Enrique Duhau is President of Administración E. Duhau S.A., one of the largest producers of grains and beef in Argentina. Educated in Buenos Aires, London, and New York, he was also co-founder of Apple Argentina and Maxim Software, which produced software for Apple products to be sold internationally. In 1990, he co-founded Junior Achievement Argentina, to teach young kids entrepreneurial abilities and philosophy.

**Kaizen:** Argentina is noted for its agriculture, and your company is a big part of that. Your story starts here in Buenos Aires?

**Duhau:** Yes, I was born here. My mother was born in England, but her parents were born in Argentina. And I have a long list of entrepreneurs on both sides.

**Kaizen:** Is entrepreneurship in your genes or is it family culture?

**Duhau:** Argentina was very, very entrepreneurial a century ago when my ancestors came here and it still maintains the culture. London Business School, where I studied, does an annual survey of many countries. Argentina is not at the top, but it is quite high on the list.

**Kaizen:** Is entrepreneurship in your genes or is it family culture?

**Duhau:** Argentina was very, very entrepreneurial a century ago when my ancestors came here and it still maintains the culture. London Business School, where I studied, does an annual survey of many countries. Argentina is not at the top, but it is quite high on the list.

**Kaizen:** When you were young, did you plan to go into business?

**Duhau:** Since I can recall, I’ve always dreamed about business and I discussed with my father different types of business and how I could make money.

**Kaizen:** So your university career was focused on business, then, both for your undergraduate and master’s degrees?

**Duhau:** Yes.

**Kaizen:** You also had further study at New York University?

**Duhau:** I took a short course at New York University. And I went six times to Harvard for a week-program organized by YPO, a business organization. I am always trying to keep up-to-date.

**Kaizen:** And later at London Business School? That was a formal master’s degree?
Duhau: Yes. It was very interesting and lots of fun.

Kaizen: So after you finished at the University of Buenos Aires with a bachelor’s degree you worked but simultaneously went to business school?

Duhau: I waited a few years to go back to school, got my share of successes and failures, and learned from experience.

Kaizen: After undergrad, what was your first job?

Duhau: The first thing I did was start a grain-trading business with a friend from college.

Kaizen: Actual commodities?

Duhau: Yes. We built a grain processing plant out in the country. I detected places where production was increasing and there were not enough traders. We set up the business and started buying grain from farmers, selling them seeds, and herbicides, and reselling to exporters.

Kaizen: What was your partner’s name?

Duhau: Carlos Scaffino. He was also the partner in my second venture at Apple Computer.

Kaizen: Did you start small with a little bit of capital?

Duhau: Yes. We started small. We got our capital from our personal savings and raised more from friends and family and added debt. The first couple of years were quite difficult; then we started doing well. When the best was coming, we were hit by a big tornado and the silo plant got destroyed. That was about four years after we started. So we decided to close down and start something new.

Kaizen: No insurance?

Duhau: We didn’t have insurance; it was too expensive in Argentina at the time.

Kaizen: Wiped out by a tornado? Ouch!

Duhau: Yes. [Laughs]

Kaizen: What year did you decide to get out of the grain-trading business?

Duhau: We started in 1976 and the tornado hit in 1980. Some people even saw cows flying! [Laughs]

Kaizen: You can laugh about it now, but that must have been difficult to go through.

Duhau: Yes it was.

Kaizen: Did you then shift into software?

Duhau: Before that—we started in 1983—I had learned that Apple was trying to find a new distributor for Argentina, so we went to Cupertino, California, and spoke with those in charge.

Kaizen: You and your partners?

Duhau: I had two partners: Scaffino, who came from my grain venture, and Antoine Thibaud, a French-Argentine with an engineering degree. It was a wonderful company. Apple was very small at that time, and you got to know everyone there, including Steve Jobs. It was very, very interesting. A wonderful experience.

Apple sent a team of managers to check us out. They interviewed four or five companies and listened to their presentations, and we won. For the next ten years we were their distributors and representatives.

