



# Helping Latinos Crack the American Code

By Mariela Dabbah

When I was 9 years old my dad—an orthopedic surgeon—used to bring home the orange sheets of paper that were used to separate X-rays for me to write on. I wrote six novels on those huge, unlined sheets, then sewed and bound them together with my own illustrated cover.

Many years have gone by and I'm still writing in a different genre, in a different language and a different country.

Writing non-fiction began as an accident and grew into my calling in 2004. I attended a panel at the Book Expo Conference about Spanish publications and during the Q & A period, I asked the panelists why they weren't publishing books on how to get a job in this country. I explained that I had been teaching a course on the topic and that there was nothing out there to help Latinos understand the system. As I walked out of the room, two publishers asked me to write a proposal for a book. I did, and I had a contract within three weeks.

If you say it was pure luck, you'd be right. But luck will find you when you are in the right place at the right time. For years, I had worked at my own book distribution company selling books to schools, training trainers, writing teachers' guides and meeting people who didn't have the necessary tools to succeed in this market. As my partner and I turned the nearly bankrupt company we had purchased into a success, I learned valuable lessons that I turned first into workshops, then into books and now again into workshops.

After I wrote *How to Get a Job in the U.S., Guide for Latinos (Cómo conseguir trabajo en los Estados Unidos, Guía para latinos*—Sourcebooks, Inc., idem all my non-fiction books), I developed networking workshops to teach Latinos a key element in the mix to find a job and move up in their careers. I also developed programs to help

job seekers understand how to conduct a successful job search in the U.S.

Suddenly, a lot of doors opened. I was doing interviews on TV, radio and newspapers; and the platform to talk about issues relevant to Latinos expanded. I realized that I was in a great position to deliver valuable information to a huge number of people and decided to make use of it.

My next book was about education. I knew the system well from my years in educational book distribution, and I also knew how much Latinos needed to understand the system in order for their children to succeed in this country. This was a very important step for them to crack the American code.

*Help your Children be Successful in School, Guide for Latino Parents (Ayuda a sus hijos a tener éxito en la escuela, Guía para padres latinos)* gave me a chance to consult with school districts and do workshops for trainers who in turn trained parents. At these workshops, parents learn about topics ranging from school logistics to what they can do at home to encourage the development of academic skills.

Thanks to this book I was able to get a story in *The New York Times* and on WNBC about Latino parent involvement, a crucial issue that is now part of the national dialog.

It was during the research for my first book when I met Arturo Poiré, the co-author of my newest book, *The Latino Advantage in the Workplace*, and a senior executive in human resources. He and I had long conversations about certain positive characteristics that most successful Latinos share, and the fact that these characteristics can be traced back to their culture became our interest.

But what about second and third generation Latinos who had lost touch

with their "latinidad"? Could they tap into these traits? We concluded that many people may not know about these positive cultural traits, therefore, Arturo and I decided to write a book. Our goal is to help Latinos reconnect with their roots and important life values such as flexibility, cooperation skills, ability to establish loyal relationships and others that can be used as an advantage in the workplace.

These, we decided, were the elements that all successful Latinos shared and we felt everyone would benefit from becoming aware of them. A new book was born, and with it a new opportunity for me to get out there and offer Latinos more secrets to achieve success faster.

Beyond the huge amount of work that comes with writing and promoting a book, I believe that the biggest difference between the orange sheets of my first novels and the books I write now is that if I spill chocolate milk on my manuscript, I have a backup on the computer and I don't have a big, dark stain on my only copy for the rest of my life. **L**



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