



**Latino Leaders Network
Remarks by Richard Montañez
March 11, 2014**

**Capital Hilton
Washington, DC**

Richard Montanez: I want to set some ground rules. The first ground rule that I'd like to set is that we're all family, right?

Audience: Yeah.

Richard Montanez: Right, we're all family. So, I want to talk to you as though I am your brother, your father, your son, your uncle, your cousin, somewhere in that position because I've got something to say and I'd like to say it to the young people, that there isn't anything that you can't accomplish if you have vision.

You see, when I started with Frito-Lay in 1976 I didn't have a whole lot going for me. I had no education. I was told I would never be anything but I had one thing, I had vision and this is what vision did for me. When others saw what I was, vision saw what I would become. The very thing that disqualified me, vision used to qualify me.

So, it's a pleasure to be here, Mickey. It's an honor. It's truly an honor to know you. Your friendship is a -- in our community there are two types of leaders. There are good leaders and then there are great leaders. Good leaders build talent. Great leaders build people. Nobody does it better than you, thank you.

I would also like to thank Dr. Andrade. I met him a few years ago. This gentleman is what -- I came home and I told my wife, "Man, I met this veteran and he is so cool." He is so cool. One of the most educated men that you will ever meet, one of the smartest men you'll ever meet but yet how he treats young people, how he sets them up to -- he builds people. It's an honor to know you.

And Brent, it's an honor to know the work that you do. You do it so well. You've been doing it for so many years. We've been great supporters of you and your organization. We thank you that you've given us opportunities. It's the work that you've done. For many, many years it have helped the people behind me to make it.

I'd also like to thank my beautiful wife who has been my mentor. Many times I'd go home crying and she'd say, "You know what, hang in there. You're going to make it."

And I want to thank Christina, my public relations manager that makes sure that I stay out of trouble and I go where I'm supposed to and don't talk to.

You know, two very powerful Latinas in my life and to all the Latinas in here I want to say something to you. You're really special. I mean, when it comes to a Latina there's not -- not a creation can match you. So, I've said this and I've said this a thousand times and I'll say it another thousand times, when God created the Latina he was showing off.

Back in my day when I first started off -- I've been with my wife since we were kids and we've been together 40 years. We've been married 35 years and been together 40 years. But when we got together we didn't have any dreams. That's why I'd like to tell young people, "You know what, dream. Let it be wild. It's ok, throw it out there."

See my dad, my grandpa they we're good men but they didn't know how to dream because all they were doing was working. So, when I started working -- I started working full time when I was in the third grade. My grandfather picked grapes, my dad picked grapes and I picked grapes. So we didn't have time to dream, but we had hope and our hoped that someday we would have a better future. That someday -- maybe someday we don't have to worry about how we're going to feed our kids today. Maybe someday we'll have a bank account. Maybe someday Judy, you and I will be able to write a check. Maybe someday we'll live in that neighborhood that we used to go trick or treating and they'd throw us out because they say you don't live in this. But I remember I don't want to go trick or treating in the barrio. There was no candy in there. Me and Judy used to go across town where you get the big Hershey bars. But after a while, after a few knocks they would realize, "You know what this is not your neighborhood, is it? Go back."

We were never hurt because we didn't know what discrimination was. We didn't know what it was, we just want -- we don't belong there. We got to go back to the other side of the track.

Young people I want to tell you today; listen to me young people. You don't need anybody's permission to become great.

Audience [Male voice]: Right.

Richard Montanez: And if feel you need somebody's permission, well I'm here to give it to you today. You have my permission to be great.

So for me it all began in the 60's. You see during the civil rights movement of the 60's I wasn't old enough to make it, to have an impact on the movement but I was old enough that the movement had an impact on me. Here it is. Let's go back to 1960 something; I won't give you the exact date. Third grade, in a one room building, my mom would get me ready for school because, guess what, we're being bused from an all-Spanish speaking school to English school. And I'm crying and mom says, "Chillón, por que lloras?" "Cry baby, why are you crying?"

"Por que no quiero ir a esa escuela" "Because I don't want to go to that school anymore."

"Why not?"

"Por que todos habló ingles" "Because everybody speaks English. What am I going to do?"

