

A Message from Garcia

Latino Leaders

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A Military Mind In Business **Charles Garcia**

Chairman and CEO of
Sterling Financial Investment Group



Writer Entrepreneur

A Military Mind In Business

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It is hard to believe that what is now a global financial services firm with more than 50 offices in the US, Italy, Athens, Argentina, Panama, just to mention some of the countries it has reached, started back in 1997 with just three workers. “I started with personal capital of \$800,000 and some financial support from family and friends,” said the man who made it all happen, Charles Garcia, Chairman and CEO of Sterling Financial Investment Group. His success skills were honed much earlier and in what at first glance looks like an unlikely place — the US military.

“I got a question from the audience when I gave a presentation to the CIA: ‘How did you go from the military to starting up a finance company, going from the government to the private sector?’ ”

I was trained as a military intelligence officer who had to figure out what was going to happen. The actual skills are the same — I research the market and analyze it and decide when to buy and sell,” he says.

Furthermore, his ability to digest, understand, and interpret information, and then explain it concisely in context in either military or financial reports, have allowed him to expand his activities into writing.

“I’ve written for magazines and newspapers and have a penchant for writing,” Garcia said.

Combining what he’s learned on his quick climb to the top in entrepreneurial circles with his writing skills, Garcia decided to share in his recently launched book, *A Message from Garcia: Yes You Can Succeed*, where he encourages the reader “to have a clear vision or dream. Create a reasonable plan. Then, most importantly, take massive action to implement the plan. And persevere. Never, never quit.”



Charles Garcia

Chairman and CEO of Sterling Financial Investment Group

Best-selling author, decorated soldier, entrepreneur, lawyer, and self-help guru, Garcia has put his drive, ambition, Panamanian heritage, and skills to multiple uses from advising on anti-Castro strategies to channeling millions into Latino markets and communities. In doing so he has become a runaway Latino success story.



Charles Garcia relaxes at home with his family at their home in Boca Raton, Florida, after a day signing copies of his book *A Message From Garcia: Yes, You Can Succeed*, which is enjoying international prestige as a best seller.

The book was released simultaneously in English and Spanish last October. Only a week had gone by, and it had already become a top ten best seller on the largest online booksellers.

A week later it ranked sixth on the *Wall Street Journal* best seller list.

Garcia's book is based, and meant as a homage as well, on Elbert Hubbard's 1888 classic story *A Message to Garcia*, which has, up to now, sold over 45 million copies and is part of the list of required readings for the U.S. Marines. "Florida Governor Jeb Bush insists that all his staff read it," Garcia said.

A Message from Garcia has been catalogued both under business and self-help categories, for it explains how to develop leadership skills to succeed at one's professional and personal life.

Garcia explains his concepts through easily read stories and personal anecdotes that motivate the reader to follow a method of writing down a list of his or her dreams and reading them three times a day to visualize them in order to channel the energy of the subconscious mind, thus moving the person toward those dreams.

Garcia is no first-time author. He

wrote his first book when he was in the military, and drew on his Latin American roots for it — it was about Cuba.

"I wrote about Cuba because the standard U.S. military thinking was 'If you know about the Soviet Union, then you understand Cuba.' This clearly wasn't true. I felt it was naive."

He studied Cuban foreign policy, which was not the same as Soviet foreign policy. Cuba was involved in El Salvador, Nicaragua, and many other countries.

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cultural and geographical knowledge of Latin America to develop a more realistic view of the communist island.

"My Panamanian father took me back to his country when I was two because he'd been appointed surgeon general by President Omar Torrijos.

"I grew up there and went to the U.S. Air Force Academy and then law school."

His mother, a science teacher, nourished Garcia with a passion for hard work and high

standards in educational pursuits. Garcia absorbed these competitive ideals and was always an ambitious honor-roll student.

At age 18 he received a full scholarship to the U.S. Air Force Academy, from which he graduated with honors. Garcia obtained a bachelor of science degree and served as chairman of the Cadet Wing Honor Committee.

He underwent training as an intelligence analyst and worked for the Defense Intelligence Agency studying guerrilla warfare in Central America in order to train Latin American militaries in counter-guerrilla tactics.

Besides this fieldwork, General



"You had to understand Latin America," he said.

And this is where the U.S.-born Garcia's heritage came in.

As a native speaker of Spanish being truly bilingual, and totally at home in Latin American culture, he used his historical,



John Gavin selected him as an advisor, and Garcia wrote a classified study on Cuba's activities in the area, which was published in 1987 upon declassification.

For all this he was awarded the Defense Service Meritorious Medal, and for his 1994 published analysis of China's air defense capabilities he earned the Strategic Air Command's Hawkeye Intelligence Award.

"There's a version of *A Message from Garcia* coming out in Chinese — I can't wait to see a copy of that," he said laughing, China having gone from being a Cold War foe to a capitalist partner of U.S. firms.

As a military expert on counterterrorism, his insights on these topics are often sought by the news media.

During the Iraq war, he was Telemundo's military analyst, and after the 9/11 attacks he made frequent appearances on both English and Spanish-language networks to discuss the challenges and threats, such as biological warfare, which the nation was facing.

Garcia is not only a highly decorated military expert, but was also selected White House Fellow when he was 27, and worked during the Reagan and Bush Sr. administrations. Furthermore, he worked for William Bennett in the Office of National Drug Control Policy, and later on with John Whitehead, "a great mentor to me," he has said, when he was chairman of Goldman Sachs.

Apart from the Air Force and

government work, Garcia has a Master's Degree in Public Administration from the University of Oklahoma and a law degree from Columbia University. When he was studying at Columbia Law School, he wrote a document on the abusive practices of police officers executing search warrants in private homes. This article has been quoted frequently by the Florida Supreme Court in Fourth Amendment cases.

In the 90s, Garcia practiced law in Florida and co-managed the Thrift Value Fund in Palm Beach County. After learning from all the people he had worked with, he took up a new trade for which he seemed a natural: international business. Being such a goal-focused person with an undeniable gift for leadership, together with his unrelenting perseverance and flawless organization, Garcia had everything he needed to reach his goals.

For a businessman, he has a most unlikely background, a complex combination of trades, which have built up successful skills in this outstanding Latino.

Garcia says there are several factors that have contributed to the effective growth of this company, which Garcia intends to turn into the leading Hispanic financial services firm in the country. First of all, private equity investment has provided Sterling's growth capital rather than depending on commercial bank loans for funds. This, of course, has required Garcia's talent to recruit investors and

plan growth strategies.

Garcia's contacts everywhere have also been an important fact since Sterling's expansion has greatly benefitted from venture-capital funding. But, probably the real key to success has been Garcia's deep understanding of his targeted market. He is totally aware that Latin American countries cannot be assessed as a homogeneous bloc; on the contrary, each country needs to have services shaped for its particular demands.

"It's a big mistake to see them as the same market," he says.

Besides, Sterling does not really have to spend a lot of money on expert financial industry consulting, because in each country the firm engages for business, it deals partnerships with domestic firms that provide the local expert advice. It is Garcia's philosophy, partly learned from his father, that a person should not attempt a solo protagonist performance and instead let people who know about the things you need do their job. Presently, Sterling is looking forward to finding investors who are also interested in the U.S. Hispanic community to continue the growth Garcia has in mind within selected U.S. locations and other Latin American markets.

Is this some tactical military strategy to take over the financial services kingdom? In the case of Charles Garcia, the analogy is fair enough.