

Ortiz Helps Employees Learn About Issues Affecting Jobs

By *H.M. Cauley*

As early as elementary school, California native Alfredo Ortiz had a sense that energy and drive made things happen. He saw how that worked in his family, as he and his mother spent hours collecting cans and newspapers to turn into grocery money. He saw it again when his mother became a housekeeper for a wealthy family, and the two moved into a house on the estate.

"The family she worked for was a fantastic role model," Ortiz recalls. "I got to see up-close these very accomplished people who had their own company. I knew then I wanted to be in business, but didn't know exactly what that entailed."

Ortiz poured his energy into his studies, graduating as the high school student body president and heading to Pomona College, where he earned an economics degree and segued into commercial banking. But after a few months, he knew he wanted something different, and the search led him to the MBA program at the University of Michigan.

"I got very excited about working in the consumer goods world, and after graduation, I landed at the finance department of Nestle in California," Ortiz said. But he didn't stop there: His resume soon expand-

ed to include jobs with Pepsico, Kraft Foods and, 14 years ago, Atlanta-based Georgia Pacific. In each role, he sensed an underlying theme.

"I was always asked to think about strategies for targeting the Hispanic market, and it occurred to me that if all these great companies were thinking about it, there could be a market for it," he said. "And I liked the idea of being in the consulting world."

In 2002, Ortiz launched Grupo Mas, an advertising and marketing firm designed to help companies reach Hispanic consumers. After three years, the company was acquired, and Ortiz went on to other corporate and consulting jobs. After a stint in Boston, he came back to Atlanta in 2010 as the vice president of sales for Tucker-based CSM Bakery Solutions where he worked for three years with Jen Volpe, a senior customer marketing manager.

"One of the things I remember best is how he led by example," she said. "You could always count on him; we always knew he had our backs. But he also held himself and his team accountable. He always gave constructive criticism in a way that was heartfelt and genuine. He's very compassionate."

Outside of CSM, Ortiz got involved with the Job Creators Network, a nonprofit established by The Home Depot Inc. co-founder Bernie Marcus, one of the leading entrepreneurs in the country. Ortiz eventually volunteered as the interim CEO, and two years ago, when Marcus asked him to take over, it was one of those "offers you can't refuse."

"I couldn't say no to one of the greatest entrepreneurs of all time!" said Ortiz. "But it was a completely different world for me."

The network's mission as a non-partisan nonprofit is to help employers educate their employees about national and local policies that could affect jobs and paychecks.

"We believe that educating employees is critical, and our programs help companies explain how decisions might impact employees on a day-to-day basis," said Ortiz. "We're not political, but we are unabashed supporters of free enterprise. We want to create and foster an environment that leads to the strong economic and job growth that comes largely from small business owners."

The network's "information station" is an online resource that explains concepts such as how a caucus works or what new taxes will affect

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employees this year. Each topic is presented in a spin-free zone.

“When I came on board, we spent a lot of time establishing neutrality,” he said. “We go out of our way to make sure when a business leader puts this information out that it’s nonpartisan. We don’t comment on whether an executive order is right or wrong. And it’s completely voluntary for the employees; it’s there for their knowledge, but they don’t have to go there.”

Remaining impartial has been a tough part of the job, but Ortiz says that partiality is the problem in contemporary discourse. “There

is so much polarization of the facts, and business leaders have been struggling with that. So we do our best to present information that is not politicized but still interesting and engaging.”

Andy Puzder, CEO of CKE/Hardee’s, has known Ortiz for two years and points to him as a great example of an energetic, young entrepreneur who is paving the way for others like him.

“You can feel his commitment to free market,” Puzder said. “Through the network, he’s done very good work. Under Alfredo’s leadership, they’ve paired up with other business

entities, like chambers of commerce, to do research on issues like minimum wage. He’s also a first-generation American who left corporate America to advocate for free enterprise. He’s committed to spreading the good news of free enterprise that he appreciates.”

Ortiz doesn’t rule out more entrepreneurial roles in his future.

“Bernie Marcus was 48 when he got fired, and at 52, he started Home Depot,” said Ortiz. “I tell people now, ‘If you run into Bernie, tell him to fire me.’ I want to be the next Bernie Marcus.”