finance and financial economics professor died at the wheel of his car. And so, I was sort of like, oh, man, he's died thinking,

you know, I'll never come back. So, when I took the dean's job in the back of my mind and part it was, I'm gonna show John that no, all is not lost.

**Whitney Johnson:** The academic, after all. Just not what he was envisioning. It is interesting how, you know, those people that you admire, and their aspirations are not even so much aspirations for you, but a vision of who you could be?

**Roger Martin:** Yeah.

**Whitney Johnson:** It sounds like that was that there somewhere in your...

**Roger Martin:** It was. Like he was absolutely here. One of the greatest, you know, kind of business school professors of his, of his era was saying, well, you have what I think it takes, right. That and Doctor Smith, saying, you know, you could do this, kind of were, were important influences that, I mean, the president of the University of Toronto, Rob Pritchard, was the guy who was pushing it and whatever. But he was, he had self-interest. He wanted to get great. But these were sort of completely independent. They had no horse in that race but provided encouragement in that.

**Whitney Johnson:** Roger, as you're saying that, it makes me think of how just having a person who believes in you and is very explicit about it and direct about it, and you actually, just a quick nod. I know this is completely digressing, but I have this sense that you've done that for Zeynep Ton, who does, you know, good jobs and, you know, just the power of a person who says, I believe in you. I see you doing this, and then it gets planted there. And I think it's just a reminder to us that when we see something in someone that it's really important to say it and maybe even be intrepid about saying it.

**Roger Martin:** No, I think so. And bless our Zeynep is just such a star, such a lovely person. Which you know, I know you've become friends. But yeah, and you know, you sometimes have to be a little bit pushy. Like, in that case, it was, Zeynep, you need to do this, right? And it was like, no, really? Do I, you know, and I said, well, and she's smart, of course, super smart. But she said, "Well, I'll do it if you'll help me. And so, but yes, it was a push, and the push was to create the Good Jobs Institute to be able to help companies adopt this, because I knew from my, monitor experience that there had to be a monitor company there to help companies who believed when they were, read Mike Porter's competitive strategy. Oh, this is great. This is great. That didn't mean they knew how to do it. And so, my experience from that said, they need help. These companies who read your book will say, oh, man, Zeynep is absolutely right. Won't necessarily figure out how to do it themselves.

**Whitney Johnson:** Exactly. So good. Okay, so here you are. You are now at Rotman. And what I want to do is, this will be a little bit unusual in terms of a podcast. I want to have this almost be a case study, a master class of you talking through what you did, because I think it's so, so powerful. And so, I want to know, you're on a brand-new S curve. You're at the launch point. What is one of the first things that you did?

**Roger Martin:** Well, I arrived on September 4th of 1998, and the chair of faculty council and which for those of you who are not academics, usually faculties, departments or schools like the school are run and sensed by the entire faculty of faculty council. So, the chair of faculty council came to me and said, "I want to give you, I want you to come to faculty council and give your vision for the school on the 11th. So, one week. So, I had one week notice and I said, ooh, that's a bit of a setup, isn't it? Because it was, it was really it was like, let's catch them with only a week and he'll probably be too kind of shy, having not taken the time to create this and socialize it in whatever. So, we'll probably do something kind of milk toasty and then, and then we won't have to do anything other than what we want to do, which is, you know, by and large, the default for most academics. So, my first choice was to say, no, I'm going to give, I'm going to give an extremely bold vision for what, what the school could be, even though it might not go over great. I am not going to be cowed by the fact that I only have a week. I'm going to say it like it is. And I said, you know, we're at that point the fourth best business school in southern Ontario. We were completely irrelevant. We were completely irrelevant. And the number one business school, the Ivey School, which characterizes itself as the Harvard of the North, it's the other case method.

**Roger Martin:** Business school was far and away number one like so far and away number one, anybody who was, you'd have asked in the entire province who's the number one. Or in Canada in general, who's the number one? Ivey by far. And so, I said, goal is to make this Canada's only globally consequential business school. I don't actually care about our local ranking. That's not of relevance to me or the relevance is the greatest business schools on the planet. We want to be counted among them. We're going to do that by being different. We're going to promote a view of business education as integrative, thinking the business education world has broken everything down into functional silos. That's not actually teaching people to be businesspeople. It's teaching them to be to be mechanics. And we're going to do it differently. And I said a bunch of other things, but that, that was and that was it. You threw it down and, and I got one of the most senior, finance was what we were known most for. We were probably considered the best finance school in southern Ontario and the head of the finance area came to visit me afterwards and said, Roger, this is a disaster. This is going to fail. You should have come in and said, we're going to win on the basis of having the best finance faculty. That's what we're, that's what we're good at. And I'm so disappointed, this is going to be a disaster. So, I did it anyway.

**Whitney Johnson:** Auspicious start. But then you got to work and you've, you've actually shared with me, and I want to just go through some of these, some of the pillars of what you did.

**Roger Martin:** Yeah, you made me do this. This is like me and Zeynep Ton. You made me think. Think about it. Which I which I haven't. So, there you go. You're, if I, if I do it, you get, you do it to me too.

**Whitney Johnson:** Okay. So, the first thing was application of time. And I know you've written about this, on *Medium* and we'll share that article [here](#), but you talked about removing 100 days from your schedule. So, talk a little bit about what your thought process was from a time perspective as you went about transforming the school.

**Roger Martin:** Yeah. And by the way, my beloved friend and probably yours too, A.G. Lafley and I are working on an *HBR* piece on this because it turns out he was of the same kind of mindset as I was. So, I have a view that leaders, any consequential leader is going to have more than 250 days' worth of stuff on their schedule to, to begin with. And so, if you actually want to focus on something other than what's already on your plate, the first step is not figuring out what you're going to focus on. It's figuring out what you're going to get off your plate to make space for doing the things that you think of as having the highest leverage. So, when I got to the Rotman School, I had a beloved dean's assistant, Kathryn Davis, who had been the dean's assistant for maybe four previous deans. So, she knew how deans spent their time. Plus, you have electronic calendars these days. And so, I said, let's go and figure out what the, my predecessor had only been there for a day and my predecessor's predecessor been there for longer, how they spent their time. Right? And what we've what we figured out is, among other things, that they spent a day of their time on financial things because dean's sort of are the financial manager of the firm. So, budgeting and planning and telling the provost we're on budget and blah, blah, blah, blah, and having meetings on this.