So, my uncle takes me to the corner bus. And guess what the bus that shows up? It's green. I told my *tiyo* and said, "Why can't I get on the yellow bus? Why do I have to get on the green bus?"

He's like, "I don't know *mi hijo*. This is the bus they sent."

It wasn't until years later that I realized that it was -- listen young people, that it was society telling me, "You're not good enough to get on the yellow bus and get on the green bus because we're going to parade you across town so that everybody can see these kids are not good enough for the yellow bus."

So we get to school. I don't understand a word that the teacher is saying. But there's one sound that's international. Every young kid knows this sound and it's the sound of the recess bell. So there we are and we hear it, and what a relief! There was about eight or nine of us, I really don't remember, but we grabbed our lunches, we sat down, whatever it is, a hundred kids, you have to use your own imagination. We're all getting ready to eat our lunch and I pulled mine out. I'm getting ready to take a bite and just like this, everybody's staring at me. so I put my lunch back in the bag. Why

do you think I put my lunch back in the bag? It was because it was a burrito. You got to remember this was 1963, the world hasn't seen a burrito yet. Contrary to popular belief Taco Bell didn't introduce the burrito to the world, me and my mom did. But I put that burrito right back. Why? Because I was embarrassed, because I thought look, why do I have to ride the green bus, why do I have to eat burritos. I don't want everybody staring at me. Why can't I fit in? I want to be like that other little boy.

So, I remember I went home and I told my mom straight up, "Momma hazme un bologna sandwich con un Cupcake como los otros" "Mom, make me a baloney sandwich and a cupcake like the other kids because I don't want to be different." But my mom being the marketing genius that she is, she said, "No, *mi hijo*, this is who you are." So she made me two burritos and she said, "Here's one for you and here's one to share with a friend." So Wednesday, I had my burrito nightmare. Thursday, I shared a burrito with a friend. Friday, I was selling burritos for 25 cents apiece.

My young brothers and sisters, that's when I started to find out that, "Well wait a minute, maybe there is something special about being different. Maybe it's okay to speak a different language. Maybe it's okay to eat different food." I finally realized, young people, I finally realized that none of us were created to fit in. We were created to stand out. Young people live your life, stand out, regardless of what anybody thinks, and remember.

Creating history is just a matter of seeing and pursuing what others can't and won't. Look, everything created has a step by step protocol and sometimes you just need to break out in order to break through.

Young executives listen, stay away from people who discourage you and hang out with people who encourage you. You know what it is to discourage someone? It means to go into their hearts and pull out their courage and they're never the same. You know what it means to encourage someone? It means to grab courage and put it in their inner being where they're never the same. That's what you need to be spending time with, people who encourage you.

So, one day after killing chicken for a living, working at a car wash -- I quit school at such a young age. That's probably the one regret because I don't have a formal education. But yet I speak and I teach leadership classes at universities across the country. And young people listen to this, too; listen to everything I say. You need to prepare for this because I don't care what room you're in, there's always somebody in that room ready to steal your destiny. You need to be looking for it.

Here's an example: No education but I know for a fact that that I'm probably the most uneducated brilliant person you'll ever meet.

Teaching an MBA class sits about 20 students. It was a six-week course and I scheduled my time to make sure that I was in on that Thursday.

A young MBA students says, "Well, Mr. Montanez all my professors have a degree. Where did you get your degree?"

Then I'm writing on the board, somebody always in the room will to try to steal your destiny, "Where did you get your degree?" I looked right at him and said, "University of Cucamonga."

He said, "Where's that at?"

"Never mind private school. You couldn't get in."

He tried to start it again, "Well, Mr. Montanez, one more question."

I'm like, "Yes."

"All my professors have PhDs. What about you?"

Looked him straight in the eye and, "Oh, I got a PhD. I've been poor, hungry and determined."

Young people you need to know that nothing outside of you is bigger than what is inside of you. Go ahead release the limits that's been placed on you and set free the unlimited life that you and I are intended to live. We're all brilliant human beings and we all hold the gift of genius.

Three things that I'd like to do today, Mickey and you've got to keep me on time, Christina. Because I know Mickey gave me a half hour and it takes me 25 minutes to get into my message so --

Male voice: 15 minutes.

