

Entrepreneurship: Reflections on ECHO's Steady Expansion and Innovating

ECHO's 25th Agriculture Conference

Martin Price
Founding CEO in 1981

Gardening on Rooftops & Other Above-Ground Locations

By Martin Price, Ph.D

Co-Founder of ECHO, Retired

**Low cost, low technology, lightweight methods to produce food
on rooftops and other locations above the ground.**



37 Years of Ministry

- What factors have been responsible for ECHO taking off, adapting, and becoming an important global agricultural resource?
- My big goal: To find a way to use science and technology to help the poor of the world and to be involved in the “Great Commission.”
- My big uncertainty: How do I know whether/how/to-what God is leading me professionally? Does He just want me to find something good to do and do it? Check out the following URL.
- <https://www.echonet.org/dr-martin-price-professional-testimony/>

What would I be praying about if . . .

- If I were the head of a household living in a shack with dirt floors, trying to support my wife and kids on a remote, steep two-acre farm, what would I do?” For sure I’d be praying.
- Then this thought also struck me. “God will surely answer these prayers. Perhaps one way He is doing that is to put in my mind this restless drive to find a way to use science to help the poor physically and spiritually.”

If Life Were a Movie There Would Be Loud Music to Draw Your Attention at Times.

- Going to a weekend retreat with IVCF and becoming a Christian
- Meeting Bonnie
- Sending a blind letter to “head of international agriculture” at Purdue University
- Prof. showed class the “Under-Exploited Plants with Promising Economic Value.” Had most impact on ECHO of any book in our library
- Meeting Dick Dugger

Shipwreck of My Career?

- 4 years getting the doctorate in biochemistry
- 4 years teaching at Geneva College
- 3 years starting and managing a Christian/secular bookstore
- 3 years post-doctoral research at Purdue
- 2 years research management at Battelle Laboratories and, finally, ECHO.
- That is 16 years after finishing my undergraduate degree!

One Last Wild Career Change

- Bonnie and I move to ECHO
- 5 acres rented from the United Methodist Church for \$1 per year.
- Each one of those, unbeknownst to me at the time, gave me unique skill sets and a network of scientific contacts that were a great preparation for the complexities of developing ECHO.

Preparation, not Shipwreck!

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- AND, finally, ECHO.

Getting Started

- Dick Dugger arranged a \$ 50,000 “proof of concept grant” for 3 years.
- Emphasis on establishing a global network
- Got started with ideas we had and resources available.
- Three Components
 - Scientists/professors, especially doing applied research and identifying good intern candidates.
 - Development workers, missionaries and those working in impoverished communities.
 - Support network in the USA
 - Churches, volunteers, the Peace Corps HQ, donors, helping us expand our overseas network

Initial Core Program Components

- Collect seed of “under-exploited” plants and demonstrate at ECHO.
- Begin building the global network.
- Rent exhibit space at one scientific convention each year.
- Respond to technical requests from our expanding network.
- Emphasize volunteer involvement (ministering to ECHO and ECHO ministering to volunteers).
- Develop an intern program.
- Figure out how to raise financial support.
- Learn: gardening in subtropics, tropical vegetables and fruits, etc.



Some Core Components Today that Were NOT Anticipated at First.

- What if, as a professor, I told my students the first day in class “I’m going to make you the best biochemists you are capable of being—what do you want to know?”
- First issue of ECHO Development Notes (December 1981) went to 37 people.
- A missionary (now a professor) told me last summer how he heard of EDN. (Indonesia around 1983)
- US Agency for Int’l Development; Peace Corps

Some Core Components Today that Were NOT Anticipated at First.

The internet

Publish ECHO Development Notes

- Interstate 75 & airport open incredible opportunities
- An unintended tourist attraction
- Sponsor conferences and workshops here and abroad
- Bookstore, retail nursery and plant propagation
- Develop a “high technology” seedbank.
- Create a specialized library

I Had Time to Grow with ECHO

- If my job description had been to develop the organization you see today (or that you would have seen when I retired after 27 years) I would not have had the confidence to try.

How did the conferences get started?

- Our observation when more than one “official visitors” came at the same time.

Visitors Thrived On Each Other

- What if several network members were here at the same time?
- A cautious beginning—the “un-conference.”
- In 1993 we hoped we’d have at least 25 attendees.
- Today we are starting our 25th annual conference in Fort Myers!
- Regional “networking” conferences in Latin America, SE Asia, E and W Africa

The Impact of Networking Conferences, Here and Overseas

- ECHO's strong Christian underpinnings but non-denominational stance made us "acceptable" to Christian ministries whose differences sometimes put limits on learning from each other

How to Create a Global Network?

- Majority probably not **primarily** working in agriculture.
- “Headquarters” usually did not reply or said they do not work in agriculture.

- The name “ECHO” symbolizes ideas, information and seeds echoing back and forth between us and our overseas network...and now between network members!

How Can Scientists Help?

- Intentional effort to involve scientists and engineers as part of our “network.”
 - Suggest research ideas to help the poor.
 - We could call on them when needed.
 - Refer students who might be great interns.
- Case study—the researcher in Honduras on banana disease speaks at conference.

We Are a Christian Organization

- Not hesitant to be known as Christians or “Christ followers.”
- No denominational affiliation.
- Accept no grants that would compromise the faith.
- Our services open to anyone helping the poor.

Internship Program

- Internship program began two months after Bonnie and I arrived.
- In a sense I was an intern with no one to guide me!
- Interns have been a very important key to ECHO's growth (253 interns as of today)
- It was and remains a major part of ECHO's ministry.

Know Those We Serve

- We based program growth on what we perceived were the “felt needs” of our overseas network.
- We take anyone doing or preparing for such work seriously, regardless of training, experience or size of organization.

A Thought I Recently Shared with ECHO Interns

- God is concerned **both** with what we **become** and what we **do**.
- II Corinthians 3:18 “But we all with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, **are being transformed into His image from one degree of glory to another.**”

The “Door of Vision”

- Dick Dugger was very fond of this quote.
- “Until one is committed there is hesitancy, the chance to draw back, always ineffectiveness. Concerning all acts of initiation and creation there is one elementary truth, the ignorance of which kills countless ideas and splendid plans.

That moment one definitely commits oneself, then providence [God] moves too.

- All sorts of things occur to help one that would never otherwise have occurred. A whole stream of events issues from the decision, raising in one's favor all manner of unforeseen incidents and meetings and material assistance, which no one could have ever dreamed would come their way. --- -- William Hutchinson Murray

My Conclusion:

- ECHO was “pre-positioned” by God to succeed.
- God has sent hundreds of incredible people who have joined us in this unique global ministry.
- If any major component had been missing, ECHO might never have become what it is today.
- Although polished and expanded, the basic vision and core values have remained to this day.

May God richly bless you,
that you may be a blessing
to many.

Gen 12:1-4

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