WITH Mark Chamberlain, *Entrepreneur, Business and Community Leader*

Mark Chamberlain is the President and one of the founding partners of Trivaris Ltd., a commercialization company focused on transforming ideas from concept to sustainable companies and social enterprises. As an accomplished and proven entrepreneur, business and community leader, Mark's passion is shaping a company culture that is driving innovative community development. He was interviewed after his Lunch on the Frontier speech in Winnipeg on March 24, 2009.

Frontier Centre: What does cross-sectoral collaboration look like?

Mark Chamberlain: Cross-sectoral collaboration essentially is looking at all the stakeholders in all the sectors that need to come together to solve a problem.

FC: So how do you start?

MC: It starts quite simply. You find like-minded individuals and you begin your first conversation. That conversation is here's what we think the broadest problem is and we know that we are all a part of this hub and we can help each other. And then you begin asking the questions who else needs to be at the table to help solve this problem?

FC: Who are these typical stakeholders?

MC: Stakeholders in terms of sectors would be the three primary sectors not for profit, business and government. But more specifically, every city has their overall civil society that should be everything from hospitals, school boards, schools, universities, colleges, United Way, social planning research councils, community foundations, other not for profit organizations, charitable organizations, businesses of all sorts, all three types of government. So it's all those participants and the problems that touch everybody in some way.

FC: In achieving collaboration on abusing poverty how did you address personality conflicts and turf interests of people in the various sectors?

MC: Interesting thing about collaborations, you know like almost anything, you're going to run into personality conflicts and just like everything else you try to deal with it or in some cases you look at it like you know that you're not going to convince everybody so spend your time convincing the convincible and hopefully others will come on board eventually. We don't expect 100% to agree with how we approach things or even the final solutions but if the aspiration is high enough very often you can take what appears to be opposing strategies to the same end. So people don't have to agree with everything they can actually come up with their own way of solving the same problem and still be connected to the overall goal.

FC: What does government need to do less?

MC: I think what government needs to do less in some respects is think that they are the solution. And I know they are voted in and we apply a lot of pressure to governments to suggest that it's their job to fix the economy, it's their job to fix poverty, it's their job to deal with the environment but, governments are simply reflections of us and they don't control all the pieces in the solution. They are not the education system, they are not the civil society, they are not the hospital system, they are not business. So they need to take these solutions, these very broad situations or solutions and existing problems and give up some control in other words when you start sharing the problem you also share the solution but, you also share the control. So I would say that the biggest challenge for governments is giving up some of that what they would perceive as their control.

FC: What does government need to do more of?

MC: I think governments at all levels first and foremost have to understand the science or the evidence that actually is in front of us in terms of solutions whether it's solutions to invest, to prosperity, solving poverty, or solving some of the environment. Governments spend a lot of time with the ideology as oppose to true evidence based on investments. They need to make the investments and start seeing things not as a cost to be recovered but actually an investment with a return on that investment. We quite often only invest if we have excess funds as oppose to looking at if we invest heavily into early years, for example, that pay off is significant in health cost in the future, educational cost, and justice cost. Governments need to start looking at the true return on the investments they make.

FC: What does government need to be better at?

MC: I think governments just generally need to be better at making the investments that show evidence of the return. We know that housing is a major determinate of health. We know that housing makes a huge difference in terms of stable housing, in terms of an ability of a child to not be moving every 3 -6 months and stabilizing their school and therefore better scholastic outcomes again meaning the less negative health outcomes for them moving forward. They end up being a more productive person in society to increase our general prosperity and our ability to be resilient for any change that we see in the future.

FC: What are your goals for law enforcement in poverty reduction?

MC: Well we're very fortunate in Hamilton certainly in that is our law enforcement folks truly understand that the best way to reduce crime and the best way to reduce security costs and things of that nature is to invest in the community, to invest into individuals. So they actually do have strong community development programs as a way to provide the

appropriate time/type to policing. In other words it's not coming in and hitting people with a sledgehammer later trying to solve the problems but actually investing in people. Again it all gets to start sounding like it's too simple or too social but the fact of the matter is that it's really good social science that leads better health outcomes, leads to better social outcomes, leads to better policing and justice outcomes.

FC: Since reducing poverty is adaptive work requiring focus, how do you keep a large collaborative process on track in distinguishing the essential from the expendable and then getting people to actually let go of the expendable?

MC: Well, we control very little, if anything. We don't control the group on track. What we can control is good information, good knowledge and insured responsibility. Just like we're asking governments to, in a sense, give back control to communities to help develop themselves and we can't fill that void by a collaborative saying that we now control it when we don't. We control information at best and that is to only to share information at best and depend on collective leadership and collective accountability to make effective changes in the community.

FC: So do you find that the process of shared responsibility is effective enough just by virtue of that process in continually guiding people towards a jettisoning the expendable?