Richard Montanez: But three things I'd like to do real quickly and I believe these are the three things that everyone in this room do is you inspire. Someone inspired me and the word inspire simply mean to breathe life into someone. So, let's inspire. Somebody did that for me, encourage you. Somebody encouraged me and I know that's what you do. You know there are a whole lot of things that I don't have. One of them that I do have is courage.

Let me tell you where I got my courage. Back in the third grade on Tuesdays, every Tuesday they had after school reading. One trailer would pull up outside for the Latinos and the other trailer would pull up for the white kids. And every Tuesday 3 o'clock we'd get in line. But one day I had a revolution -- a revelation that led to a revolution that became an evolution in my life. Young people remember that. Get a revelation because it would lead to a revolution that would create evolutions.

So one day -- here's the antidote to fear. One day, on Tuesday I decided to break ranks and I got out of the line that I was told to get into. This is the Latino line. I got out of that line and I got in the white line. And I had a fear that I've never had as a child. And my own, intentionally or unintentionally were calling me back, "Ricardo estas loco" "you're in the white line. This is the line you're supposed to get in."

But this is what I said, with fear but listen to me, I had something inside of me that was greater than the fear. I looked at them and I said, "They got cookies inside. I'm going to get us some cookies."

So I remember walking up and it was like this but I was scared. Two white ladies, what are they going to do when they see the little dark kid? But I had something inside that was greater. I had a hunger. I was hungry. My pain of hunger was greater than my fear of being different. What if I just could get a cookie for me and my friends? So I got closer and closer. You know what those two ladies did? They filled my pockets with cookies.

You're all wondering: what's the moral of that story? A couple of parts, first, if you're hungry, young people, if you're hungry for that position, for that career; fear will leave. If you're hungry to live in that neighborhood; fear will leave. If you're hungry to run for that political office; fear will leave.

So one day my neighbor says, "They're hiring at Frito-Lay." Frito-Lay, wow. I got an application. I couldn't read or write but I have my beautiful wife who filled out the application. I went back and it was like 11:30 in the night. And in those days they didn't do background checks and I thank God they didn't do background checks.

When Governor Schwarzenegger ran for -- when he became governor I actually got a phone call from him. I don't know him. You know what he says, "I'd like to offer you a position on a workforce investment."

And I'm like, "But I didn't vote for you."

"That's okay. I know that you know how to create jobs.

And I said, "Well, I think that would be pretty cool."

"That's okay. I'm going to put you in contact with my --what do you call him, Mickey D., they got that -- appointment secretaries.

Male voice: Exactly.

Richard Montanez: Yes. And then we did the interview. He faxed it, we down the little -- the very first question, "Is there anything you or any family member have ever done that would embarrass the governor of California?" And I looked at him and I'm like, "I'm Mexican." So we got by that.

And then the last one. The last one the appointment secretary says, "Welcome, you're in. All we got to do is a background check."

And I'm like, "Well, how far back do you go?"

So anyways, I get hired at Frito-Lay. I remember telling my dad and my grandfather, and my grandfather said, "que hacen ay."

I didn't really know how to explain potato chips. I just said, "Papa fritas."

"Okay, *bueno mi iho*. You're doing so good."

And I was a janitor but you would think in the Montañez family that I just graduated from Harvard because something was happening. Young people, there was a revolution that was taking place in the Montanez family. Somebody was breaking away from the grape field and was going into a factory job as a janitor. And somebody said, "You're just a janitor." There's no such thing as just a janitor. There's no such thing as just a waiter. Every waiter in this room, I want to tell you that someday you can manage this hotel. No such thing as "just".

So I began to mop those floors. My dad and my grandfather said, "You make sure that they shine. You make sure that those floors looked like a Montanez mopped them." I began to take everybody's trash out. I didn't care whose it was I took it out. I cleaned it and people would walk in and people would say, "Wow, this floor smells good." I had an influence and I was a janitor but I had an influence.

Then one day the CEO sent out a video, said, "I'd like everybody to act like an owner." Here was the opportunity for a janitor to act like an owner. Is he serious? I didn't know what our company was all about. I began to research it, found out that we were a sales and marketing company. Then one day, destiny -- because I'm a firm believer in destiny. I saw it. I just got a revelation of what I could do.

