

CITYSPEAK

“THE YEAR OF THE WOMAN IS NOW”

March 8 is International Woman’s Day, and the entire month of March is being celebrated as Women’s History Month, I thought it appropriate to dedicate this CitySpeak newsletter to recognizing the important role women have played in my career and my life.

This year, it’s not just a day or a month we should use to recognize *the time of woman is now*. No, I have come to believe that the year of woman, indeed the century of woman, is now. In fact, I believe we have always lived in the time of the woman. I just think that both men and women alike are finally waking up to that fact, so we are finally recognizing it. What do I mean?

I am a 55-year old Mexican American male, born and raised in Southern California, in a close, loving, and spiritually-minded family. *I am a product of my environment and my experiences*. This means that I am (and I will continue to be) a “work in progress” until the day I expire. Certainly, 35 years ago, I lacked the experience to fully appreciate the value of women in our world. I don’t think back then I would have had the wisdom to fairly and accurately write about how the time of woman is now. While I do believe that men and women are endowed with unique qualities, strengths, and abilities that are either masculine or feminine, *never would I argue that a woman’s place is in the home with her children, tending the domestic fires of the hearth*. The Bible has taught me, that men and women are equal in their spiritual standing before God. This understanding creates more cooperative partnerships and marriages that will result in stronger families and communities which are the infrastructure of our society.

As a Mexican American man, growing up in Southern California, there were some (perhaps many) in my culture that carried around and perpetuated a lot of sexist, twisted logic with it. Of course, there is beautiful, colorful, and spicy food, music, people, family and love that I would never trade with any culture. But we’ve all got our faults, and *machismo* has long been a big burden for both men and women in my culture that we have had to bear. So, when I was younger, of course I laughed at the guys’ “*barefoot and pregnant*” jokes, along with the “*women’s place is in the kitchen*” ribs. We laughed as though we were joking, but we were kind of serious, too.

At 55 years of age, this means I am more than half a century old! During these years, I have come to learn that if we don’t continue to grow in life, in all ways possible, we die. Well, I’m not ready to die. And I have grown incredibly in my understanding of the issues facing women, both in the home and in the workplace. The Bible has also helped me grow in my appreciation for women. I began to read the Bible for myself, becoming a self-taught practitioner of the Word of God, and I learned for myself just how much love God has for women. I also credit this evolution

to my force-to-be-reckoned-with wife of 32 years, and our equally headstrong and independent daughters. But I know with absolute certainty that *it all started with my mother*.

MY MOTHER SHAPED ME

It's funny. I never once thought of my mother as less-than. She was, and still is, the strongest woman I know. It just took me growing up into adulthood and having my own life experiences to see the connection between how I saw my mother and how I see that vague concept of "all women."

You see, my mother was in an abusive marriage almost since I was born, and she struggled to do the right thing with two children, me and my sister, who is one year younger than me. Those who have never suffered from abuse may think it is simply a matter of "leave him." But the ties that bind are strong and the stakes are high. My mother was devoutly religious, young, inexperienced, penniless without my father, and ashamed of having found herself in this situation. In spite of all that, she still picked up and finally left her husband for good when I was five, although I really think it was her husband that did the leaving.

My mother's only regret, she tells me, is that she did not have the opportunity to continue her education, "para no andar rodando", which loosely translated means, "to not be tumbling everywhere". She also tells me all the time, "John, if I only had your education..." It was tough for Mexican American *males* trying to make it in California in the 1960's; just think how hard it was for Mexican American *females* like my mother. In the 1960's, few, if any, Mexican American males, let alone women, had any education beyond junior high school, let alone college. Yes, life was very hard for divorced women in the 1960's, especially Mexican American women like my mother.

Yet throughout my entire life, and to this day, my mother has been a great source of wisdom in my life, teaching me empathy, enthusiasm, energy, optimism, drive, ambition, and love, and hope, always reminding me that I could accomplish anything I set my mind to do. I am who I am largely because of my mother.

Fortunately for me, she found love and refuge in another man, my stepfather, and the only *real* father I have ever known. It is only because my mother had the strength to leave, that she had the courage to put herself, and her children, in the care of a new man. He taught me self-sacrifice, trust, endurance, and a strong work ethic. He became the role model for me for what a man should be, and how a man should protect his wife "until death do us part". But honestly, he could never have given me any of that if it hadn't been for my mother.