**Roger Martin:** So, 50 days a year, essentially 50 days a year on faculty recruiting, sitting in on seminars to judge the new candidates for assist, mainly assistant professor positions although senior hires too and I just said can't do that, I'd like to get both of those down to five. Now how could I get that down to five? These are both super important things. Nothing could be more important than your faculty quality. Nothing could be more important than having the kind of the university give you the ability to operate. And if you don't do all the financial stuff, right? They'll take that away from you. But it relates to the kind of the second point about this, which is, which is a leader shouldn't line up the tasks and say, this is the absolutely most important task for the institution. Therefore, I do that because I'm the boss. Here's the next most I'll do that. Next most. Okay, now I'm done. Now all the rest of the tasks that aren't as important other people can do because they're not grand. Great. Me. Right. And that's wrong in my view, and A.G.'s view, by the way, is absolutely the wrong approach. It should be old-fashioned. David Ricardo, as you recall, David Ricardo, the father of comparative advantage, right. Who said he said a nation should manufacture and export the things that they have a comparative advantage in. They may not be the absolute best, but they have a comparative kind of advantage, in it.

**Roger Martin:** And they should import the things that they're not very, very good at. So, I said, do I have comparative advantage over the brilliant Peter Pauley, who was the great German, by way of Penn, kind of star finance, economics professor, we had business economics professor. No, he's like, he was as old as I was and had

spent his entire time on kind of life in, in a faculty-on-faculty issues. We were not hiring the way I believed we should hire. And so, he and I had to have a sort of what I call the Vulcan mind meld. On agreeing on what our approach would be to faculty. But then I, I didn't show up at these meetings duplicating his effort by saying, oh, that person made an interesting point in that seminar. And you probably know that game, you know, Whitney you have to, they come in and give a job talk and you then you have a seminar afterwards and then blah, blah, blah. And then you do this for 20 people, for one, one position. It's enormously time-consuming. That's how a dean could spend a day, a week. And, um, I got it down to five. We ended up with. Well, by the time I left the third ranked faculty in the entire business school world after Harvard and Wharton, with me spending five days a year max. In fact, I probably toward the end was below that rather than 50 days. So there. 45.

**Whitney Johnson:** Wow, wow, wow!

**Roger Martin:** Mary Ellen Yeomans, our chief administrative officer. Brilliant woman. She was only at University of Toronto because her husband was a star CYC professor over in Arts and Sciences, Columbia grad. You know, she had just smart as heck, and underutilized in my view. Right. But she knew more about the intricate workings of university finance than I would ever know, in part because she had a stint at Simcoe Hall, which is which is the University of Toronto kind of headquarters. So, she so she knew everybody at Simcoe Hall, how they looked at finances, and she knew how the Rotman School, in any other department or division looked at it. Was I going to figure out all of that arcane stuff as well as her? Well, maybe if I spent years at it, but no, she was great. But we wanted to completely change the way we were managed financially, like completely and utterly, which terrified her a little bit. But we had the Vulcan mind meld, and I invested disproportionately in the first six months or so. Right. In that I probably spent more than a day a week for the first six months of my time on that. But then for the remaining 14.5 years, I spent five days or less. And she had first thought, it's because you don't care, Roger. And I said, I don't, it's not that I don't care Mary Ellen. And any time you want to come to me with anything important my door will always. You are so top of the list, but you are and can continue to be better than I'll ever be kind of at, at this. And we transformed. We transformed the way the Rotman School managed its finances. They created a separate system for us, where we took way more responsibility and got less university protection. And the subsequent president of the university saw it working so well that he converted the entire university to our system.

**Whitney Johnson:** Wow.

**Roger Martin:** So, super important was I did, am I responsible for that? Well, in a certain degree by pushing it. But Mary Ellen Yeomans, bless her was almost, you know, like she was, I was 20% and she was 80% and you know, so it's great for her, like that university wide CAO meetings. I think Mary Ellen would like stride in and everybody would say, why can't I do stuff like she does like it, you know, because she was the coolest, the coolest kid on the block, right? She was doing the coolest stuff. So, it was it was good for her. Her salary during the time I was there doubled, which is unheard of in the university because she was just taking on way more responsibility and the university saw oh man, is she making a difference? And so, but that only became the case because I didn't pick the most important things to spend my time on. I picked the things where I had comparative advantage. I had comparative advantage in seeing the outside world and knowing what the business world wanted. I had comparative advantage in being able to write stuff for a business audience. Right. That would bring essentially intellectual glory to the Rotman School, because I was the dean and the dean was doing this stuff that the external world saw and so, and others, others were not equipped to do that. So, I filled in and did the things where I had substantial comparative advantage and didn't spend time on super important things where I didn't have comparative advantage. And I think every leader should do that. And the clients I work with, I say, take out your calendar and get rid of 24 days, two days a month where you do not have demonstrable comparative advantage. Right.

**Whitney Johnson:** So powerful. Yeah. So, two days a month, take it out, demonstrable comparative advantage. And as I'm listening to you there are some other things that are coming up which is, it takes confidence to do that because if you're not confident, you want to have the most important job.

**Roger Martin:** Yes. You want to seize control,

**Whitney Johnson:** There's that undergirding ability to say, I'm great at this, you're great at that. And we are going to play where we are best suited. So that's the first thing. The second thing that I think I'm really pulling from this is the Vulcan mind meld that you said. Sure, Mary Ellen was going to go do that. And what was the name of the other man that you mentioned?

**Roger Martin:** Peter Pauly.

**Whitney Johnson:** Peter. Okay. So, Peter and Mary Ann, they were going to both go do that. But it was important that you took the time to transmit to them. Your vision so that they when they were doing their work, they had on the lens that you wanted them to have so that they could do the work through that lens. And that takes a lot of discipline and willingness to take the time and patience to convey what it is that you want.

**Roger Martin:** No. Yeah. I mean, as per usual, you're glomming on to exactly, exactly the precise point, I think, which is that and I had to over invest early on to make sure that we had those conversations and I couldn't like this is something to where you can't order somebody to believe something like especially in like Peter was an established, chaired senior, faculty member, just sort of saying, hire people at different way, you know. Good luck Roger. It was to talk to Peter about what we were trying to accomplish together, what we needed. And on that front, right, in the academic world. Right. If you're recruiting a junior professor, and you see two candidates and one has five journal articles already in journal qualities of X, and one has four and journals of quality X, right. But the one that's four hates students, hates teaching and is incredibly miserable. Sorry, the one that has five hates students and is miserable to work with and the one that has four loves students is a fabulous teacher is just wonderful to work with as a wonderful colleague. The academic world will pick the one with five every day of the week.

