

LEADERSHIP BY THE MANY

THE POWER OF LATINO INCLUSION

by Juana Bordas

For generations, the centerpiece of mainstream leadership was the individual leader. This fashioned a hierarchical form that worked in an assembly-line in which people followed orders and looked to the boss for direction. Today, our economy centers on service, technology, communications, and industries such as health care, where people skills, joint problem solving, and on-the-spot decision making are required. Civil rights, diversity, and globalization have also transformed leadership.

Effective leaders, therefore, create inclusive environments that encourage diverse people to generate viable solutions and desired results. Leaders must be able to hand over the reins and shift the locus of control from *I* as the leader to *We*—the people served by the leader. In response to these changes, leadership has become more collaborative, people centered, and inclusive.

Latino leadership is in sync with these changes because Latinos come from a *We* or people-centered culture. They are natural collaborators, having learned to contribute to their families and community at an early age. Values such as reciprocity, cooperation,

and generosity encourage collaboration. This is encapsulated in the revered Latino saying *mi casa es su casa*.

Moreover, Latinos are inherently diverse. They are white, brown, red, chocolate, or latte and all the colors in between. From a historical context, Latinos are hybrids—mainly the Spanish and Indigenous people of this hemisphere, but many Latinos have mixed ancestry from other countries. Latino leaders have to motivate and guide people who come from many backgrounds and races.

Latinos are connected by language and culture to twenty-two countries and through a special kinship with Brazil, Portugal, Italy, and the Philippines. Latinos are also an integrating force of the Western Hemisphere—bridging North, South, and Central America. Historical connections across the world give the Latino culture an international flair that is being revitalized by immigration, technology, travel, and globalization. Latino leadership, therefore, is global in scope. These differences drive an inclusive leadership form rooted in the culture's expansive diversity that welcomes people's

contributions and nurtures participation—Latino leadership, therefore, is *leadership by the many*.

Leadership by the many has also been reinforced by the wave of Hispanic immigration in the last quarter of the twentieth century. The Latino community embraces immigration as a human and civil rights issue. Integrating immigrants into the American way of life has been an ongoing leadership challenge.

This speaks to another Latino dynamic that impels leadership by the many. As minorities who have endured discrimination and have not reached equity, Latino leadership has entailed ardent community organizing and social action. Activist leadership requires the *fuerza*, or strength, of many hands and many voices. Leaders share responsibility, and through collective action grow a community of leaders.

Leadership scholar and activist John Gardner believed that our volatile times would require “a whole army of leaders.” He predicted, “I can’t emphasize strongly enough that we are at a historical moment. The next America is going to be forged at the grass roots. It is going to emerge from the communities of our great nation.” Arturo Vargas, executive director of the National Association of Latino Elected and Appointed Officials (NALEO), concurs: “We’re not going to have one charismatic leader who’s going to bring everybody together. It’s thousands of leaders. It’s thousands of movements in thousands of communities across the country, whether its immigrants who are organizing at a local level or the head of a nonprofit mobilizing his community or the young politician that gets elected to office. It’s a different kind of leadership—it’s much more inclusive.”

Likewise, Sylvia Puente, who heads up Chicago’s Latino Policy Forum, understands the power of leadership by the many: “Our strength lies in our numbers, in our collaborative work with hundreds and hundreds of community members. Every day we’re working to train community members—more than five hundred this year—in parent education, fair housing, and to understand the complexities of immigration reform. Then they become community leaders in these areas.”

Culturally Centered Leadership

With such a colorful array of family-centered, hard-working, fiesta-loving people, one might wonder, What could possibly keep this sundry group together? What are the connecting points of the Latino culture?

Much like the Jewish community, Latinos are an ethnic or cultural group. The culture is woven together by a common history, heritage, spiritual tradition, and the Spanish language. *Most important, the culture is integrated by shared values such as respect, honesty, service, and generosity.*

Two core cultural dynamics are a humanistic (people) orientation and a love of diversity. *Relationships are the heart of the culture!* Many values, therefore, emphasize the way people should relate to and treat one another. This affects the relationship leaders have with people. Treating people like *familia*, being generous, having respect for everyone regardless of status or position, always keeping one’s word, and being of service are pillars of Latino leadership.

As a *We* or collective culture, the *familia* and community take precedence over the individual. People and community are emphasized more than material wealth or individual achievement. Honorable Anna Escobedo Cabral, former U.S. treasurer, has seen this tendency in her extensive work with Latino leaders: “Our ultimate motivation is a concern for the people we serve.” Leadership, therefore, is not driven by individual success or credit, but by contributing to the group welfare.