IT'S EVOLUTION, BABY

Over time, I have come to appreciate the unique and magnificent role women play in our families and our society. And I don't mean just carrying our children in their womb for nine months, nursing, cooking, and making our cold houses warm homes. No. I also mean the vital role women play in managing our institutions, safeguarding our democracy, and making our communities safer places to live.

From family to positions of leadership in business and government, women have demonstrated they can accomplish any goal they are compelled to pursue. Truly, women are limited only by the personal goals and ambitions they dare to allow themselves to dream. Yes, it is true that *I believe that someone should be home taking care of the children*. It does take a village, after all! But I don't think that "someone" necessarily has to be the woman. There are many fully capable, loving, nurturing fathers happy to stay home with their children while their wives are out preparing to fly to the moon or run a country.

This is where my culture and beliefs have evolved for me: while I do believe deeply that no personal ambitions, can come before our children, our spouse, or our God, I believe that goes both ways. The following saying makes my point:

“A truly rich man [or woman] is one whose *children* run into his [or her] arms even when his *hands* are empty.”

~Ziad K. Abdelnour

I, as a man, was never willing to sacrifice my marriage or my children or my relationship with God, for any personal pursuit, regardless of the compelling reasons urging me to keep climbing, and I know many women who feel the same, entrepreneurs and stay at home moms alike.

With that in mind, men and women should partner with people who share their core values to succeed in business and government. And ample evidence shows that when we leave women out of our boardrooms and executive offices, in an effort to keep them in the kitchen, both the boardrooms, executive offices, and the kitchen suffer. Women make up more than 50% of the population, and the key elements that the vast majority can see women bringing to our families – nurturing, compassion, multi-tasking, open minds, diplomacy, and so much more – are the same elements essential to thriving and successful businesses and government organizations. I for one could not possibly have the successful municipal consulting business I run today were it not for the contributions of so many women, those from long before I even started my business to the ones who still help it run today.

INFLUENTIAL WOMEN IN MY LIFE AND WORK...

Obviously, my mother has been the most influential person in my life. Growing up in a migrant farmworker family with overly-protective brothers who kept her from getting to meet young suitors, my mother had it tough from the beginning. *She was a beautiful young lady who, in any traditional American family, would have had dozens of guys to choose from*. Yet it was what it was, and my mother did what she had to do, remaining strong then and is still strong today. For this I am grateful, but I'm also grateful that at 55 years of age, I still have my mother alive and well to strengthen me when I need honest feedback on any issue I face. Yes, I still go to mom for advice!

It has been my mother's dogged perseverance and faith in God that has kept her from losing her optimism and strength, especially back in the 1960's when she was thrown out of her husband's house, then brought back again, then thrown out again, with me and my sister in tow. I must again thank God with all my being that He has allowed me to have my mother at my side

for so long. She has given me the courage and strength to believe in myself, and to achieve things I would never have achieved on my own, like graduating from college with a bachelor's and master's degrees, as well as obtaining my license as a Certified Public Accountant (CPA) to practice accounting in California.

With such achievements, I shouldn't be surprised that mothers are usually the ones who receive accolades from their children, which brings me to the other, incredibly influential woman in my life: *my wife*.

I have to say, in all seriousness, that I appreciate every single day my wife has spent with me, stayed by my side, and given over her whole life, not just to raising our six children, but also to educating them! We homeschooled our children all the way through high school, and when I say "we," I really mean "she." I was off running municipal organizations, putting myself through graduate school, and starting and running my own successful small business. *If there was a national award for homeschooling moms, I am confident my wife would win.* How many women do you know, anywhere in America, who have **five (5) high school diplomas hanging on her wall from homeschooling** her own children?

Always, always, my wife has been there to balance me out, ***even though at times I hated this***, to remind me to enjoy each moment, to ground me when I start to float off into the realm of my dreams and aspirations. She is, truly, the rock of our family. Of course, I still sometimes complain to my wife, joking, that our six kids constantly brag only about how great, how supportive, how beautiful, and how young looking their mother is. Meanwhile, I sit in the background and hope I might get even a small shout out.

And something that has gotten old during my last 32 years of marriage, especially the first 20 years, is having people ask me about my wife, "is that your wife or your daughter?" Ha!

In all seriousness though, this woman took a chance on me when I was barely 23 years old, and she has stood by me and our kids with love and devotion throughout. Sure, we've had our ups and downs (which long marriage hasn't?), but in the end, we have grown together as individuals and as a couple, and I know for sure that it is largely because of my wife's inner strength.

