



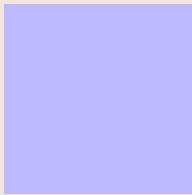
Lifelong Learning

If there is one thing Latinos agree on, it is the importance of education. These executives take us beyond academics and degrees to shed light on new frontiers of learning for all.



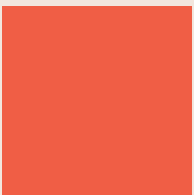
122.

Lorena Peñaloza
University of California
at Riverside



128.

Matthew Whitworth-Howe
L'Oréal USA
Professional Products



131.

Lauren Lopez
National Women's
Soccer League

135.

Tony Aguilar
Chipper

138.

Marissa Solis
National
Football League

144.

George Pauta
Sweetgreen

Lifelong Learning

Education is a beacon of hope in our community, but the best leaders don't just collect degrees, they embark on a lifelong journey of learning about themselves and those around them.



122.

Lorena Peñaloza
University of California
at Riverside

128.

Matthew Whitworth-Howe
L'Oréal USA
Professional Products

131.

Lauren Lopez
National Women's
Soccer League

135.

Tony Aguilar
Chipper

138.

Marissa Solis
The National
Football League

144.

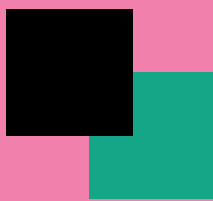
George Pauta
Sweetgreen

Legal Studies

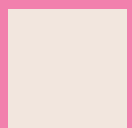
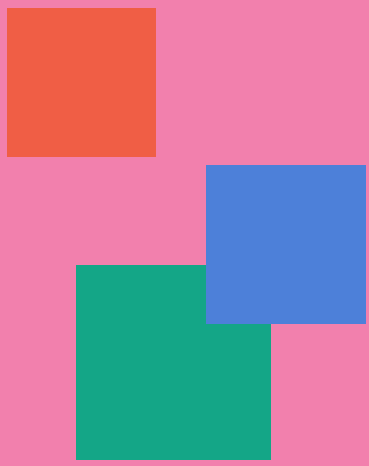
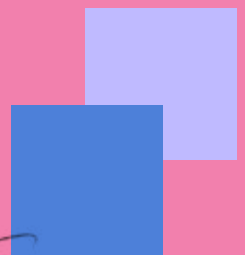
By Marcos

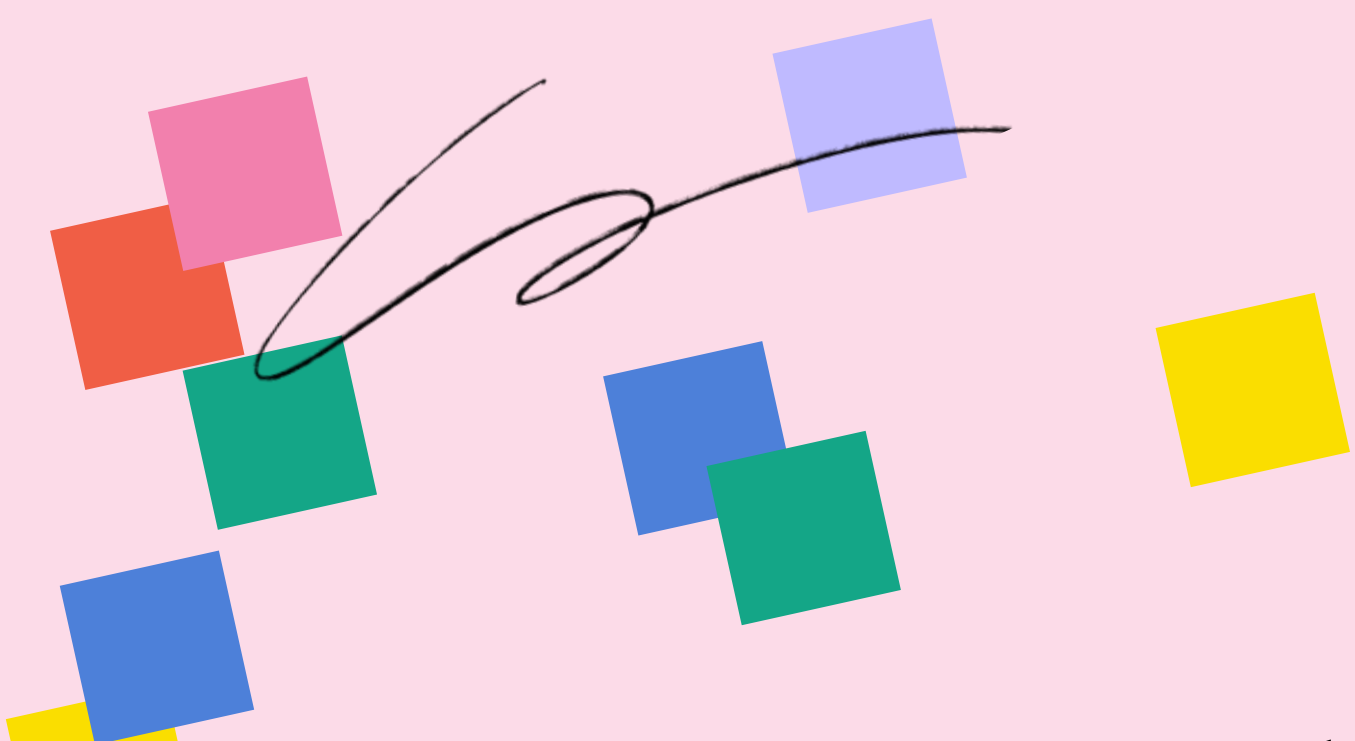
Chrisholm

Lorena Peñaloza turns her legal expertise into a cornerstone for better communities as the chief campus counsel for UC Riverside

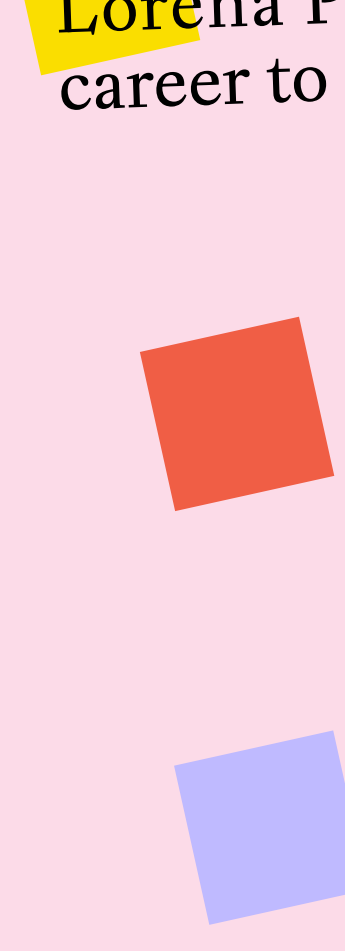


Lorena Peñaloza
Chief Campus Counsel
University of California,
Riverside





Lorena Peñaloza has dedicated her legal career to public service.




She launched her career at the Social Security Administration's Office of the General Counsel in Maryland through the prestigious Presidential Management Fellowship. She spent years rising up the legal ranks of the two largest public university systems in California. And she served as the chief campus counsel at University of California, Santa Cruz before transferring to University of California, Riverside in January 2023.

