



Women in Leadership Seminar Highlights September 14, 2007



“Overcoming Adversity: An Extraordinary Journey” – featuring Sara Gonzalez, President & CEO, Georgia Hispanic Chamber of Commerce. Her personal journey from political refugee to one of Georgia’s “power brokers” is marked by twists of fate and her own self-professed tenacity and persistence. Quote: “Fidel Castro has done a lot of bad things, but in a way he changed me, who I am and who I was supposed to be.” A 2006 Atlanta “DIVA,” YWCA “Woman of Achievement” and most recently, “Legendary Leader Award” - Ms. Gonzalez continues to be recognized and honored for her innovative and boundless leadership. Her inspiring story attests to the belief that for an enterprising woman, nothing is impossible.

- Most recent recognition: Purpose Prize – major new initiative to invest in Americans over 60 who are leading a new age of social innovation (www.purposeprize.org/finalists/winners2007.cfm)
 - o Ms. Gonzalez – a \$10,000 award winner; one of 40 “fellows”
 - o Criteria: Capable, energetic, active in the community / over 1000 nominees
 - o Recognized for her efforts in incubating new Hispanic businesses and linking them to the larger business world
 - o Nominated by her daughter
 - o Honor Ceremony takes place for three days at Stanford University over November 9 –11, 2007

- Sara’s thoughts on Retirement
 - o “Only know I’m old because I see myself in the mirror” – The day I don’t like what I’m doing is the day I’ll do something else -- Don’t like the word retire – Find something you like, are passionate about...”
 - o “My hobby is my office, my work and my fun -- I am the Latina Johnny Apple-seed – as a boss, I’m flexible, not by the book – I never knew where my life would take me ”

- Life’s Journey / Background
 - o Grew up in Cuba – attended a convent school – rec’d degree equivalent to 2 years college in US
 - o Got married early / cultural expectation. Had 2 children / daughters.

- Then came the revolution / Castro changed everything!! -- Left Cuba in 1960 to take a “vacation” to New York City for 6 months which turned into 7 years -- Never able to return -- Later divorced.
 - At that time, just went with the flow – moved to Miami, had nothing – Worked at car dealership as receptionist and did a little modeling for fun.
 - Remarried GA Tech grad, moved to Chapel Hill, NC and had 3rd daughter. – Worked PT, then relocated with family to Boston for husband’s fellowship (he was a doctor) – Relocated again to ATL for husband’s job at Emory – later divorced, 5 years now.
- Learning Experiences
 - Live alone now, and loves it! Doesn’t do e-Harmony! “Me time”. Parents both deceased and was only child. Daughters grown now.
 - Arrived in ATL, needed to do something. Opened Cuban cuisine restaurant – very hard work – people didn’t really understand the cuisine. Had to “sell” everyday. Not financially successful and decided to close business. Received rave and positive reviews, but it was grueling experience.
 - The day she decided to close the doors, USA Today published a very positive review! Too late. But she’s an optimist, glass always half full!
 - Became a sales associate for one year at Nieman Marcus but did not enjoy the experience at all.
- The Beginning of the Georgia Hispanic Chamber of Commerce
 - Through the Hispanic Association, which was a United Way agency, learned that the Latin American Association (LAA) was looking for a receptionist -- LAA had very little money so decided to host a fund raiser called Latin Fever --LAA became better known
 - Later, took a position that needed a Latina to be a liaison between the 1996 Olympic Games (ACOG) and the Latin community; had to find volunteers to host the Latin countries – Worked hard for boss, Shirley Franklin! Great experience!
 - Later was asked if interested in heading up a volunteer assignment - Atlanta Hispanic Chamber of Commerce --“This opened up a tremendous door for me, and I walked right through it”. They said “Take this ball and run with it” – Took responsibility. Needed members- paying members.
 - Believed so much in the Latinos and their work ethic --Wanted to get corporate America to know who we were.
- Path to Today’s Success
 - City Hall, crooked place before the arrival of Shirley Franklin; big changes occurred when she came in
 - Corporate America finally came around- “I finally taught them to eat black beans”
 - One day a Policeman came into her Doraville office and said he spends most of his time helping Latinos to start their own businesses. They

usually have a box with money in it with no knowledge of how to start their business. They would give someone \$500 of their money to take care of all the formalities of starting a business and then never see them or their money again.

- He said, can you help? Found a place to present a seminar on opening a business in Georgia -- Hosted a business incubator for Hispanic businesses entitled - HACHED
 - Today, almost 60 seminars are offered to teach Latinos how the system of opening a business works in Georgia -- Home Depot works with them and UPS has given grants for the business incubators.
- Comments on Passion, Immigration, Successes, and History
- Anna Cablik is a Latina multi-millionaire here in ATL; she started a construction company
 - Hispanic is a term invented by the 1980 consensus to help specify the people that marked the group “Other” on their forms.
 - Spaniards killed all the Native Americans in Cuba- so there’s no Indian influence in Cuban culture
 - Wish for a time just be able to pick male or female on forms instead of having to specify “race” or “ethnicity”
 - Instead of retiring I might someday “restructure” my life -- many passions -- animals, domestic violence etc
 - Latin Chic- Ralph de laVega had a signing party for (Sara Gonzalez)
 - “Be responsible for you, don’t depend on anyone else, go get it”
 - Re immigration issues
 - Find out who your local political representative is or your senator, research their views on immigration, and if they’re pro-immigration don’t vote for them
 - When you see an immigrant who looks tired and dirty, don’t look down on them; think about what they went through to get here to even work that job.
 - Remember, Atl would not have had the Olympics were it not for the Hispanics who helped build the venues on time
 - Current situation breaks her heart - HS drop out rate for Hispanaice kids has sky-rocketed because they’re afraid their parents will be deported and they give up. Super-complicated situation for the Feds to work out. .