

## Heritage and “Cultural Smarts” Huge Assets for Latina Senior Executives: But Stigma and Stereotypes Undermine Progress

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Lisa M. Quiroz, Time Warner’s SVP of Corporate Responsibility, tells how “cultural smarts” were critically important in the successful launch of *People en Espanol* – a magazine she kicked off in 1997. In her words “the folks who wrote the original business plan didn’t realize that a Spanish-speaking Latina wouldn’t necessarily know how to read the language. The plan also called for the magazine to be a direct translation of *People*. This did not take into account what kind of music the average Latina listened to, the TV she watched or who her heroes were.” Plugging in more realistic assumptions, Quiroz re-wrote the business plan and laid the groundwork for a wildly successful magazine launch.

In subsequent talent management roles, Quiroz has continued to probe what Latina executives bring to the table, and on October 29th, as Hispanic heritage month draws to a close, she will preside over an event – at the Time Warner Conference Center in New York – marking the release of *Sin Fronteras: Celebrating and Capitalizing on the Strengths of Latina Executives*. Published by the Center for Work Life Policy this new study fills a hole in the research literature. Despite the rapidly growing heft of the Latina market (in terms of both brain power and buying power) rather little is known about this increasingly important group. Latinas are little studied and poorly understood.

This study showcases the strengths of Latina executives. Drawing upon a heritage that is rich in transferable skill sets – work ethic, collaborative leadership, cultural fluency – Latinas have extraordinary potential in the executive suite.

Potential is the key word here. The fact is, many of the rich assets Latinas bring to the workplace are either ignored or denied by employers. Negative stereotypes are alive and well – impeding progress, undermining trust and increasing “flight risk” among Latinas.

A few highlights:

- **Heritage is a huge asset.** The data is impressive here, whether you’re talking work ethic (rated 9.2 on a 10-point scale), aptitude for collaborative leadership or “cultural smarts,” Latinas have enormous potential in the executive suite.
- **A triple whammy.** Latina executives perceive both gender and ethnicity as challenges in the workplace. The data also demonstrates that stereotypes and stigma are serious on-going barriers. All too often high-achieving Latinas are seen as “lazy, ignorant, illegal immigrants draining the social services.” Members of the “old boys club” have a hard time seeing this group as “leadership material.”

- **Distrust, disillusionment and propensity to quit.** Given the unfairness of a system that rewards “comfort level” above performance, many Latina executives tune out and turn off. A substantial minority are on the verge of quitting.
- **Cutting edge companies are beginning to leverage Latina talent** creating support networks (Goldman Sachs, GE); providing leadership training (J&J); honoring community outreach (Time Warner); underpinning personal and family resilience (Booz Allen Hamilton, Credit Suisse); and tackling stereotypes and stigma up front (Cisco). All of these initiatives involve the top rungs of management and thus are potential “game-changers.”

### **ABOUT THE STUDY:**

Research is based on qualitative and quantitative data including two Advanced Strategy Labs among Latina executives, 38 one-on-one interviews with key senior executives, and a U.S. survey of 1,601 professionals ages 28-55, 1,001 of whom were minority women (one-third African-American, one-third Hispanic and one-third Asian).

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