

# MULTICULTURAL ENTREPRENEURS

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Antonio Argibay > [www.meridiandesign.com](http://www.meridiandesign.com)



Antonio Argibay AIA, Principal, Meridian Design

## **What do you need to be an entrepreneur?**

You need the four "D's" — a dream, the daring, the determination and the dedication. Mastering these four qualities and keeping them in proportion are essential to a successful business.

## **What did inspire you to start your business?**

While in college I met my now business partner Bice Wilson. We were both active in school government and had a deep commitment to the affairs of the world. After having experienced our first paying jobs, we decided that we wanted to run our own firm. That decision was based on a desire to have better control of the

design process and, most importantly, to provide a creative and exciting working environment that reflected our goals, both as employers and as architects.

## **How did you finance it?**

We began by working independently as consulting architects for other firms, sub-contracting portions of projects and taking on small projects on our own. We worked in my partner's loft space, a large, open factory space converted to a residence by his labor. We financed it with sweat and blood, as any new business has to.

## **Being Hispanic...Does it have any influence on your business?**

I have firsthand experience with the disadvantages that an immigrant faces in the business world. Many people confuse speaking with an accent with thinking with one. We here at Meridian Design have made it a central point in our business plan to hire the best talent available. We have one criterion: excellence. We have a diverse group of people, and being based in New York has helped us to turn diversity into a competitive advantage worldwide.

## **In the face of adversity, how do you decide to keep going?**

One has to have faith and understand that there always will be adversity. Being an immigrant teaches you that there are always opportunities in America, but you have to be nimble and ready to act when the opportunities emerge. A business person has to understand the position of his enterprise within the overall economy, because there are established business cycles that dictate the ebb and flow of the larger economy. Many times, what seems like a difficult period is really an opportunity, and while adversity tries you, it is a great teacher that provides you with the strength and skills to survive. I remember soon after having survived Meridian Design's first prolonged dry spell, I sat down to have a drink with a much older friend who said to me "Well, now you can call yourself a business man."

## **What is the biggest challenge your business has faced?**

In general, the biggest challenge for any business is controlling growth so that it's healthy and consistent. You can't let your ego or your timidity get ahead of you — you have to grow at a controlled and healthy rate. A faster growth can really weaken a business, and when the inevitable reversals of the economy happen, the business will be too weak to survive.

## **If you could change one thing about your business, what would it be?**

First of all, I can change anything about Meridian Design, and we frequently do. It is important for a business leader to understand that. We do a lot of business planning and are constantly looking for that competitive edge. We also know change in business occurs in an evolutionary manner. You look for new markets while looking for growth in your existing market.

## **What was your childhood ambition?**

I always wanted to be an architect, but I only learned that with hindsight. I had a talent for drawing, organizing, planning and visualizing. As I matured, I

honed into skill sets. Architecture is the place where my skills and my dreams came together.

**Tell us about three entrepreneurs whom you admire?**

I have always admired "idea" people: inventors and discoverers. Thomas Edison was always a favorite. He not only invented many of the technologies that shaped the last 100 years, such as movies and recording, but he also invented the modern research and development laboratory. Not many recognize Christopher Columbus as an entrepreneur, yet I feel that is what he was. While it is true that he had miscalculated where he was, he had been sure he was within sailing distance due west from Europe, and proved it. In the process, he negotiated with monarchs to have the enterprise under his control and opened a New World. However, my absolute favorite is Benjamin Franklin. His influence on the world went well beyond his business acumen. As a writer, scientist, patriot, diplomat, humorist and thinker, he embodied all the qualities I admire about America. A great believer in education, he gave the best advice an entrepreneur can have: "An investment in knowledge always pays the best interest."

**For business meetings: breakfast, lunch, or dinner?**

All three are crucial, yet the most important is having a "cafecito".

**What sacrifices in your personal life did you have to make in order to become a business success?**

Being successful in business is very much about staying ahead once you get ahead. That takes constant reinventing, planning and pushing. At times, it is difficult to know when you have stopped working that day or that night, so in a way, you sacrifice time with the family.

**What is your favorite quote?**

"The pessimist sees difficulties in every opportunity. The optimist sees opportunities in every difficulty" - Sir Winston Churchill

**Is it difficult to be unconventional?**

It is my opinion that you should always be yourself and be comfortable with who you are. Thinking for yourself sometimes takes you to unconventional conclusions. A person has to trust his analysis and discard convention that is not based on facts. The Wright brothers were humble bicycle repairmen; they defied the convention of the time on what would fly and how, by analyzing and experimenting in unconventional ways.

**Biggest mistake made?**

I am very critical of myself, so the quantity and quality of my mistakes is truly impressive. On the other hand, without mistakes, there is no learning, so I'm fortunate to have had such a good education. However, if there was to be one mistake, I would say it was suppressing my spiritual side. To understand yourself, and to recognize that we are material and spirit, is to reach a consciousness from which happiness flows eternal. The longer one fails to see that, the less fulfilled he will be.

**Do you consider yourself an innovator? Why?**

When we began our practice many years ago, there were three areas in which architects were doing little or no work. Today, in part through our contributions to architecture and increased awareness, they are commonplace. Meridian was designing spaces for media and communications companies, a large portion of our clientele. We have been described as the "DNA" of the industry, as we have designed for new and changing technologies, as well as for new and changing business environments. Another is our goal of better design through the "humanization of space," which has become an ever-growing reality as many companies adopt our gospel: the idea that spaces are designed for people.

Finally, at the core of our firm is the emergence of sustainability as a form-giver in present day architecture. We founded our company, Meridian Design Associates, when the idea of conserving energy and the environment was revolutionary. Now it is a mainstream concept. This notion was extremely important to us, leading us to name our company "Meridian" (after the solar meridian) in preparation for all the solar energy and sustainability projects we would do. Today, the efforts to make our planet a better place through this consciousness are generally embraced.

*Antonio Argibay, AIA, is a principal of Meridian Design, an award-winning architecture and design firm headquartered in New York City with offices in Miami*

and Geneva, Switzerland.

*The company has designed broadcast and media facilities for major global corporations such as CNN, Telemundo, Lifetime, HBO, ABC, NBC and CBS. Their work for Lifetime was voted the "Best Workspace" in 2007 by Reader's Digest in the "Design & Style" category. Argibay and his work have been featured in Broadcast Engineering, The New York Times, The New York Post, The New York Daily News, EFE News and other leading national and international trade and consumer publications. He received his Bachelor and Master's degrees from Pratt Institute.*

To learn more about Antonio and Meridian, visit [www.meridiandesign.com](http://www.meridiandesign.com).

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REACTIONS:  funny (0)  interesting (0)  cool (0)

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