

**Presente: Latinas Leading the Way**  
**Opening Plenary Session - Monday, September 20, 2021**

**Sponsored by:** Facebook, Capital One, EMILY's List, Entergy Corporation, Mastercard

**Panel Chair:** Rep. Nanette Diaz Barragan (CA-44)

**Moderator:** Amanda Renteria, CEO, Code for America

**Panelists:** Karelis Barrios, Head of Commercial Closing and Loan Operations for the Commercial Bank, Capital One  
Zuraya Tapia-Hadley, Manager of Public Policy, External Affairs, Facebook  
Mercedes Garcia, Vice President, Community Relations, Mastercard

The 2021 CHCI Leadership Conference began with the opening plenary session, "Presente: Latinas Leading the Way." Projected to be more than a quarter of all American women by 2050, Latinas have made significant advances in educational and professional achievement in just the past decade and are one of the fastest growing demographics in the nation's workforce. Yet, Latinas still face barriers to inclusion and success in the workplace and are severely underrepresented in positions of leadership. In this session, Latina leaders discussed strategies to attract, grow, and retain Latina talent across all sectors.

Representative Nanette Diaz Barragán (CA-44), CHCI Chair, opened the session by shining a spotlight on the achievements and challenges faced by Latinas in the workforce. In particular, she highlighted the significant role Latinas play in the US economy and contrasted that with the fact that Latinas continue to face significant barriers in the labor market including pay inequity, undervalued work, and outdated notions of care-giving.

Johanna Silva Waki, the Vice President of EMILY's List, provided welcoming remarks focused on the importance of ensuring Latinas are represented in politics by attracting more Latinas to run for office. She also recognized Harris County Judge Lina Hidalgo, as the recipient of the 2021 EMILY's List Gabrielle Giffords Rising Star Award.

Amanda Renteria skillfully moderated the panel discussion with Karelis Barrios, Zuraya Tapia-Hadley, and Mercedes Garcia. The conversation covered a wide range of topics including advocating for yourself and the Latino community at-large, the importance of relationship building, and the shift in corporate culture that has led to greater support for working mothers and families.

Below is a summary of some of the themes that emerged from the dialogue, as well as recommendations and best practices.

**All** the panelists spoke passionately and discussed the need to take risks by taking on high visibility projects and trusting in yourself and your abilities. They advocated for growing the ability to take stock of policies, processes and people around you and to speak up and point out

where there are gaps, and what is and is not working well. Effectively communicating your needs was a concept that came up repeatedly. The panelists stressed the importance of learning how to take constructive criticism well while pushing back if you think feedback is unfair or incomplete. They focused on the need to take risks, be open, flexible, and approach challenges with a positive outlook.

Mercedes reminded us about the Mexican saying “No soy monedita de oro para caerle bien a todos,” “I’m not a gold coin to be liked by everyone.” She stressed the importance of doing your best and understanding that it is not possible to be loved by everyone.

The panelists also had a lively discussion about “Imposter Syndrome.” The general takeaway was that everybody falls into this trap at some point; it’s impossible to always know everything - especially if you are humble and self-aware. When you find yourself worrying about it, stop and take stock of your many achievements on your path to success.

**Advocate for your Community** The panelists spoke eloquently and passionately about advocating for the Latino community. All of them noted they feel a sense of responsibility to work to represent Latino community and culture and to support products and policies that reflect this. Panelists spoke about asking themselves how they can use their skills to make the biggest difference in shaping the future for Latino representation and Latino voice. They also discussed other ways to advocate by “showing up in your workplace beyond just your job,” to find creative ways to overcome stereotypes and support future leaders.

**Relationships Matter** Networking, connecting, and creating effective alliances were all discussed as ways of meeting the same goal: supporting each other and leveraging our strength by working together. The panelists dedicated a significant portion of the session to discussing the importance of sharing and learning from each other and intentionally building relationships with people you work with and those you want to work with in the future. This could be through formal employee affinity groups, mentors/mentees, or less formal relationships and friendships. These communities were called out as playing a significant role in recruiting and maintaining talent, and providing employees with a home and a support network. Speakers also agreed that it is their duty to mentor and coach young people to pay back those who provided help along the way.

**Latinas Lead When Companies Support Us** The last portion of the discussion focused on the changes in corporations that make it possible for more Latinas to lead companies while also supporting their families. The speakers made personal connections, “I feel the weight of my family on my shoulders” and “I need a job that allows me to care for my Abuelita, my mother and my children” and touted the spirit of corporate culture that has made it possible for them to feel good about their work and their family support system. The panelists spoke with one voice about the importance of supporting individuals and families with great benefits, including: maternal leave, parental leave, fertility support, paid leave, back up child care, legal aid, mental health care, physical health care - “the full range of support makes all the difference.”

Parting words for the audience: (optional - if there is space and interest in calling out one or two of these quotes - may also add visual interest to lay out)

- Mercedes: “Work hard to become the best version of yourself, and don’t take anything for granted, the world changes so much, be appreciative and thankful for what you have, never stop being yourself and work everyday for that.”
- Zaraya: “Be deeply in touch with yourself and your needs. Over-communicate with yourself and others. Over-communication is a good thing and will set you on the right path.”
- Karelis: “Adaptability does not mean changing who you are. You’ve gotten to this position because of who you are. Ask for something, ask for one thing today, you are your greatest advocate and you cannot forget it. We have this extraordinary opportunity to reimagine the way we work, we can come up with much more creative ideas, the future can be very bright with all of us putting our minds together.”
- Amanda: “There are not enough Latina leaders, but if we take the time to learn about the history of Latinas before us, there are a lot of lessons to draw out. It is our responsibility to pave the path forward. None of us are walking alone.”