The executive is wired to always think about how she can leverage her position to serve the public, and that includes how she saw her role at UC Santa Cruz in 2022 (at time of this interview).

"I describe this role as sort of being a city attorney for a mini-city with some added layers," Peñaloza says.

On the surface, that sounds like a bold take. Yet, Peñaloza was also a former assistant city attorney for the City of Santa Ana, California. With over eighteen thousand students enrolled at UC Santa Cruz, a population greater than a lot of small American towns, Peñaloza's role advising students, adminis-



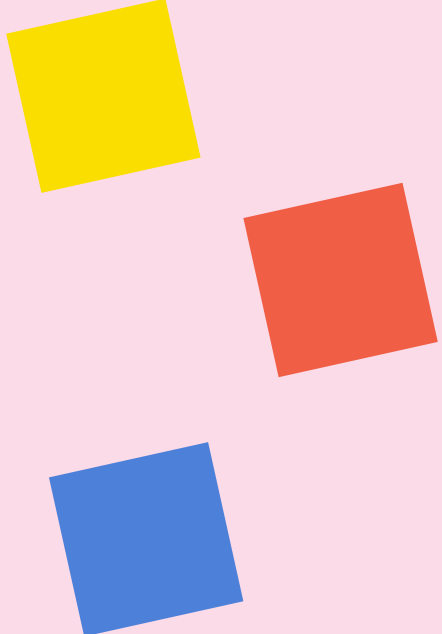
trators, and faculty on their legal matters is no small feat. "Most of the attorneys [at UC Santa Cruz] provide advice and counsel on a wide range of issues," she says. "On top of that, we have academics here, students, and people who live on the campus."

Of course, Peñaloza was not alone in her journey. She led her own team of lawyers and support staff paralegals that delivered full-service capabilities despite a lean headcount. By hiring diverse talent that practiced more than one area of law and had a knack for problem-solving, she positioned her office to do more with less while collaborating at-scale.

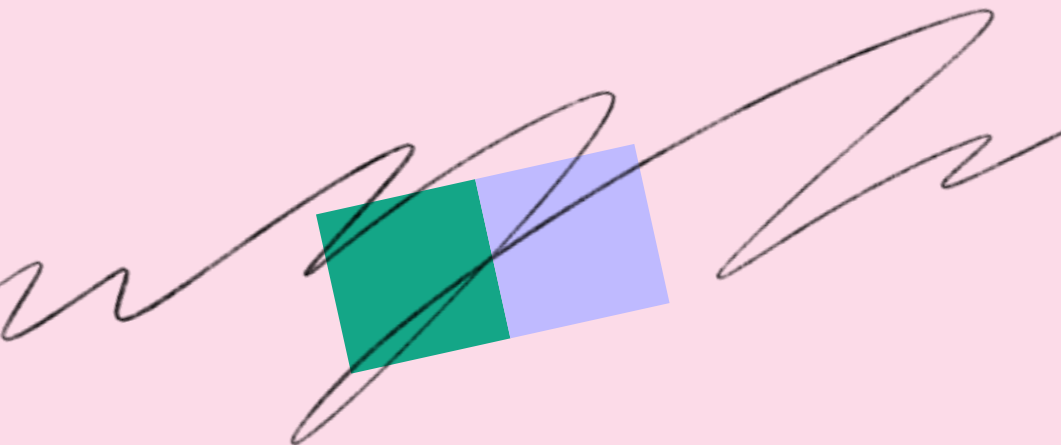
"This philosophy is not unique. It's modeled by the general counsel [Charles Robinson] for the UC system," she explains. "[It] is very much about being in a collaborative legal office, and it's one of the reasons that when the position opened up, it felt like such a great fit."

Peñaloza knows she's not the first leader to build a collaborative and cross functional team. However, unlike executives who credit

“Sometimes, especially as we’re starting out in a career, we’re more timid about voicing our thoughts on issues that hit close to home, [but] it’s really important for us to have the courage to do that.”

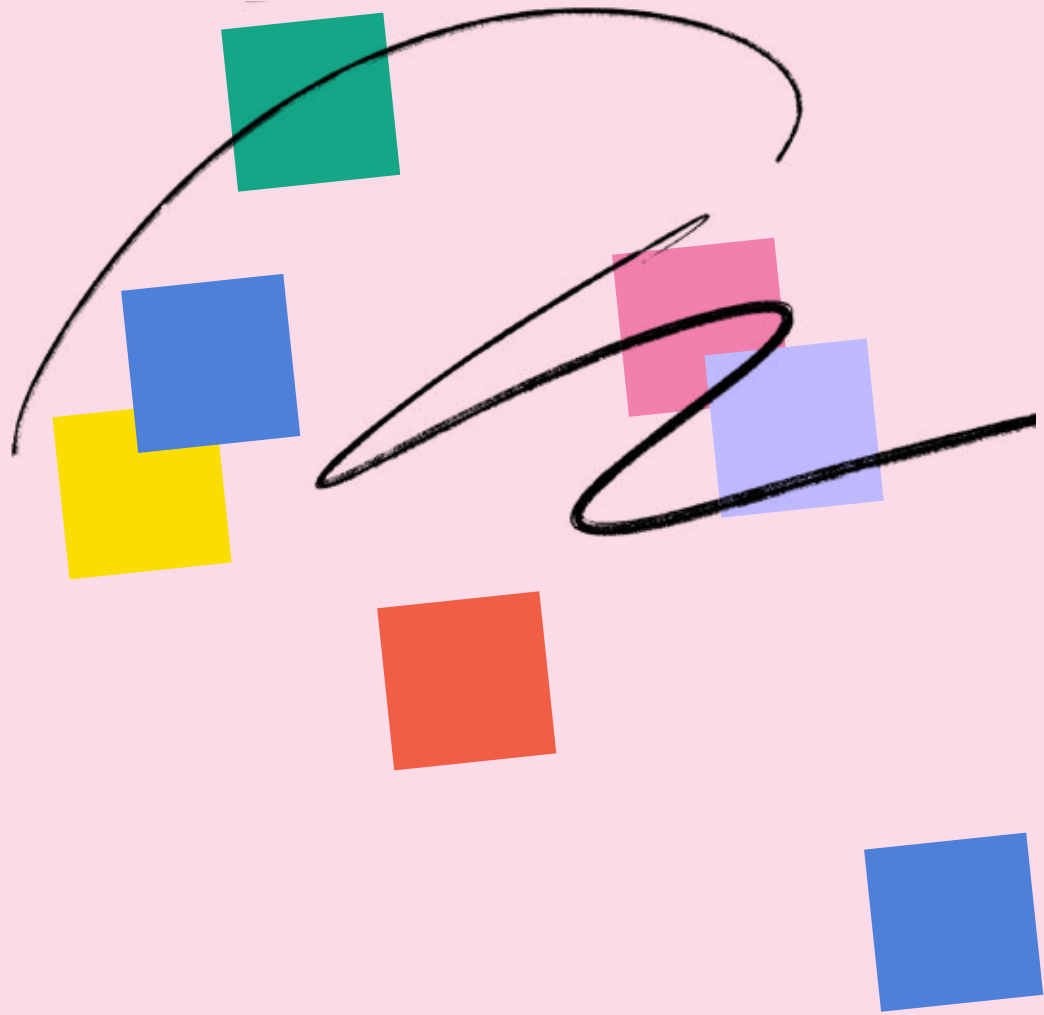


their ability to say no as a key to their success, she centers her management style around finding “a path to yes” for her clients. “My goal is not to tell them no unless it’s truly unlawful or unethical or something like that,” Peñaloza says. “My goal is to figure out how can we get them to where they want to be with the most acceptable amount of legal risk. Ultimately, they get to make the call.”



