



LATINO LEADERS
NETWORK™

MICKEY IBARRA, FOUNDER & CHAIRMAN

Remarks by:
Adam Rodriguez
Latino Leaders Network

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Adam Rodriguez: Thank you. Thank you, Fidel. Thank you. You're a good man. I'm glad to know you and I appreciate you being here today. I appreciate all the work you're doing at HSF. This man is extremely passionate and focused and has really led this organization further than anybody could have imagined in the past year, so, I'm really excited to be there and to be working with you and Margarita and the rest of the board there.

Speaking of other friends, I wanted to thank all my friends that appeared on that big screen to say how much they love me and appreciate me. That's always nice to hear especially on a screen like that and a roomful of people that are here to celebrate your accomplishments. I'd also like to thank like Mickey did, Amir Hemmat and Raul Lomeli, the two guys that run a wonderful company called SABER es PODER. They are partners and friends.

And Mickey, of course, I'd like to thank you for all of your hard work in putting this event together and all the events you do throughout the year and throughout the last 10 years that you've been doing the Latino Leaders Network. I don't think we've realized how important it is to have afternoons like this, certainly there probably aren't enough of them because we tend to discount our accomplishments sometimes. We don't think that what we're doing is influencing as many people as it actually is. We all walk our own path and we do what we do for not necessarily

selfish reasons but those are the things we want to do with this life we've been given and I think it's very easy to just get caught up in that and lose sight about who sees that, who's inspired by it. And so, I thank you for doing this and taking the day to honor me and give me a moment to realize that, yeah, maybe all of this hard work and consistency that I've been putting this effort into over the years actually means something to a lot of people so I'm very humbled by that and I thank you for doing this.

I'd like to thank my dad for being here today. Being a new dad and finally understanding the love that a parent has for their child in a way that you never can until you experience that for yourself, I appreciate you more than ever. So, thanks for your pride and everything you've done and showed me throughout my life. Your pride in being Latino and all the things you've done for people along the way as a result of that pride and as a result of just having a good heart. So, thank you. And my mom too. If she ever sees this on some kind of video, I thank you every bit as much, mama.

So, I had a speech ready for today, and I was up the last couple of nights with a crying baby and waiting for her to fall asleep whenever she decided for that to be, and one night was four-something in the morning and last night was two in the morning, and I'm sitting there and I'm trying to put together some thoughts and ideas and things that I wanted to share with a roomful of leaders, a roomful of people that get what it is to show up, not only at these events but on a daily basis in life and accomplish things that have warranted you all to be sitting here.

Young people that are on their way to accomplishing these things and just setting out on the path, and they're taking the time to be here today because they realize the importance of days like this and the people that are my peers and my age and the same thing and all of the other people that are here that are from the generation before that we've looked up to and been inspired by. And again, I just thank everybody for recognizing the importance of this, not just on a political level or on a level to come and shake hands and be seen but actually to take the time to sit here and celebrate ourselves and what we have accomplished. And I don't think it's been easy for anybody in this room. So, this is in a way a day to celebrate yourselves as well.

So, getting back to the speech that I was so diligently trying to prepare, I had two people today, one was Mickey, who has a

little experience with these events, and another friend of mine, Norma Vega, who urged me to get rid of that speech that I had put together that didn't really talk about my personal story, that was more about the things that I hope for for the future, the things that I expect of us as leaders, the things that I hope to be able to participate in as a leader and leading the next generation to moving our place here in America as Latinos further. Hopefully, so much further that things like the Hispanic Scholarship Fund aren't even necessary or the Latino Leaders Network becomes America's Leaders Network, and we all see each other as that, as Americans, as opposed to what type of Americans we are.

And so, because my arm was twisted and Mickey had a real persuasive conversation with me and Norma gave me a look that made me feel like, "Oh, geez. If I give this speech, I'm just going to bomb," so I better just talk about what I know and that is my personal story. And hopefully in that, you'll have a laugh, you'll have a smile, and maybe even find some inspiration.