Kaizen: What were you distributing?

Duhau: The computers and their software. Apart from their operating system they didn’t have much, but they had some software, accessories, printers, and monitors.

Kaizen: What made your proposal stand out to Apple?

Duhau: I think we understood better what Apple and the personal computer were. I had been using personal computers for three or four years; I was always fascinated by computers, even at an early age when you could only see a computer in a photo—you couldn’t even touch it. Computers were in labs, behind glass, and in air-conditioned rooms, and I couldn’t even get in.

Kaizen: Very much at the beginning of the personal computer revolution.

Duhau: Yes. Apple started in 1977. Microsoft and IBM were released in August of 1981. We started a couple of years after that.

Kaizen: Very cutting-edge. Was distribution in Argentina challenging? Or was there a business plan and you just followed the plan?

Duhau: Argentina has had problems for about 60 or 70 years now. It was a rich country—one of the richest in the world—and now we’ve had quite a few decades of decadence.

We signed the contract with Apple in August or September, and it was to begin October 1, 1983. On that same date, the government published that we could not import computers for about 90 days. There was a new government and they wanted to protect industry, so they thought they would develop a local computer industry by putting restrictions on imports.

Kaizen: Their protectionist policy specifically prohibited foreign computers?

Duhau: Yes. They thought that they could manufacture computers, yet they didn’t understand what a computer was. The view was that if you inserted a few chips and put everything together with a screwdriver, then you were making computers. But the value was not there; it was in the Operating System, design and marketing.
Jennifer Harrolle, a senior Philosophy major, won the Department’s annual Walhout Prize, named in honor of professor emeritus Donald Walhout. The prize honors a student who has achieved excellence in philosophy. In addition, over the past year Ms. Harrolle was awarded a scholarship to attend a week-long seminar on political economy at Utah State University and a student-faculty summer research award from Rockford University to work on a project on philosophical aesthetics.

Dr. Terry Noel visited Rockford University on March 28. He gave a talk entitled “The Virtuous Entrepreneur,” which included a discussion of the character traits of successful entrepreneurs. Dr. Noel is Associate Professor of Management and Quantitative Methods at Illinois State University. A video interview with Dr. Noel is available on the CEE website.

At this year’s High School Entrepreneur Day, co-sponsored by the EBA department and CEE, more than 120 local high school students learned about the facets of entrepreneurship from professors and received advice from a panel of local entrepreneurs. Students explored the personality traits of an entrepreneur, discussed the economics of entrepreneurship, and competed against each other in a business planning exercise. Students also received a gift from CEE of materials related to entrepreneurship and ethics.
ENRIQUE DUHAU, CONTINUED

**Kaizen:** How did you overcome that political challenge?

**Duhau:** We talked with the government and explained that we could also manufacture Apple computers. In the short-term we got some import licenses. Then they opened up imports, but set a 108½ percent import duty.

**Kaizen:** So a computer cost Argentines over twice as much.

**Duhau:** Then an enormous contraband started. So our competition was smugglers. We didn’t do that. As official representatives we couldn’t smuggle; we couldn’t run the risk of being in the newspaper.

Then we saw that there was a substantial business in software and that software would become much more important than hardware. Hardware, in the end, would become a commodity business with low margins. So we set up Maxim Software in 1985.

**Kaizen:** To make software for the Apple system?

**Duhau:** Yes, for the Apple Macintosh.

**Kaizen:** What kind of programs, for example?

**Duhau:** We developed programs for banks and financial companies for their trading desks. They would have the trading desk of currencies and bonds, and they would put maybe 10 or 15 Macintoshes there, collect them in a network, and trade through the computers. It worked very well.

**Kaizen:** Do you have a partner at this time or more than one partner?

**Duhau:** I had two partners in the hardware business, Scaffino and Thibaud, and an additional partner for software, Hector Goldin. They were all very smart and hardworking.