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Latino Leadership Principles

The principles and practices of leadership are rooted in the rich Latino culture. Just as important, leadership has been strongly affected by the historical and social status of Latinos. Leaders have transformed the tribulations of being colonized and deemed minorities to the incredible influence Latinos have today. They are building a tradition of socially responsible and community-based leadership that was revitalized in the 1960s when César Chávez and the United Farm Workers marched for fair pay and humane working conditions.

Five principles fundamental to Latino leadership are overviewed next. These are (1) an intergenerational spirit, (2) the leader as equal, (3) *juntos*: collective community stewardship, (4) *Sí, se puede* (Yes we can!)—Social activism and coalition building, and (5) *Gozar la vida*—(Leadership that celebrates life!)

Intergenerational Spirit

Latino inclusiveness is evident in the way the culture embraces all ages and stages of life. By grooming the younger generation, leaders strengthen community capacity, ensure continuity, and build the critical mass needed for social change. Unlike societies in which people retire, Latinos honor their elders, who remain in leadership roles and continue contributing. Former San Antonio mayor Julián Castro, who serves as U.S. Secretary of Housing and Urban Affairs, speaks to this: “People from different generations need to work together. This way we can preserve our history, keep the integrity of those who came before, and young people will understand the sacrifices made in the past. Otherwise young people may compromise and lose their culture. Only by staying connected across generations can we keep moving forward together.”

An intergenerational approach is crucial today because an immense generation shift is occurring. The millennials are the largest and most diverse generation in history. Because more than 20 percent of millennials are Latino and were raised in traditional *We* cultures; they value connectivity and group welfare over individual reward. In fact, millennials have been

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termed the *We* generation. Latino leaders capitalize on these preferences by supporting *circular relationships* that foster participation, support, and mutual learning among different ages.

Young people share in the decision-making power and are equal players. Cooperation among generations requires older leaders to shake off previous beliefs that they know best or should be in charge. Young people must develop patience, learn from and respect the achievements of those who have come before them. Dr. Antonia Pantoja, who started the ASPIRA Association to empower Puerto Rican and Latino youth, had a knack for building circular relationships and encouraging young people to share responsibility: “What do you do about the future? I make the future. You make the future. We make the future together.”

The Leader as Equal

Creating a community of leaders is essential when a group’s advancement depends on people power, collective resources, and a critical mass of skilled and motivated people. Ironically, one way leaders develop people is by staying a part of the group, being humble, and not getting snarled in the web of power or money. This facilitates people’s identification with the leader as “being one of us” and reflects that *the leader is one among equals*.

Such leaders roll up their sleeves, stuff envelopes, serve food, attend community functions, and pick people up for meetings. Any type of elitism or projection that one is above a certain task lessens credibility and reestablishes hierarchy. This would reinforce their “minority” status and lack of influence of Latinos who struggled with exclusion and discrimination. Standing

out too far from others or calling too much attention to oneself can damage the group cohesion so central to collectivist cultures.

In the hierarchical system a leader might take big bonuses, fancy perks, or fat salaries. The *leader as equal*, however, cannot take more than his share. When the leader assumes no special status and works side by side with people, this levels the playing field, so others believe they too can become leaders. The result is authentic collaboration through which people work as equals to attain mutual goals. Because everyone can contribute, leadership is rotated depending on the task or function. In a truly equitable environment the *We* identity is strengthened and mutuality flourishes. When people feel connected,—they reinforce each other’s motivation and commitments,—and *leadership by the many* is cultivated.

Juntos:—Collective Community Stewardship

As noted, the Latino culture has strong family ties, community bonds, and centers on the collective. Leadership flows from this orientation. This spirit is captured in the word *juntos*, which means “union, being close, joining, being together”—and expresses the principle of collective community stewardship.

In a community that grapples with historical disparities, countless needs, great diversity, and burgeoning growth, keeping people involved and motivated takes a great deal of patience and perseverance. Raul Yzaguirre, president emeritus of the National Council of La Raza, who basically wrote the handbook for Latino advancement, advises, “We have to have a strategy of little victories. We can change things but in bite-size pieces. Leaders need to think big, but it is the little success that builds people’s self-confidence. Having both a long-term vision and building sequential steps, *paso a paso*, keeps people moving and motivated. As people succeed, their vision of what is possible to accomplish becomes wider and more expansive.”