Meanwhile, Peñaloza did more than just let her clients call their own shots: She remained dedicated to UC Santa Cruz’s commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) efforts. She lent her voice to boost diverse representation on internal committee. She also helped implement DEI best-hiring practices that she leverages in her own candidate searches. In fact, many of those practices are now being adopted more widely across the university.

“That understanding and perspective informs how we see and deal with diversity issues through DEI best practices . . . that best serve not just the campus, but it



Changemaking Siblings

As the eldest of four siblings, Lorena Peñaloza set the tone for how they could each serve the community through their professions. Today, her brother, Luis, is an electrical engineer at the California Department of Transportation; her sister Marisol is a nurse at Tufts University, and her sister Bianca, the youngest, is an assistant US attorney for the Southern District of California.

“We all tried to stay on top of politics or try to continue to have that influence, at least locally, in our family,” she says. “We all have different grades of involvement externally. But I think that in public service, we [saw] the value of it growing up in part because we also just [saw] people who look like us. Public service impacts the Latino community greatly.”

best serves our clients and our community,” Peñaloza says. “If those issues are important to us, as they should be, then it’s an important contribution that we [can] provide.”

Additionally, Peñaloza helped UC Santa Cruz, with a quarter of its student population as Chicano or Latino, perform its due diligence on initiatives to pave the way for more Latino students to enroll and graduate. “Particularly in higher education, we’re working really hard in terms of growing the number of Latinos represented in higher education,” she says. “What that really means [is that] it’s not just recruiting, but also retaining our students, and trying to recruit and retain faculty and staff that reflect those numbers.”

Despite the fact there are more Hispanic and Latino college students than

ever, less than nineteen thousand managers at US colleges and universities identify as such. Peñaloza offers her advice on what Latinos should keep in mind when pursuing a career or degree in higher education. “Sometimes, especially as we’re starting out in a career, we’re more timid about voicing our thoughts on issues that hit close to home, [but] it’s really important for us to have the courage to do that,” she reflects. “Because we are in the room.”

Peñaloza’s message reminds this writer of the age-old adage: *Ponte las pilas*.

“Whether we like to think about it or not, we are seen as representatives of our community, even if we don’t want to take on that responsibility,” she says. “So, it’s important to keep those issues that impact our community in the forefront of our thoughts.” □



Meyers Nave
congratulates
our client
and friend,
**LORENA
PEÑALOZA,**
for her
remarkable
career

www.meyersnave.com

800.464.3559



Sloan Sakai
congratulates
Lorena Peñaloza
for her
recognition as
an outstanding
leader and
executive!



EMERYVILLE | SACRAMENTO

sloansakai.com

(916) 258-8800



Beauty School 2.0

By Zach

Baliva

Matthew Whitworth-Howe helps L'Oréal, the world's largest beauty company, change cosmetology by creating a path to higher education for beauty professionals everywhere



Matthew Whitworth-Howe
Assistant VP
L'Oréal USA
Professional Products



MATTHEW WHITWORTH-HOWE

thought he might study acting but changed his mind as college approached. Instead, he combined interests in American history and European fine arts to graduate with a degree from the Gallatin School of Individualized Studies at New York University. It's not surprising that an executive who crafted his own major would later have an innovative vision and strategy to bring new educational opportunities to underserved communities.

As assistant vice president at L'Oréal, Whitworth-Howe partnered with ROLFS Global Institute to launch the very first collegiate degree program for beauty professionals. Originally founded as a hair color business by Eugène Schueller in 1909, L'Oréal has grown to include 90,000 employees and 34.3 billion dollars in annual sales to support its growing international presence. Its brands and subsidiaries include Garnier, Maybelline, CeraVe, Redken, and the Body Shop.

The status of L'Oréal as an undisputed industry leader means that it can make a real difference. Whitworth-Howe, who came to the organization in 2008, is helping the company do just that as it invests in the future

and trains highly specialized stylists to thrive in a complex and evolving landscape.

The nation's 1.2 million hairdressers were previously capped by a cosmetology school license, with few possessing a two- or four-year degree. Leaders at L'Oréal Professional Products Division are changing that reality and challenging the stigma that beauty is a less noble vocation that requires little skill. "We're taking beauty from a trade to a profession. Beauty professionals do so much more than just cut or color hair," Whitworth-Howe says.

In recent years, Whitworth-Howe and his colleagues at L'Oréal Professional Products Division have worked behind the scenes in partnership with ROLFS, Mesa Community

College, and Arizona State University to create the LEAD program. LEAD students can complete their training and receive an associate's degree in two semesters or a bachelor's degree in four.

Those who enroll receive more than just online classroom instruction—they also interact with industry professionals, connect with advisors, and get personal professional development training. The curriculum includes courses such as Salon of the Future, Evolution of the Beauty Profession, and Transformational Leadership Development.

Whitworth-Howe knows just how needed and valuable this type of knowledge is. He spent portions of his career in the field



“We’re taking beauty from a trade to a profession. Beauty professionals do so much more than just cut or color hair.”

where he observed educational gaps in beauty salons, barber shops, and cosmetics stores. He started with L’Oréal as an intern while earning his MBA from the Gabelli School of Business at Fordham University.

After holding various marketing roles, Whitworth-Howe asked for an international assignment and spent more than a year launching the professional brand matrix, or HQ, in Mexico. The task required him to understand the cultural preferences, nuances, and factors in play while working with distributors and business owners.

He returned to the US in 2014 and later trained sales teams to work with customers as true business partners. Instead of pushing one product or line, his teams dedicated themselves to offering creative and holistic business solutions. L’Oréal Professional Products Division signed a contract with Summit Salon Business Center in 2016 to offer a full array of services and to implement

the necessary systems and processes to make salon companies more profitable.

Today, Whitworth-Howe manages the partnership with Summit and L’Oréal’s Salon Emotion program, which teaches salons how to offer the best guest experience possible. “We’re dedicated to educating beauty professionals to help them succeed. Cosmetologists often stop their education when they earn their license and then work behind a chair and try to build a client list, but they don’t always know how to run a business. That’s where these programs come in,” Whitworth-Howe explains.

After nearly fifteen years with L’Oréal, the veteran leader still finds new challenges to tackle and new ways to develop in his career. The large company has maintained an entrepreneurial spirit that empowers him to do so. “I’ve learned that a career doesn’t always need to be one that goes straight up the ladder,” he says. “You can and should take different paths, because that helps you get various valuable

experiences. You can still get to the top, and you’ll be more well-rounded when you do.”

Founder Eugène Schueller had a saying in French that loosely translates in English to “Do, undo, do better.” Whitworth-Howe has used the saying as his personal motto at L’Oréal as he tried new things, learned from missteps, and aimed to make valuable contributions. “Risk taking is encouraged here. That’s how you innovate,” the assistant VP explains.