**Whitney Johnson:** The one with four? Wait, wait, you're saying the academic world will pick the five one and you're like, no, no.

**Roger Martin:** Even though they're, even though they're a complete jerk, like, even though they're a complete jerk and will not contribute in any way but that one dimension because they sort of say, well, you know, research is what we what we do. And I said to Peter, listen, if it's five versus two, okay. Right. Although I'd keep searching for somebody who's got it's got both. But on things that are close to a tie, we're going to care deeply, deeply about the kind of culture that we want to create in the professoriate and the culture we want to create is collaborators who aren't these solo? It's all about me. I don't care about anybody else. I'll fight with them if I want. We just have to have a different culture because my thesis was happy professors are going to be more productive. And professors that are fighting with one another and there had been all sorts of infighting before. I was warned when I got there. Oh, there's like a massive, massive infighting and faculty council is a zoo and blah, blah, blah, blah, blah. And I said, no, we have to have we have, to have this place where people love to be here, and they love to work with their colleagues and the like. And so, we talked about it enough and Peter, Peter was like, yeah, no, you're probably character caricaturing our searches a little bit. But there's more than a bit of truth to what you're saying and sure enough and you know, we, you know, we hired over 120 professors, tenure stream professors during my time there. It was like, huge ramp up. And I would say that we only hired four jerks. Which is a very, a very low, kind of number.

**Whitney Johnson:** Did you know they were jerks when you hired them, or they just presented not as jerks.

**Roger Martin:** Yeah. They dissimilated extremely well in interviews, and I think, I wasn't in them, but I think and Peter, Peter was so, at one of them, he was so annoyed, but at an incredibly low ratio. And we had almost no regretted departures in the professoriate during my entire time there, like about 2 or 3, which is insanely low. Why? Because everybody liked being there, liked working together. Because we had made that that choice to care about that. And did it stop us from being great? No. We went from not relevant in the world of research to in the FT rankings of research of faculty, where they rank them quantitatively on faculty, number three.

**Whitney Johnson:** Wow.

**Roger Martin:** Number three, ahead of Sloan, Chicago, Stanford. Like if anybody would have said that's going to happen, they would have just said you are smoking some serious dope. There is not a chance in the world that could possibly ever, ever happen. No.

**Whitney Johnson:** All right. That's amazing. And so, one of the things I think is a great thing to tease out for a minute, because you've kind of alluded to this is how you interacted with people. There are two things that I would love for you to share. One is when people would come to you and complain. And you said there was a lot of infighting when you arrived. And this idea of people being the process working, people working together and being productive. You talked about having meetings, these one-on-one conversations with people. So, can you tell those two stories? Because I think that is very much, some of the secret sauce of these outcomes.

**Roger Martin:** Yeah, and I like the direction you're going because it involves the reinvestment. So, what do you do with those 100 days? One thing I reinvested it in is overcoming what I thought was an insanity when I got there. What which was the way the University of Toronto works and most universities work. Which is that at the end of the or near the end of the academic year, the professor and each professor has to submit an annual form, an annual activity report, is what they were called at University of Toronto. Here's what research I did. Here's what teaching did. Here's the other service I did. Committees I served on. And then the dean issues them a one-page letter that says how they rated on those things and that gives them their overall rating. And I'm like, you people have been telling me that the professors are your most important assets, and we pay them the most. The biggest chunk of the cost structure, you know, is, is for, professors. And that's it. That's your HR development system, a one-page letter, which is mainly a form letter with three numbers on it, like from 1 to 7 on research, from 1 to 7 on teaching and 1 to 7 on service, and then an average of those. The rest is actually a form letter. Thank you, thank you Whitney for the...you got to be kidding me.

**Roger Martin:** And so, I said here's what I'm going to do. I'm going to reinvest some of those times that I've saved in meeting one on one with each professor. Now, that was a little easier when we had 36 full time tenure stream professors, because that's what I started with. But it took, you know, an hour or two of prep for each, each one of them. So, you know, so it kind of, and then an hour, an hour with them. And I just would ask them, what were you trying to accomplish? Did you accomplish what you were trying to accomplish? Yes, or no? And if no, what are you going to try and accomplish this year? Are you set up to accomplish that, or is there something that would be that would be helpful that the school could do to set you up better to accomplish that? And then the second year, I could ask, you know, last year you said you were going to try and accomplish this. Did you accomplish this? Did you get what you needed to set up? That's all. That's all I did. And some of them were, were like epic, right? Which is we had an accounting professor. She was a, what is it called, a teaching stream person. And so, they unfortunately have lower so, you know, social status.

**Roger Martin:** And so, and we have at University of Toronto, three campuses, one right downtown and one in the east and one in the west. And she said, well, you know, there is one thing that would really make a change in my life because this was remember, this was 19. It was probably 1999. She said, you know, it would be really nice to have a laptop because I go out to University of Toronto, Mississauga, I have to take all my disks with me to plug them into the computer, because that was before you had this grand, fantastic, you know, kind of database system where it would show up, show up there. So, she so she said it would be so much easier if I could just plug my laptop in, and I didn't have to make disks of everything, and whatever. It would be great. And I said, well, why don't you have a laptop? And she said, oh, the policy, the school policy is you can have only a desktop, one desktop computer for your office. And I just said, Joan, you can have a laptop. And so, and she goes to get a laptop. And they phoned me up and say, have we changed policy? I said no, but this was really important to Joan. If it's really important to other people, we'll figure that out as we go. But it's really important to Joan.

**Whitney Johnson:** Hmm.

**Roger Martin:** What do you think Joan's attitude toward me, the school administration, toward students was thereafter. You know, I made a reasonable ask, and they did it.

**Whitney Johnson:** Yeah.

**Roger Martin:** It's no exaggeration to say he loved me. And you know, the extreme high cost of that move.

**Whitney Johnson:** Yeah.

**Roger Martin:** Right.

**Whitney Johnson:** 2000?

**Roger Martin:** Four grand, maybe. Maybe at the time.

**Whitney Johnson:** At most, yeah. Wow.

**Roger Martin:** And so those meetings. So what those meetings did was give me a human connection with, with all of them, and I and I got to learn about their research more than I would have otherwise so that I could promote them on the outside and say, when I'm talking to somebody, you know, we've got somebody who does really cool work on that, I could hook you up with them. I could talk about it in speeches, which would get back to them and they'd be all happy. So, it had all these, all these knock-on effects. Now the problem is we got up to 120 full time tenure stream professors, all the adjuncts and sessionals and whatever insisted on doing it, too. And that was another probably, 75 of them. So, I ended up having to do eight weeks of this a year.

