

Glorimar Maldonado

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Glorimar Maldonado's path to her current position as Senior Advisor at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) is a "meandering" one. She started her career in management and administration at the American Red Cross, moved on to becoming a writer for environmental insurance, transitioned into the nonprofit sector, and then eventually to the government sector. What has remained constant throughout each career move and challenge, however, has been her passion and commitment to Latino issues. In her role as Senior Advisor, Glorimar brings a Latino perspective to the CDC's human capital activities and diversifying its processes and practices.

How did your career move from publications manager to writer/editor, to White House Chief of Staff, and now to senior advisor at the CDC?

It's a bit of a meandering pathway, actually! I graduated from Flagler College, St. Augustine, Florida, in 1996 with a BA in English, History and Psychology. At the time, I just studied what I enjoyed most and didn't really know what I was going to do with my degree. I did some freelance writing/editing in college but I didn't know where that would lead. Two weeks after graduating, I was hired by the American Red Cross in Jacksonville, Florida, to manage one of their field offices at Naval Air Station Cecil Field, a military installation.

After a year, I quit and moved to Atlanta where I was hired as a writer by a corporation that specialized in environmental insurance. I lasted about three months! I found Corporate America to be incredibly boring, and I left to work part-time in a bookstore across town. During that time, I, like other recent graduates, struggled to find a place I fit in. I wanted to enjoy my job and look forward to coming to work. Ironically, I did enjoy working in the bookstore, but I wanted more. A lot of people asked me if I was going to teach because of my degree, and I did end up leaving the bookstore and teaching middle school for about a year, but the administrative issues sent me running out of that profession and back to the bookstore.

A few months later in February 1999, I was hired by the fourth largest faith-based nonprofit in the southeast, World Changers Ministries, as a proofreader. I can honestly say that job changed by life. I remember sitting in the office of the director of the publication department, answering questions during the interview, and I thought, "One day I'll be sitting in her seat." I just knew that I knew I was destined to be director of that office. And that's exactly what happened. I was hired as a proofreader. Within three months I was promoted to writer-editor and six months later to senior writer-editor. Another year and a half later, I became the director. It was truly a wonderful period of professional growth for me. I came into my own as a leader and a manager, instituting cross-training, open lines of communication, and collaborative relationships across the organization and with other large faith-based nonprofits nationwide. Our division conceptualized, wrote/edited and printed more than 10 books a year in English and Spanish,

and we were responsible for all web copy, t.v., and radio scripts, voiceovers, product catalogs, brochures, and more.

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During this time I also launched my freelance writing-editing business, subcontracting with a local printing company to produce brochures, web copy, and other written products for Fortune 500 companies such as Coca-Cola, Delta Airlines, Enterprise Rent-a-Car, Home Depot and the Georgia Hispanic Chamber of Commerce. However, after five years of working for the ministry, I knew it was time to move on to other things. My mother, who will retire next year after 30 years in the federal government, kept talking to me about working for the government, saying there were great benefits and pay, job security, and opportunities for upward mobility. I had resisted for five years but once my office began running like a well-oiled machine, I knew she was right - it was time to try something new.

In October 2004, I was interviewed by a panel of six senior leaders and hired as a writer-editor for the Office of Communication and Outreach at the U.S. Department of Education. Although I enjoyed the challenge of technical writing-editing (anyone who has seen a government publication knows how dry they can be!), I wanted to do more. I became involved in the employee led group U.S. Department of Education Hispanic Employees Council (ED-HEC), running for and becoming elected to the position of secretary. In subsequent years I became four-time chair, planning events for the department that would foster a greater understanding of Latino culture and the issues impacting Latinos in the workplace.

It was my work with ED-HEC that got the attention of the executive director of the White House Initiative (WHI) on Educational Excellence for Hispanics. I'd see him in the hallway and he'd try to convince me to come over to his office on a detail (temporary reassignment). In April 2007 I became the marketing-communications manager for the WHI. In October 2007 I was permanently transferred to that office and my title was changed to Chief of Staff. In that capacity, I managed the daily operations of the office to strategic planning, program implementation, and more. I also did quite a bit of writing from our new executive order signed in 2009 to Hispanic Heritage Month proclamations signed by President Obama.

After eight years with the department and the office I knew it was time for me to take on a new challenge. Last July while on detail to the Office of Diversity and Inclusion at the Office of Personnel Management, I met one of CDC's senior leaders. After discussing job opportunities with the agency and my career goals, I was introduced to and interviewed by the agency's chief human capital officer. In November 2013 I was offered a job in her division. Because I have such a diverse professional background, I was given the title of Senior Advisor and placed in the Office of the Director so that I could have a bird's-eye view of all Strategic Programs Office operations.

