Ten Principles of Latino Leadership

by Juana Bordas
Becoming a leader in the Latino community requires pondering questions such as: Why do I desire to lead? What will be my unique contribution? How will I stay on the path I have chosen? Three culturally based principles prepare a person to become a leader and to tap into his personal power.

Principle One: “Personalismo: The Character of the Leader,” explores the belief that every person has inherent value and must be treated with respect. While many cultures espouse this, for Latinos it is an actual expectation, not just a cultural nicety. Personalismo prescribes that leaders establish personal, genuine, and caring relationships.

Second, the leader must become the type of person other people will follow. The essence of personalismo is the leader’s character—her persona. The leader embodies traits that earn respect and trust. To become this type of person requires a deep connection with the leader’s inner self—the rock on which character formation rests. This implies understanding one’s roots and family heritage, staying culturally connected, and understanding history.

“Conciencia: Knowing Oneself and Personal Awareness” point to two critical questions for Latino leaders: Who are you? And, what kind of person are you? Answering these questions requires the practice of Principle Two – conciencia, or in-depth reflection, self-examination, and integration. Conciencia is the connection the leader has with his inner core—the reliable, consistent self that provides direction and guidance. Since Latinos do not choose leaders because of position, wealth or status, but by core values and the way a person lives, conciencia is the...
mechanism for character formation and personal development.

Conciencia also entails knowing what one’s self requires. This requires tapping into the intuition that allows one to be aware of her motivation, values, intention, and internal dynamics.

The belief that every person has a distinct life path and purpose is explored in Principle Three, “Destino: Personal and Collective Purpose.” Knowing one’s destino requires the insight of conciencia. Individualistic cultures believe a person is in charge of and determines his own future. Many Latinos believe it is impossible to control chance, fate, or unplanned events. (Having to deal with discrimination is a case in point.) Life presents certain opportunities, experiences, and challenges. Destino is a dance with the currents of life. The leaders whose voices resound in this book are in sync with their destino and unique life path.

The Cultural Foundations of Leadership

Latino leadership flows from the cultural spring. Values unify Latinos and nurture the emerging collective identity. This understanding will encourage young Latinos to integrate their cultural assets into their lives and leadership path.

Principle Four, “La Cultura: Culturally Based Leadership,” looks at how the Latino culture is bound together by a common history, heritage, spiritual tradition, and language. Most importantly, the culture is integrated by shared values such as respect, honesty, service, and generosity. Latino values are taught through dichos (adages or proverbs). Mi casa es su casa, for instance, encourages generosity and sharing. Mi casa es su casa frames leadership as service and as caring for people. It counsels leaders, “Give of your time and ideas. Be generous. Value people and tend to their needs.”

Dichos are way for Latinos to remember the wisdom of their abuelos and understand the foundations of leadership. For non-Latinos, learning dichos invites them to increase their cultural adaptability and become Latinos by corazón.

Latinos are diversity. Their multifaceted identity is a testament to Latino inclusiveness and is reflected in “De Colores” (Of Many Colors)—a traditional song about life’s incredible diversity.

Principle Five: “De Colores: Latino Inclusiveness and Diversity,” invites people to be part of the culture. “De Colores” must include the official US census designation of Hispanics as a category in 1980. (To better understand this, download the article: Latino, Hispanic, Puerto Rican.) However, while the census brought together the multiple categories of “Latino,” these subgroups continue to maintain their distinct identities and nationalities. Bringing diverse communities together and building a shared identity has been the ongoing work of Latino leaders. In today’s multicultural and global community, this indispensable ability is a special contribution of Latino leadership.

Inclusiveness is also evident in the intergenerational spirit. Latinos venerate age and experience. At the same time, young people are the promise of tomorrow. This intergenerational model is even more imperative today: the 2010 US census indicated that 23 percent of children under eighteen are Hispanic.
Putting Leadership into Action

Latinos are a We, a collective culture, where the familia and comunidad (community) take precedence over the individual. Leadership, therefore, is not driven by individual success or credit but by contributing to the group welfare. The culture’s humanistic core propels a people-oriented leadership through which the leader strives to empower the community. Principle Six, “Juntos: Collective Community Stewardship,” discusses five action-oriented principles that support this process.

Juntos (we are together) signifies the collective and collaborative nature of leadership. Latino leadership is the power of many. Leaders are community stewards who promote dispersed, shared, and reciprocal power. The leader as equal—where the leader works side by side with others—facilitates people’s belief that they too can contribute. Traditionally, people power (not money, influence, or extensive resources) was the fuel for advancement.

Four practices foster community stewardship: (1) the power of a shared vision, (2) the power of history and cultural traditions, (3) compartir—the power of participation and shared responsibility, and (4) paso a paso—the power of a step-by-step approach where each success reinforces abilities and self-confidence. By linking the past, present, and future, leaders leverage the power of history and culture so that a sense of continuity and wholeness emerges.

