



**Remarks by Ozzie Areu  
Latino Leaders Luncheon Series  
Eagle Leadership Award**

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Ozzie Areu: Wow, wow, wow. Thank you, Will. Thank you, Monito. Winning this award is already an honor, but it's even more special when my brother and my best friend is up here presenting it to me on behalf of so many amazing people and leaders in this room. I'm so excited and honored. You took my breath away, man, but you always have.

I hope everybody can hear me all right. When I say everyone, I'm referring to all the leaders, all the students back there - the future leaders - and the staff who worked so hard in putting this event together today. Thank you, thank you, thank you. This is the 59th Latino Leaders Network event. For me to be here in front of all of you following so many greats and being around so many of my friends and colleagues that I've gotten to know over the years here is very special.

For some of those that don't know me past my headshot and my bio, my name is Ozzie Areu. I was born in California. I'm one of four children to Cuban parents. *Mi papa es de Havana y mi mama es de Pinal del Rio.* [My father is from Havana and my mother is from Pinal del Rio] They came to this country as immigrants and they worked their butts off for us, and now it's my turn to do what I can to make them proud and return the favor. Because of my tenacity and hard work and all the things that I've been able to accomplish along the way, those things are all a direct reflection in my mind of how they raised me and the morals that they taught me and my family.

My journey into the entertainment world began with my first position at Warner Bros. Studios which was working as a security officer in an empty parking lot. I mean an empty parking lot. It was just paved. It didn't even have the lines on it. And for a few months that was my job. It was in the middle of summer and so every couple of hours somebody would come by and bring me a gallon of water. I did the best I could, and I watched the hell out of that parking lot. Doing a good job in a position that most people would have easy slacked off on paid off for me.

Those are the things that pay off for many people as it led to the company moving me around a few times until I finally landed in a security guard position on the hit TV show *Friends*.

From there, it was the same deal. I focused so much on making sure I was the best in my position no matter how small that task seemed, and it didn't go unnoticed. A *Friends* cast member, Jennifer Aniston, hired me to become her and Brad Pitt's assistant. Now I know that can sound really, really cool. But trust me, as cool as that was and it really, really was, it wasn't always that glamorous especially at the beginning.

I mean I did all kinds of things like walking the dogs and getting coffee, getting groceries. You name it. I washed the cars. And when I washed the cars, they didn't even know I was doing it. But for me, it was just about taking care of people that were taking care of me. And they cared about me. That was just the way I was raised. I was raised to always give my best no matter what I was doing in life. And from my experience, I promise you that attitude will get you farther than you can even imagine.

After Jen and Brad, I spent some time working for Ellen DeGeneres and Portia de Rossi also as an assistant. Then I got the opportunity to work for a visionary and entrepreneur who championed and inspired me maybe sometimes more than people can imagine. That person is the man himself, Mr. Tyler Perry. I started off as an assistant for him. For those of you who don't know, only a year after Tyler called me into his office with all the executives in his organization. That was pretty normal.

So when he called me in and then he asked me to stand up and he said I want everybody in this room to congratulate Ozzie, he's now the president of Tyler Perry Studios, that doesn't happen very often does it? But I can tell you what had a lot to do with it. It was attitude, work ethic, determination, and perseverance. No matter what task I was given, I did my absolute best at it. I got stuff done no matter how crazy, or hard, or complicated, or sometimes even seemingly impossible things felt. It wasn't easy, but also truly they weren't impossible.

All of those small positions that required an attitude of serving people actually molded me into the leader that I am today and the one that I want to become in the future in ways that no other higher positions could have. Integrity, humility, respect - those are some of the things I believe make great leaders. If it weren't for my parents raising me to have these traits, I wouldn't have excelled in all those entry level positions and in turn would not have gone from assistant to president of Tyler Perry Studios to where I am today - CEO and founder of the first major Latino-owned and operated studio in the nation. As well as the first entertainment company to make a true impact in our community through our work with federal opportunity zones. And did I mention first?

I'm proud of where I came from and also proud to be here in Atlanta with my family and friends where I've been for over a decade. I'm proud of the work I've accomplished producing TV shows and movies that have provided many jobs, but more importantly have provided representation. It wasn't too long ago we couldn't see people that look like us on the screens or at least portrayed accurately. I mean that was certainly the case for my siblings and I. By a show of hands, how many of us saw people that looked like us when we were growing up watching TV? Not many. Some of my favorite movies were *Rudy* and *Lucas*.

But we would wonder where are the Latinos, the people like us, people of color? Where's the *sazon*? On a serious note, if it wasn't gang or drug-related, the Latinx roles were very few and far between. There might have been the occasional Latino headline movie or TV show. But if it didn't meet the industry's sometimes suspect metric of success, then there would be a long wait for another one. In my opinion, way too long to wait.