**Kaizen:** What was the division of labor among the four of you?

**Duhau:** Thibaud and Goldin were writing code, and Scaffino was in sales. I took care of the finances and marketing. It was a small market, but very profitable. We had one main client who paid for all of the development, and we had two or three other banks.

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“I ALWAYS KEPT GOOD RELATIONSHIPS WITH PEOPLE, EVEN PEOPLE I DIDN’T THINK FIT WITH THE COMPANY.”

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**Kaizen:** In the late 80s, Apple had some difficulties.

**Duhau:** Yes. In 1985 Apple fired Steve Jobs; that was a big mistake. The company started to lose profitability and market share. A decade later the company was nearly broke.

**Kaizen:** Yet you were successful, and in the late 1980s you received an award from Apple?

**Duhau:** Yes. We got a marketing award because of rapid growth. We sold thousands of computers even though they were more expensive than overseas. Part of that was profit by smugglers.

**Kaizen:** Your company. How many people were working there at its height?

**Duhau:** About 35 people. Our dealers had many more.

**Kaizen:** As a partner with management responsibilities, was that a new skill-set for you?

**Duhau:** No. I liked management; that’s what I had studied at university. I was good at making people work, making them enthusiastic about the product—Apple helped a lot. It was a very interesting product; full of innovations. Everyone was very enthusiastic about Apple computers.

**Kaizen:** When Apple was going through its difficulties and you decided to get out of Apple distribution, did you wind the company down or sell it off?

**Duhau:** We sold it off in 1993—ten years later—to other distributors. It was just in time. As margins were squeezed by competition, Apple placed a small office to do marketing in every country. They gave out the logistics for imports and actual sales to the distribution company. So did many other products at the same time.

**Kaizen:** If it’s not confidential, can you put some numbers to it? For example, how much sales revenue between 1983 and when you finished?

**Duhau:** By the end we were selling about $30 million.

**Kaizen:** Per year?

**Duhau:** Yes. And for Argentina, this was quite substantial. I think there was an equal amount in the hands of smugglers.

**Kaizen:** How did the smugglers bring the computers in?

**Duhau:** Through customs: they just bribed the agents. And as a libertarian, I can’t fault them. Smuggling shouldn’t exist: there should be just open markets.

**Kaizen:** The import controls made it hard for people to make a legitimate living.

**Duhau:** Yes.

**Kaizen:** Looking back, what did you enjoy the most about that 10 years in the software and computer distribution?

**Duhau:** I just loved being in the forefront of technology, enjoyed looking at new products, and talking with Apple. They were very open with us about all of the lines and products they were releasing. I was always fascinated by computers. I also liked talking to our clients because they loved them as well. And I enjoyed building our company—we had good people. I even sometimes enjoyed terminating employees because I always kept good relationships with people, even people I didn’t think fit with the company.

**Kaizen:** How do you do that? [Laughs]

**Duhau:** I think to have a good company, you need to have good people. Some people won’t fit or some people are not good enough, so it is essential to push them out. And to do it in good terms is important.

**Kaizen:** “Good terms”—does that mean being clear about expectations, but in a positive way so that people understand?
Duhau: And also try not to destroy the person’s self-image and reputation. Sometimes I tell them, “Maybe it’s our fault; maybe we do not fit with you.”

Kaizen: You next went into agriculture. How did that big shift of focus happen?

Duhau: Agriculture is the main industry in Argentina; it has always been quite an exciting business. It is my family’s business also. My father was retiring, so he wanted a new generation in the family to take over the business. I saw that there were many opportunities to grow. At the same moment my brother went in; so we took over the company.

Kaizen: How old were you at this point?

Duhau: I was about 42 years old.

Kaizen: When the transition occurred, what kinds of things did the family company do at that point?

Duhau: Agriculture and beef production.

Kaizen: The crops you grew—were they for human or cattle consumption?

Duhau: Mostly for cattle consumption, but also human. We used to do wheat and soybeans for oil, which are for human consumption. And corn for human and cattle consumption.