**Roger Martin:** Eight weeks, right? A non-trivial amount, but I'd saved 100, right? I should say more than two days. Yeah, but 100 days. And so, I gave back 40 of them to something that was enormously valuable. And I attribute our, our insanely low regretted turnover and professors in part to that because they, they had a relationship with their dean. And you'd say, oh come on shouldn't you have that. Well no. No there was no, no time for that in, in the Dean's busy schedule. Yes, there was, if you got rid of all this other stuff that other people could do, well nobody could do that. And the funny thing is, like, we had relationships with engineering and economics, those Faculty of Arts and Sciences and School of Engineering, because we had a joint program, and I would get calls from the professors there saying, can I do the one on ones with you? I'm like, no, I can't do the whole year. There are 5000 professors in the University of Toronto.

**Whitney Johnson:** You are not the president of the university. Wow. So, you have a quote, "culture changes in the crucible of one-on-one conversations".

**Roger Martin:** Ah, yes. Yes, it does. And that and that relates to another thing. So, I'm into sort of, corny things too, Whitney. So, promise you won't laugh. But I had what I called the Campaign for Adult Behavior.

**Whitney Johnson:** Mhm. Say more.

**Roger Martin:** Well, there was all of this like infighting. There had been a scandal before I got there that had toppled the previous dean that resulted in, in kind of a couple of factions. One was on the old Dean's side who got toppled. One was the people who forced his toppling and blah, blah, blah. You know, they were they were at each other's throats. And I was told this is a cesspool of, you know, intrigue and, and whatever. And so, so I said, well, that's not going to be helpful to us being great. So, we got to, we got to fix that. So, I'm going to have, I'm going to have the campaign for adult behavior and so what I, what I did is whenever somebody would come into my office. To complain about somebody else, right? I would somewhat theatrically say, so that you Whitney and you're complaining about Sally. I would, I'd say I hear you, Whitney. And I'd get up and go, Catherine, Catherine, can you get Sally on the phone? Because Whitney and I are going to come talk to her right now.

The Whitney in this in this picture would say, whoa, whoa, whoa, whoa. That's not what I want. What I wanted was to be able to unload on Sally behind her back so that she could not defend herself, so that you would then side with me and slap Sally. Right. So, I destroyed all the fun in that and games and that. And they would, the Whitney in this story would grab me and say, uh, Catherine, no, that's okay, that's okay. You can work it out. And after half a dozen of those, nobody came to me because they couldn't get what they wanted and what they wanted was a one-sided chance to slam somebody behind their back without them being able to defend themselves. But it sent



the message. That's not how we're going to act. That's not adult behavior. And we had a Campaign for Adult Behavior.

**Whitney Johnson:** Oh, so good.

**Roger Martin:** You laughed, but at least you liked it.

**Whitney Johnson:** No, I actually liked it a lot. So here, here's the question. What other stories do you have around, you know, you talked about professors that time with them one on one, helping them feel seen and cared for? But what else did you do in order to build this world class faculty? What kinds of conversations did you have?

**Roger Martin:** When I started, we only had a handful of professors who would be genuinely world class, i.e. they could publish in the world leading journals. And we had we had, kind of one who came to my, came to, I will call him Bob to protect his identity, although it's a super positive story. So, Bob comes to my office. He's one of the four that would be the most painful to lose and says, listen. And he was not cocky about it. He said, listen, I'm sorry to say this, Roger, but I just got an offer from a great US business school with better weather than us, where his writing partner happens to be the guy, he became famous, kind of writing with and it's essentially, it's \$80,000 a year higher salary, like a big a big number higher.

**Whitney Johnson:** Oh, an \$80,000 bump.

**Roger Martin:** Bump. An \$80,000 bump.

**Whitney Johnson:** Okay.

**Roger Martin:** And so, I sit down and say, okay, Bob. So, here's the scoop. You are like a precious resource for us. You're one of our finest. And you're one of the finest in the field. We don't have many like you. We're going to get, you get a whole bunch more over, over time. And what that requires is for me to transform the economics of the school, which I did. By the time I left, we were at 130 million. So, we were ten x, and so we could afford a lot more. Lots more.

**Whitney Johnson:** What were your expenses?

**Roger Martin:** We brought you know, this is, it was probably close to 130, like in business and business schools. Everybody thinks they make a lot of money. They don't, they, you just spend it back on, on being great.

**Whitney Johnson:** But your revenue was up 30, so you ten x your revenue. Okay. Keep going back to Bob.

**Roger Martin:** But so, Bob. So, I said, you know, right now we have a huge economic problem. We can't pay world class salaries for world class professors. We play kind of sort of Canadian level salaries because most of our professors aren't world class. You are, but we don't have the economics to do it. I'm going to create the economics for doing it. But here's the situation. If you make me pay 80 more thousand for you today, that's going to make it harder for me to do everything else I'm doing. If instead, you'd be willing to wait five years and I promise you absolutely, positively, you will make actually more than that. We can pay more than that because they're not actually a super-duper top tier two school. We want to pay like the top ten schools. I promise you I will. I will get you there. But I need the time to transform the business. So, you have a choice. I can give you the money now, or I can give you the money and more in five years, and you can go away and choose.

**Roger Martin:** But here's something you need to know, which is I'm keeping a list in my head. It's in my head only I will never release, kind of reveal it to anybody, and I haven't. It's now ten years since or 11 years since I was Dean. I haven't, on one is going to be a list of the people who made my job harder. So, we're going to succeed, and it's going to be spectacular. But I'm going to have a list of people who made my job harder. And if you need to have the 80,000 now, you'll be on that list. And you can't get off that list because you made my job harder. So, you're it's a choice of what list to be on. The other list is the list of people who made my job easier,

and I will always feel about them that they helped the great transformation that we're going through. And I recall we are a really crappy business school at the time. And people I'm not sure are thinking that we're going to be as great, as great as we ended up being.