All my children, and for good reason, speak fondly of all the wonderful things their mother has done for their life. I'm ok with that, even if I have at times felt being a father was a thankless job.

But to be fair, my oldest daughter does make it a point to tell me, from time to time, how thankful she is for my loving fatherly instruction. And that is the important role of a father, isn't it, to provide, protect, and guide his children so they can grow up confident and strong, ultimately making their own decisions in life?

Yet, the *mother is usually the best, at least in my family, at giving emotional love and support*, and maintaining the stability and balance in the home. This is true of working mothers and stay at home mothers. Studies show that even today, women do the vast majority of the housework and the childcare, even when both parents work outside the home full time. The woman's role in the home has become so hard wired, that we have much work to do to balance things out as more women enter the workforce alongside their husbands. It does take a village after all!

Still, let's face it, fathers of America: *mothers have always been, and generally, will likely always be, the most influential person that our children will tout and remember when they grow up, with some exceptions of course.*

But don't think for one second that I regret the 32 years that I gave of myself, to partner with my wife, sacrificing much to raise our six children whom I am so proud of today. This was my primary purpose in life, the reason I was born. And I realize now that my wife was born to be the same influential woman in the lives of my children that my mother was in my life.

In the end, only birth mothers can have that special bond and connection with their children that comes from birthing and nursing. To be clear, I, along with all men, and along with all adoptive mothers, can bond with their babies, guide and nurture, care for and love deeply. But there is just something about giving birth to a life you carried inside you that I can never understand on a biological level, which keeps me slightly removed from that connection my wife has with my kids.

Interestingly enough, we often feel a similar bond to the businesses we "give birth to." This may be of more interest to entrepreneurs than government professionals, yet there are many municipal initiatives, programs, departments, and even the creation of new government organizations that are initiated by government leaders to relate to the notion of "giving birth".

ALL MEN AND WOMEN CAN GIVE BIRTH...KIND OF

I could never give birth to a real baby. I knew as soon as my kids were each born that they would bond with their mother in a unique way I would never be privy to.

However, I would later find that I could give birth to a company. Remember, in this country, corporations are people. So please bear with me on what might feel like a ridiculous comparison (though no more ridiculous than "fur babies").

When you start a company, you first "conceive" of the idea. Then you plan and prepare for its arrival/open date, including all the stress, money, and physical labor involved in starting a business. Then you do indeed "give birth" to it, paying the fees at the County Records Office, right next door to where you get your real baby's birth certificate, giving your company a name, and opening up for business, and then you have to nurture it, in fact, you have to nurture it, promote it, expand it, and dedicate yourself to it often for many years longer than we do with our actual children.

Now don't get me wrong, I do not think for a second that a human baby and a business baby are the same thing, and I do not make this comparison to minimize women's contributions as mothers. On the contrary, I make it to show how these same essential qualities women bring to motherhood and domesticity are critical to the growth of businesses as well. Women, whether they have actual children or not, are naturally, biologically, stronger in some ways than men and vice versa. Thus, in the same way we need two-parent families. We need men and women in business and government.

Obviously, a company baby is not a real baby, but again, it requires a lot of the same love and nurturing required to raise a “corporation” (that is, if you want your company to *legally* be a “person”) from infancy through adolescence and on to maturity. You may not realize it, but hundreds or thousands of lives are affected by the success or failure of the small business you give birth to and through incorporation, so much is at stake.

The “child” I personally gave birth to in 2006 was my company: **MuniTemps**.

I brought forward this MuniTemps child with pangs of distress and birth pains! And I stayed up countless nights when this child was sick. There were many times when this child came so near to death, I still get tears in my eyes or a lump in my throat just thinking about it! Even prior to giving birth to this child, I spent hundreds of hours thinking up a name for my brainchild (MuniTemps). Actually, in order for this company child to become a “legally” real “person” (really), I had to incorporate this brainchild (company) in the State of California. The name of my brainchild MuniTemps is actually a “fictitious name” (or DBA, “doing business as”), for marketing purposes, as a part of the legal entity **GOVERNMENT STAFFING SERVICES, INC.**, just like John Herrera is a DBA (alias) of the real person Juan Herrera, also for “marketing purposes” and real money purposes. There is more on that in a future CitySpeak newsletter.