I'm not going to summarize 39 years of living up here on stage but I'm going to touch on a few things, and one of them I already did and that was my mom and dad. Two very proud Latinos and very hard working people that always instilled in me a belief that anything could be accomplished. And I think that probably the backbone of that was just a tremendous amount of love that I received at home and never, ever lacked for love. And although my parents were always working, and my sister and I were left to our own devices quite often, I was in charge, I took on the big brother/absentee dad role -- and I say "absentee" just that he was out working for us. And that kind of love lets you know that you're never alone and that you are believed in and you're cared about and you're thought about on a constant basis, and that kind of love is the kind of love that gives you the confidence to know that you can accomplish anything. The kind of love that allows you to dream big. Where you feel like there's just nothing I couldn't accomplish because these people believe in me this way, they love me this way, why shouldn't the world love me this way? Why can't I do something that would make the world feel as good as these two people make me feel?

And with that in mind, you go out into the world and you live your life. And part of my life was lived, especially in my earlier years, was lived really bouncing back between a town called New City which is a suburb of Manhattan and the Bronx and going back and forth from there to the Bronx. And so, I would shuffle back

and forth between these two places -- my dad was in Boston in school, going to law school, and my mom was taking care of my sister and I most weeks, my dad would drive home on the weekends. We had a lot of family that helped out.

And so, I was shuffled back and forth between these two worlds where I didn't really fit in New City -- for those of you that don't know which is 99.9 percent of you in here, it's a town that's predominantly Irish, Italian, and Jewish, and Latinos, other than the Rodriguez family, pretty much did not exist in this town. And so, there were plenty of times when you were just made to feel different enough for whatever reason, you know, from the way you looked to your last name to the way you might be treated on any instance -- not to say the whole place was bad, it wasn't, but -- to then going to the Bronx where everybody I knew there was Latino. Black or something that was totally different than my experience in New City. And so, not fitting in in either place was a weird position to be in, especially as a kid. You have this confidence and love at home but you don't know who you are yet and you're trying to figure that out, and a lot of your peers sort of influence you determining that.

And so, I did feel like an outsider for a long time. I felt like I was alone. And that ended up being the greatest thing that could happen to me, because it gave me an opportunity as an outsider to look in as opposed to being in the middle of all of this. It gave me an opportunity to recognize that, really, it doesn't matter, it's insignificant, it's BS, really. It's stuff that we get clouded in and we lose what we're able to relate to each other as human beings with. And all of this crystallizes as you get older. I wasn't nine, 10, 11, 12 years old realizing this but little by little, these are the things that teach you these lessons.

And during this time while I'm figuring this all out, my escape, my babysitter often was a television or a book or a movie to watch, and I would get lost in these stories and I just developed a real love for getting lost in these stories and the people that were telling them, whether they were writers that I love to read or actors that I love to watch, television programs that I love to watch, and the morals that they would teach on an episode of *Different Strokes* or whatever the lesson was in those things, they just resonated in me and I wanted -- there was something in me that wasn't clear on it but I knew that one day I wanted to be a part of affecting people that way.

And I didn't even think about being an actor at this time. When I was a kid, I dreamed of being a baseball player. That was the way I was going to reach people. That was the thing I loved to do and that was the way that I was going to be able to connect with people and one day be able to take care of my family and take care of -- build the kind of life that I envisioned myself having as a grownup -- this is where you get in trouble for not writing a speech.

I had a real clear vision that I wanted to reach people and that stuck with me throughout. And when baseball went away from me, I sustained an injury, and this dream, and who knows if it would've come true or not, disappeared and I really had never thought of doing anything else. And my dad said, "Hey, there's this acting class you should check out," and I went and I did and it suited me, it felt good, and I was like, "Yeah, you know, I like this." And unfortunately at that time, I never considered being an actor because on those television shows and in those movies that I was watching, there really weren't that many actors, characters even, that looked like me, had Spanish surnames, really had anything that I saw myself in other than what I could imagine as being the hero. But there was no reality to that. I mean, sure, there were a few guys sprinkled here and there, but certainly not enough to make you believe that that was a viable choice to make a living, that was something that you could go out and really touch people with.