**Whitney Johnson:** It was a bold statement.

**Roger Martin:** That's a bold statement. So, I said, Bob, go away and think about it and just come, come back to me when you're ready. And you're either you get the 80,000 on this list, wait for the 80,000 and you're on that list. And I really didn't know for sure what to make of it. I thought he'd say, wow, that's like 400 grand of price to pay, to be on a secret list that nobody other than the dean is ever going to know. Sure enough, comes back five years later and says, Roger, I want to be on the good list. So. Instead of paying 400,000. I showed him affection and respect. Right. I said, you will get my respect and the affection of warm feelings about me. So as a leader, never, never think that you've got no chips that you can play. You just got to figure out what the chips are. And based on your context, that sh\*\* may well not be money. If I were the dean of Harvard Business School, I'd say boom, boom, 80,000. No problem. We've got it. And that's their context. And so, they should do it. And they do it. They just, they make sure that nobody's going to leave them for money. That was not our context, and I couldn't I just didn't, kind of have the money. And so, love and affection, these are all chips that can be played.

**Whitney Johnson:** Yeah. And what's interesting about it is that what I appreciate is because, you know, if you think about, you know, forgiveness, right? We think about, like, the idea of forgiveness. But what's important about this is. Unless you are a saint. And maybe even if you're a saint. You would want to say, I won't remember, but you will.

**Roger Martin:** Yes, yes.

**Whitney Johnson:** And a willingness to say, you know what I will remember, and I will, and I'll want to treat you the same, but I won't be able to, because I will remember that when we were trying to build this, you weren't here. And I will remember that when we were trying to build this you will, you were here. And that's going to feel really good for both of us. That's really powerful.

**Roger Martin:** Yeah. And he talks about it. So, I mean I'm supposed to give it but he, he does because we did make a fantastic transformation. We are Canada's only consequential global, business school. He's still, you know, part of the faculty and he's, and he will say kind of my buddy when referring to me. Right. And so, he feels the sense of being, having been on a great adventure from darkness to light for the school. And he was he was a part of it.

**Whitney Johnson:** And he trusted you. He trusted you because. Right. You were making a very bold statement. So inherent in that also was, you know, don't say something that you don't absolutely, 100% believe that you can stand behind. I mean, there was a risk in you being able to do this, but you believed that you could.

**Roger Martin:** Yes. Yes. Yep. I had what I thought of as a plan whereby I could pay him the, I could pay him the money. But you're right, you're right. You know, it would, I mean, the worst possible thing to do would have been five years later to say I tried, but I couldn't. And then he would say, well, you're a jerk, right? You promised me something, and I made a decision, and so I for sure had to deliver.

**Whitney Johnson:** Yeah. You kind of had that sort of money in the bank from a we can deliver this. Okay. So, I want to talk about experiments. One of the things I've heard you say that I am fascinated by is that you actually never other than that bold statement on September 11th, 1998, you never said sweeping transformation. You just started doing experiments. And yet there was sweeping transformation. So, one of the things I would love to do is hear about your philosophy around the experiments. And then what did that look like? And can you tell us a story around that?

**Roger Martin:** Sure. So yeah, I often joke that said, I never did anything for 15 years. I just ran experiments. And the reason is, again, contextual and what I would say to anybody listening to the podcast kind of remember, I had a context and don't try to do things. If you say, oh, Roger's got some cool ideas, don't try to do exactly what I,

what I did because your context will be different. And so, you've got to adapt it for your context. My context is the academic world where getting a thing, a change through the governance process is lengthy and painful. Painful, painful. So, if I were going to, I were going to make a curricular change. It would have to go to the curriculum committee and back and forth and back and forth. And then finally they would take it to the executive committee to see whether it's ready for the faculty council and back and forth. Then it would go to faculty council and get sent back to the executive committee, which would send it back to the curriculum committee. And, you know, and the reason is not stupid, right? It's really hard to kill things in an academic institution. Possession is way more than 9/10 of the law in an academic institution. So, they recognize that officially adding something new, doing something new means it's probably there forever, unless somebody has got the intestinal fortitude to take it through the three or four- or five-years' worth of work back and forth.

**Roger Martin:** That's frustrating as heck. So that's my context. So, I see that context and say, well, am I going to do that? You know, kind of no. And so, rather than saying, I'd like to, I'd like to do this, I would like to run an experiment. And most people and again, it's sort of good in the academic world there are for running experiments. They run experiments all the time in their own business. So, it's a metaphor that is meaningful to them. We'll just run an experiment and then once I got them to say, yeah, go ahead, run it, run an experiment because they've not made anything, kind of permanent. Right. Then I would work like a demon to make sure the experiments succeeded. Like it wouldn't be an unbiased experiment. I would put my finger on the scale of just making work, an effort to do it. So, I'll give you, give you an example. So, I, I always believed that we could create all sorts of benefits by taking the second term of second year. So, second year is all electives. Five in the fall, five in the spring. Some schools are four and four and six and six, but we're five and five in the spring is when they're doing all their recruiting.

**Roger Martin:** And so, five courses can be kind of onerous. They're missing classes for that, for that period. So, I said, wouldn't it be great if we would just push second terms of second year back two weeks to start in the middle of January and for the first two weeks after the winter break instead of starting right after New Year's, you'd put a two-week intensive into it where you could take a course essentially all day long for two weeks. The benefits would be 1-you could knock off one of your five credits, that's good. So, then then during the recruiting season, you have four rather than five, you have a little more space to do those, do those things. 2- it opens up possibilities for kinds of courses that you wouldn't otherwise be able to do. A travel course. You can't travel when you've got one class a week for 13 weeks, which is what it was, one two-hour class a week for 13 weeks. That's 26 hours of class time. You can put 26 hours in two weeks. And if you want to do the class in Silicon Valley or New York or Guadalajara, you know, you could actually do that. The professor and the students could go and do that.

**Roger Martin:** And additionally, one seventh of the world's tenure stream business school faculty, at any given time, are on leave right there on their sabbatical, because everybody gets a sabbatical once every seven years. It's hard to convince a professor to say, take your sabbatical and come to University of Toronto Rotman School for a whole year or even a semester. But saying you can come for two weeks; we'll pay you really nicely for it. And just teach for two weeks. We'll put you up. We'll like, you don't have to worry about anything. Like, if you go on sabbatical, you got to find a place to live and all that. No, no, no. We'll put you up in a hotel, treat you like a king or a queen. You teach a course, and you're out of there, and you go to whatever other sabbatical thing you want to do. Okay, so lots of lots of benefits, lots of reasons to do it. I also had a view of it could help us with lifelong learning and have people who graduate allow them into those courses, to pick up courses. They could do more easily by taking a couple of weeks off and doing it anyway. So, I say, can we do this experiment? A whole bunch of the professors are, that'll never work.

