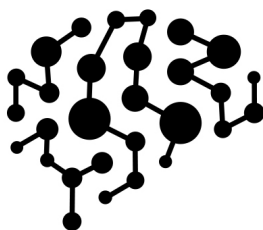


ONE GOLDEN NUGGET



**HOW TO
SURVIVE
AND
THRIVE
VOLUME III**

**JOE FOSTER, FOUNDER OF REEBOK,
RETURNS WITH POWERFUL NEW STORIES OF
RESILIENCE AND INNOVATION, CHANGING THE
WORLD ONE PAGE AT A TIME.**

Joe Foster



ALEJANDRO MARTINEZ

Co-Founder of Propelling Tech

I was just twenty-three when I decided to start Reebok. Looking back at that time, I appreciate it was a huge risk and responsibility for someone so young. I sometimes ponder how I could have been so bold and fearless, but meeting with Alejandro, who also took significant risks at a young age, reminded me that all it took was a deep sense of self-belief to take a leap into the unknown.

Growing up in Medellín in the '80s once infamously regarded as “the most dangerous place in the world,” Alejandro was exposed from a young age to harsh realities like robberies, kidnappings, bombings, and violence. He describes a life of constant vigilance, where he was “always adapting, changing routines, altering behaviours daily, adjusting schedules, and taking different routes to school.”

Alejandro's father had his own real estate company, and his mother was a stockbroker before starting her own company selling cleaning systems. Although Alejandro grew up with the many privileges of an affluent upbringing, he also witnessed his family endure multiple bankruptcies, having to sell assets and rely on his grandparents to step in and cover expenses. These experiences left a deep impression on him, and at a young age, he vowed he would never incur debts.

His “conservative” family and religious school instilled a strong sense of “discipline and ethics” in the young Alejandro, who excelled academically until his studies were interrupted by a serious accident in which he walked into a pane of glass. The injuries to his face and lower limbs were considerable, necessitating numerous surgeries. When he returned to school, Alejandro faced bullying and ultimately decided that striving to



be the most “popular” student was more desirable than being the most academically accomplished individual.

Nevertheless, Alejandro attended “one of the top universities in Colombia,” studying business engineering, and once again thriving academically. Before graduating, he moved to London, where he worked in various cafés while learning English.

Coming from Colombia, where “news revolved around local issues and the USA was seen as the ultimate aspiration,” London broadened Alejandro’s perspective, “not just on life but on the world.” He discovered diverse cultures, countries, and opportunities, and he fell in love with the idea of travel and exploration.

He decided to continue studying in Spain and moved to Valencia where he obtained a double degree, and eventually gained a master’s degree in Project Management. He recalls his professor and mentor, Ernesto De Los Reyes, saying that getting A* grades wasn’t about working harder but about studying smarter. Instead of revising for every anticipated exam question, Alejandro focused on understanding each professor’s style. He explains, “The strategy paid off, and I became the top student in my course.”

After nine years in education, Alejandro described himself as institutionalised. He didn’t know “how the system worked” and was “afraid of getting out.” However, with the help and support of Professor De Los Reyes, he found that consulting could help develop his passion for learning, and he started his career with a boutique consulting firm specialising in strategic planning.



**“If you don’t measure it,
you can’t control it.”**



He managed to secure sponsorship for a work permit, but when the financial crash hit Spain, he lost both his job and the permit. Undeterred, he applied for thousands of jobs worldwide, and his tenacity paid off when he was hired by SDG Group in Barcelona. Though the position was at a lower level, it marked his first step into the world of data and analytics.



Alejandro soon found that while he knew how to sell, lead on projects, and communicate with high-level executives, he didn't have the technical acumen needed, so he taught himself programming by reading books. He explains, "I set up Google alerts to stay informed about industry developments, read any possible handbook, and practised a lot. I used my academic and professional background to stand out among my colleagues at SDG. This advantage accelerated my career, and I was promoted nearly every six months, rapidly advancing through the company."



It was at this stage that all of Alejandro's life lessons seemed to align. He explains, "I relied on my ability to adapt quickly, a skill honed during my time in Colombia. I drew on the research skills I developed at university and the non-conformist mindset I embraced during my school years." His attitude and ability to learn allowed him to climb the ladder swiftly, and within five years, he was a partner in the company.

Under Alejandro's leadership, the company expanded its operations to the UK and

Europe before eventually entering the US market. A major French corporation later acquired the business, prompting Alejandro to relocate to New Jersey in 2021. There, he assumed the role of CEO of the global enterprise, which employed nearly 3,000 people.

He likens his consulting career to a video game, “where I was constantly drawn to the promotions, the bigger responsibilities, and the higher salaries. Each new level in the hierarchy motivated me to keep learning.”