Kaizen: You also have cows?

Duhau: Yes, in the poorest lands. It also is the lowest return business, so we are getting out. But we grew in grain production, milk, and feedlot. We operate the largest feedlot in the country now.

Kaizen: Do you do your own distribution?

Duhau: No. We sell to meat-packing houses and to supermarkets.

Kaizen: What were the areas of biggest opportunity?

Duhau: One was feed-lot, which practically did not exist in Argentina. We traveled extensively. We went to the United States and visited many, many feed-lots and learned how to do it well. And we became the largest, especially by integrating grain production with the feed-lot.

Kaizen: Vertical integration to keep your costs down?

Duhau: Yes.

Kaizen: Argentina’s beef is world famous. What makes it distinctive?

Duhau: Part of it is the way it is cut and cooked. It’s very different from the way Americans do it. Another reason is that much of it is grass-fed. Even though we have feed-lots, more than half of what we give is grass—we don’t give just grains.

Kaizen: How about dairy?

Duhau: For dairy, we have about 2,000 cows; but we haven’t grown that business because there is a tremendous government interference. Government restricts exports and caps prices, so it is never a good business. Argentina has a fantastic opportunity in milk production, but we need free markets and less government interference. We are waiting for policies to change, and ready for a tenfold growth in the business.

Kaizen: And that’s not likely to happen because it is a politically sensitive product?

Duhau: Yes. But I think at some moment we’ll get a new government with new ideas and they’ll realize the way Chile, Peru, Colombia, Panama—that half of Latin America is going in the right way and that controls and restrictions are bad and cause poverty.

Kaizen: Your feed-lot section is the largest in Argentina. How many steers do you have?

Duhau: We fatten about 70,000 per year. It is a new industry. In the USA, I think the largest is 100,000. So we are getting there, we still have room to grow.

Kaizen: You’ve also invested in internet businesses?

Duhau: At the same time, I started an internet business in greeting cards. It’s very interesting because it is easy to launch in different countries; it doesn’t require logistics: cards are sent through the internet. It has worked in Spain; it’s relatively small in the United States; and it is more or less large in South America.

Kaizen: What is that company called?

Duhau: Correo Mágico, which is Spanish for Magic Mail.

Kaizen: To go back to agriculture: the best cropland is in the central part of Argentina?

Duhau: Yes.

Kaizen: In how many Argentine provinces does your company operate?

Duhau: In six provinces: two in the north and four in the center.

Kaizen: The center is the Pampas?

Duhau: Yes, the fertile Pampas.

Kaizen: What do the provinces in the north do?

Duhau: In the north, we produce crops: corn, soybean, sunflower, and cotton. Steers and dairy are in the central provinces.

Kaizen: How many employees overall in all of your operations?

Duhau: 220.

Kaizen: And when you started?

Duhau: When we took over there were about 45 people.

Kaizen: So you’ve grown about four or five times the size.

Duhau: Yes. In dollar sales we’ve gone up about eleven times.

Kaizen: How do you decide each year which crops to grow and in what quantities? Is it driven by what you think your cattle will need, or by commodity prices in Argentina and the rest of the world?

Duhau: Well, both. But first there are agricultural reasons. It’s important to rotate crops; it’s not good for the land to produce the same crop year after year.

We also look at the markets—especially the futures markets in Chicago and Buenos Aires. Agriculture is a very volatile business. We have market and climatic risks. We cope with them by planting in different parts of the country and in different planting seasons, to lessen the drought risk, and producing different crops.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 6
Agriculture is very different, because each plot of land is different, and the weather also differs regionally. So new technology is implemented locally because there are local differences, even on different plots, and especially on different farms and in different regions.