**Roger Martin:** The only way to learn is by seeping in slowly over the 13 weeks. Having this compressed won't work, blah, blah, blah, and I'm, so I don't have to fight it, right? I say you might be right, and the experiment may prove that you are absolutely right. And then they're like, yeah, he's right. Like, I know what the experiment is going to do. It's going to fail miserably. And so, this is no, this is no biggie. I start teaching in mid-January. I ain't teaching one of those compressed courses. No way. So, they fine. They're totally fine. I have no, I have no real meaningful, opposition. Right. But then I go and so they say yeah, Roger, go ahead and do your stupid a\*\* thing. And so, then I go to some of the best professors and say, the ones that I've been meeting with and say, please, pretty please, and we'll give you an extra stipend to create, because you're gonna have to create a little bit different. We'll give you greater teaching support to help you with the grading and whatever. And please, please,

pretty please, do it. I got a number of professors to do it. They ended up loving it. Because they also discharge part of their teaching load. Right? So, they have less. Less to do. And the rest they, quick. Students adored it.

**Whitney Johnson:** The intensity. Yeah.

**Roger Martin:** Right. And so, you know after that I just say to the faculty, can I keep running the experiment. And they're like okay, sure, sure. The ones that thought it was a complete failure would be a complete failure or oh, I guess I guess it worked. And some of them said, maybe I should try that too and did it. And then after about, I don't know how many years it actually was 3 or 4 years. I said, you know, shouldn't we, shouldn't we just sort of like formalize this. And they're like, yeah. Like, of course it's working great. And you know, of course. And it just goes through like curriculum executive, you know, because it's like, duh, like, do I have stupid written on my forehead? This is working great. And of course, we should ratify it. So that was my tactic for everything. I never went to create a fight that I had to win. I just said, let me try it. Yeah, let me try it.

**Whitney Johnson:** Okay. Let's talk about fundraising. Yes. Because that's a big job of a dean. You reduce the number of days that you were doing it and yet you were highly successful. So, what was your philosophy around that?

**Roger Martin:** Yeah. So, this is one of the, like I don't want to sound disrespectful to the academic world because there's a whole bunch of things that are really sensible, but there's some things that I just do not know where people get these ideas. And fundraising is, is absolutely one of them. Whitney which is, which is the approach to fundraising, because I got sat down and like, you know, you're an outsider. You don't really know about fundraising. Here's what you do. You make, we have to create lists of rich people. And then what we do is we, like, phone them up and badger them into having a meeting where then you go, Roger, and you ask them for money. And I'm like, hmm. I actually just because of, you know, the business I've been in and the world I've been in, I kind of know a lot of rich people and that's not how they work. That's not. That's not how they work. Getting badgered for a meeting with somebody they don't want to meet with, whose only purpose for having that meeting, the only thing they care about at all is getting their money. And. But then they said, but no, that's the way it works, Roger. And that's why you have to have so many of these. The hit rate is really low.

**Roger Martin:** And I was like, right, right. It's sort of like direct mail, right? The hit rate is like a reason. Oh four of a 1%. And so, I just say. I'm not doing it. Here's my belief. My belief is that it's 100% about worthiness. We are not now worthy. Fourth best business school in Southern Ontario with nothing that it stands for. We're not worthy. We are going to make this place worthy. Big time worthy. And on a whole bunch of fronts. We're going to go from two events a year that outsiders are invited in, to more than two a week. We are going to be the place that they come for IP. We're going to be on TV, and in the print media because we've got, kind of ideas. We're going to work tirelessly on making this place worthy. And so people ask me, how much did you, time did you spend? Because they all think Dean spent all their time on fundraising and in part because of the stupidity of fundraising. And I say I can give you two answers. One answer is 100% of my time. And it's a truthful answer because I spent 15 years making Rotman School worthy.

**Roger Martin:** Full stop. So, 100 is a completely honest answer. I can also give you another honest answer, which is about 5%, because I spent about two hours a week talking to rich people about their about their money and giving it to us. So, I said, we're just going to focus on worthiness and we're going to get people with money, right, involved in the school. Right. So, one - we had we had this super fantastic conference on Canadian competitiveness. And this guy who just sold his investment management firm, who I knew was interested in, in competitiveness issues, we had a speaker who was awesome, awesome. Dan Treffer, professor was Rotman professor, awesome, gave it this awesome talk about childhood education and its impact on competitiveness. And he and his wife, this guy who sold his investment management firm, he and his wife were really interested in that. And they came up to me after the conference and said, Dan Schreffler. I notice he wasn't he was not introduced with a chair. It wasn't. It was professor of economics, not the blah, blah, blah, distinguished chair of the distinguished chair of this. My wife and I would love to see him do more of that work.

**Roger Martin:** Uh, here. And, if we gave you \$2 million, would you give him a chair? Think we can do that? I think we could. I think we can. I think we can make that work. Right. It's like. So how long did that take me? It

was 10, 15-minute conversation, right? And I had asked our people to invite him because I had gotten to know him and knew he was interested in the subject. Did I think it was going to be a \$2 million kind of conference? No, it was what, doctrine of relentless utility. We were going to be relentlessly useful. And good things are going to happen in ways that we may or may not have expected. I, I had got this other one of the Canada's billionaire real estate developers, who was chagrined at the fact that there's very little real estate, or very few real estate courses in business schools. And we had one, but it was more the theory of it, it wasn't sort of the practical side of it. And he came, he actually came to visit me and said, you know, we, you know, why doesn't the Rotman School do more of this? You're at downtown Toronto.

**Roger Martin:** Toronto is a good real estate town. And I said, well. Would you be willing to teach a course? I'd provide all sorts of help and guidance for you. Would you teach a course? And he said, yes, Roger, I would, but you have to make me a solemn promise. You will never ask me for money. These billionaires are always worried about that. Oh my God, I'm going to do this. And then they're going to ask me for money. I said scout's honor. Promise. I promised. But then we had a project to build. Well, you've been there. The new. The new building you've presented there in the new building. It's a \$120 million building. This guy is a billionaire real estate developer. So, I ask him, would you be willing to serve on the selection committee to select the architects? And he's like, sure, sure. And he had all sorts of like, like all sorts of questions that nobody else was asking. And it was like grilling people, grilling people because like, he knew he knew development and building buildings and you know, that was all great. And then he just gives me a call and says, Roger, that new building that's going to be pretty expensive, huh? Yeah, yeah, you probably need a lead donor.

