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PINNACLE GROUP CEO NINA VACA: NOT LONELY AT THE TOP

Story by: Judi Jordan

NINA VACA
 CEO
 Pinnacle Group

Entrepreneur extraordinaire Nina Vaca's legendary optimism is real, intense, and highly contagious. Genetically wired for success and coded for brilliance, this sparkling leader, triathlete, benefactor, mentor, scholar, mother of four, immigrant, presidential ambassador, and CEO of her thriving information technology services corporation, reconfigured the paradigm for achievement on her own terms. Vaca never held a corporate job, nor did anyone in her family; she grew up in a busy hive of entrepreneurs. "I came from a family of entrepreneurs; you could argue that it's all I've ever known. I grew up thinking that's what you do—you build your own company! It's my 'safe space!'"

The ultimate outsider made good, Vaca created her own mega corporation. Having discovered her calling early in life, twenty-one years in, Nina is very serious about Latinos accessing their destinies. "We have to create wealth in our communities where wealth does not exist. There are Hispanics in the C Suite, just not enough of us. There are Hispanics on corporate boards but again, not enough. There are Hispanic entrepreneurs but they're not scaling."

"Often times as I was climbing and finding success I was the youngest and the 'only,' I looked around and said it's not enough to be the 'only' or 'the first,' to me that is not acceptable. The higher we climb and the more opportunities we see at the table, the more I want my community to be there."

"The more successful Pinnacle becomes, the more opportunity, and frankly, the more bandwidth and financial ability I have to give back. What I do at Pinnacle feeds my family, but what I do in the community feeds my soul."

The Vaca family bond is tight, full of wisdom, moral support, and patriotism.

"My parents ingrained in our minds, that yes, we are immigrants to this country, but we need to give our best to this country. My dad worked three jobs, he parked cars; he had a night job and an afternoon job... we were your classic immigrant family in LA." Nina's mother was a role model; Nina witnessed the power and strength in numbers. Now when she launches a big project she gathers her 'troops.' "I've been like that all my life, I'm the daughter of a real grassroots activist! All I ever saw my mother do growing up was gathering people together, inspiring them, taking



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action. It’s in my DNA. I’m happiest when I know that I’m helping people. To me, this is how you build a legacy.”

My secret to success? “I never do anything by myself! I always have an army of people along, much like I never take all the credit.”

After coming to the US from Ecuador when Nina was two, the family’s early years in California were no picnic. The Vacas moved from town to town in California, in search of the best schools for their children. Vaca credits her determined parents who actively prioritized their children’s futures. “Those schools were in different cities; where there were no Hispanics. I never saw myself as a Hispanic growing up; I always tried to blend into the mainstream. I thought, ‘I’m just as good as everybody else,’ and I worked just as hard.”

When Nina was a teenager, her dad altered the course of her life by buying a computer.

“What led me to technology was seeing my first computer when I was fifteen years old. My father in his infinite wisdom brought a Sabre Travel System terminal to the office—this huge thing—and I thought it was the coolest thing in the world! I was savvy enough to know that the technology sector was growing very fast.”

This major AHA! moment for Nina never gets old. “I was fascinated by technology and I knew that if I pursued a career there it would be something that would have a future, so like a good entrepreneur I started

Boards and Organizations:

- Cinemark
- Kohl’s
- Comerica Bank



diving in!” Nina’s unsinkable spirit lives in these words: “Good entrepreneurs see opportunity where others see none and they dig! They go through the back door, the side door, the chimney!”

Nina didn’t stray from her entrepreneurial roots. “Twenty-one years ago I realized that corporations would need a technology workforce and the need would go up every year! This is the industry of the future. 65% of our elementary school children are going to be doing a job that doesn’t exist today! And 80% of the new jobs in this country will be STEM related. With the rise of Artificial Intelligence and technology everywhere, you are going to see America transform!”

Nina foresees longevity and opportunity for Latinos on an unparalleled scale and she’s committed to getting them access to STEM education.

“We need more Latinos in STEM. STEM is the way to the new American dream. But with the rising cost of education and the median income in America flat for the past 12 years, how were we going to get young Latinos



Awards and Recognitions:

- 2017 – National Women’s History Project National Women’s History Month Award
- 2017 – 50 Most Powerful Latinas of 2017
- 2017 – Women Of Distinction from Women’s Business Enterprise National Council
- 2017 – Women Of Impact Award from Off the Field Players - NFL
- 2016 – AT&T Supplier Award (Pinnacle Group)
- 2016 – Minority Business Hall of Fame and Museum (MBHF&M) Inductee
- 2016 – Second Fastest-Growing Women Owned/Led Company by the Women Presidents’ Organization
- 2016 – Annual Enterprising Women of the Year Award
- 2016 – Lifetime Achievement Award from Dallas Business Journal’s
- 2016 – The Staffing 100 by Staffing Industry Analysts
- 2015 – Fastest-Growing Women Owned/Led Company Worldwide by the Women Presidents’ Organization

into STEM?” Nina has contributed meaningfully to several initiatives over the past decade to address this very question. But in 2016, she and Pinnacle Group joined the Pathways to Technology Early College High School Program (P-TECH) for the Dallas Independent School District and Dallas Community College District. During their 4 years in this life-changing program, students will earn their high school diploma, an associate’s degree, relevant certifications for their chosen job path, and job training and skills from their industry partner. Pinnacle Group is proud to be the industry partner for Thomas Jefferson Collegiate Academy, whose student body is over 97% minority and over 60% Latina. Nina beams when she talks about the freshman class that started in 2016, and the incoming freshman starting this August. “I’m very, very proud of this program. This is a legacy that will live on. Hispanics are the fastest growing and the youngest segment of America; if we do not do well, then this country does not do well. This is the single biggest reason why I do what I do.”

Nina is unique, but she does share a common trait with super-successful entrepreneurs; she’s fearless. Vaca jumps in where others vacillate. “I’m a triathlete. That takes a lot of risk and courage jumping in the cold water! I’m not really afraid of anything. I think that’s served me well.” She does have criteria for her choices: “I ask how I can be a person of value, versus a person of success.”

By putting her desire to contribute first, she opened opportunities for others. Incredibly intuitive, smart, personable, persistent, and prolific, Vaca loves what she does. She sought a meaningful way to share the how-to secrets of her success with the world. It became a website with real, practical instructions for a slew of different goals.

Nina lives for the success of those around her; it’s her oxygen. Now, there’s a website for all the amazing stuff she does so well: NinaVaca.com. “On my site, I’m going to introduce you to my ecosystem; that’s the way I’m going to change lives. I’m going to give people the resources and the know-how. Even if it’s how to run a 5k, they’re going to get it from my website.”

On the way to the top, she discovered the secret of life. “I’ve learned that you can have it all, but you can’t do it all.”

Regrets? “None. I don’t live life with any regrets. I feel like every life challenge is an opportunity to learn, and grow from it.” ●