Marc Slavin

Along for the Ride

"Car washes, body shops, and gas stations. That's how I grew up," says Marc Slavin. "I've been in this industry for 55 years, and I'm 55 years old!" Now the president, CEO and founder of MarcParc, a business dedicated to designing, building, and managing parking lots and garages, he can still recall when he was a toddler and his father would put him on his lap as he'd drive around the garages. It's not just his line of work; it's his bloodline. And just as family was an integral aspect of his experience in the beginning,

it remains, above all else, his motivation and top priority today. "Life has been one crazy ride, and it's the people who ride along with you that make all the difference," he affirms.

This bloodline dates back to the end of World War I, when Marc's grandfather returned from the battlefields with a fifth grade education level but with a mastery of mechanics and a special proficiency with Packard engines. He planted himself in Washington and morphed

his practice into a repair shop, and the government paid him to train veterans in the trade. He began charging for parking for the cars he was fixing, and he subsequently sold the lot to Pepco, which brought in substantial revenue that was then fed back into the business. His parking business embarked on a marked escalation through the 30s, 40s, and 50s as cars became more prevalent, and he invented several parts for Ford Motor Company, which afforded him extra capital for purchasing real estate for more lots and garages.

Marc's grandfather's enterprise, Atlantic Garage, later became a family business as Marc's uncle became involved, and when Marc's mother married Alan Slavin, Alan joined the business as well after returning from the Korean War. Alan then split off to find a partner and develop his own parking company in the 60s, with Marc's grandfather and uncle continuing to run Atlantic

Garage. Marc and his twin brothers were certainly troublemakers as children, riding their bikes all around town and getting into mischief, yet Marc never missed an opportunity to go to the garage with his father. "In the summer or on days off, I remember just parking cars with my dad," he says.

Everything changed in young Marc's life, however, when Alan was tragically killed in a plane crash in April of 1967. In June, his mother packed everything and relocated the grieving family down to Florida to start a new life. She met

a doctor in the airport several months later that she later married, and they built a good life together. Marc's grandfather had semi-retired to Florida as well, and day in and day out, Marc would both work and fish with him. "I have a lot of him in me," he explains now. "I grew up in Florida, but I really had a love for the business that kept bringing me back to Washington. It was in my blood, and I was traveling back and forth to visit my uncle, who was still running Atlantic Garage." Marc's grandfather

also had a body shop that he loved to work in through the summer, and Marc actually ran it for him the summer he was nineteen years old.

Marc's passion and natural proficiency for the business couldn't be denied, and he ended up leaving college to work for his uncle full-time in 1977, starting as a supervisor. He had parked cars since he was 12 years old and continued to do so until he was 30, when his uncle made him Vice President. Marc took that role and ran with it, evolving it into a marketing and business development position and growing the company to between 60 and 70 locations. They were doing \$12 to \$15 million in revenue with admirable margins. His uncle had expanded the company into a real estate empire as well.

As the years went on, however, Marc saw the writing on the wall and realized he was unhappy with the business philosophy his uncle had developed, resolving to submit his resignation in 1995. "I knew I had to go out and try things on my own," he remembers. "I couldn't continue without ever knowing whether I had the ability to succeed independently, my own way. With that, on April 15, 1996, I settled into my own office with an old computer and chair. I had one telephone, and I began making calls to people in the industry I knew who might give me a chance. Lo and behold, there actually were people out there who trusted me to come in and operate some of their parking facilities."

It started with one client, and then another, and before long, Marc added staff so he was able to go out and meet with new business to nurture the company. By 2000, MarcParc had 10 to 12 facilities. Now, in 2012, they have 50 facilities and around 200 employees. He also founded MarcParcValet, a professional valet concierge, in 2004, which is projected to do 1,500 events this year with 800 part-time employees and 50 full-time employees.

To say that Marc and his team have an eye for detail is quite the understatement. They work with engineers to build garages, and they use an eye for detail with decades of experience to assess the condition of garages. From the equipment, to the lighting, to the drainage, to the concrete, Marc can do visual analyses of these garages, identify problems, and coordinate solutions. "This is what we do," he explains. "It's what we live and breathe in this business." And, though there have certainly been challenges along the way as a result of the financial strains put on developers through the recent economic crisis, Marc remains optimistic that many new opportunities remain, and it is on these new opportunities that he keeps his sights set when he's not focused on the minutia of garage inspection.