**Roger Martin:** How about if I give you \$15 million? And I said, I promised I would never ask you for money. He said you didn't, I offered. Doctrine of relentless utility and treat, treat people the way they want to be treated, not as a piggy bank.

**Whitney Johnson:** Yeah, exactly.

**Roger Martin:** When you treat them as a real person, help them out.

**Whitney Johnson:** Exactly. I felt myself very moved by that because, yeah. When you are a person with resources and it, and financial can be very obvious, but any kind of resources, there is that continual feeling for someone that they are being used. And so, when you were willing and able to treat him with respect, then he could offer something, but it was a gift that was freely given. It's really beautiful. Yeah.

**Roger Martin:** Yeah.

**Whitney Johnson:** Really beautiful.

**Roger Martin:** So that, so we ended up raising and its chump change. Like from my alma mater, I think Harvard raises this and every couple of weeks, but we raised a quarter of \$1 billion while I was Dean, which was more than any other business school by a by a long shot by essentially rejecting the methodology. I just like in 15 years, I did very few sort of cold calling, you know, I got, I'm going to come and visit you and ask you for money, kind of things. And one way to be relentless, relentlessly, useful is to make Joe Rotman School. So, it's called the Rotman School because an entrepreneur named Joe Rotman, gave \$15 million to, he gave \$3 million first to name a building, then \$15 million. So, 18 million to name it that school. And immediately it had this big scandal and was all over the paper as the faculty of mismanagement and all of this stuff. So that's what he got for his \$18 million. I kind of helped turn it into something really special where everybody would say, he, one of his moments, it's sentimental to me because he did he passed away now, which is sad, but he was he was driving down the street that the school is on with his grandchild and, and we have big Rotman banners on it, and the kid apparently says to him, grandpa, grandpa, grandpa, there's our name up there because he's a, the kid's name is Rotman.

**Roger Martin:** A surname is Rotman too. Grandpa. Grandpa, there's banners with our names on that. And he said it made him cry, Joe cry because he could say, yeah, that's our school. Yeah, we did that. And so, you know, he calls me up, kind of out of the blue 6 or 7 years later saying, you know how I gave \$18 million to the to the school, to name it and set it on this path. You've fulfilled my greatest dreams for the school. And our family

would like to give you another 18. Wow. Again? Didn't ask for that. Didn't ask for the 15. Didn't ask for the two. Why did we get them? Worthiness. We were worthy and we were relentlessly useful. I was relentlessly useful to Joel, to what he wanted to be as a philanthropist, what it meant to him to have a to have the business school there. And, you know, he increasingly got all these other kinds of philanthropists coming to him and saying, Joe, how did you do that Rotman School thing? I mean, you must be so happy. And he's like, well, as a matter of fact, right. Like, you know, it's useful for. And he deserved it. Like I'm saying that, like he deserved it. He couldn't have been, he couldn't have been a better, donor. He would always give me good advice. Oh, I miss him. He's fantastic. Fantastic man.

**Whitney Johnson:** So, good. Alright. So, a couple of final questions. If we look at your 15-year tenure as an S curve, how long were you on the launch point? When did you know you'd hit this sweet spot? And when did you know you were in mastery and needed to go on and do something else?

**Roger Martin:** Good questions and a not awesome answer to your last one. So, I think it took me it took me 3 or 4 years of really steep learning and then, and then it was, it was...

**Whitney Johnson:** You got into the sweet spot. So, it took a while.

**Roger Martin:** Got into the sweet spot, and, and I kind of knew what to do. Mainly things worked the way they were supposed to. Many of the seeds that were planted on the early part of the S curve were flowering. And so, so it made it easy. And then you know what Whitney, like I should have, you should have written your book before you wrote your book. Come on. I, because I, I think I stayed too long. If I look back on it, I would say I coasted for the last three years without, because it was sort of tricky, like they, you're only supposed to have two terms. Seven and five. And it's in the University of Toronto Act, which is an act of Ontario parliament. There's this special provision that says under extraordinary circumstances, you can get a third term. And so, I was the longest serving dean of any faculty in University of Toronto history. I got this extra term of three years, and they were like, you can't go, you're so important, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah. And they're, I shouldn't say blah, blah, blah, because they were genuine, but I should have known that I was going to coast because there's not much I could do in three years because that was the end, no chance whatsoever. But I stayed because people begged me to and said it would be good for the school. It wasn't good for me. I should have gotten on to my next thing. And if you would have written your book in 2010 Whitney, I might have not stayed those three years.

**Whitney Johnson:** It is interesting how, so basically three years at the launch point, nine years in the sweet spot. But then you got to master and probably were in mastery that last, probably mastery years 11, 12, maybe ten. And it was time to go but we don't know. And I think it's very difficult to be able to say, you know, I know you're saying that you want me to stay, but the right decision is to go now and to be able to have the language to do that. It's tough, especially when people are, it's tough.

**Roger Martin:** We want, and this is where and I know you do, you do a lot of this Whitney of coaching people. But I think if, if you would have been my coach in 2000, let's say from 2008 on for ten years, if I would have said Whitney come coach me. Yeah, I bet you would have talked me out of accepting a third term. You would have said, you know, yes. All of their arguments for the school and the university are right. But they're not right for you.

**Whitney Johnson:** And because it's not right for you, it's not right for you. Because companies don't disrupt people do. It's not right for the university.

**Roger Martin:** Ultimately, in the end, they may think it's right for them, but it's not okay.

**Whitney Johnson:** Lighter notes. Lighter note. You're a big fan of the New England Patriots. Bill Belichick is gone. How would you approach fixing their organizational issues in this transitional period? And what would you do if they reached out to you and said, we want you. Wouldn't that be fun?

**Roger Martin:** That would be fun. Yeah, I think it's, I mean, it may sound platitudinous to say, but I think they have to make sure they pick things that they really, really want to maintain right about that, that era, which is the

most successful era in the history of the, of the sport and, and be quite explicit and say, we want to keep these things and say, here are the things we're going to change, not because we disagreed with the way he did it, because you can't because it's the best track record in the history. But we don't think we can replicate that. This is a new context. And so, we think these things are important and these things are going to change and then stick with, stick with that formulation.

**Whitney Johnson:** That's really powerful.

**Roger Martin:** Don't leave it. Don't leave it like ambiguous as to which is which. Because then people will say, well, you're disparaging the previous coach. No, no, we're not really. Well yeah. It's because you leave too much to interpretation.