I also did lengthy research on how to be a good “parent” of this MuniTemps child that would be under my responsibility and oversight, not just for the 18 years that most parents plan for, but forever (*that is what a **going concern** is*).

I spent numerous hours preparing a life plan for this company child (a **business plan**). Yes, I spent many days forming this child, preparing it for each stage of its life, teaching it to speak the language of business (using basic accounting terms everybody understands) and teaching it to “walk the walk” as a growing MuniTemps child. Just think how ridiculous my company child would look to everybody if it was still crawling as a teenager company under my guidance and counsel. That would be an embarrassment to me and my child!

Of course, there are women who give birth to a new company and to children. These women are **Superwoman in my book!** And I know and respect women who have started their own companies while raising children. This was likely only possible because of the support they had from their husbands or significant other at home. If they didn’t have the support at home, they likely built a team of people to help them succeed. Because with human children, and with company children, it takes a village after all!

I know I could not have raised MuniTemps without the help of my village, and most of that village was made up of, yep, you guessed it, women!

GIVING BIRTH TO A COMPANY IS A TEAM EFFORT!

Truly, it can be an individual effort to conceive of the idea for a company, but it is a team effort to give birth to it and raise it from infancy through adolescence and on to mature adulthood.

I had a few generous business people who became my friends, who were there to help me grow my child from infancy to adolescence where it is today. My child, MuniTemps, is 13 years old

today. It is not quite yet at the mature stage, but that growth spurt will come any day now. Thanks to the people who helped me along the way, I can be proud of where MuniTemps has grown today.

I remember when my three-year-old company child was colicky and crying all the time. I did not know what to do. One day, I brought my crying three-year-old to a business owners retreat, and there I met a female business coach Patricia Drain (with whom I'm writing a book today). She was a presenter at this retreat where many other company owners, who were also present with their own crying children (companies). Patricia spoke, and what she said resonated with all of us.

We all listened to Patricia speak about her own experiences birthing companies and sharing the truth and trials and tribulations of raising her company child from infancy to maturity.

I was very impressed with Patricia's honesty and her willingness to talk about the mistakes she had made and how she learned from them along the way, correcting and adjusting the business to achieve success. This is a quality I have found mostly in women. *A capacity for vulnerability and sharing that many men just don't have, and yet we men really need it.*

Patricia was not necessarily sharing anything new, but it was her candor and her honesty and her sincerity that allowed me to get the sense of what she was trying to teach us new parents of newly formed business corporations.

I suppose this is what makes women especially capable of solving problems and being such good leaders and role models: *they care so much about people's feelings that they give of themselves in a trusting and caring way that we men are often incapable of being able to emulate.* Of course, I am generalizing here, but that has been my personal experience working with women. There is obviously a need for caution and calculated risk-taking for businesses in general, but we should never lose our humanity...the kind of humanity women in general display, presumably because of biology.

I participated in Mastermind group sessions put on by Patricia after that retreat to expand my business experience. I got to hear the thoughts and voices of dozens of other women, with the same challenges new business owners face. This diversity of ideas, from the feminine side, proved very valuable to me. During the Mastermind sessions, the group was 100% women aside from me. I was the only man. And although it was a bit uncomfortable at times, that did not keep me from participating in the great ideas and gaining synergy value that would be added to my company. I know for a fact that it was all that time I spent with female entrepreneurs that largely shaped my insight into my business growth.

I also have enjoyed partnerships with many other good business people, mostly women, who also generously gave me good advice, and even gave me the forms and document templates that I needed for my new company. They even gave me referrals to other sources of wisdom and relevant knowledge to keep my company child healthy and growing up strong to accomplish its mission and goals. They also referred me to professional business organizations that would help me take my new municipal consulting company to the next level.

In business, *I needed to appreciate the unique qualities of women and their abilities* to teach me how to nurture the various facets of small business management, client relationships, business growth strategies, and the partnerships with women who know how to care and feed my child company MuniTemps, especially when it almost died (went bankrupt) in its early, formative years. I can write another 5,000 words to tell you just about the NDE (near death experience) of my young municipal consulting company, but that is writing for another CitySpeak newsletter.

