

Latina Leaders in the Boardroom

NACD Southern California held a lunch meeting on Wednesday, September 7th, 2016 at The California Club in downtown Los Angeles. During the lunch, Lorraine Segil moderated a discussion with two dynamic Latina leaders talking about diversity and success in the board room. Aida Alvarez, Chairman of the Latino Community Foundation, and Dorene Dominguez, Chairman of the Vanir Group of Companies, provided insight on corporate growth in California and tips on how to take advantage of economic opportunities in a diverse community.

Aida has been an award-winning journalist, a successful investment banker, and a member of President Clinton's Cabinet. She currently serves on the boards of Hewlett Packard (NYSE:HPQ, Oportun and Zoosk and chairs the Latino Community Foundation. Dorene, inheriting Vanir Construction from her father, now oversees 24 offices throughout the United States, Dubai and Saudi Arabia. Dominguez also founded The Vanir Foundation, a nonprofit organization dedicated to partnering with elementary schools in selected Vanir service areas to bring innovative programs to children in underserved communities.

The following are 10 key takeaways from their discussion:

- 1) Diversity brings new and different perspectives, cultures, and backgrounds, allowing you to better meet the needs of your markets. Dorene highlighted that the buying power for the Latino market, for one, is \$1.2 trillion, so the absence of having a Latino on your board could be devastating. Ultimately, you want the board to look like your customers. If you want to be better and attack those markets, diversity is the key to success.
- 2) With that said, Aida noted, "each person brings certain experience and expertise that has to be of value to the board, irrespective of whether they are man, woman, Hispanic, Caucasian, or something else." In order to be a good leader and a successful board member, you must constantly be learning new things and meeting new people. "If you are not uncomfortable, you are not learning," Alvarez also stated.
- 3) You have to be willing to talk about failure and how to get through that failure. You shouldn't be afraid of who you are or your experiences, these are what make you unique and of value.
- 4) A lot of being a successful board member is also about the relationships you develop and how well you can work with other board members. Knowing how to respect each other, even when coming from different perspectives, and how to appreciate what the other person is trying to accomplish, even though that may not have been where you originally intended to go, is crucial.
- 5) Social responsibility is now more important than ever in corporate America. "It makes a difference just because it makes good business; regulation is one thing but good business stands," stated Lorraine. Today, increasing shareholder profits are based on social responsibility and companies that do not have a social agenda see profit loss.
- 6) Company culture is another significant consideration when running a business or sitting on a board. About 72% of employees in America are disengaged from their jobs which is costing companies about half a trillion dollars a year in productivity and profitability. Having good company culture and high retention rates are directly correlated with profits. Giving employees a sense of appreciation, connection, and engagement is very good for morale and in turn, great for the bottom line.
- 7) Creating positive company culture is a role directors can help play as customer and employee retention is one of their key responsibilities. Millennials are more interested in social responsibility, company culture, and quality of life than in profits and if you do not change with the trends, your retention rates, specifically of millennials, will significantly narrow and your bottom line will suffer.
- 8) Learn how to work with a team and where your strengths lie. Being a successful board member is a very delicate balance of having the courage to speak up but also the ability to fit in.

- 9) The biggest area Latinos in particular could grow in is financial experience. Being a good leader is important but being a good leader who can deliver results is where real success lies.
- 10) The women closed with some advice to those either aspiring to be on a board or for those already in seats. A lot of it is about relationships that you develop, so you should be doing as much association work as possible in your industry to build your network. You must go out and create context and build credibility.