**Whitney Johnson:** And that's powerful of like okay, here's what we know we're going to keep. So that legacy, that foundation and here's the part that we're not going to keep. And what I loved about that reframing is maybe there's some stuff that didn't work because he's not perfect, but there's also that piece that you just said, which is really powerful. We're not going to keep it because it's not going to be Bill Belichick and we can't replicate it. So, we need to evolve. That's really powerful. That's an important reframing.

**Roger Martin:** And Whitney, the replaying that is really personal for me. It's something I've had to come to terms within my career. Right. Which is well, I have some special qualities that when I disappear from this, from whatever scene it is, are not going to be there. And so, I've assumed they would be, and I've had many life, now disappointments at watching organizations that I have left, not be able to continue the path that I that I've had the organization on. And I've been more disappointed than I realized I should be. I should just be expecting that and maybe you know, setting the stage for at, in the academic world, you can't do that because the dean isn't involved at all in the selection of the next dean. So, you can't do anything. But in, in some of the other things I've done the super grinning thing for me is a regression to the mean that I didn't expect, but I know why it happened, and it's because I'm not saying I'm awesome by any stretch of the imagination, but I'm special, right? Like, there's special just like you are special.

**Whitney Johnson:** Your way of doing things.

**Roger Martin:** There's things that you are particularly good at and assuming that if you're particularly good at something that will automatically persist is foolish.

**Whitney Johnson:** Yeah.

**Roger Martin:** You got me all introspective now Whitney.

**Whitney Johnson:** I want to stay with this just a little bit longer, because I think there's something really important about this because one of the things, I hear you saying is like, there's sadness. Like you put all this work into something, and you think that you've created structures and processes. I mean, this is what you do. So, there's an element of sadness, of realizing things just, they're going to change. And no matter how hard you try to put a process in place, it is it's going to change. And so, I think that's one thing I hear you saying this element of sadness. But the other piece, which I think is quite lovely, is to recognize, you know, when you said, you know, that you're special, like everybody's special, like everybody is contributing something to an organization. I mean, if they're doing, if they're contributing and when they leave, that spark isn't there anymore. And that's correct. And it's just the way it is. And so...

**Roger Martin:** It's just the way it is.

**Whitney Johnson:** Why what you said was so powerful is to say we can't replicate it and we shouldn't try to. So, we need to know there are a few things here that we must hold on to, but we have to just understand that the rest of it needs to, must and will change.

**Roger Martin:** Yes.

**Whitney Johnson:** And you're making me think of a wonderful quote from Angela Blanchard. Who, I had her in *Smart Growth*. She said, at every milestone, there's both grief and gratitude.

**Roger Martin:** Yeah. Oh, that's good, that's good.

**Whitney Johnson:** Just like you described.

**Roger Martin:** Yes.

**Whitney Johnson:** Grief and gratitude.

**Roger Martin:** Yep. I have a whole lot of gratitude, which I've said to various people at the Rotman School, but I have grief as well.

**Whitney Johnson:** So, Roger, what's been useful to you in this conversation as we wrap up?

**Roger Martin:** Oh, man. Everything. You're the best. Whitney. This is why, when you said, let's do this, I say it. What's useful is to have a super empathetic and super smart person with a body of knowledge behind the smartness probe my thinking, because it brings out things I would not have necessarily, thought of. And that's why you're as good as you are at doing this kind of podcast.

**Whitney Johnson:** Thank you. Any final thoughts, that you'd like to share with our listeners as we wrap?

**Roger Martin:** You know, Dale Carnegie, you know, the making friends and whatever and influencing people guy had an important piece of advice. He said, never give another person a speech. And he said, by which he meant sort of like if I was your executive assistant, and you were like a senator or something, and you were going up to the podium to give a speech, a trip, you fell, you knock yourself out. I should not take your speech and give it, because you can't ever give somebody else's speech. He said it would be better if, even though I'm a lowly, that I would, I would create a speech that was my own and that would be my message is, is you do not try to be somebody, somebody else when somebody says, this is the way things are done around here, take it under advisement. Don't be foolish and say I'm going to ignore it completely. Take it under advisement because you need to, you know, give your own speech. You need to forge your own way. And that would be the single most important piece of advice I could give that I think hopefully, listening back on this, a person would say, no, that's what Roger infused in what he did at the Rotman School.

**Whitney Johnson:** Thank you.

**Roger Martin:** You are most welcome. Thank you.

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It's funny, for a rather complex episode, what I'm really coming away with is a notion of... simplicity. Roger's whole approach is rooted in demystifying these myths and regulations that every workplace has, clearing away the muck and grime of "that's how it's always done," and injecting a healthy dose of simplicity. Don't make it more complicated than it needs to be. Oh, Rotman says every employee can only get a stationary desktop? And there's about three football fields worth of red tape to get to before you change it? Well... what if I just get you a laptop... anyway?

It can seem bold, but simplicity often is, because simplifying things involves asking the dreaded question – why? Why are we doing things this way? Why don't I have the authority to change it? In the 92 Clinton campaign, James Carville and George Stephanopoulos kept the message about as simple as it gets – "It's the economy, stupid."



Simplify, simplify, simplify. Don't engage in the quote unquote cesspit of intrigue – just tell them, hey, I'm strapped for cash now, but if you wait it out and trust in what we're doing here, I'll make good on what the others are offering.

Beyond all the nuggets of wisdom in our talk, one easy thing we can all do today is just start feeling out for the moments of unnecessary complexity. The times where you say, "man, I don't know what the solution is, but there has to be something better than this." Maybe it's a weekly meeting that just rehashes the same old agenda, but take note – and then ask yourself, why? Why hasn't this changed? Maybe even, why do I feel like I can't change things? Real ecosystem change begins with small disruptions.

For more on clearing away the muck of complexity, we mentioned Zeynep Ton – she's running the Good Jobs Institute, simplifying what it means to work well. That's [episode 326](#). On spotting bad friction – and on the good kinds of friction that exist – there's [episode 358](#) with Robert Sutton. And if you're looking for more advice on experimentation, there's [episode 290](#) with Wes Carter.

Thank you again to Roger Martin and thank you for listening. If you enjoyed today's show, hit subscribe so you don't miss a single episode.

Thank you to our producer, Alexander Tuerk, production assistant Etta King and production coordinator, Nicole Pellegrino.

I'm Whitney Johnson.

And this has been Disrupt Yourself.