Whitworth-Howe says L’Oréal Professional Products Division has big things planned. The company has already enrolled more than two thousand students in its LEAD program and will continue to expand its offerings and grow internationally. After all, it is seeing how it impacts the lives of those who participate. “I’ve seen salons and stylists grow and develop in new ways through this program,” Whitworth-Howe says, “And it’s great to know that I’ve had a role in helping them fulfill their dreams.” □



Not Less, Just Different



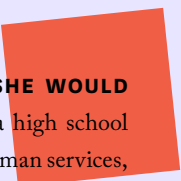
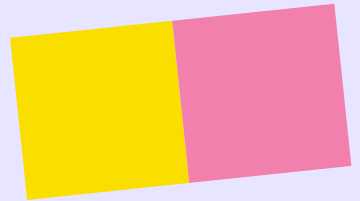
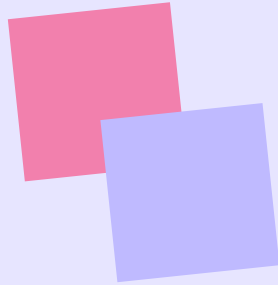
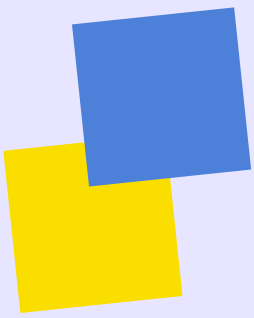
By Zachary

Brown

Lauren Lopez didn't have many guides on her early professional journey, so she's made it her mission to open doors and share her story with underrepresented and first-generation talent



Lauren Lopez
Chief Culture Officer
National Women's
Soccer League



LAUREN LOPEZ THOUGHT SHE WOULD

go into nursing. She attended a high school that specialized in health and human services, and nursing offered a path that not only served people but also provided stable work that her family would be proud of. Career conversations in immigrant and minority households often center around steady pay and not making a lot of waves.

But when it came to registering for her nursing practical, Lopez was advised that trying to work while studying would be impossible. “I was living on my own and paying for my education,” she explains. “There wasn’t an option to not work, so I had to find an alternative path.”

A pivot into human resources—a recommendation from her college advisor—led Lopez to her purpose. “My advisor explained that human resources was responsible for serving people in the world of work, ensuring that they had what they needed to be successful and thrive,” she says. “I found this very compelling and jumped in feet first.”

In the seventeen years since, Lopez has held various roles across the HR function for major organizations such as Bloomberg, NBCUniversal, Condé Nast, the NBA, and

the *New York Times*. As the *Times*’ first senior vice president of talent management, Lopez and her team led efforts around employee performance, professional development, and diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI).

Despite working for well-known companies, Lopez remembers what it was like to feel “less than” along her professional journey in corporate America.

“Walking into the corporate world with little to no guidance is hard for anyone but specifically underrepresented and first-generation talent,” Lopez says. “We often feel and carry our differences more heavily than others. Perceived deficits in the socioeconomic, cultural, educational, and professional realms may stoke insecurities that undermine potential and in turn impact performance. What was key for me was understanding how my differences set me apart or prepared me for the road ahead.

Helping others find their way became my own personal mission.”

Her first corporate role was at Bloomberg developing campus recruitment programs. It was an incredible opportunity to support and elevate early career talent from all walks of life. While loving what she did, Lopez struggled with feelings of inadequacy as she compared herself to her colleagues. She didn’t go to an Ivy League school, intern, or study abroad, nor did she have a network to propel her in the early days of her career.

But she did have a willingness to work hard, learn, and execute. With time and key mentors, Lopez reframed her thinking. “My experience wasn’t less than, it was different,” she says. “I was beginning to acknowledge my own worth.”

She began sharing what she was learning in real time with the candidates she was connecting with, including networking tips,

“Helping others find their way became my own personal mission.”



communication styles, mock interviews, editing résumés, and travel tips. “It was important for me to make these individuals feel seen and supported to afford them a smoother experience than mine,” she says.

Lopez built a roster of incredible mentors that she still taps into today. Her mentors were leaders, peers, and in some cases direct reports who shared the ability to teach and model the skills she wanted in her own tool kit. Though her parents didn’t attend college or hold offices in large skyscrapers, they taught her the power of servant leadership, resilience, and the importance of bringing others along with her.

She’s brought her mission of helping and mentoring others throughout her career, most recently at the *New York Times*. Lopez had the opportunity to influence how one of the world’s most notable media brands onboards, trains, develops, and grows its

talent. She defines her work as “ensuring that every employee has equal access to the opportunities and tools that will help them thrive in their careers.”

The *New York Times* has stated its goal to increase the number of its Black and Latino leaders by 50 percent before the end of 2025. Doing so, Lopez notes, furthers the organization’s efforts to create a diverse and inclusive culture to better equip them to serve its wide-reaching audience.

Part of Lopez’s success lies in her willingness to make the time to get to know talent across an organization. “Leaders have to be intentional about forming relationships at all levels, so they can really understand needs and uncover how they can support others,” Lopez says.

Big steps like tapping someone for a leadership position matter. But it’s the more organic gestures—speaking someone’s name at a

leadership table or giving an employee quality facetime with executives—that executives can offer support and increase pathways to growth.

This year, Lopez has brought her mission and culture-building expertise to the National Women’s Soccer League (NWSL), where she is the first chief culture officer and its first Latina C-suite leader. In this role, she identifies, develops, and implements HR strategies, initiatives, and best practices across the league and club ecosystem. It’s an opportunity to help the NWSL create “a community and culture where all feel safe, supported, and set up for success,” she said in a statement.

Her experiences balancing school, financial security, and living independently prepared her for this journey sooner than most—and it is core to the leader she has become, Lopez notes.

“I have had the unique opportunity to influence how some of the world’s most notable organizations onboard, train, develop, and grow their talent,” she says. “Ensuring that every employee has equal access to the opportunities and tools that will help them thrive in their career is critical and a responsibility I do not take lightly.” □

