

Remarks

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American Federation of Teachers/Dialogue on Diversity

Women's History Month

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Good afternoon, and thank you, Cristina (Caballero, President, Dialogue on Diversity). I am deeply honored. I have learned so much from the outstanding speakers that preceded me.

All are women of achievement.

Today we celebrate women, our successes and our great diversity. And we should celebrate.

We can be proud. Each has a powerful story to tell of sacrifice, hard work, perseverance and getting a good education.

We celebrate that women create more businesses than men. Among them, Latinas lead. But we should also decry that women hold merely 15 percent of Fortune 500 company board seats, a failure of vision.

My good friend Sylvia Acevedo, a member of the Presidential Advisory Commission on Educational Excellence for Hispanics, is developing a suite of communication products to tell stories of outstanding women whose feats are not adequately known.

We celebrate "Women's History Month." I believe, however, that we should be celebrating **women** – for our history is still being written.

A woman is a viable candidate for president;

23 women are CEOs of Fortune 500 companies;

More women are Members of Congress (but only about 18 percent).

Despite advances, we have a way to go.

I am a proud Latina. I was born in New York City to working class parents who came from Puerto Rico in search of opportunity. Neither finished high school, but they taught me and my sisters the value of education and our heritage. My three sisters and I have graduate degrees and are working in service fields.

The founder of a high-tech start up in New York City took a chance on me, a recent college grad. He made me his VP of human resources. He became my mentor, expanded my portfolio and eventually, promoted me to Senior Vice President. When we began, the employees were all white men. When I left,

we were extraordinarily diverse. I like to think that the amazing success of his company, now a worldwide operation, owes in large measure to smart HR management.

After two decades in the corporate world, I joined ETS in 2001. I began as VP of HR. Here, again, my CEO expanded my portfolio. And I am blessed to serve the ETS mission: To help advance quality and equity in education for all people worldwide.

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Women possess those skills women in abundance. They can be as valuable predictors of success as GPA or SAT scores.

We work with the U.S Army on assessments to help transition veterans to productive civilian life. We are developing child-friendly tools to measure English language proficiency for the nation's 6 million English learners, 80 percent of whom are Spanish-speakers. And we support parental engagement initiatives and programs to inspire youngsters to stay in school, excel and go on to higher education.

I am convinced that doing more to help each other through mentoring, sponsorship and networking will do much to accelerate our progress. Let me ask for a show of hands. How many of you are mentors? How many have mentors? How many are sponsors (that is, helping someone in your own organization)? Fact is, we should all mentor, be mentored and sponsor.

Working in a nonprofit whose mission is to advance education, I am convinced that education is at the heart of everything that must be done to surmount our challenges. Here are some of them:

First, increasing educational opportunity for the disadvantaged, particularly women. We leave them behind at our own peril. Whether you labor in government, health care environmental affairs, education, health care, civil rights ... whatever you do, education is at the heart of it all.

Second, better serving the 6 million English learners in our public schools, the fastest growing K-12 cohort; too many are being left behind. The solutions are local.

Third, improving classroom instruction. Educators and school administrators have told me of their hopes for better pre-service and in-service training. It seems that too much of our teacher education is still rooted in the past century.

Fourth, replicating education models that work. For example, can we do what Julián Castro did in San Antonio – a ballot initiative to increase taxes and strengthen early childhood education?

Fifth, harnessing the power of new Americans. How will we take advantage of the 11 to 12 million who are poised to become newly enfranchised residents?

Sixth, changing attitudes. Outdated attitudes are alive and well, as is a lack of civility. Such attitudes limit opportunities, and must be met with conviction.

I think a lot about what our country will look like a generation from now. And I remind you that these changes cry out for women leaders:

- African Americans, Asian Americans and Latinos will be the majority.
- Spanish, already our second language, will be more pervasive.
- Diversity will shape the mainstream culture as never before – and I mean African-Americans, Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders and Latinos.
- Good health will be more related to good education. Our diets, I hope, will change, and we will be healthier physically and intellectually (see a NY Times article in last Sunday's business section on income and longevity in Virginia).
- Massive Open Online Courses — or MOOCs — will include assessments; assessments, by the way, are the great equalizers.
- Science, Technology, Engineering and Math, the STEM fields, will be more important than ever. We at ETS do much to encourage more people to go into STEM.

These and other changes await your leadership and our willingness to give back.

Toward Solutions

Now, I could give my prescription for how to overcome these challenges. But late last year, JoAnn Sernke, Wisconsin's 2013 Superintendent of the Year, said it best: "Systems of all kinds can create environments that embrace innovation and creativity instead of stifling it."

Here is how:

First, create a context. Help women see why they should commit to doing something differently.

Second, change the field of perception. Don't get pigeon-holed into one sector or improvement method.

Third, break the replication trap, and be curious about diverse information sources; get outside your comfort zone to find ideas and inspiration.

Fourth, embrace dissonance. Conflict is part of the process of addressing mediocrity.

Welcome conflict and make it productive.

And fifth, collaborate with your women friends. The only way for good ideas to mature is through open communication, teamwork and divergent thinking.

These formulas come from an education administrator and from me. Although rooted in education, they apply anywhere and they apply to how we can support each other. Now is the time to act, apply these principles and bring about change.

Oprah Winfrey said: "Each of us has a calling that's as unique as a fingerprint – and the best way to succeed is to discover what you love and then find a way to offer it in the form of service, working hard and also allowing the energy of the universe to lead you."

And so as not to leave out the men, I offer another favorite quote. Ghandi said: "The best way to find yourself is to lose yourself in service to others."

I know you lose yourselves in service every day. As I look at this audience, as I recall the powerful messages of today's panelists, I know that our future is in good hands. We have come a long way, but new gains require a renewed commitment and more help from every quarter. Women helping women is one of the most powerful tools available.

Yes, my friends, we celebrate Women's History Month. But rather than history month, we should rename it "Women's Future Month."

We are the ones who MUST provide the checks and balances; we are the ones who MUST provide insights to right the ship; we are the ones who MUST assure a stronger, better, more productive, more competitive and more just America.

Thank you.