MC: For the most part yes. The aspect of it that actually helps a process and this is where I think funders become very strategic as well. Funders when it comes down to making really good decisions on what we invest in cause again that's a limited resource, they can actually help the process and they actually accelerate the process by saying that we will only fund those things where we can truly understand that we are actually basing it on the best the investment, the most effective investment that people are already talking about and that we are not getting overlap programs, things of that nature. So funders can make a big difference whether it's United Way, community foundations or cities themselves. They can help move the whole process forward and the collaborative part of it forward not just for the sake of collaboration but to really find more unique solutions and hopefully lower cost solutions, more effective solutions by using funding as a tool to push people in the right direction.

FC: Just reducing the number of silos?

MC: Reducing the number of silos doesn't necessarily mean reducing the number of organizations. I think when we think of saying that all these organizations are all doing the same thing and therefore it's a redundant. Well, redundancies actually aren't a bad thing. From a resiliency perspective in a community it's a matter of can we get them all working for the same best practices, can we work collectively to scale things. Sometimes we have these great anecdotal things going on in our community that's just something that's not being shared by anyone else. That someone is somewhere else in a community doesn't have to be very big to not know what they're doing but, funders

typically know all these things going on because they're all being asked by the same groups of people. They're the ones that can be a really wonderful connection piece to getting people working together.

FC: How do you handle experiments that fail?

MC: Celebrate. Failure is one of the things, I don't know if it's just a Canadian thing that we don't like. It's always been played as being if you fail at something that therefore you are a failure. We need to separate those two things. To fail is not to mean that you are a failure, to fail means that you tried something and it didn't work, move on to the next thing and it really becomes a practice. We have to begin, and I truly mean this, celebrate the failures and even something as simple as to say Wow that didn't work. I won't do that again but, if we're going to innovate and to try new things then we have to build in our culture that it's ok to fail periodically, hopefully not all the time but periodically.

FC: That seems like the natural result of the no-blame culture that you tried to instil right from the beginning of the process.

MC: Absolutely. It is a no-blame environment that you want to create. And again, I'm not saying this is easy. This is really, really hard because it is so easy to be angry. We talked earlier about the different personalities or people that just seem to be stubborn or if we're caught with an idea that just doesn't seem to make sense. It's hard. It's really hard work. It's a constant reflection back to those principles.

FC: How do you have a collaborative process that at some juncture really does need repetitive, strong leadership?

MC: Repetitive, strong leadership comes in a number of ways. Again, it's that collective leadership piece, when it's the city, the United Way, the community foundation when all of these partner groups are all aligned by saying we all agree, we all want this place improved. Well people will say we have to make sure that we deal with all others as well. We say well we agree but that's our primary focus that we make sure that we are all aligned around that same vision.

FC: So is basically that everyone is empowered to say ok some blaming has started here?

MC: It's everyone. We're all responsible. Collaborative does not necessarily mean consensus. Really what it's saying is that we generally believe that this is what is important to us as a community. It means that we have a few different ways to try and if one fails we have others that will work. But if something doesn't work of if there's a blame that occurs in the community we try to quell it pretty quickly and that is simply by bringing those groups together to discuss it. I find mostly that disagreements occur mostly because of ignorance not because bad people.

FC: Regarding the education of poor children in Hamilton, what is happening now that was happening before this collaborative approach? How did that come about?

MC: When we think of education there's both formal and informal. How do we provide service to level that playing field for all individuals whether that's early years, high

school, public school, all that. I think was different in Hamilton today is that the scale of the solution is much greater than it was in the past. That is, more and more children are now participating. More families in their early years are participating in the types of interventions that make a difference to them and to their families. I don't know that we've actually come up with any new radical science around these things. Most of these things we've known for decades in terms of you make a certain kind of intervention you get this kind of output. The data is maybe a bit better, maybe a bit tighter we've improved a bit but it's really, I find, the scaling of these issues. The interconnectivity between the various groups, people are no longer working in silos. We're working a lot smarter.

FC: How do you approach the "Breaking the Cycle: Asset Building and Wealth Creation" component of your framework for investment? What are the greatest challenges and how do you overcome them? – You've got your framework for investment and your last piece is this Breaking the Cycle: Asset Building for people who've moved through the other four parts how do address that particular...

MC: One of the things, and we won't know this for a number of years, but my belief is if we made the correct investments in the first three or four parts then most of these individuals won't be suffering from lack of asset creation and their own personal development. But asset development and creating, one of the things we're looking at in that particular area is everything from ongoing education of could be individuals that maybe didn't go through the whole process but today find themselves without assets. It comes back to making the right investments in affordable housing and moving people from rental to ownership. We have a number of very exciting programs and opportunities there. A lot of education around financial management and that's not just for people who are poor that's for everybody.

FC: Are you actually mobilizing in that very activity right now?

MC: Yes where we're mobilizing particularly right now is this initiative or partnership with a number of partnerships for job creation and how we help individuals from an educational perspective going back to college, retraining and things of that nature and helping from that perspective.