In the spring of 1981 Donald Calvin Burr, former Wall Street analyst of aviation stocks and former rescuer of a nosediving Texas airline, founded People Express with three used Boeing 737s purchased from Lufthansa and 250 employees. Today, the company has more than 60 planes, 4,000 employees, over a half-billion dollars in assets, and is the tenth busiest airline in the country, carrying nearly one million passengers per month. With the addition of several aircraft scheduled for delivery next month, the airline will have 73 planes in use, and that, according to one source, is the fastest growth in aviation history.

As amazing as the success and growth of People's, is the manner in which it has been achieved. Don Burr leads a company that has no traditional supervisors, no secretaries and no organization charts. People employees belong to no union and are expected to perform a variety of tasks — it's called "cross-utilization".

Mr. Burr's interest in aviation is inborn. As a child he was fascinated by airplanes, and he and his older brother often visited the airport just to watch the planes come and go. At Stanford University, however, he reluctantly shelved his hobby, deciding instead to major in English and go on to law school. By chance, a conversation with two visitors to Stanford, W. Peter Slusser, an investment banker, and Keith Funston, chief of the New York Stock Exchange, changed all of that. Both encouraged Burr to enter the world of business. Don Burr graduated with a major in economics, earned his private pilot's license, received his MBA from Harvard, and joined the National Aviation Corporation a small Wall Street Securities firm. Eight years later, at 30 years of age,
he was named president of the organization.

In 1973, Mr. Burr went to work for Texas International Airlines, a small regional carrier in Houston. By 1978, with Mr. Burr as chief operating officer, the airline had become profitable. He was named president but resigned six months later, stating that the company "had no vision, no excitement."

The federal government deregulated the airline industry in 1978 and opened the door for Don Burr to start his own airline. People Express began business in the best location Burr could obtain — an unpromising corner of Newark Airport's North Terminal. Some experts believed that the location itself would kill the business before it got off the ground. But Burr persisted, aided by the ready supply of venture capital funds, the availability of cheap aircraft, and a large pool of experienced airline personnel who had been laid off by other airlines and were willing to accept lower, nonunion wages in return for a piece of the action. In 1981 People Express... took off!

Today, the successful People's operates, as it did in its infancy, on the theory that people will work harder and have a better time at it if they are given four ingredients: a financial stake in the company; the opportunity to learn and hold a variety of jobs; an organizational structure that allows employees to make large and small decisions based upon a company philosophy and tradition; a sense of belonging, not just to a company but to a family. It is a family that has been created by Donald Burr, and one of which he and its members are justifiably proud.
Rupert Murdoch has been called an unusual mixture — part accountant, part gambler, part brilliant marketer, and part shrewd journalist. No one can deny, however, that at age 54, the Australian publishing magnate has successfully parlayed a struggling two-paper publishing company into a three-continent publishing empire.

Born in Melbourne in 1931, Mr. Murdoch was the only son of Sir Keith Murdoch, founder of Australia’s biggest media company. While a student at Oxford, he spent his summers on London’s Fleet Street, learning the newspaper business by working on Beaverbrook’s Daily Express. After graduation, Mr. Murdoch remained in England for two years, returning to Australia in 1954 to take over News Limited, a small South Australian publishing firm in which his late father had bought a controlling interest two years earlier. Under his leadership, the company diversified into magazines, radio and television.

In 1960, Mr. Murdoch moved to Sydney, taking over the ailing Daily Mirror, an afternoon tabloid. The vigorous competition which broke out between the Mirror and its rival raised the circulation of both papers. It also established Rupert Murdoch as a force to be reckoned with in the publishing industry. By 1964 News Limited was operating as a truly national Australian organization, publishing newspapers in every state, with profits of $1.5 million. Mr. Murdoch launched The Australian, the
country’s first and only national daily, printed by electronic facsimile process simultaneously in four cities. It is now Australia’s most influential daily, with a heavy emphasis on national politics, foreign news, business and the arts.

News Limited acquired the western world’s largest selling newspaper The News of the World in 1969. Shortly after, the British company, renamed News International, purchased the ailing national daily, The Sun, formerly the Daily Herald, and successfully relaunched it as a tabloid.


Escort: Bethany Wood
Roland Smith
Peter J. Sprague might easily be considered a modern-day Don Quixote, tilting at corporate windmills. But, unlike The Knight of the Sorrowful Countenance, Sprague finds that his tilting can turn unsuccessful ventures into profits.

Why does Peter Sprague reserve his time, money and efforts for risks that any sane person would run from? "For the money," he says. "But only on occasion. More often for the challenge of doing it. And for the ego satisfaction."

Sprague's entrepreneurial career began in 1962 while he was still a graduate student at Columbia University. "I had this grand idea to feed the world," he says. "I wrote a paper on my ideas and sent a copy to Columbia and another to the government." He received an 'A' in the course and $280,000 from the government as start-up capital for a chicken farm in Iran.

Two years later Sprague became interested in National Semiconductor, a young company in trouble, facing a lawsuit from Sperry Rand for theft of trade secrets. He liked what he saw and, weighing the company's growth potential against the likelihood of the legal problems being resolved, he began buying up available stock. National settled with Sperry for about $260,000, payable over three years. The company, however, was not out of trouble yet. It had fewer than 25 shareholders and was not considered a publicly-owned company. Sprague persuaded a friend at Allen & Co., a New York investment firm, to list National Semiconductor on the pink sheets for over-the-counter trading. Then he let people know where they could buy stock in the company. In two
years, shareholders went from less than 25 to more than 2600. In 1966, Sprague became chairman of the board of National. He hired a new president and gave him free rein. His confidence in the new management was well rewarded. National’s sales doubled annually over the next three years, profitability increased, and the stock started to climb. The then 27-year old chairman of the board had turned his first company around.

Ten years ago, while reading the New York Times, Sprague noticed an obituary for Aston Martin, the British manufacturer of luxury sports cars. "It would have been a pity to see one of England’s national treasures disappear," he says. However, the English felt that it would be nearly as bad to see Aston Martin sold to an American. After four months, Sprague found a British ‘partner,’ Alan Curtis, and a deal to buy Aston Martin was struck. To get an indication of the integrity of Peter Sprague, one has but to listen to him discuss the Aston Martin purchase. "It was a marvelous purchase and would have been even better if I had closed it down. I could have joined the ranks of British asset strippers, relatively easy to do and quite satisfying financially, and walked away with a $4.5 million profit. But the trouble is I also bought the obligation to make Aston-Martins. That is a glorious challenge to someone in my line of work."

At present, Sprague’s line of work continues to be close coordination of the activities of National Semiconductor, serving as a director of Caesars World, Inc., and Caesars New Jersey, Inc., and Dunhill Trading, Inc. as well as serving as vice-chairman of the board of Display Sciences, Inc. Who is willing to say, however, what new project might excite Peter Sprague tomorrow?

Like Quixote of old, the threads of some lopsided dream are woven through Peter Spragues life. He has incited a riot in Helsinki, started a chicken farm in Iran, photographed the invasion of Hungary, and honeymooned in Outer Mongolia. He has always sought the road less traveled ... and he has chosen it.