So I did what a typical Latino janitor would do and I called up the CEO. This was many, many years ago. Remember when corporate America was in command and control? Corporate America has not seen empowerment yet. I believe. I believe that I changed corporate America. I believe that I introduced the word empowerment to corporate America. Some people said, "You're so full of yourself, Richard."

And I said, "I am and you should be, too." Fall in love with yourself because when you fall in love with yourself there's a freedom to be yourself.

So in those days there were no emails, we had phone books. You could find anybody who was anybody. So the first one was the CEO. So I got the -- so what do I do -- so I went to one of the secretaries, "Say, can I use the phone?"

"Oh, you can't use the phone, this is just for --"

"Oh, it is, I'm going to call the CEO."

And she's like, "Oh yeah, you can use my phone. You're going to get... I've never seen anybody get fired on the spot."

So I called him up and in those days we were in every country that government will allow us worldwide. So all the other CEOs call up our CEO. So the secretary says -- excuse me, his executive assistant who is a visionary and still is my friend today says, "What country are you calling from?"

"United States."

"You're the president of the --."

"No, I work in California."

And she's like, "You're the general manager in California?"

I said, "No, I work in the Rancher cooker --."

She was, "You're the director of operations."

I said, "No."

She said, "What are you?"

I said, "I'm the janitor."

A visionary. A visionary. Young people, many times greatness will come in a ridiculous form. You've got to be willing to look ridiculous. And leaders, many times a great idea will come in a ridiculous form. Can you see it? She did.

He gets on the phone, I tell her my idea. She says, "I'll be there in two weeks."

I hang up, happiest man that you've ever seen. Wow, didn't know what I just done. Here comes the plant manager, somebody always in the room to steal your destiny, "Who do you think you are?"

Because, see, the phone call just came down, "Hey, who's this guy that just --."

"What are you doing?"

Because in those days if you were anybody -- you know all the corporate jets flew in, right? This was many, many years ago.

"Who do you think you are? Are you going to do the presentation? Everybody's coming, now, I got to fix everything. Now, I got to paint the place."

So I remember I went home and I told my wife, what I've done my whole career, "I don't know what I did. But now they're coming and you know."

She's like, "We're going to go and get a book on how to create a marketing strategy, don't worry. Richard, your destiny is to stand before great men, don't worry."

So we went to the library and checked out a book on how to create a marketing strategy and you know what I did? We copied it word for word. So the day comes. We didn't have technology, right? Remember the transparencies? So I made a bunch of copies. I went to a store and bought my first tie for \$3.50. I had my neighbor fix it, so in the morning I just --

And here they come. The CEO himself with every high level executive in the PepsiCo organization. Didn't realize what I had

done. So I started the presentation word for word and I was feeling it. I was feeling great. Then all of a sudden a question comes up. There's always somebody in the room to steal your destiny. It was one of the highest marketing executives in the company and he raised his hand and says, "Well Richard --." And it was going so well. It was going too good. He says, "Well Richard, just how much market share are we talking about?"

And I froze, "The market share?" We haven't read that chapter yet. So I almost fainted. I was that little boy again. When will I fit in? I'm making a fool -- who do I think I am presenting to some of the most educated men and women of my organization? But then I remember going into the stores where the racks are, we call them gondolas. With the most ridiculous smile you would ever see, I said, "This much market share." How ridiculous is that? How much market share? This much market share.

Do you know what the CEO did? I didn't realize what I had done. But the CEO stood up and he said, "Ladies and gentlemen, do you realize that we have the opportunity to go up to that much market share?"

And then there was a young vice president whose name was Al Kerry who is the CEO of Pepsi today. He stood up and he told his sales team, "Sales team, do you think we can get that market share?"

So I've come to realize that I'd become a legend by being ridiculous but I've accepted who I am. So be it. So what if I'll never look like a regular vice president? I don't even tell people what I do because nobody believes me anyways. "Oh come on, Richard, quit lying. What do you really do?"

"I oversee the --."

"No, no, what do you really do? What much do they pay you to do?"

Well, I just give it up, "I don't do anything I'm still mopping floors."

