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Making Headlines

Monica Lozano has leveraged news desks, corner offices, and corporate boards to drive positive change for the Hispanic community

by Matt Alderton | Photos by Sheila Barabad

Monica Lozano doesn't look like a revolutionary. She wears pinstripes, not camouflage. She holds a smartphone, not a shotgun. And she stands before a corporation, not an army.

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Chair of the Board

Still, rebel blood courses through Lozano's veins. Her grandfather, Ignacio Lozano Sr., was a Mexican journalist who immigrated to San Antonio in 1908—two years before the start of the Mexican Revolution, which in 1910 commenced a decade-long migration of more than 890,000 people from Mexico to the United States. Like most of them, Ignacio wanted a better, safer life for his family. Because he planned to someday return home, however, he also sought a stronger, more prolific Mexico. So in 1913, he started La Prensa, a daily Spanish-language newspaper, to keep Mexican immigrants apprised of political events at home.

As more Mexicans headed north, so did the watchful eye of La Prensa, whose coverage expanded from current events in Mexico to those in the United States, where communities of Mexican inmigrantes were flush with discrimination and disparities.

"My grandfather's vision wasn't just to publish a newspaper. It was to represent the interests of a community, to defend it when required, to be a part of its empowerment, and to be a mechanism for growth and development," says Lozano, 58, who has safeguarded her grandfather's legacy over the past 30 years as caretaker of La Opinión, La Prensa's Los Angeles-based sister publication, established by Ignacio in 1926. Lozano eventually took over Hispanic media giant ImpreMedia as CEO. ImpreMedia is the parent company to La Opinión and various other influential multimedia brands.

Although La Prensa ceased publication in 1957, La Opinión continues after 89 years as the largest Spanish-language daily newspaper in the country, reaching two million monthly readers in print and online.

"I believe in the mission of La Opinión and share my grandfather's passion for it," says Lozano, who joined the family business as a journalist in 1985 and became the paper's editor in 1990. In 1995, she became associate publisher of ImpreMedia and subsequently ascended to president, COO, and publisher. She took the helm as CEO of ImpreMedia in 2010 and led the transformation of the company from newspaper to multimedia, multiplatform content provider. In 2012, ImpreMedia was acquired by Argentina's La Nación through its subsidiary, US Hispanic Media. It remains the premier Hispanic news content provider in the country.

Though Lozano retired from ImpreMedia in 2014, she remains a critical influence as board chair of US Hispanic Media. In that role and others—including directorships on the boards of Bank of America, the Walt Disney Co., the University of Southern California, the Weingart Foundation, and the Rockefeller Foundation—she continues to advance the Hispanic community like her grandfather did before her. Now, she's not just leveraging the press; she's harnessing corporate America.

The Power of Language

"My parents were very clear about the importance of language," says Lozano, who, along with her three siblings, spent summers in Mexico visiting her grandmother and cousins. "Many people of my generation grew up with parents who wanted them to avoid speaking Spanish and to assimilate as quickly as possible. I had a different experience. Even though we grew up in Southern California, we spoke Spanish at home. Maintaining our language was an important part of who we were, and that very clearly contributed to my sense of identity."

Equally influential to how she grew up was when she grew up. "I was born in the mid-1950s, so my world was shaped not only by being bicultural and bilingual, but also by the civil rights movement, the Vietnam War, and the awakening of America's social conscience," she says.

Lozano studied political science at the University of Oregon before moving to San Francisco in the late 1970s. While she was there, she became involved in various grassroots issues and realized the important reach La Opinión had into the Hispanic community, which prompted her to join the newspaper.

"I wasn't immediately motivated to work in the family business, so when I joined it in 1985, it was a very deliberate move on my part," Lozano says. "I realized that there was enormous opportunity with La Opinión, which had reached a level of importance and influence, but had not yet completely capitalized on the opportunities of the time."

As she moved up through the paper's ranks, Lozano seized those opportunities by building a far-reaching, professional news operation that saw the world through a Latino lens. "We came to understand the power of the content we created not only to tell the story of our community, but also—and more importantly—to reach out to the broader society and influence it by communicating the interests and concerns of our community," she explains. "It was a wonderful opportunity to not only make a mark on a business, but also to establish an extended reach into the community that we served."

Under Lozano's leadership, that reach allowed La Opinión and, later, ImpreMedia, to remain relevant even as technology and demographics evolved. "We have been very successful in diversifying our product lines to include not just print, but also digital and mobile," Lozano says. "Likewise, as the community has evolved from being an immigrant population to being a citizen population—one that aspires to buy a house, put kids through college, and achieve the same dreams as anyone else who resides in this country—we have evolved with it."