Principle Seven: “¡Adelante! Global Vision and Immigrant Spirit,” notes how Latinos are connected to twenty-two countries through Español and through a special kinship with Brazil, Portugal, Italy, and the Philippines. Latinos are also an integrating force of the Western Hemisphere—bridging North, South, and Central America. Moreover, in the United States there are three dominant subgroups: Mexican, Puerto Rican, and Cuban, but in the last twenty years Latino diversity has expanded. Today there are substantial populations of Dominicans, Guatemalans, Nicaraguans, and Colombians.

These international connections make Latinos a prototype for global leadership. In 2010 over 50 percent of all US immigrants were from Mexico and South or Central America. Immigration has contributed 40 percent of Latino demographic growth in the past decade. Immigrants seek opportunity, work hard, and bring an entrepreneurial spirit evident in the Latino workforce participation and small-business sector growth—both of which are the highest in the nation.

Immigration presents a conundrum for Latino leaders—any organization or business experiencing a 40 percent growth must scramble to find the resources to integrate this expansion. Furthermore, leaders must constantly help the newly arrived with education, English classes, and basic services. Thus, the fair and humane treatment of immigrants remains fundamental to the Latino agenda. This reflects the commitment to social justice and inclusiveness, which are cornerstones of Latino leadership.

“Sí Se Puede: Coalition and Activist Leadership,” frames leadership as social activism—a natural evolution for Latinos whose concern for the community good necessitated challenging social inequities. Principle Eight: Sí se puede! (Yes, we can!) was a rallying cry for the farm workers who marched with César Chávez in the 1960s advocating fair pay, decent working conditions, and adequate housing. Chávez was following the Latino tradition of advocacy and social action that was reignited during the civil rights movement. Dealing with immediate issues while providing the skills and knowledge to
address the institutional barriers that perpetuate injustice is core to Latino leadership.

The struggle for social and economic equality has endured because of consistencia—fierce determination, commitment, and reliability. While these are widespread leadership traits, for Latinos consistencia is a lifelong commitment—an understanding that social change takes generations. Consistencia is the reason leaders put in the long hours and hard work needed for community progress. Consistencia has been the nucleus of the growing Latino power today.

Social change requires a critical mass of organized people with a unified agenda. The most powerful Latino organizations are coalitions that bring the diverse Latino groups together around a whole array of issues. Coalition leadership is sorely needed today in a divided America. Latinos offer viable models of reaching across differences, promoting partnerships, and working for the common welfare.

So how do leaders motivate people to do the hard work of community building and commit to the long-term struggle of creating a more equitable society? In Principle Nine: “Gozar la Vida: Leadership That Celebrates Life,” we discover that leadership has to reflect the social, family-oriented, and celebratory nature of the community. Check out most Latino events, and you will see music, dancing, good food, and socializing.

Gozar la vida means to enjoy life. For the 70 percent of Latinos who are working class, or who have dealt with discrimination, enjoying life replenishes their spirit and resolve. Since the culture prescribes that people come first, celebration strengthens relationships. What better way to enjoy people than to have a fiesta where the music is blaring and everyone contributes something? And what do people do when they get together? Well, Latinos love animated conversation, story-telling, and expressing cariño (affection). When Latinos greet each other they give each other abrazos (embraces). They hug their leaders, too, because they have personal attachments to them. Then Tenth Principle, “Fe y Esperanza: Faith and Hope,” explores the abiding faith that grounds the power of Latino leadership. How could Latinos have otherwise survived the five hundred years since the conquest of this hemisphere and kept advancing with their values and communities intact? (While US history describes the “discovering and settling” of America,” part I presents the perspective of the indigenous people who were already here.) The revered dicho Está en las manos de Dios (It’s in the hands of God) acknowledges protection and guidance on a daily basis. It anchors Latino optimism.

Faith, or fe, is a living current prescribing that people take care of one another. Leaders can tap into this sense of social responsibility and inspire the hope that by working together people can change their lives. César Chávez recognized that spirituality upheld the activist nature of leadership. “I don’t think I could base my will to struggle on cold economics or on some political doctrine,” he said. “I don’t think there would be enough to sustain me. For the basis must be faith.”