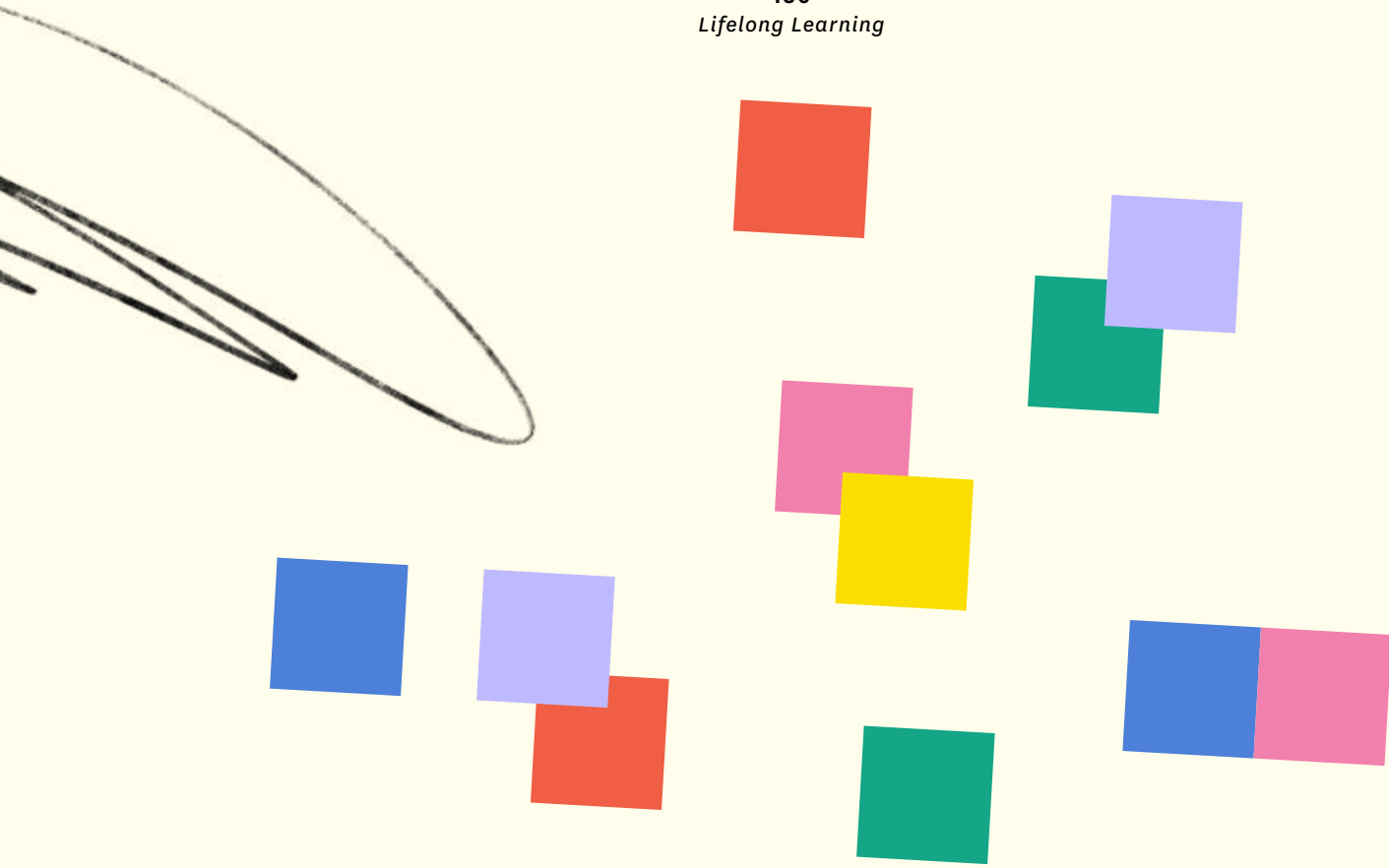


Transform Debt into Opportunity

By Frank

DiMaria

As CEO and founder of Chipper, **Tony Aguilar** helps college graduates “chip away” at their student loan debt



HIS BUSINESS CARD READS “I WAS blessed with \$100K in student loan debt.” Most would view that much debt as a burden. Not Tony Aguilar. “If it wasn’t for my experience in having to deal with that much debt, I wouldn’t be doing what I’m doing today,” says Aguilar, the CEO and founder of Chipper, an app that allows student loan borrowers to analyze, manage, and pay back their student loan debt. As its name implies, Chipper helps college graduates “chip away” at their debt.

Student debt is a massive problem, and Aguilar wants to be a catalyst for change. “The government is trying to solve it, but they’re essentially putting Band-Aids on the issue. Just kicking it down the road instead of trying to solve the epidemic,” he says.

In addition to being “blessed” with \$100,000 in student loan debt, Aguilar was blessed with parents who insisted he go to college, though neither of them completed high school. “They understood that education is a gateway to living a better life and making a better income,” Aguilar says.

Since attending college was a forgone conclusion for him, he embraced his college

experience as an adventure. Born and raised in a small Texan town, he refused to apply to Texan schools. “I wanted to get away, as far as I could to see what was out there,” Aguilar says. He passed on the Ivy Leagues and instead chose the University of Indiana for its prestigious business school and size. “I really wanted to find myself and just experience people from all different cultures and be somewhere I can experience life at a bigger scale.”

With a degree in finance and economics, Aguilar came back to Texas and founded Chipper. Typical Chipper users can have a dozen loans, and up to eighteen if they attended graduate school. Chipper helps users find the 150-repayment forgiveness loan consolidation options out there in the market. Once users link their loans in the app, Chipper’s algorithm takes over, showing them the forgiveness programs for which they qualify. “It’s a very modern tool to help people understand their options and enable them to take action in just a couple clicks,” Aguilar says.

Chipper automatically enrolls users in the loan forgiveness program that they choose. “We handle all the paperwork after the

“If it wasn’t for my experience in having to deal with that much debt, I wouldn’t be doing what I’m doing today.”

signatures and any other forms necessary to ensure they get into the plan,” Aguilar says. To date, Chipper users have qualified for over \$250 million in loan forgiveness. “This is a life changing financial situation for so many people. Some of our members have had \$50,000, \$65,000, \$100,000 forgiven,” he says.

The users who fail to qualify for any loan forgiveness programs can chip away at their college loans by linking the credit cards they use to make daily purchases in the Chipper app. Each time they make a purchase or enjoy a meal, the app rounds up their transaction to the nearest dollar and applies it to their student loans. “So every day they’re chipping away little by little,” Aguilar explains.

To get Chipper aloft, Aguilar turned to angel investors who shared his vision and believed in him. But as Chipper grew and required more financial runway, he was forced to turn to venture capitalists, some of which were reluctant to invest in a company started by a Latino. “Those conversations and the environment of those meetings changed dramatically,” says Aguilar,

comparing the pitches he made to VCs to the ones he made to his angel investors.

Fewer than 2 percent of all VC capital goes to Latino founders and just 2 percent of VCs are Latino. “That correlation is there . . . People end up investing in people they can relate to and people they connect with . . . Until we get more Latinos into seats on the other side of the table—into VC funds making decisions on where they inject the capital—we’re not going to see a shift in the dollars going to Latino founders,” the CEO says.

As a community, Latinos must be more proactive about helping other Latino entrepreneurs. When he’s not running Chipper, Aguilar expends considerable energy helping Latinos and other founders with backgrounds like his, living by the philosophy, “As I climb, I pull.” Wherever he can open a door and make an introduction for these founders, he does. “The hardest part is getting into the room with these VCs. Once you’re in the room you can showcase your skills and your passion,” Aguilar says. □

