Linda Alvarado

Brains Versus Brawn

“Formalized training is important, as well as [training] on the job. And you need both. Particularly in business, I don’t believe that it’s just a single point where you take a class, or get a degree, or get a business card that says you’re ‘president.’ This really is about a lifetime of learning, and technology now and education are the drivers in every industry, even an industry that is considered to be blue collar--a lot of muscles and brawn. Construction really is about brains.”

Self-Perception

“Hispanics--we’re on construction sites, but we were viewed as being laborers or great carpenters, or cement masons. [We are] really not looked at, first of all, as being the owners of the company. And women, if they were on the construction site at all, they were in the job trailer, they were secretaries, not on the field . . . Likewise, I didn't look the part, fit the role, but in reality it’s important, not how other people see us, [but] how we perceive ourselves . . . I was bound and determined that I liked this industry and I wanted to get more involved.”

Accidental Careers

“One of the great myths [is] that all great careers are planned. People say, ‘Focus, focus, plan.’ But sometimes accidental careers, or opportunities, are presented in your way. Let me give you an example. I needed to work, as most people need to do, and they post jobs in the college . . . On the wall it said you can either work in food service or as a landscape assistant at the new botanical gardens raking up leaves, watering, and doing these kinds of services throughout the college.

So I pulled the piece of paper. I knew I didn’t want to do food service and I thought, ‘Well you know, working outside might be a good thing,’ because my little brother and I had this lawn mowing service growing up--which we were very bad at probably--but the neighbors were very kind to us and paid us anyway. So I went to apply for the job and they said, ‘What are you doing here?’ and I said, ‘Well I came to apply for the job.’ They said, ‘What are you doing here?’ I said, ‘They posted this job.’ They said, ‘No you don’t understand. Girls work food service. Boys do landscaping.’

So they sent me back for counseling. But I came back the next day and said, ‘I really would like to apply for the job,’ and they said, ‘What are you doing here?’ Well this guy finally told me, ‘Okay come back tomorrow.’ And I think two things: he thought either I would quit because I wouldn’t be able to do the job, or perhaps he thought he could make us quit . . . You can imagine [that] I was not well accepted. But, I did enjoy it. I thought, ‘This is going to be terrific.’ When I think about it, I get to wear Levis to work. I’m going to get this great tan, work with all these single men and they’re going to pay me to do this?’
It was a naïve thought in many ways, but it’s those kinds of accidental opportunities that we need to at least look at. As it turned out, this job, which was construction related, enabled me to eventually consider taking jobs on construction sites during the summer—not in the field—but in the office . . . Quite frankly, it was the determining factor that I really wanted to think about becoming a contractor. It was very radical and in many ways very naïve because women, and especially Hispanic women, were not on construction sites.”