How many times have we all heard the phrase women and minorities? And how many times has that been in the context of being left out, or underemployed, or undervalued? Too many. Well, that phrase is central to the productivity at Areu Bros. I know that it's trendy for some companies to say they are getting behind women and minorities, people from the LGBT community. Some see it as a marketing tool.

Let's take the Latinx community. Companies spend an exorbitant amount of resources to try to understand what the specific market wants. Unfortunately it's not always because they care but because they see the dollar signs and how much our buying power has increased. We want to watch what everyone else wants to watch with people that look like us. At the end of the day, what all consumers of content want is to see authentic and compelling stories that cross over into all demographics.

To be clear, Latinos are Americans and live American lifestyles. Many are not so different from their white American counterparts. They may have different food at home and speak Spanish with their relatives, but outside their home they're just like everyone else. They're not living stereotypes. They're just normal Americans.

Our problem is that companies go out and spend lots of money in market research in order to determine what people want, but they are missing the point. What they should do is get to know us as people. They should hire women and people of color as top executives in their companies and as well as the entire food chain in their organizations.

My first hire was an LGBT woman. As a matter of fact, she's here today. Kim Leadford, would you please stand up? Thank you. The second leader I brought onboard was none other than Ms. Gloria Estefan. Gloria was important to me for many

reasons. To set the tone of my company. Having a strong matriarch and community leader like herself, to bring her perspective to our executives and our creatives alike. I really wanted someone who broke barriers and stereotypes firsthand, someone who my family admired and respected and who could share her wisdom with a lot of younger people we bring onboard.

Another senior executive I brought on is a woman whose family sought refuge in the United States to escape the USSR for a better life. She is also American. She has no accent. She doesn't dress differently. She's just like everybody else. We didn't bring her on to source Ukrainian content. We brought her on to find those voices that we are not hearing. We brought her on to find those superstars, who happened to be women and minorities, and to bring top level executives of color to our organization. And that's Kate Neyberg. Kate, would you please stand up?

At Areu Bros. Studios we're putting our money where our mouth is. Some larger organizations at times have trouble being authentic and inclusive towards diverse audiences because they started way back when, when there were very few people of color and women in top leadership positions. It's one thing to talk about supporting minorities and all other underrepresented communities. However, when it's not genuine, people like us see right through that. It's like when organizations get behind

something just because it's a hashtag or it's politically correct. But, hey, real recognizes real. Doesn't it?

I see all of you in here. Just being at this event supporting an organization like the Latino Leaders Network speaks volumes and speaks for itself. I look forward to working with many of you and anyone out there who is genuinely getting behind diversity and inclusion. Because we are new and we're just getting going, we have the unique ability to staff up in a way that's more reflective of our society as a whole - all the way from assistants, straight up to the highest levels of our organization.

Having people from various backgrounds make the green lighting process in our business more meaningful. I see this every day. I hear the conversations they're having with creators and producers. It's something I've never seen before. It's working. Our slate is so dimensional and diverse I can't wait to share it with everyone.

Tyler Perry Studios was a game-changer for the African-American community here and for African-American representation everywhere. It's been an honor for me to be a part of that path, and now it will be an even higher honor to create an additional one with Areu Bros. Studios. I intend to change the game for the Latino-American community, *our community*. Latinos, people of color, we are all a driving force as consumers and



creators. This can be even more the case moving forward and moving forward together.

Marinate in that word for a second. We're often referred to as minorities but together, together we are truly the majority. Please remember that, together we're the majority. So there's more to come. In fact, we're just getting started. But first and foremost, my mission as a leader is to highlight our community especially the underrepresented. If our kids in this day and age can't see it, they might feel that they can't be it.

I hope that seeing a Latino-American heading up a studio, a physical place of jobs and opportunities and creativity, as well as seeing the fresh and authentic content that comes out of there with real people that actually look like them will lead to them opening doors for each other and also for future generations. So many people have paved the way from me. So many, millions and millions of people are already doing so much. I promise everyone in this room and all of those who've contributed to the things that mean so much to us that I will work my butt off for all of us. I hope to make us all proud.

My sincerest gratitude to Mr. Mickey Ibarra, Mr. Rudy Beserra, and to everyone at the Latino Leaders Network including Maritza, Maricella. You have all been so great. You're all true champions and leaders. I also want to thank all the

sponsors here today. Thank you for coming and supporting me but also and more importantly supporting us. As I mentioned earlier, I want to thank you all again for coming. I also want to thank the staff that's here, everyone that --

All the hard work that goes behind the scenes for these types of organizations and these types of events when people are honored, the work that goes on behind the scenes that sometimes isn't noticed by everyone that comes is definitely noticed by the people that are involved in the organization. I just want to thank you all because we've all been there. We've all been there. The harder we work, the more people like us that are able to support and then - like my brother Will said - give that hand up. This country, no, this world is filled with storytellers. Each one of their own unique stories to tell. I look forward to the future, one where we can all enjoy and see these stories together.

*Muchisimas gracias* and God bless.