We also travel a lot to other countries. Two weeks ago I traveled to Brazil, for example, and visited quite a few farms. And we had a conference with farmers from the Ukraine, Russia, and South Africa. Three months ago I went to another conference in Mexico with farmers from Canada and the United States. We also travel a lot to the United States; it’s a country where you go to universities and discuss with scientists the new technologies. So every year we take ten or fifteen of our managers to the States—they are very enthusiastic about that. They get to see agriculture from a very different viewpoint. It’s very interesting and helps get cohesion in our group of managers.

**Kaizen:** With futures, you can choose how far in the future you want to go.

**Duhau:** Yes, up to two years forward.

**Kaizen:** Do you have a sub-group of employees who look after the commodities and trading in the futures? Or is that something you do yourself?

**Duhau:** My brother Alejandro and I watch the futures markets very closely. We have a group of people who work in markets, but we take a lot of care there; we put a lot of time into it.

**Kaizen:** When you hire people to work in this part of your company, are you looking for mathematics or economics graduates?

**Duhau:** No. We subcontract market advice to specialists. We also have, after many decades working at this, a good feel of the market.

**Kaizen:** Agriculture is a traditional business, but it is also very high-tech, particularly in the last century—agricultural equipment, hybrid crops, pesticides, and so on. So keeping innovative is an important part of agriculture. How do you do that at your company?

**Duhau:** In agriculture, an important fact is that every farm is different and every region is different. Industry technology has globalized; it is very similar in different parts of the world. Agriculture is very different, because each plot of land is different, and the weather also differs regionally. So new technology is implemented locally because there are local differences, even on different plots, and especially on different farms and in different regions.

**Kaizen:** So are you then in fairly constant communication?

**Duhau:** With people in our organization, communications is constant: weekdays and weekends. Agriculture is a business that goes on day and night.

**Kaizen:** Have you segmented your time by area—how much is finance, how much is marketing, how much is reading technical stuff, how much is travel? Or is it just all mixed together?

**Duhau:** It is all mixed together. But maybe twenty percent of my time I read. I answer emails for about an hour and a half. I talk on the phone with our managers. And I look at the markets maybe ten percent of the day. The rest is finance and the basics—the boring part: accounting, and that sort of thing. [Laughs] But it has to be done.

**Kaizen:** Argentina is very rich in natural resources, with an entrepreneurial culture and immigrants from all over the world. But it also has high levels of poverty. Why is Argentina struggling?

**Duhau:** Because about 70 years ago Argentina closed its economy, abandoned free markets, and started over-regulating. The government at that moment thought that you could develop industry by restricting imports, which I think was a big mistake. Instead what you develop is protected industries that are inefficient and can never compete. With open markets you develop much stronger industries. The truth is that over the last few years the countries that have grown are countries that have open markets with very low import duties and low taxes.

**Kaizen:** Can you give some examples?

**Duhau:** One close example is Chile. Thirty years ago, Chile decreased import taxes for all products to a flat ten percent. Since they have lowered them to a two percent average. Before that they had duties of up to 200%. Then the Chilenos had—from 1990 to 2009—leftist governments, and those leftist governments kept the free-market policies and even reduced import duties to four percent. They also signed free-trade agreements with more than 60 or 70 countries: United States, Canada, Mexico, with all of America, Europe and Asian countries.

**Kaizen:** So if Chile is a clear success example, why has that not come to Argentina? Economic ignorance? Vested interests?

**Duhau:** I think it is a bit of both. But economic ignorance is the bigger part of it.

**Kaizen:** They don’t see that protected industries become lazy and inefficient?

**Duhau:** But after you do protectionism for a few years, you have many workers who are working in those protected industries, so they become a factor also.

**Kaizen:** The protected workers don’t want to lose those perks and that support?

**Duhau:** Right.

**Kaizen:** Would you say, then, that to turn things around in Argentina, the biggest single step would be eliminating the import–export regulations?

**Duhau:** Yes. Then you would also have to reduce all regulation—the entire economy is currently regulated. You also have to reduce taxes. Taxes are way too high. In agriculture, we pay about 80 percent of the value we create to the government.