But young people, I want you to understand, there's always somebody who's going to try to steal your destiny and you need to be prepared. You need to be looking for it. I also want to tell you that corporate America is looking for you. So your job is to break the doors down. That's what Dr. Andrade did years ago; he broke the door down for us. And then leaders like Mickey came in. It's kind of embarrassing on my bio, it said I've been invited to the White House several times. It's like I've been invited to the White House

several times but he had a key to the White House. Men broke the doors down. Other men got the keys and you know what they did with it? They made copies and they began to pass the keys out and that's what we're doing here. We're giving you the keys to success. We're making room for you. We're telling you that we have your back. That's the new generation.

So the next is history. The new product became a billion dollar a year product. I've created twelve other products but I can never tell that story because people stop at Flaming Hot Cheetos. But I was, "But I got twelve other products."

"No, no just tell us the Cheetos story."

And I've finally accepted, Mickey, who I was and what my calling was. I knew that I didn't have a career, I have a calling. Out of that me and my wife we were able to create our own foundation. Last year we fed -- just my family, three boys, two daughter-in-laws, five grandkids -- last year we fed over 20,000 people. Last year me and my wife we bought 5,000 pairs of brand new shoes, good shoes, and we gave them away to kids who needed them. Last past Christmas we gave away 2,000 wrapped presents to kids who needed them. And people say, "Why do you do it?"

This is what I love to say, "Because I can."

Okay, I'm going to close right here even though that's just my introduction but I'm going to be good. I made a fool of myself in my whole career.

Last story. First time I get a call to join the corporate jet, the CEO calls me up and says, "Richard, I want you to fly from L.A. to New York, to get on our jet to come to D.C. because I want to introduce you to --."

He began to develop me. He began to mentor me. I'm so happy, a corporate jet, I've never even flown let alone a corporate jet. So me and my wife did what every typical Latino would do in those days. We didn't have no luggage. We went to Sears and we bought that piece of luggage where there's 5.10 inside. It was about this size. I go up for one day and Judy packs it with -- I mean, I'm like going for one day. So I pull up to the hangar and there's two pilots there looking at me and they're like, "Uh-nuh."

I'm like, "Watch it with that."

"It's not going to fit."

Then I go, "Well, you got to put it."

So I was the first one there and I sat in the first seat that I saw. And I could see at their hangars, I could see the limos pulling up and it was the CEO and the board of directors and they were all coming. And first time I had my own lunch. So I sit down and they walk by and they say, "Hi Richard. Hi Richard." And here comes the CEO, "Hi Richard." I almost seem like the bad guy, went up then more than 30 minutes back down. Sitting there, dinner and the senior vice president of HR, she's retired but a good friend of mine. She's looking at me at dinner, she's just giggling. She's like, "I just love your spirit, and you don't care, do you?"

"I do care about some things. What?"

"I don't know if I should tell you."

I'm like, "Tell me, please."

She says, "Well on the way over here you sat on the CEO's seat."

Man, I felt like that. The first thing I thought was, "Man, typical Latino even on the corporate jet I call shotgun." Some things never change. So I remember we got on the plane and I sat in the back. I flew back to New York, Purchase. Went to JFK and flew back commercial. I sat on a window seat, put my head on the window and started crying. I remember I said, "Again, it's that little boy with the burrito. When am I going to act like the other executives? When am I going to start looking like them? Where will I fit in?"

Now, that little voice that talks to me and talks to you said this, "Don't you realize just what happened? Intentionally or unintentionally everyone on that plane had so much respect for you that none of them was going to tell you that you were on the wrong seat."

The CEO himself said, intentionally or unintentionally, "Doesn't matter to me. He just sent a statement that if anybody could sit in my seat, it's that man."

And that little voice said, "Richard, it doesn't matter where you sit. What matters is where your heart is." And I got a hold of that. And I've been sitting where ever I want to sit.

Let me close with this, this is for my young friends in the room. No one is born successful but we are all born to succeed. Vision is a source of life and hope. The greatest gift ever given to mankind is not the gift of sight but the gift of vision. Sight is

the function of the eyes. Vision is a function of the heart. I said, "Look we're coming. But eyes that see are rare. No invention, development or great accomplishment was ever done without the vision first. Vision is the key to unlocking the gates to what was, what is and what will be. Vision sets you free from the limitations of what the eye can see and allows you to enter into what the heart can feel. It is vision that makes the unseen visible and the unknown possible. Thank you, ladies and gentlemen.

[End of Transcript]