The hard times have not been limited to financial woes, either, as Alan Slavin's death was far from the last familial loss Marc would need to weather. He'll never forget the early morning hours of August 7th, 2002, when the phone rang as he was tying his shoes. "Your brother's dead from a heart attack," came his mother's broken voice over the receiver. She had to bury a child at age 42, and she never got past the despair. Shortly thereafter, she was at his house in Ocean City when she reported that she hadn't been feeling well. She was diagnosed with stage four colon

cancer, and Marc took a significant amount of time off work throughout that final year of her life to be at her side.

In the aftermath of his mother's death, Marc found himself once again on a plane down to Florida to be with his twin brother, whose heart was failing due to an ailment he had suffered since birth. Making the necessary decision to later take his brother off life support was the hardest thing Marc has ever had to do, and cultivated in him an awareness of true priorities that continues to shine through his leadership style today. "My life's been an unbelievable roller coaster for the past few years now," he says. "I was dealing with all of that while running the business, and I will admit, I lost some of my drive and zest for the company for a while. It was certainly regained, but with a nuance of wisdom it hadn't possessed before. perspective shifted a bit after losing my father, two brothers, a mother, and later my stepfather."

This perspective permeates the company culture of MarcParc, placing the wellbeing of Marc's team members at the forefront of his consideration at all times. "Be good to the people that work for you," he emphasizes. "Hire good people and take care of them, because they'll take care of you too. Let them enjoy the fruits of their successes, and be sympathetic to their needs and personal lives. These are the things you have to deal with in business everyday—the real, hard aspects of not only your own life, but the lives of your employees as well. You have to understand their problems and give them the freedom and support to deal with them as constructively as possible."

Beyond this awareness and empathy for others, Marc stresses the importance of a basic foundation of perseverance and hard work in advising young entrepreneurs entering the business world today. "Be dedicated, and don't let anyone tell you that you can't do something," he avows. "My high school English teacher once told me I'd never be able to read or write, yet today, I write proposals and letters as eloquently as any graduate scholar can. If you believe in something with your heart and your gut, go for it with all you have. And never think that someone's better than you, because you don't know what happens behind closed doors."

An integral aspect of perseverance, however, is having a clear concept of what one is working for or toward, so he remains a staunch advocate of the simple practice of putting ideas on paper and writing up a plan. "What is it that you're trying to do or develop? What do you want the end result to be?" he challenges. "Decide what you want the end result to be, and then back into it. That philosophy holds, whether you're designing a garage, playing a football game, or trying to achieve a life goal. Keep it simple and get advice from people who have been through it."

More important to Marc than mentors, however, are family and friends, and while his commitment to MarcParc is evident in the company's success, his commitment to those closest to him far surpasses all else. Indeed, of all his accomplishments, he remains most proud of his two sons and daughter, and strives to stay in close contact with his friends on a daily basis. "It's really important to me to be there for them," he acknowledges. "If they need me, I'll drop whatever I'm doing."

Perhaps it was growing up and watching the compassion that radiated from his stepfather, who was a physician for the Fountain Blue Hotel in Miami. He wouldn't force his patients to pay in cash, but would rather accept virtually any form of barter—a true testament to his love and acceptance of people for who they were, in every sense of the word. Every time a slab of Nova Scotia salmon would appear at their door, or a Senator would treat them to dinner, Marc knew his stepfather valued his patients more than any paycheck and was willing to put his relationship with them before all else.

He sees the same kind of compassion today in his wife, Brigid, who has been his biggest supporter for fourteen years now. "She's the quintessential woman and wife," he muses. "She sticks by me—even if it means going to Africa with me to hunt the Big 7, or going fishing 70 miles offshore, or riding in the back of my airplane at a dizzying 50 degree angle." Indeed, it's the friends and family who stay with us despite—or because of—life's unpredictable twists and turns that make it worthwhile, and it is for those people that he truly committed his business to a standard of excellence, integrity, and resilience.

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- By Gordon J. Bernhardt, CPA, PFS, CFP®, AIF®

About Gordon J. Bernhardt

President and founder of Bernhardt Wealth Management and author of Profiles in Success: Inspiration from Executive Leaders in the Washington D.C. Area, Gordon provides financial planning and wealth management services to affluent individuals, families and business-owners throughout the Washington, DC area. Since establishing his firm in 1994, he and his team have been focused on providing high-quality service and independent financial advice to help clients make informed decisions about their money. For more information, visit www.BernhardtWealth.com and Gordon's Blog.

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