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Adam Arroyos - Trailblazer

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SELF PORTRAIT

Date and place of birth: March 26, 1975, Lockney, Texas

Occupation: President, ALPFA Institute

Family: Wife Kate, daughters Samantha and Megan, son Preston

Lately, I've been re-reading John Maxwell's Four Levels of Leadership. I find myself rereading lots of books.

My pets are Rosie, a Labrador retriever, and Poppy, a Chihuahua.

The last movies I saw were Joyful Noise and Red Tails.

My kids would say I'm a committed dad.

On the radio, I listen to country music in the mornings, pop in the evenings.

One word to sum me up: authentic

FAYETTEVILLE - A single share of Wal-Mart stock changed Adam Arroyos' life.

In the mid-1990s, Arroyos decided to take a semester off from South Plains Community College (Levelland, Texas), and he got a job as a pallet truck driver at a Wal-Mart Distribution Center in nearby Plainview. As he filled out his paperwork, he decided to participate in the company's associate stock purchase plan. Arroyos bought a single share.

That summer, when a drawing was held to award a trip to the company's annual shareholders meeting, Arroyos' name was chosen. That meant a free trip to the University of Arkansas at Fayetteville, where the meeting was held.

Upon arriving at the university, Arroyos fell in love with the campus. It's a love that has never waned, leading to three degrees from the UA, and it's what made him demand just a single condition when he was offered the opportunity to head the Association of Latino Professionals in Finance and Accounting Institute in January 2011: It had to be headquartered at the UA's Sam M. Walton College of Business.

"I don't want to follow; I want to lead," says Arroyos, whom Hispanic Business Magazine named one of the 100 most influential corporate executives in the country last

year. "This is about being a trailblazer."

Arroyos loves connecting people with UA because he's proud of the education he received there. He's also excited that Northwest Arkansas' thriving corporate community offers so many opportunities to the area's Hispanic population.

In 2008, Arroyos was the founding president of the Northwest Arkansas chapter of ALPFA. Membership is open to Hispanic professionals and students; among the opportunities it offers are mentoring, networking, leadership skill development and expanding business connections, as well as providing scholarships for student members.

He made the chapter one of the nation's strongest. It has more than 600 members, and is one of just four nationwide that has a full-time director. In 2011, Arroyos received ALPFA's National Outstanding Service Award.

That same year, a few months after Arroyos had become president of a new ALPFA consulting division, he sold Chief Executive Officer Manny Espinoza on a new, comprehensive operating model for the division, which would be called the ALPFA Institute. Espinoza liked the idea, and offered Arroyos the position, which he accepted once he was assured it would be located at UA.

The ALPFA Institute is the product of a partnership between ALPFA and Walton College. It opened May 16 with the official launch on Sept. 16, to coincide with ALPFA's 40th anniversary.

Its slogan is, "Think big, act quickly, deliver on your promises," and its impact takes many forms. It can be members who become strong leaders because of ALPFA's training, when they make volunteering a priority, when they are encouraged to go to graduate school - or even when high-school students involved in ALPFA Academies acquire the tools they need to get into college.

"We're about helping develop leaders from the inside, doing what they're passionate about," Arroyos says. "Our mission is simple: Build leaders, and provide them with opportunities to lead. We do this every day, and it's rewarding to see the difference our members are making in their workplace and in their communities."

THE RIGHT PLACE

Neither of Arroyos' parents finished high school, but the wisdom they acquired through their life experiences continues to amaze him.

His father, the late Julian Arroyos, would tell his nine children, "The only person who can keep you from doing something is you." It's a lesson Adam has never forgotten.

Arroyos' father challenged all of his children to go to college, and Adam, a strong student growing up, seemed to be well on the way. But when Julian passed away in 1991, Adam, then a sophomore in high school, felt the top priority was helping out his widowed mother and four younger siblings.

That was how he wound up at South Plains Community College. He felt out of place there, though, which led to him taking the semester off - and the fortunate stock purchase, which ultimately resulted in him enrolling at UA in 1994.

"When I walked on [South Plains'] campus, I was lost," Arroyos says. "Unless you feel connected, it's easy to get lost. ... [When I came to UA] I said, 'This is it. This is for me.'"

Arroyos' mother, Adela, was not happy when Adam announced he wanted to attend UA. It wasn't because she was opposed to him pursuing higher education; she was worried about him moving so far away from his support system.

Adela Arroyos taught her son the value of building a strong network, a skill that he needs in his work with ALPFA.

"Adam is a passionate leader who is about the collective win," says Hector Perez, president of ALPFA's national board of directors and a director of business development at Tatum LLC in New York. "He demonstrates compassion, and a strong drive and work ethic."

Arroyos also gained from his mother a strong Catholic faith. In his family, you went to church on Sunday morning; it was "non-negotiable," he says.

Because of that, Arroyos met his future wife, the former Kate Benedict.

Arroyos had pledged Phi Kappa Tau fraternity at UA, earning the nickname "Columbus" as a nod to his status as the chapter's first Hispanic pledge. During one Saturday night party, he asked if anyone knew where the nearest Catholic church was.

"Kate does," someone told him.

Adam asked Kate for a ride to church, and they soon were dating. Married in 1995, they have three children - Samantha, 15, Megan, 13, and baby Preston, born Feb. 17.

ON THE RISE

Arroyos stood out quickly.

He did a merchandising internship with J.C. Penney while he earned his bachelor's of arts in foreign languages, and following its conclusion, he was named the outstanding intern in the region. In 1998, after graduating, he joined the company's management-trainee program in Nashville on the path to J.C. Penney's merchandising and operations track.