Paso a paso—a step-by-step approach—is a strategic leadership tool that requires planning, analytical thought, careful execution, and incrementally building

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on progress. It reminds people that by staying on track and remaining focused, small contributions add up and collective efforts pay off.

Leaders recognize that it took generations for Latinos to advance. By remembering the struggles of their parents and grandparents, people find the resilience and courage to continue working for Hispanic progress. The past has made Latinos stronger, wiser, more resourceful, and determined. Former Congresswoman Hilda Solis, the first Latina to sit on a president’s cabinet as secretary of the Department of Labor, captures this spirit. “We are persistent and continue to move along even in the hardest and worst times. We move forward and we’re relentless. We don’t give up.”

***¡Sí, se Puede!*—Social Activism and Coalition Building**

The shaping of leadership as social activism was a natural evolution for collective cultures in which protecting and sustaining the *We* is the heart of a leader’s responsibility. Bringing people together, reinforcing a strong sense of culture and community, and articulating a vision that inspires people are the preludes to the real work of Latino leaders—*concerted and collective community action*.

Changing the social and economic conditions that perpetuate inequality necessitates a coalition and activist leadership form that builds a critical mass of people. Latino leaders propel social change by building coalitions *internally* with Latino subgroups and *externally* with other groups. Let’s look at how internal

and external coalition building complement each other to build the Latino community's capacity.

Many national Latino organizations are coalitions. The National Council of La Raza (NCLR), for instance, is the largest civil rights and advocacy organization in the country—a coalition of more than three hundred community-based organizations from every Latino subgroup. These organizations have joined forces in order to have a national impact on issues such as education, jobs, employment, health, and homeownership. Likewise, realizing that one organization trying to influence corporate America would be a voice crying in the wilderness, the Hispanic Association for Corporate Responsibility (HACR) was started by a group of leaders in 1986. HACR builds internal coalitions within the Hispanic community and external partnerships with corporate America. As a coalition of the sixteen largest and most influential national Latino organizations, HACR represents such diverse constituencies as Hispanic businesses, youth-serving organizations, veterans, publishers, women's leadership, and Hispanic-serving colleges and universities.

Building external coalitions requires leaders to assume the role of cultural brokers who can identify resources and organizational supporters. Brokers are able to maneuver in multiple cultures and articulate the benefits of forming partnerships and coalitions. This was a trademark of Solis's terms as a congresswoman: "I learned to engage with people in other communities and include them in helping me address issues and develop policies. Leaders have to build networks, to always be inclusive, to show people that good things can come out of working together, that there is more strength in numbers." *Si se Puede* is a roll-up-your-sleeves kind of leadership—good old fashion community organizing, coalition building, and advocacy.

¡Gozar la Vida!—Celebrate Life!

The band is blaring. People are conversing at full throttle, waving their hands and making expressive gestures. Everyone is talking at the same time. The noise level is decibels above a cocktail party of people from the mainstream or majority culture. Bright colors,

spicy food, and having fun are mainstays. Latinos spend more money on food, entertainment, restaurants, and music than other market segments. In a culture that regenerates through fiestas and celebrations, *gozar la vida* flavors the leadership process to be a celebratory and congenial process.

Leaders make tasks exciting, meaningful, a chance to work with friends and make new ones. Before and after any gathering or meeting, a social window must be open to allow people to connect. A hard-and-fast rule is to celebrate small and large wins, *and always serve food*. Community celebrations strengthen bonds, bolster collective identity, and create communal memories.

The Latino culture revolves around the oral tradition—talking, expressing feelings, and storytelling. Communication, therefore, is a quintessential leadership trait, especially in a community that gets things done through people. Leaders must hone their ability to converse in a heartwarming, inspiring, and convincing manner. One valued trait is charisma, by which leaders speak with passion, are persuasive, and move people to action.

Latinos also relish expressing affection *or cariño*. As a leadership trait, *cariño* is the emotional current connecting people with their leader. A survey by National Community of Latino Leadership indicated Latinos wanted their leaders to be *loving and kind and part of the family*. In a world where many feel isolated and alienated, expressing *cariño* is a special contribution Latinos leaders make. Leaders demonstrate how truly caring for people and seeing them as *familia*—holds people together during difficult times and makes the journey more enjoyable. Like good cooks, Latinos are simply stirring the *salsa* and *gusto* into leadership.

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Conclusion

Leading and managing our great diversity is a key challenge of this century. According to the U.S. Census, it is projected that by 2050 there will be no dominant culture and the United States will be a mosaic society. Latinos will make up 30 percent of the population. Because of its inherent diversity, Latino leadership is a model for including people from many backgrounds and countries. Leaders leverage the power of inclusion by bringing people together to appreciate differences,

find common ground, build coalitions, and embrace partnerships.