However, after the COVID-19 pandemic, Alejandro witnessed many “C-level executives,” who had dedicated years to their companies, being abruptly let go. Determined not to face a similar fate, he made a bold decision to leave his “salary, security and everything.” So, in February 2024, he resigned from his position at SDG Group to, as he explains, “build something on my own.”

For Alejandro, this meant exploring diverse fields like cryptocurrency, tutoring and coaching, and eventually, real estate. He also played a pivotal role in founding an innovative consulting business that, as he describes, “starts with technology design first, then adds the services to it.” Alejandro explains that by prioritising technology, they were able to deliver solutions faster and at a lower cost. This fresh approach began opening doors to new opportunities, securing his company, Propelling Tech, significant business in the Middle East, Europe, and the US.

Over time, he gained knowledge in two distinct areas: one rooted in programming and technology, and the other shaped by life experience. He evolved into an innovation-driven, skilled negotiator with a non-conformist attitude. A natural salesperson and deeply customer-focused, he oversaw the company’s global operations from his new home in New Jersey before stepping down from the position of CEO, “realising it was time for a new direction.”



**“Bad data gives you
bad results.”**

As he suggests, “It wasn’t an easy decision. It required months of mental preparation, planning, and weighing alternatives.” Ultimately, he “chose to leave the comfort of an excellent salary and jump into the unknown.” At his wife’s request, Alejandro used this time to focus on himself. Weighing in at 105 kg, he started a programme with a conscious focusing on food, sleep, and exercise. After only three months, he lost 25 kg and quickly found his energy levels rising and his “brain becoming sharper.”

Looking to the future, Alejandro predicts a significant evolution in the coming years. He asserts that the focus is shifting: “it’s no longer just about information, it’s the human application of it that truly matters.” He elaborates further, explaining that while knowledge was once traded for money, the internet has made it “accessible to everyone.” As a result, the future will be more about “how well you understand the person and how you apply that knowledge to a situation.” He adds, “It will be more about how quickly you can detect something and implement it.”

As a new and emerging company, Alejandro suggests that Propelling Tech has distinct advantages over larger corporations, particularly its ability to move swiftly. He believes that “mid-market companies now have an opportunity to compete by leveraging technology to act faster and access markets more efficiently than the bigger players.”



Alejandro advises business leaders to keep things simple. He explains, “Many companies, when implementing technology, begin by heavily modifying and customising, which makes it incredibly complex to maintain and upgrade.” By prioritising simplicity, businesses can adapt quickly to change, keeping them ahead of the competition.

Being open to new ideas is a behaviour Alejandro has recently developed. He admits that there were times when he wasn’t paying attention and “lost a lot of opportunities just by not being open to trying new things.” Another effective behaviour he uses in his personal life is creating a “strategic map of actions.” It allows him to focus on his goals and the steps he needs to take to reach them. He explains, “I put a quadrant with all the different goals and then create the cause and effect of all the actions that need to happen to achieve those goals. For example, family investment and living with awareness are goals. I also have my personal branding as another goal.”





**“People don’t invest in an
idea; they invest in the
people executing it.”**



Speaking at Davos was a proud moment for Alejandro, who saw it as a “recognition of [his] journey.” It also provided him with the opportunity to build new connections and expand his network. Alejandro describes the annual meeting of the World Economic Forum as “a small town with a big filter.” He explains, “Once you are invited to the ‘club,’ you’ve passed all the filters, so nobody questions how you got there. In other words, it grants you access to people and opportunities.”

Alejandro values efficiency and speed, and he likens Davos to “having coffee throughout the week with a group of people influencing the world, rather than simply meeting individuals in a fancy hotel.” His part at Davos was discussing how technology can accelerate many businesses in a way that doesn’t have to be overly complex. To this end, he often asks himself, “What is the biggest value [he] brings to the table?” While he can point to his twenty years in the industry, his energy and passion, and his ability to grasp the potential of technology, the most insightful answer came from an unexpected source — a construction worker — who explained that Alejandro’s unique value lies in “solving issues through a technology lens.”

With many considerable achievements, his greatest pride is clearly his family: his wife, Maria, and two daughters, Carlota and Leonor. Together, the Martinez family founded their own company, started investing in startups in the US and the UK, and built a real estate portfolio in the US, Colombia, and Spain.

Alejandro is a reflective individual who is quick to evaluate his own strengths and weaknesses. He embraces transformation and celebrates his “illumination” phase, where he is still in a mode of discovery and, “instead of looking around for threats, [he] has started looking straight ahead. Shifting his mindset from being prey to becoming a predator.”

Alejandro once believed that he had reached his pinnacle as CEO of SDG Group. But it didn’t take him long to realise that “there is even greater potential to reach, and the sky is much bigger than I had imagined.”



**“Sometimes, unexpected
places offer the most
valuable lessons.”**



“Staying loyal to my goals taught me the importance of not basing decisions solely on money, but instead focusing on the bigger picture.”



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