Calling the Plays



By Zach

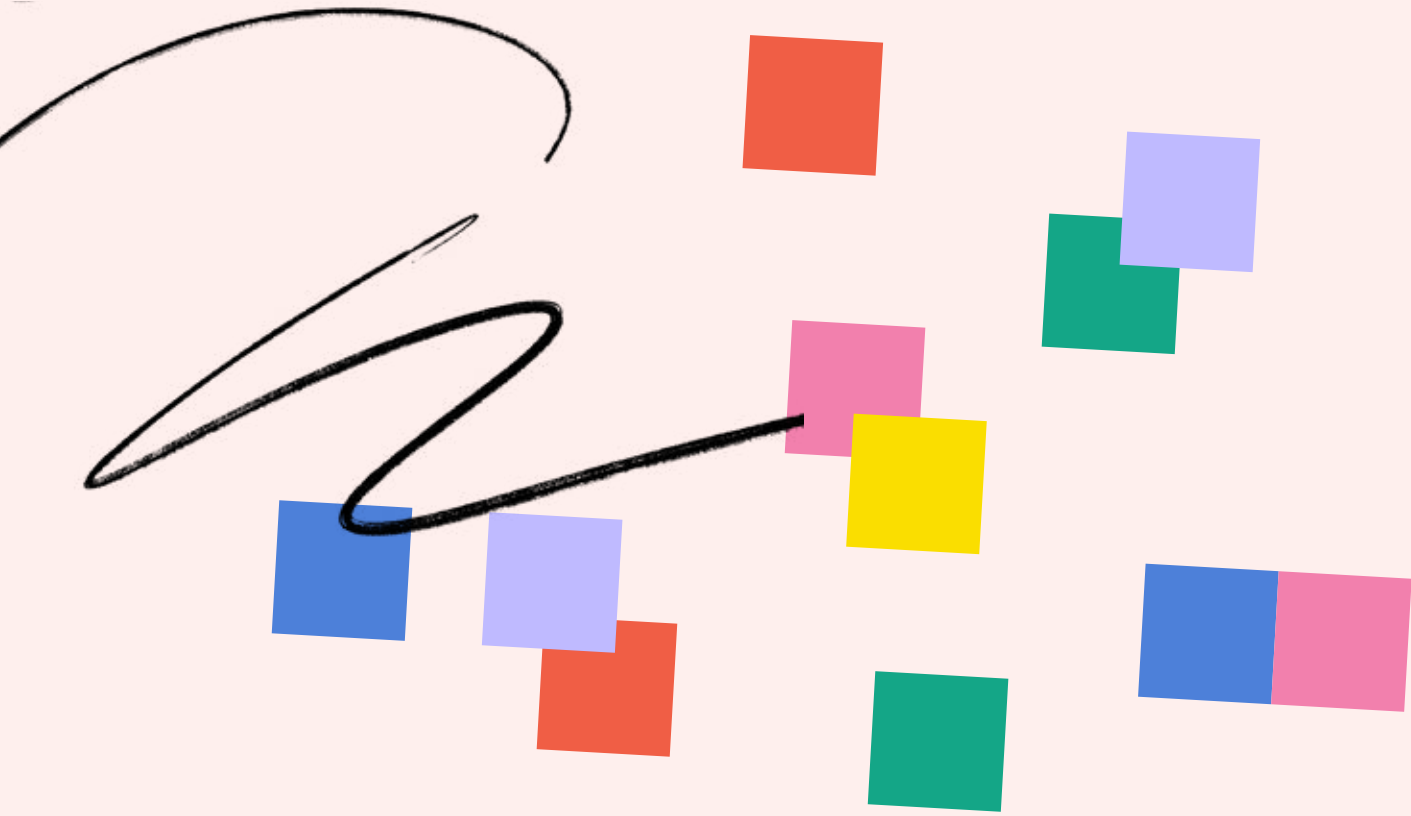
Baliva

Marissa Solis is writing a new playbook for how to diversify the National Football League's fan base, give back to communities, and transform in step with America's changing demographics



Marissa Solis
Head of Global Brand &
Consumer Marketing
National Football League





THERE WAS A TIME WHEN MARISSA

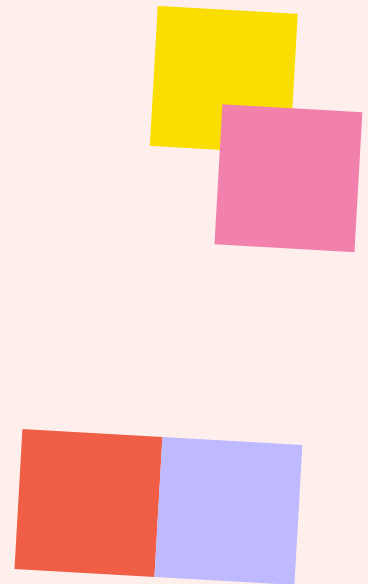
Solis thought she would become a US ambassador. The proud Mexican came with her family to the Rio Grande Valley at age ten and fell in love with the idea of studying at Georgetown University. She managed to get a full scholarship and studied foreign service, development economics, and international development. But when a dean encouraged a young Solis to consider the influence she could have in the corporate world, she changed paths and went on to lead marketing efforts at iconic organizations like Procter & Gamble, PepsiCo, and the National Football League (NFL). Her original dream didn't die; it evolved. Instead of working as an ambassador for her country, she's making a global impact as an ambassador for her community.

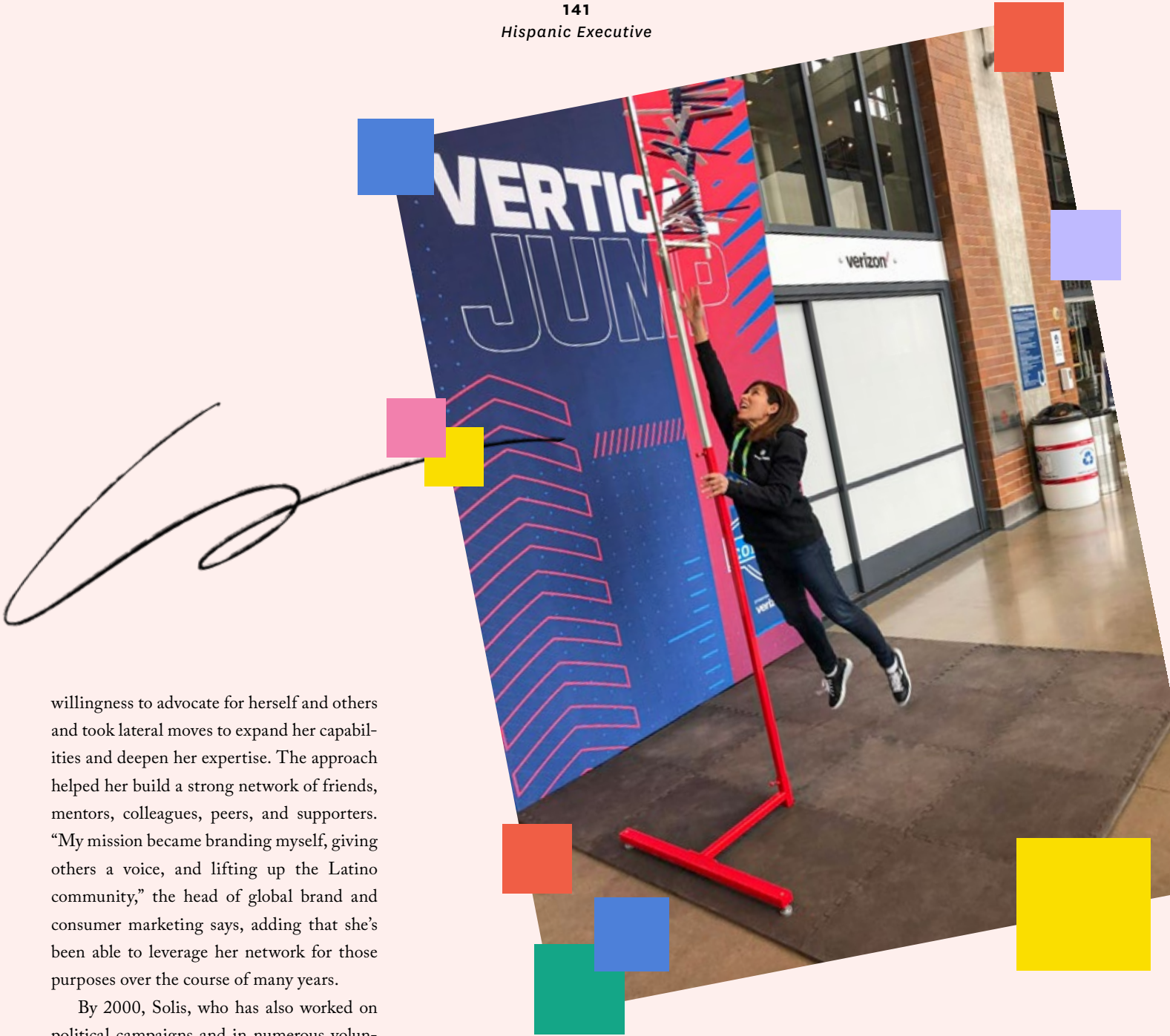
While moving from the halls of a top-ranked international relations school into the office of a leading consumer goods corporation might seem like a leap, Solis was a quick study. She had never studied