Many people today lament the lack of social and civic engagement in the United States. Yet the Latino social change agenda is gaining momentum—fueled by immigration, growing numbers, and a strong Latino identity. Latino leadership holds the promise of a new America with inclusiveness and active citizenship at its core. It is uniquely suited for today’s diverse, global, and collaborative age. Latino leadership is of, by, and for the many.

Latino Leadership Principles

Principle	Overview	Leadership Application
<p>La Cultura <i>Culturally based leadership</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Latinos are a culture and ethnic group, not a race. • Values are the fastening points for the culture. • A humanistic orientation (people come first) and diversity and inclusion are cultural mainstays. • Latinos are very diverse and are connected to twenty-six different countries. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A “We” orientation drives collective shared leadership. • Be <i>simpatico</i>—congenial, likable, easy to get along with. • Respect, honesty, service, and generosity are central to leadership. • Establish personal ties and be part of the <i>familia</i>. • Forging a collective identity from diversity is a Latino leader’s ongoing work.
<p>An Intergenerational Sprit <i>Inclusivity across generations</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Latino inclusiveness embraces all ages and stages of life. • Elders remain in leadership roles and continue contributing. • Millennials are the largest and most diverse generation in history. • Intergenerational leadership promotes continuity, strengthens capacity, and builds critical mass. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support <i>circular relationships</i> that foster participation, support, and learning among different ages. • Honor the contributions of those who came before. • Understand millennial values such as connectivity and group welfare. • Provide meaningful decision making and leadership roles for young people.
<p>The Leader As Equal <i>Create a community of leaders</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The leader as equal levels the playing field, so others believe they too can be leaders. • This facilitates people’s identification with the leader as “being one of us.” • An equitable environment strengthens a <i>We</i> identity and mutuality flourishes. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be part of the group and work side by side with people. • Follow the rules: Do not assume special privileges. • Practice humility, modesty, and courtesy, the foundation for the leader as equal. • Find ways everyone can contribute, rotate, and share leadership based on task or function.
<p>Juntos <i>Collective community stewardship</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Juntos</i> means union, being close, joining, being together. • Latinos are servant leaders and community stewards. • Leadership is conferred by the community and followers. • Leaders build a community of leaders and community capacity. 	<p>The leader as equal—Four practices anchor the collaboration process:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Shared vision 2. Integrating history and cultural traditions 3. Shared responsibility 4. <i>Paso a paso</i>

Latino Leadership Principles (contd.)

Principle	Overview	Leadership Application
<p><i>Si se Puede</i> <i>Social activist and coalition leadership</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Economic discrepancies and social inequalities drive a social activist agenda. • <i>Si se Puede</i> is a community organizing, coalition building, and advocacy form of leadership. • The Latino model is <i>leadership by the many</i>. • The inclusive Latino agenda speaks to the welfare of all Americans. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Build people’s faith that they take action. • Practice <i>consistencia</i>—perseverance and commitment. • Build networks, be inclusive, and forge coalitions. • Be cultural brokers and build partnerships with other groups.
<p><i>Gozar La Vida</i> <i>Leadership that celebrates life!</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Latinos have a celebratory, expressive, optimistic, and festive culture. • Celebration strengthens bonds and collective identity and reinforces people’s resolve. • Latinos are stirring the <i>salsa</i> and <i>gusto</i> into leadership. • Communication is key for getting things done through people. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leadership is congenial, includes good times and time to socialize. • Leaders communicate with <i>carisma</i> (charisma), <i>cariño</i> (affection), and <i>corazón</i> (heart). • Speak the “people’s language” and “translate” with mainstream culture. • The hard-and-fast rule of Latino organizing is always serve food. • Keep a “cultural balance” and exercise strategic thinking and problem solving.



Juana Bordas was founding president of the National Hispana Leadership Institute and the first Latina faculty at the Center for Creative Leadership. She served as a trustee for the Greenleaf Center for Servant Leadership and the International Leadership Association. In 2009 the Denver Post and Colorado Women's Foundation named her Colorado Unique Woman of the Year. The Power of Latino Leadership won the prestigious 2013 Nautilus Prize for best multicultural book and the International Latino Book Award for best leadership book. Juana's first book Salsa, Soul, and Spirit: Leadership for a Multicultural Age, is considered the seminal work on multicultural leadership. Visit her website: www.mestizaleadership.com