While in Nashville, he worked and continued his schooling, studying for his master's in education from the UA.

"I just didn't give myself an option [of taking a break]," he says. "If you give yourself an option, you tend to go to the easy one."

In 2000, Arroyos moved his young family back to Arkansas, when he was recruited to manage Wal-Mart's product development division and to help launch the company's George clothing label as a brand coordinator.

It was a project with a steep learning curve. Arroyos had no background in design.

He was a great listener, though, and he knew how to rally a team, get the members to talk

with one another, and take their best ideas to the table.

"He is a very unselfish leader and never takes people for granted," says Becky Wood, who was Arroyos' manager at J.C. Penney. "Adam has great business vision and insight, and is always willing to share for the good of the whole."

Arroyos left Wal-Mart in 2003 to accept a graduate fellowship at UA. For the next three years, he served the Donald W. Reynolds Boys and Girls Club in Fayetteville as its director of public affairs and operations.

He spent a year at the organizational development company SVI in Springdale, where he was a principal and senior director. He returned to Wal-Mart in 2007, as director of the newly launched Corporate Affairs division.

The next year, Arroyos was founding president of ALPFA's Northwest Arkansas chapter. He says it was the only chapter launched in a nonmetropolitan market. According to the chapter's website, it is the fourth largest in the country, after New York, Chicago and Boston.

"You're starting a business once you start a chapter," he says. "You put a board together, build a business model, make a strategic plan, build a consumer base. It took a lot of planning and praying to pull it together."

ALPFA was largely focused on the fields of finance and accounting when the effort to launch a Northwest Arkansas chapter started. Arroyos envisioned it being much more.

"Adam saw it as a broader Latino professional organization that could impact other business professionals and benefit the community," says Wal-Mart comptroller Steve Whaley, who serves on the chapter's corporate advisory board, as well as the ALPFA national board.

FUTURE DEVELOPMENT

During a February 2010 company reorganization, Arroyos' position at Wal-Mart was eliminated.

After taking a few months to do some serious thinking, Arroyos was named vice president of college relations at Northwest Arkansas Community College that May.

"I had a lot of time to evaluate what matters to me," he says. "I'd never allowed a title to define me."

Along the course of Arroyos' career, there have been common threads woven through his work experience.

His resume is thick with references to recruiting, training and managing team members, strategic planning, promoting diversity and inclusion, developing and managing budgets, marketing and public relations, and consulting. All these skills prepared him for the opportunity with ALPFA.

The organization had achieved great success in helping prepare Hispanic professionals and students for the workplace, and helping businesses learn how to attract and develop

their talent, Arroyos says. Espinoza, its CEO, wanted to launch a consulting division, and brainstormed with Arroyos over the phone one day about what it would look like.

They agreed to meet in Dallas, where Arroyos would present his vision to ALPFA executives. In the time leading up to the meeting, he talked to friends and former colleagues at organizations including Wal-Mart, Tyson Foods, and the Northwest Arkansas Council.

He also shared his idea with dean Dan Worrell of Walton Business College. Everyone agreed to support the institute if Arroyos could convince ALPFA to locate it in Northwest Arkansas.

After making his pitch, the executives agreed to his proposal, as long as he agreed to cut the ribbon on Sept. 16.

"I thought my dissertation defense was tough!" Arroyos says of his meeting with the ALPFA board. "This was a long day."

On the morning of the ceremony, Arroyos was up at 5 a.m. His day included an early meeting with corporate executives, including Hispanic Business founder and editor Jesus Chavarria, who was making his first trip to Arkansas to cover the event.

That was followed by a lunch meeting with Gov. Mike Beebe and members of his staff, as well as members of the Northwest Arkansas ALPFA chapter's executive committee and corporate advisory board, and a meeting with Rep. Loretta Sanchez of California.

That afternoon, a town hall meeting on "The Current State of Latino Leadership in Corporate America and Public Office" was held with a nationwide webcast and Twitter feed.

The next morning, Arroyos was joined in Bentonville by a group that included Rep. Sanchez, Chavarria, Espinoza, Perez and other ALPFA executives to attend the weekly Wal-Mart team meeting. A short briefing with Sanchez followed, then the day closed for the Arroyos family doing one of their favorite things: attending a Razorbacks football game.

A self-described "big sports guy," Arroyos and his family are huge Razorbacks fans. Both his daughters participate in sports at school.

"No matter how long or stressful my days are, I know I have something great to go home to: my family," he says.

Work experience prepared Arroyos for his current position, but there's another important source of his expertise.

"I have learned so much more from volunteer opportunities so much faster than I could have just from work experience," he says. "In nonprofits, you're given the opportunity to lead and held accountable to it. You invest in it wholeheartedly, and your natural leadership capacity comes out."

Arroyos served on the boards of the Pagnozzi Charities Endowment Fund, First Tee of Arkansas, the Fayetteville Public Education Fund and the Donald W. Reynolds Boys and

Girls Club. He was appointed to the Arkansas Advisory Committee of the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights and has been a member of the Boys and Girls Club of America's National Latino Advisory Committee. He's also served on the parish and finance councils at St. Joseph Catholic Church.

Above all else, Arroyos is determined to better Northwest Arkansas - for all people.

"Adam is a dynamic and charismatic leader who is changing the face of Northwest Arkansas," says ALPFA chapter board member Scott Shipper of Rogers. "His genuine style and passion for making a positive impact in the lives of others is truly remarkable."

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