marketing and branding when she landed an entry-level job as an assistant brand manager for one of Procter & Gamble's laundry and paper businesses. She soon found herself working in Puerto Rico as part of a LATAM division and had the opportunity to lead her first major marketing campaign.

That's when Solis learned that she would have to navigate bias, defy expectations, and claim her place in corporate America. She remembers walking into a creative agency to present her plans for a brand only to find a room full of older white men. When a partner advised her to grab coffee with his admin while the men talked business, nobody, including her male boss, stood up for her. Solis had to stand up for herself. She did not leave, led the meeting, and won their business. "As a young Latina in the American business world, I had to open the door to opportunity myself," Solis says. "I had to show that I am here to play."

That moment set the tone for Solis's entire career. She's maintained a





willingness to advocate for herself and others and took lateral moves to expand her capabilities and deepen her expertise. The approach helped her build a strong network of friends, mentors, colleagues, peers, and supporters. “My mission became branding myself, giving others a voice, and lifting up the Latino community,” the head of global brand and consumer marketing says, adding that she’s been able to leverage her network for those purposes over the course of many years.

By 2000, Solis, who has also worked on political campaigns and in numerous volunteer positions, had completed a master’s in public administration and public affairs at the University of Texas. In 2003, she started an eighteen-year stretch at PepsiCo. During that time, she created a Hispanic business unit and helped the organization sell to Hispanic-owned stores and businesses while marketing to the Hispanic community.

During her tenure at PepsiCo, Solis was instrumental in forging a partnership with Bad Bunny, the Puerto Rican rapper, singer, and global sensation. Together, they created the *Deja tu Huella* campaign. Cheetos and Bad Bunny gave \$25,000 grants to 20 individuals who make a positive contribution to


Hispanic communities in the US and Puerto Rico. *Deja tu Huella* was an evolution of the Cheetos Estudiante Fund, created with the singer’s Good Bunny Foundation the previous year.

Her ability to leverage powerhouse brands for good makes Solis proud. “I experienced the American dream thanks to the sacrifice of my parents, and I get to use my experience to not only sell products but help people give back. We’re using platforms to give others a voice they wouldn’t otherwise have,” she explains.

In late 2021, the NFL recruited Solis to lead its global brand and consumer marketing group. Although the veteran leader had

planned to perhaps retire with PepsiCo, the chance to influence four hundred million sports fans around the world was too tantalizing to pass up. Now, she’s leading marketing relationships with major broadcast partners, managing social media campaigns, helping the league give back to its communities, and working to make the NFL more diverse.

That last part is key. “I was hired to do many important things as the NFL transforms, and one of those things is to help future-proof the league,” the executive says. Today’s league is big and powerful. It enjoys rabid support from a massive audience—but 60 percent of that audience is both white and



“As a young Latina in the American business world, I had to open the door to opportunity myself.”

over the age of thirty-five. The America of the future will be young and multicultural. Solis knows she has to help the league evolve to match the country's changing demographics.

Solis isn't thinking only about numbers; she's also thinking about potential. "I don't want to simply make the league cool and relevant; I want to think about how we can lift up underserved communities and do more good as we grow," she says. Solis and her colleagues are rolling out a "helmets off" strategy to showcase NFL players in a more relatable way and help them engage fans through verticals like music, fashion, gaming, food, and culture. Today, the NFL has twenty-five million followers on Instagram and is rapidly growing its TikTok footprint in partnership with players and influencers.

The NFL has seen its share of public relations challenges in recent years, with everything from controversial calls to cheating allegations to high-profile injuries. Players have been charged with crimes and fans have debated national anthem protests. Solis knows that some of her efforts to promote

diversity and break new ground may be met with resistance. She plans to stand up to it like she always has. "Given the nature of our fan base, half will love and half will hate anything you do, but we have to follow the data that says our nation is getting younger and more passionate about social issues," she says. "We can't shy away from the issues that matter to the communities we serve."

While NFL players do their battling on the gridiron, Solis battles off the field. She's scraping and clawing for yardage just like they are. And like them, she makes any negative reaction into her own motivating bulletin board material. "The naysayers only fuel me and serve as affirmation that I'm in the right place. I belong here," Solis says.

And her work does not go without recognition and respect from her colleagues. "Marissa Solis is that rare leader who

effortlessly evokes both love and respect. It undoubtedly comes from her ability to inspire people, her contagious optimism, her big-picture thinking, and [her determination to] never settle for 'good enough,'" says Rose Kaur, managing partner at Jester&Genius. "She exemplifies the best qualities of a coach, a champion, a teammate, and a fan who gives it her ALL, both on and off field."

Solis watched the 2022 NFL draft with great interest. With the eleventh overall pick, the New Orleans Saints picked Ohio State wide receiver Chris Olave. Olave was the only Latino picked in the first round. Still, the entire draft produced the biggest class of Latinos the NFL has ever seen. Solis says that's a step in the right direction and says football fans can expect to see more progress with her under center. □



Transforming
brands through the
**POWER OF
STORY**

At Jester&Genius, we believe that there's one thing that separates good brands from the truly great ones. And that is Story. By harnessing the power of story, we have created a revolutionary new approach, both intensely human and strategically actionable. ***One that speaks to the heart, convinces the mind and brings steady, heady growth for your business.***

To learn more about our compelling results, drop us a note at hello@jesterandgenius.com or visit www.jesterandgenius.com

Jester&GeniusSM
A BrandStory Company



No Success Without Failure

By Claire


Redden

George Pata draws on the lessons learned early in his career to teach the next generation of lawyers and help Sweetgreen achieve its mission to build healthier communities by connecting people to real food



George Pauta
*Associate General Counsel
and Head of Labor,
Employment & Litigation*
Sweetgreen





WHEN ASKED ABOUT HIS PHILOSOPHY, “the importance of failing and growing to love it,” George Pauta admits that he has failed many times early in his career and that growing to love it came much later.

