

## **Chapter 14**

### **Bolivia: The Case for Entrepreneurship**

Maria Laura Flores was raised in Bolivia in a middle-class family that stressed education and self-reliance. Her father worked in a mining company, and her mother was a pre-school teacher. Even as a child, she liked to play games about buying and selling things rather than playing with dolls. In her excellent Catholic high school, she loved all the courses that related to business: management, computer science, geometry, and calculus. And she also studied English. Because of her high grades and TOEFL score, she received a scholarship to the University of Florida in Gainesville, where she majored in business management, with a minor in marketing, graduating magna cum laude. Along with all her studying, she found time to party with her many fun-loving friends.

Maria Laura traveled around the United States before returning to interview for jobs in her native city of La Paz. She was hired almost immediately by a shipping company that trained her to work in sales and marketing. Recognized as a hard worker and talented businesswoman, Maria Laura was promoted several times until she became the sales manager in Chile. After seven years in Santiago, Maria Laura decided to return to the States for an MBA. When she told her disbelieving boss, he said: “What—you’re not getting married?”

Two years later, with her MBA from Georgetown University, she interviewed with the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and several large non-governmental organizations. Maria Laura had decided to work in developing countries to help those who were not as fortunate as she was acquire business skills and competence in management. She was offered a position with the IADB in Central America and worked there for five years, using her knowledge of management to help people start new businesses. In 2005, having achieved her original goals, she returned to her home of La Paz, Bolivia, to fulfill her dream of becoming an entrepreneur in Latin America. Maria Laura hoped that having her own business would enable her to make worthwhile contributions to society and also to do well financially, if all went according to her carefully designed plans.

To start her own business, MLF, Maria Laura needed a substantial infusion of cash. She turned to the wealthy Cuban American parents of her friends at the University of Florida, who lent her \$600,000 at a low interest rate. Then Maria Laura advertised herself as a consultant to Latin American start-up businesses that needed an expert to help them design, develop, and implement leadership training for their employees. She quickly had more work than she could handle, so she hired ten employees, and the following year, ten more. Four years later, Maria Laura was considered a well-known businesswomen in Latin America, but she was not as energized as she had been when she worked for the IADB because her life had only one focus: work. Her family life was non-existent. She had been married briefly to a doctor, but they divorced since she had had no time to spend with her husband, who wanted a loving companion, not a workaholic business executive.

At this point in her life, Maria Laura, who was 40, was at a crossroads. Her success as an entrepreneur was an established fact, and her financial gain had enabled her to repay her original loans and invest what was left in the stock market. Without any worries about money, Maria Laura thought she would feel content, but she didn't. Although her lifestyle was one that many of her contemporaries would envy, it had no balance. In truth, she was burned out and bored and felt that she needed a larger challenge. As the president of MLF, she assumed full responsibility for business development, engaged in short-term and long-term planning, and handled every personnel issue. She kept meticulous financial records of the company assets and liabilities. If anything, she was too much of a perfectionist and was reluctant to delegate important tasks.

Thus, her expanding and demanding business took all of her time, and even if she wanted to experience more in life than the business world, what other goals could she pursue? What other dreams could she realize? As an entrepreneur, she knew how to take risks, how to assess opportunities, and when to cut her losses and move on. Was it time for her to sell MLF? Should she go to law school or write a book about her unusual life? But then again, those alternatives would disrupt the status quo, which was pretty comfortable. Maybe she should just learn how to relax and enjoy what she had accomplished.

One Friday night after working in the office until 8 pm as usual, Maria Laura went home to eat a light dinner. While she was reading the first chapter of *Jack: Straight from the Gut* by former GE president Jack Welch, her cell phone rang. The voice on the other end sounded familiar. Suddenly Maria Laura recognized her previous boss at the IADB, Carola Casari. They had been not only colleagues but the best of friends. Now Carola had become the Human Resources Department Director of the IMF in Washington, DC.

"Hello, Maria Laura. It's been a while since we spoke. I'm so glad I've reached you! How have you been—still running around 24/7?"

"Oh, yes, Carola. Just trying to keep one step ahead, like always. I hope you're well and enjoying life in Washington. I really miss you and that lovely city."

"Well, that's exactly why I'm calling. There is a job that would be perfect for you—and I want to invite you to Washington to discuss it. I know how busy you are, but is there any chance you could get on a plane and come next week? And maybe stay a couple of days? This is an incredible opportunity, and as soon as I learned about it, I thought of you."

Maria Laura didn't have to think twice about this invitation. "Of course I'll come. I'll try to make a reservation tonight and e-mail you tomorrow with my flight arrival time. Can you tell me something now about this position—why do you think it's perfect for me?"

"It's the IMF Training Institute Director. You will work in Washington, with some travel, and report directly to the Managing Director of the IMF. Are you at all interested? And could you see yourself moving back to DC?"

“Well, I’ll need time to think this over. And then there’s my company to consider. But your call comes just when I’ve been looking at my life and wondering where I should go next, so maybe it’s a viable option. I’ll be eager to hear more about this.”

“That’s great. I can’t wait to see you. Good night, Maria Laura, and sweet dreams!”

### **Discussion**

1. What characteristics contributed to Maria Laura’s success in her professional life?
2. How was Maria Laura able to achieve so many of her goals?
  1. Why has Maria Laura burned out?
  2. What options does Maria Laura have?
  3. What are the advantages and disadvantages of being an entrepreneur?
  4. What would be the advantages and disadvantages for Maria Laura of accepting the position at the International Monetary Fund (IMF)?
  5. What would you do if you were Maria Laura?

### **Case Study Report**

- I. Statement of the problem
  - A. Definition
  - B. Analysis
- II. Suggestions of possible solutions
  - A.
  - B.
  - C.
  - D.
- III. Evaluation of possible solutions
  - A.
    1. Advantages
    2. Disadvantages
  - B.
    1. Advantages
    2. Disadvantages
  - C.
    1. Advantages
    2. Disadvantages

- IV. Selection of a solution
  - A. Choice
  - B. Justification