**Kaizen:** Eighty percent?

**Duhau:** Yes. It is a ridiculous amount.

**Kaizen:** Outside of your business career, you were a professor at ESEADE, the graduate school of business here in Buenos Aires?

**Duhau:** Yes. That was for a few years many years ago, but I’ve always been involved. I’ve always believed in free minds and free markets—I believe in freedom. Argentina would
have a tremendous opportunity to reduce poverty and to grow if we adopted free-market policies and a better political system.

**Kaizen:** What was your role in getting Junior Achievement in Argentina up and running?

**Duhau:** I was one of the founders. We were a team of six business people, and we were very involved in the management and to help get donations every year to make it work. Every two years we would name a new president, who was always a high-profile businessman. Eight years ago, it was my turn; I was chairman for two years. It’s doing quite well, although we haven’t been quite able to change Argentina. But there are many, many entrepreneurs who began their interest in business there.

**Kaizen:** In your experience, which of those traits is most essential in being successful as an entrepreneur?

**Duhau:** Well, I think you need quite a few traits, but one is being a good communicator. You have to transmit enthusiasm to the people involved, especially to your employees. These people are a part of your team—you are partners. But also to your clients, your suppliers, the bank—who will finance your operation. Many times you will go to the bank, and the bank will look at the situation and say, “Look, this is not good business for me.” But when he sees your enthusiasm—there’s a contagion there.

**Kaizen:** Good enthusiasm. Where does that come from? From really believing in your product?

**Duhau:** Yes. From passion. It’s having the traits of a salesperson selling your project, your product, the business you are in.

**Kaizen:** So if you are talking to younger people, is the lesson first to find your passion, find something that you are very interested in?

**Duhau:** You have to work very long hours—and you’ll have very low pay, especially at first. The only way you can get through all of that is passion. And you’ll have your family, maybe your wife, saying, “Why are you losing your time on this and not working at Citibank where you can have a good salary?” You’ll also have to convince her that this is the best way. You’ll have to convince everyone of that.

Of course resilience, the ability to have a fall, to have a problem, and to pull yourself up by your bootstraps is very, very important—in life and also in business. You’ll always have failures and problems, and many times people will say, “You are finished.” Your will and your passion will get you over the problem.

The other part is selecting a good business. The businesses which are very, very difficult or which are for big investors—you can only make them work with large amounts of money. So maybe they are not for an entrepreneur.

**Kaizen:** So business schools are adapting?

**Duhau:** Yes. Some people who have been tremendously successful, like Bill Gates and Steve Jobs, were dropouts. But I think they are geniuses, so for the rest of us, we need business school.

**Kaizen:** As you look back, has something consistently been the most satisfying part of being an entrepreneur? Being your own boss? Seeing your business grow?

**Duhau:** For me, interfacing with people is always fascinating: talking to customers, talking to employees. And seeing them and the business grow. It never is the end result of making a lot of money that is the satisfaction; it’s always the ride.

When you look back, the best years are when you were three or four people in an office working all day and all night to get the shipment out—that brings you the most satisfaction.

**Kaizen:** What advice would you give to young people at the beginning of their careers about how to make their careers the most successful and enjoyable?

**Duhau:** Well, as I said, to follow your passion. I think passion is a much more important mover than just money. Steve Jobs’s objective was to change the world one person at a time and to put a computer in front of every person in the world. I think if you want to change the world, you do it with objectives like that; you can’t change the world by just wanting to make millions. No one would follow you. But many people will follow if you want to change the world.

Also, talk with industry movers and shakers. Some people are a bit intimidated, but it is incredible how many of these people—if you just knock on the door or give them a call—they will receive you and talk to you. It’s a very good way to learn what the opportunities are and where the industry is moving.

Then, try to get a good mentor. Mentors are very helpful. They can help you prevent a lot of mistakes.

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**This interview was conducted for Kaizen by Stephen Hicks. For more information about Enrique Duhau, please email him at eud@admin.com.ar.**
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