One of Pauta’s failures, or at least that’s how he perceived it at the time, occurred when he graduated from law school. After maintaining high honors throughout college, graduating from a top twenty law school, and passing the New York State Bar Exam, Pauta couldn’t land a job.

“It reflected my upbringing and the lack of resources and professionals around me. Even though I was in law school already, I only knew how to succeed in academia, which was self-taught. I didn’t have the mentors to teach me how to be successful as an actual lawyer,” Pauta reflects.

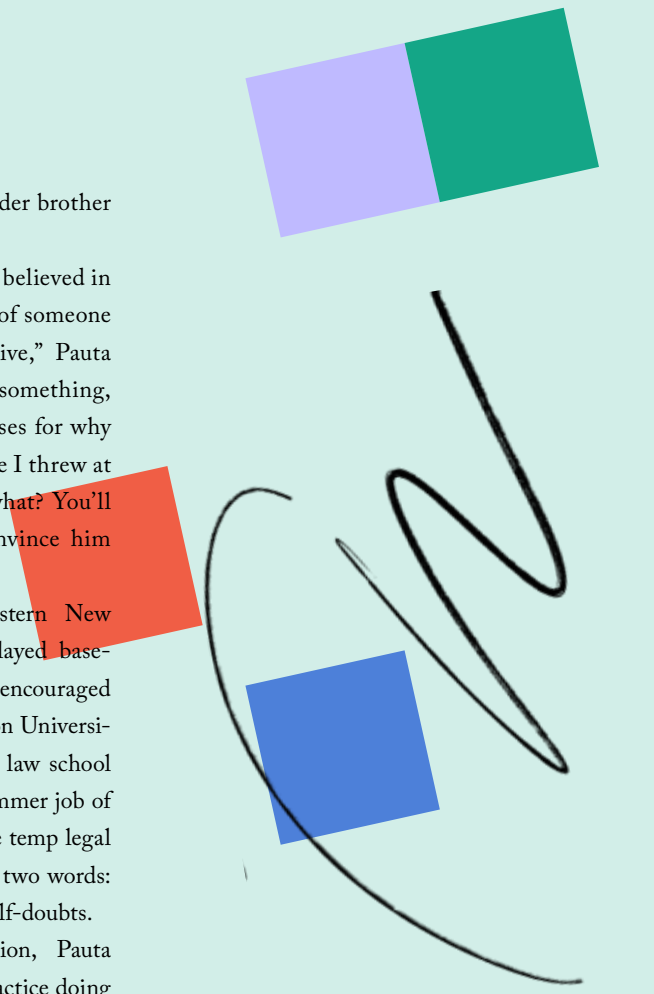
As a first-generation American, Pauta grew up in a single-parent household in Long Island, New York, without many examples of success to look up to. So, for the early part of his life, Pauta set the bar

low and dreamt small, but his older brother changed all of that.

“He was the first person who believed in me. It’s so cliché, but the power of someone believing in you is transformative,” Pauta explains. “If he said I could do something, I would give him a million excuses for why I couldn’t. No matter what excuse I threw at him, he would always say, ‘So what? You’ll figure it out.’ I could never convince him that I couldn’t.”

After graduating from Western New England University where he played baseball, the support from his brother encouraged him to attend law school at Boston University. But then, when he graduated law school and found himself back at his summer job of moving furniture and doing some temp legal work, he again used his brother’s two words: “So what?” to deflect any of his self-doubts.

Seven months post-graduation, Pauta landed his first job at a private practice doing what he thought he’d spend his career doing. But, in 2016, he was recruited to his first





in-house role at a financial services firm, and in 2020, Pauta had the opportunity to go in-house at Sweetgreen, a not-so-typical fast-food chain that is headquartered in LA.

Already a fan of the company's product, its mission, and its story, it made perfect sense. Not only for Pauta but his wife, a California native, and their growing family. Nevertheless, after making it down to the final two candidates, he didn't get the job.

"The path of every successful person is checkered with failure. If you want to impress someone, you can tell stories that focus solely on your successes but that won't resonate," Pauta says. "If you want people to really connect to your story, you must also share your failures. And when I think of the younger generation trying to navigate their paths, they need to hear your whole story, especially the failures."

It wasn't the first, nor the last, time that Pauta fell short of his goals. "There are moments of doubt and questions of worthiness that accompany every failure. You have to push through those moments and instead, take stock in all that you have achieved that helped put you in the position to have an opportunity to fail in the first place," the executive says.

So, despite the unfortunate news, Pauta sent an email to his would-be boss to express his gratitude. Then, he moved forward by focusing his attention on another goal he'd already set in motion to enhance his chances of moving to California: passing the California State Bar Exam, the lowest passing bar exam in the country and one which he'd failed once before.

Scaling Greens

As Sweetgreen reimagines American fast food from a convenient option into one that can also be healthy, fast, fresh, and friendly, the company is laser-focused on consistency and scaling across the seventeen markets in which it operates.

George Pauta is a critical part of the legal effort behind this goal. Since joining Sweetgreen, he has built the company's employment law function from the ground up. In doing so, he's placed a special focus on building out repeatable and sustainable processes for long-term growth to create a better experience for its teams.

His push to pivot the company's compliance work from manual to automated by leveraging technology solutions fit for the dynamic food landscape is just one example. "This can be a tricky endeavor," Pauta says, "but when you have great cross-functional partners who all care about the company's compliance measures (especially how these measures impact our team members), that makes my job quite impactful and satisfying."

JacksonLewis


We get work.™

Congratulations
George Pauta,
Sr. Director,
Associate General
Counsel, Labor &
Employment at
Sweetgreen, for
this well-deserved
recognition of
your exceptional
leadership.


Focused on labor and employment law since 1958, our 950+ attorneys located in major cities nationwide consistently identify and respond to new ways workplace law intersects business.

Lori D. Bauer,
Office Managing Principal
666 Third Avenue, 29th Floor
New York, NY 10017
(212) 545-4025
Lori.Bauer@jacksonlewis.com

©2022 Jackson Lewis P.C.
Attorney Advertising | jacksonlewis.com



“If you want people to really connect to your story, you must also share your failures.”



But, about two weeks into his studying, Pauta got a call from Sweetgreen. The other candidate had declined their offer, and now the job was his. “Many of my friends and colleagues were like, ‘Great. You don’t need to retake the California Bar.’ But I’m not one to quit halfway through a goal: I still took it.”

After everything, it all worked out. Pauta took the position as the associate general counsel of labor, employment, and litigation at Sweetgreen, where he gets to be a part of its work in reimagining “fast food” so customers can have real food made to order that is fast, friendly, and fresh.

Not long after that, Pauta got the news that he had passed the California State Bar Exam.

Now, Pauta seeks opportunities to mentor kids and first-generation law students from low-income environments, including through programs at Sweetgreen and Boston University. “It’s a big thing for me because I identify with many of them,” he says.

“The biggest impact mentors have had on me, starting with my brother and throughout my career, was that they saw more for me than I saw for myself,” he adds. So now, not only does Pauta get to be that person for his mentees, but he also gets to bring them all the knowledge he has learned through his mistakes, so they don’t have to. □