Media reacts to social change. In the case of La Opinión, however, media also led it. During Lozano's 30-year tenure, for example, the paper participated in numerous empowerment campaigns to drive action on issues such as education, immigration, financial literacy, small business ownership, homeownership, health care, voter registration, and civic participation.

Step Into My Office
Monica Lozano meets with Ana Dutra

Ana Dutra: *Go back to your first experience as a board director. What do you wish you knew as a first-time board director that you know now?*
Monica Lozano: I would be very deliberate about raising the issue of diversity at the board table. It's an unfamiliar environment, and you're trying to establish your authority and your voice. You want to be seen as a director who represents and understands the broad issues facing the company, not just a single issue. So, it may take a while before you bring the diversity question up. Today, I would be more direct and more forceful about bringing it forward.

AD: *Do you feel that being a female director or being a Latina is more impactful on the boards you serve?*
ML: I think being a Latina brings a very unique perspective. There are other women who serve with me on boards, but bringing a Latina perspective to the attention of the company in a very strategic way is, I think, the more impactful thing that I can do.

AD: *Do you recall a time you felt your perspective as a Latina changed the outcome of a discussion in the boardroom?*
ML: Many times. There are companies that have launched Hispanic-focused initiatives as a result of questions I asked. There were people hired in senior roles as a result of my voice. There were products that were questioned as being appropriate because of my input. My voice as a Latina is not the only thing I bring to the table, but it is something that can be uniquely valuable to a company, and I know I've played that role multiple times.

"When information comes from us, people are more willing to act on it because they trust us," Lozano says. "Don't get me wrong: our company isn't a social enterprise. It's a business. However, it does have the power to change people's lives, and I'm very proud that we've been seen as a positive influence on the trajectory of the Hispanic community in the United States."

A Boardroom with a View

As influential as ImpreMedia is in the United States, Lozano realized early on that corporate governance could be just as impactful as content. That's why she considers her service on boards of directors among her most important contributions to the Hispanic community yet.

"I joined the board of a local nonprofit in 1991," recalls Lozano, who served on the boards of several small, Los Angeles-area Latino organizations before being invited to join her first corporate board. "Somebody I served with on one of those boards recruited me to serve on the board of a regional bank. That's when my board career really started."

Lozano has held corporate as well as academic and political appointments. In 2013, she completed a 12-year term as a regent of the University of California, a position to which she was reappointed in 2014. She also served as a member on President Obama's Council on Jobs and Competitiveness and, prior to that, on Obama's Economic Recovery Advisory Board. She understands that she represents the Hispanic community for the organizations she serves, and she takes her post seriously.

"In many cases I have been the first Latina to serve on an organization's board, and when you're the first, you don't just have an obligation to yourself or the company you're serving—you have an obligation to everyone who will come after you," she says. "You're not just building your résumé. You're breaking down barriers that exist because of stereotypes and lack of understanding."

Unfortunately, many of those barriers remain, according to the Alliance for Board Diversity, whose most recent analysis of Fortune 100 boards reveals that Latinos occupy just 3.5 percent of board seats and Latinas just 0.8 percent. White men, by contrast, occupy nearly 70 percent of all board positions.

"There are clearly bottom-line reasons why boards should be diverse and more representative as well as strategic reasons," Lozano says. "Better decisions are made when you have people with distinct points of view around the table who can debate in an appropriate fashion and come to an agreement about the path forward. If you've got no dissension, no diversity of opinion, and no diversity of background, you're operating in a way that's insulated and distanced from the general public, which means you're liable to make some very real strategic mistakes."

Although the business benefits are real, board diversity isn't solely about profits; it's also about policy. "Clearly, public policy is influenced by the people who are in elected office, and we have an opportunity to influence who is in that office by encouraging greater political representation and participation. But that is not the only way to empower the community," Lozano says. "We have a very strong business community, including the fastest and largest number of business startups. The Hispanic community has very deliberately created the mechanism to elevate our voice politically, and we must do the same thing in terms of our business leadership capitalizing on our community's entrepreneurial spirit and recognizing our role in the economic progress of America.

"Ultimately, job creation is what will drive this country forward," she continues. "We as a community must embrace economic opportunity and inclusion as one of our most important issues going forward."

Lozano intends to remain on the front lines in her latest venture as chair of the Latinos and Society Program. Launched in October 2014 by the Aspen Institute, a nonpartisan institute, its mission is to empower the next generation of entrepreneurial leaders and increase awareness and understanding by the broader community of the rising importance and influence of Hispanics in America.

"We have made great progress but still have work to do to fully empower the Hispanic community in this country, and those of us who are in a position to contribute have a responsibility to work as hard as we can to advance this forward," Lozano says. "I've done the best I could to make a difference, and I'm proud to say I think I've had an impact."

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