Can you describe what projects you are working on at the CDC?

My job primarily consists of bringing not only the Latino perspective to all of CDC's human capital activities (i.e., workforce and succession planning, recruitment, outreach, etc.), but to assist the agency in diversifying its processes and practices. For example, I speak to hiring managers about alternate hiring mechanisms, such as Schedule A (persons with disabilities), Veterans hiring authority (veterans preference), and Student Pathways. I also make recommendations that are mutually beneficial to underrepresented applicants and the CDC such as the creation of more career-ladder/entry level positions.

I am currently in the process of establishing strong relationships with Hispanic-Serving Institutions in the top five states: California, Florida, Illinois, New York and Texas, and travelling to those states to meet with

college and university presidents, chancellors and deans to explain what CDC offers students and young professionals. Next year, CDC in collaboration with these institutions, will host "Find & Apply" workshops, whereby we explain why they should consider pursuing a career in federal/public service and share the ABCs of finding and applying to those jobs. We also provide a robust federal resume writing session and have added supplemental sessions in our full-day agenda that cover a variety of programs and hiring methods. The idea is to pair these meetings or workshops with events we're already doing. For example, if we're scheduled to participate in a career fair we tag on workshops or meetings the same day, the day before, or the day after. There's something about a face-to-face meeting that engenders trust and respect. That's key to reaching out to the Latino community.

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What made you want to get involved with Hispanic issues?

As a Puerto Rican it's always been something of interest. We have so many ongoing issues back home on the island and my mom always felt it important that we know what was happening even if it didn't directly impact us on the mainland. There have always been ways for me to get involved in Latino issues, whether through the University of Puerto Rico's Alumni Association, ED-HEC, or activities sponsored by the Smithsonian Latino Institute.

Through my mom I've learned how important it is to "know who you are so you know where you're going." It's critical that we study our respective cultures and histories, so that we can employ those lessons learned in our everyday lives. Additionally, I feel very strongly and passionately about Latino issues because in not knowing you lose out on so many opportunities. My goal is to know about as many of the opportunities that are available to Latino students and young professionals so that I can share those things with them as I mentor interns and young professionals, conduct workshops, and participate in recruitment and outreach activities.

What would you say are the biggest hurdles in recruiting and sustaining a diverse workforce?

One of the biggest hurdles is the stereotypical thinking that pervades government. There are so many people that don't realize diversity is more than just race or gender. It includes the ways we think, the experiences we bring to the table, and much more. Another hurdle is government's passive approach to recruitment. For decades we've sat back and waited for candidates to come to us for jobs instead of marketing ourselves as a trusted brand and proactively gone out to seek talented individuals.

Things are starting to change but not by much. It's absolutely vital that we understand that the onus is on federal agencies to meet candidates where they are and explain not only the federal application process via USAJOBS, but also why they should work for government. They need to be able to speak to those of us in the federal career track about the pros and cons of civil service and address expectations and doubts. Knowledge is power, and agencies should be providing knowledge to candidates.

Finally, I think the government could stand a lesson in giving young people a chance to prove themselves. Many science-based agencies require a ton of specialized experience, and in some occupations, that's critical. However, there are many occupations that could stand to be rewritten as career-ladder-entry-level positions to allow room for learning and growth, and enable agencies to really utilize succession planning methods. Unfortunately we're still shortsighted in this area, expecting the perfect candidate with the perfect pedigree to apply, and that rarely happens.

Where do you see yourself going from here?

To be honest, I'd like to get to the top of the career ladder in the federal government. Right now I'm a GS-14 and the highest grade on the scale is a 15. However, I'm thinking beyond that and considering a jump

to the Senior Executive Service so that I can really effect change at the highest levels. The number of Latinos in the SES is quite low, and the number of Latinas even lower - we're an asterisk in the footnote of the figure in many reports! To be able to represent Latinos and fully exercise strategic thinking to steer government is quite a goal and one I'd like to achieve in the next five to 10 years. I don't know if I see myself at CDC forever but I know that I'm in civil service for the long haul. Education and outreach are my passions and right now I've been given the green light to exercise them. Those are my lanes and now that I know that I can focus future job hunting in that direction.

In my personal life, I know I need more work-life balance! It's so easy to get caught up in the urgency and complexity of the work I do. I often work late into the evening and on weekends, which is never a good thing. Disconnecting from the work I do is important so that I can be refreshed and ready to tackle the projects at hand. I do make time to exercise every day, and I have several 5K and half-marathon races planned during the next six months. Next year, I'll run my one and only full marathon, so I can check that off of my to-do list. Anyone who knows me knows I'm always looking to challenge myself, whether at work or in my personal life. However, that work-life balance issue always crops up. What can I say? I'm definitely a work in progress!