Portugal, Italy, and the Philippines. Latinos are three dominant subgroups: Mexican, Puerto Rican.) However, while the census brought official US census designation of Hispanics as a category in 1980. (To better understand this, we...
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<thead>
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<th>Overview</th>
<th>Leadership application</th>
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</table>
| **1. Personalismo**  
The Character of the Leader  
*(Page 1)* | Every person has inherent worth and essential value  
The leader’s character earns trust and respect  
Personalismo secures the relational aspects of leadership | Treat each person with respect regardless of status or position  
Never forget where you came from  
Connect to people on a personal level first  
Always keep your word |
| **2. Consciencia**  
Knowing Oneself and Personal Awareness  
*(Page 1)* | In-depth reflection  
Self-examination  
Integration  
The psychology of oppression and “white privilege” are barriers to inclusion | Examine personal intention, “Why do I do what I do?”  
Listen to your intuition and “inner voice”  
Resolve discrimination or exclusion issues  
Develop a secure cultural identity and know cultural assets |
| **3. Destino**  
Personal and Collective Personal  
*(Page 2)* | Every person has a distinct life path, purpose, and a unique life pattern  
Destino is not fatalism  
Tapping into one’s destino brings clarity, alignment, and a clearer sense of direction  
Powerful leaders are in sync with their destino | Know your family history and traditions  
Explore your heart’s desire  
Identify your special skills and talents  
Open the door when opportunity knocks  
Reflect on your legacy and personal vision |
| **4. La Cultura**  
Culturally-Based Leadership  
*(Page 2)* | Latinos are a culture and ethnic group not a race  
7 key values are the fastening points for the culture  
A humanistic orientation (people come first) and diversity/inclusion are cultural mainstays | La familia – A ‘We’ orientation drives collective shared leadership  
Leaders are expected to be simpatico – congenial, likable  
Respect, honesty, and generosity are required leadership traits  
Leaders establish personal ties and are part of the familia |
| **5. De Colores**  
Inclusiveness and Diversity  
*(Page 2)* | Latinos are connected to 26 different countries  
Hispanics were added to the US Census in 1980  
Hispanics are the only group that “self-identifies” on the census  
Latinos embrace all ages – an inter-generational spirit | Leaders practice bienvenido  
Because culture is learned, people can become Latino by Corazon or affinity  
Forging a collective identity from diversity is leader’s on-going work  
Intergenerational leadership: create allies, circular relation ships; participation; social action |
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</tr>
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<tbody>
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<td><strong>6. Juntos</strong>&lt;br&gt;Collective Community Stewardship&lt;br&gt;(Page 3)</td>
<td>- Juntos means union, being close, joining, being together&lt;br&gt;- Latinos are servant leaders and community stewards&lt;br&gt;- Leadership is conferred by the community and followers&lt;br&gt;- Leaders build a community of leaders and community capacity</td>
<td>- The Leader as Equal - Leaders are part of the group and work side-by-side with people&lt;br&gt;- Leaders follow the rules&lt;br&gt;- Four practices anchor collaboration process: shared vision; integrating history and cultural traditions; shared responsibility; and paso a paso</td>
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<td><strong>7. Adelante!</strong>&lt;br&gt;Global Vision and Immigrant Spirit&lt;br&gt;(Page 3)</td>
<td>- The U.S. is a nation of immigrants who bring initiative, hard work, tolerance, optimism, and faith&lt;br&gt;- Latino growth has been fueled by immigration&lt;br&gt;- Latinos are acculturating not assimilating. A cultural revitalization is occurring&lt;br&gt;- With ties to 26 countries, Latinos are a prototype for global leadership</td>
<td>- Leaders integrate the newly arrive and provide multiple services&lt;br&gt;- 51% of Latinos identifying with their nations of origin. Leaders bring this diversity together&lt;br&gt;- Immigrants have revitalized the cultural core and are strengthening Latino identity&lt;br&gt;- Immigration is a Civil Rights and advocacy issue leaders are addressing intercultural capacities of leaders cultural self-awareness and relationship-building are foundations for global leadership</td>
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<td><strong>8. Si se Puede</strong>&lt;br&gt;Social Activist and Coalition Leadership&lt;br&gt;(Page 3)</td>
<td>- Economic discrepancies and social inequalities drive a social activist agenda&lt;br&gt;- Si se Puede is a community organizing, coalition-building, and advocacy forms of leadership&lt;br&gt;- The Latino model is leadership by the many&lt;br&gt;- The inclusive Latino agenda speaks</td>
<td>- Leaders build people’s faith that they take action&lt;br&gt;- Leaders practice consistencia – perseverance and commitment&lt;br&gt;- Building networks, being inclusive, and forging coalitions are leadership trademarks.&lt;br&gt;- Externally leaders are cultural brokers building partnerships with other groups</td>
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### 9. Gozar La Vida
Leadership that Celebrates Life!

- Latinos are a celebratory, expressive, optimistic, and festive culture
- Celebration strengthens bonds, collective identity, and reinforces people’s resolve
- Latinos are stirring the salsa and gusto into leadership
- Communication is key for getting things done through people.

### 10. Fe y Esperanza
Sustained by Faith and Hope

- Optimism is esperanza or hope - an essential Latino quality
- Gracias (being grateful) allows people to be generous and give back
- Latino spirituality centers on relationships and responsibility
- Spirituality is a moral obligation to ensure others’ well-being and the collective good.

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<td>9. Gozar La Vida</td>
<td>Leadership is congenial, includes good times, and time to socialize Leaders communicate with carisma (charisma), cariño (affection), and corazón (heart)</td>
<td>Leaders speak the “people’s language” and “translate” with mainstream culture The hard and fast rule of Latino organizing is always serve food Leaders need a “cultural balance” such as strategic thinking and problem solving</td>
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<td>10. Fe y Esperanza</td>
<td>Leaders must be bold and make unpopular decisions – requiring faith and courage Humility, modesty and courtesy are the foundation for the leader as equal Leaders must be clear on their purpose, put an issue or a cause first, and serve something greater. This lessens self importance Leaders tap into optimism, gratitude, and faith and are the “translators” to inspire and motivate people.</td>
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