And so, the years had gone by and I started doing this acting class, and even though I'm enjoying it, I still didn't consider doing it for a living. A few years go by and I'm doing it some more, and I'm in community college. Baseball went away and if I wasn't going to play baseball in college, I just felt like college at that time wasn't really the right move for me. And I'm going to community college to pass the time and it was part of the ticket for me to live in my house at that time, otherwise, I was going to be out on my own. You know, it was college, military, or full-time job, and I figured college and a part-time job sounded like the easy way out at that time.

And so, I'm in this class and I'm in front of people and I'm doing this scene and I just completely lost myself. But somehow in the moment of losing myself, I had this revelation, like this is it, this is what I want to be doing. I want to be doing this. It felt like something I would wake up and love going to do every day. And I realized that that was what was going to be the most

important thing to me in my life, waking up and having a passion for what I got up to do every day, and acting was going to be that. And so, from that moment on, I decided that's what I was going to do and it was a long path from there, of getting a job as a stockbroker and working as a waiter here and there, and a bunch of other things, but I was clear, this path was set. And I never for once doubted that I could achieve this. I was able to dream it and I believed that this could happen. There was no doubt in my mind, fortunately.

And so, from there, years go by and I'm working hard at it and I'm taking my classes and I'm studying and doing some plays here and there, and again, my dad comes into my life and a guy that he was in the army with who was a New York City police detective, who has a great story that I'm not going to sit here and tell, but he ends up being a technical advisor on *NYPD Blue*. And my dad hasn't seen him in years, and I'm walking in the house one day, and my father is having a fit wondering how this guy that he was in the army with ended up on television with the guys from *NYPD Blue*. And so, through a series of events, my dad gets in touch with him, they re-connect, things are great with them. We end up seeing this man, who's become a godfather to me, and this guy gives me an opportunity to audition for a show they were doing, and this was my big break and it was for a show called *Brooklyn South*. And I got the gig. I went and auditioned against a bunch of other people and managed to get this job. I had just moved out to L.A., it was all brand new to me, and I was very, very fortunate.

But I knew with that opportunity that that was just going to be the beginning. Not the beginning of something that I could even foresee. It was an opportunity to start walking this walk I had always dreamed of, to be this man that I had always envisioned. It was the first moment that I knew that some eyes were really on me, and I made a very conscious choice at that time to carry myself a certain way and to know that in carrying myself that way, I was carrying all the people that I represented with me, that I was that guy now that some kid was going to be watching on TV and hopefully be inspired by, hopefully to not doubt that that was a possibility if that was something that that child wanted to do.

And you go out and you do this, and little by little -- you know, talking about how it's hard to -- we don't realize the things we accomplish, we discount our own accomplishments, and you do that along the way because it's a long ride. And little by little, you make an accomplishment and you sort of -- you put the ribbon on and

you keep walking and you keep walking, and I'm standing here today, almost 20 years into this career and you realize, wow, by making that choice to carry yourself that way, by being consistent in that choice, by never forgetting the things that inspired you to want to do this in the first place, people do take notice, people are moved by this. You inspire people.

And that really has always been my dream, to be a leader. Whether it was playing sports or that it was being the one voice of reason in a group of friends, I have always wanted to lead people to better, to more. And I am humbled and I am honored that you think enough of me today to have me up here as one of those people, and I assure you that I will continue to work hard, and if the opportunities are there, wonderful. If they're not, then I'm going to make them. But to continue to be a beacon of hope and inspiration for our community and even for people outside of our community, that this is the example, this is what we can achieve, and this is still in a time when those opportunities aren't as prevalent as I would hope they would be by the time I got here.

So, we've got to keep going, we keep pushing, and we keep doing the kind of work that we're all doing here, which is why we show up today, and I just thank you all for your support and for the love and the inspiration that you provide me with, because I really don't do this just for myself. I do this with our entire community in mind. So, thank you for having me here today.

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