And I'm not just talking about women in business. It was all of those years with my mother who was such a strong influence in my life, and then with my wife by my side, as heart and soul of our household, along with many, many other women who really shaped my early years of life, both in business and in positions I held during my 30-year career in municipal government. Here are just some of the women who were most influential in my career success:

- Fran Dempsey, Manager at Del Taco.
- Mary Hays, EVP at Bank of Coronado.
- Ruby Moreno, Escrow Officer at Wells Fargo Bank Escrow.
- Norma Hernandez, Dean of Student Services, Southwestern College.
- Shannon Murphy, Administrative Analyst at City of Hemet, CA.
- Suzanne Kozma, HR Manager at City of Hemet, CA.
- Sarah Sessions-McComas, Payroll Supervisor at City of Hemet, CA.
- Mayor Gayla Jennings, Mayor, City of Hemet, CA.
- Pam Easter, City Manager at City of San Jacinto, CA.
- Anne Hallberg, Accounting Supervisor at City of San Jacinto, CA.
- Sharon Christensen, Payroll Manager at City of La Quinta.
- Diane Rose, Mayor of City of Imperial Beach, CA.
- Debbie Lopez, Assistant City Manager at City of Pico Rivera, CA.
- Andi Welsh Costello, City Manager at City of Lemoore, CA.

Then there are the dozens of women who have come along with their inherent ability to give, to listen, to share, to help, all from a place of love and community. Those are the elements that lead to truly successful life, family, and yes, business and government. And all of these elements are biologically inherent in women.

From personal experience, I can say that partnering with a team, especially one that included the insights of women in business and government, helped keep my young company from going bankrupt during its "first-five" infancy stage. I thank God and the people He sent my way to help me along the way!

IN CLOSING...

In short, I humbly write about women in business and leadership, about giving birth to young companies, and about nursing them into adulthood, all with the help and support of women. Thus, I must dedicate this March CitySpeak newsletter to women as *the time of women is now*.

As stated earlier, I grew up in a world where some men viewed women as less than the capable and powerful leaders they could become, creating a culture through humor and epithets about

the place of women in ways that were wrong. I will not here discuss the different views on the role of men and women in the family; however, suffice it to say that some men have denigrated women in the past, and because of this, *the pendulum has swung way the other way*, creating unprecedented challenges for men who do honor and respect women.

Long-standing cultural norms have made fun of women, making jokes that, frankly, I am embarrassed to admit, I laughed at along “with the boys, when I was younger.”

But I grew up. We all need to grow up from being boys to being men. And, gratefully, it is women who help us do that, if we have the **patience**, wisdom, and virtue to listen.

As I grew up as a Mexican-American, trying to climb the ladder in a predominantly white male dominated society, I am very well aware of how hurtful joking and discrimination can be. As an ambitious Mexican-American working in California, I had to work twice as hard as the boys of the establishment, to achieve my professional and personal goals. So too, *women have had to work doubly hard*, facing the same or greater challenges as part of the minority in the professional world of business and government to achieve their goals and ambitions for themselves and for their families.

Today as a mature man, I realize that to find humor and laugh at jokes about women is to laugh at our own mothers, and sisters, and daughters. This is less of an issue today, but it still happens.

Bottom Line: Men who truly come to know and understand and accept the value of women in business, partnering with women, *with mutual respect*, to achieve a common goal, will realize unlimited synergy value. We need women in leadership in all areas of life, society, business, and government because life, society, business, and government all make decisions concerning women. This will result in stronger marriages, more loving and united families, and more successful companies and organizations. I believe this will even make our world a better place while we are entrusted as stewards of our home.

I LOVE YOUR FEEDBACK...

As always, please call me if you want to share your thoughts on this or any other subject I write about in this newsletter; I would love to talk to you about your ideas for interesting municipal topics for future CitySpeak newsletters.

MUNITEMPS IS HERE TO HELP...

And remember, MuniTemps is here for you should you need temporary help to fill a staff vacancy in any municipal Department, especially now that you're preparing your new budget.

As president of **MuniTemps / MuniGlobal**, I am passionate about implementing best practices in local government. I have worked hard during the past 29 years, serving many Cities and Special Districts as Director of Finance and Administrative Services and can provide your municipality with tried and tested organizational and staffing solutions. My team and I

understand municipal organizations, the budget, the CAFR, and the many nuances of municipal organizations serving our communities.

May you have much success as you carry out municipal best practices and the *continuous improvement* professional work ethic in serving our City organizations!

Respectfully,



John Herrera, CPA, MPA

President / CEO & Municipal Finance Officer

MuniTemps - Municipal Staffing Solutions

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