

Irvine executive seeks to develop Latino leadership

Glenn Llopis wants to see Latinos bring their values and inner resources to the workplace — and become leaders.

They are a key, he says, to companies that seek to foster innovation, and gain a competitive edge.

"We're already wired to understand uncertainty and change," said Llopis, founder of the [Center for Hispanic Leadership in Irvine](#). "For us, reinvention is no surprise with respect to how handle and manage it...For Hispanics and other multiculturals, it's a fundamental of what we've experienced and we know how to navigate around it."

The Orange County executive is launching what's envisioned as the 10-city 2011-12 Hispanic Leadership Tour with a three-day symposium this week at [Florida International University in Miami](#).

Speakers include Latino executives from such companies as Pepsi, AOL Latino, Winn-Dixie Stores, and Sears Holdings Corp. More than 200 people are expected to attend. Llopis expects Denver to be the second city on the tour.

The seminar focuses on how corporations can gain a competitive advantage by encouraging the growth of Latino leaders, as well as how Latinos can tap into their own natural characteristics to become more effective leaders. He outlines the six in a free eBook titled "[The Six Reasons Why Hispanic Leadership Will Save America's Corporations](#)."

Those include an immigrant perspective, an entrepreneurial spirit and what he calls Latin passion.



Glenn Llopis, founder of the Center for Hispanic Leadership, is planning a nationwide Hispanic Leadership Tour that begins in Miami. In this photo he addressed the fourth annual Latino OC 100 reception in Santa Ana last year, honoring people who have made a difference in Orange County's Latino communities. "We see that opportunities are everywhere, every day, and we make the most of those that cross our path," he says of Latino leadership in his eBook.

"Most Hispanic professionals do not truly begin to thrive and create influence until they realize that their cultural roots are sources of strength rather than barriers to advancement," he says.

His goal is to train a million Latino professionals in the next decade, and educate Fortune 500 companies on the importance of developing them – and tap into the growing purchasing power of Latino consumers.

Ruben Alvarez, who runs [Stay Connected OC](#), a social networking business, has taken part in panels that Llopis has organized.

"His focus is developing Latinos as a brand, what we bring to the table," Alvarez said. "Corporate America sells us short a lot of the time. Our background brings a lot to the corporate table, especially as our country becomes more diverse."

Llopis is the Southern California-born son of Cuban immigrants, whose story he recounts in his eBook. His father, Frank Llopis, studied chemical engineering at Cornell University in the 1930s. Back home in Cuba, he founded the [Los Llopis](#) quartet, integrating American rock 'n' roll with Cuban music, and married Glenn's mother, Jenny, a dancer. They performed throughout Latin America and Spain.

In Argentina when the Cuban revolution began, they couldn't return home and settled in the U.S. in 1965. Frank, now 95, became a chemist at Miller Brewing Co. in late 1960s. Glenn Llopis grew up in Azusa.

"He would always tell me that if he had not taken action when faced with adversity," Llopis wrote in his book, "he would have been an incomplete person."

Llopis recently answered some questions about his effort.

Q. What's the purpose of the tour?

The purpose of the tour is to essentially create awareness and to teach corporations why they need to allow their Hispanic professionals to be their natural and whole selves so that they can help propel new types of growth and opportunity for their organizations. Especially in this post-2008 economy.

Glenn Llopis

Age: 44

Residence: Irvine

Occupation: CEO of the [Center for Hispanic Leadership](#); CEO of the [Glenn Llopis Group](#); executive director, [Center for Innovation and Humanity](#); contributing leadership writer, Forbes magazine and AOL Latino.

Family: Wife Annette

Education: Bachelor's, UCLA, 1989

Hero: His father. "He taught me how to trust myself at a very young age. He taught me the meaning of sharing and giving and making others better around you."

Learn more: glennllopis.com

The whole reason I decided to do this is there's a misperception of who we are as people; a community...People don't recognize us enough as having the ability to be great managers and leaders. We need to rewire their thinking. ...They need to start thinking about who we naturally are by tapping into the six natural characteristics that we have. We train companies to do this.

I've spent quite a lot of time in South Korea, Europe and other parts of the world. They are big proponents of tapping into different mindsets. We can't afford to have a cookie-cutter approach. We can't be linear thinkers. We need to be more circular, to embrace innovation through diversity...

People in general need to be able to trust themselves to share their unique ideals and ideas. This is the kind of activity that takes place outside the U.S. because that's what they've had to do to survive.

Q. What's your message?

Hispanic leadership matters — in very simple terms. In today's emerging workplace, that is defined by trust, transparency, taking on the entrepreneurial attitude, creating a family environment, making room for individuality, corporate responsibility, and creating a cultural and generational mosaic. Those are all things that come naturally to Hispanic professionals and that will define success in the workplace in today's new economy.

If given the opportunity to embrace their six natural characteristics and blossom through them, they can be leaders for fast-changing companies seeking to capture sustainable growth.

The other message is that we don't have to assimilate to be relevant.

Q. What do you mean?

When I say assimilate, I'm talking about it in the context of the work environment. We need to make sure we don't lose our identity along the journey...The way I put it in the book is, being your natural whole self isn't risky. Playing it safe is.

The more we assimilate, the more we lose our identity and unique capabilities. The more we assimilate, the less we'll be able to reflect as role models and leaders for the next generation of Hispanics.

By 2050, Hispanics will represent 30 percent of our country's population. Can you imagine a country as great as the United States having 30 percent of its population underutilized?

Q. You speak to a variety of communities. Is your message the same when you address an audience that's primarily Cuban American, for example, versus one that's Mexican American?

It's time to embrace the unique cultural differences that exist with the Hispanic community. It's time to unite these disparate elements that are represented in our rich culture and Hispanic legacy and utilize them to best represent a competitive advantage in the workplace.

The only way we'll have a voice that matters is if we find way to unite. One thing that unites is the six characteristics we share.

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