



[ONE TO KNOW]

31

OneToKnowMagazine.com | ISSUE 06

She Dares

Yanira Borges and the power of authenticity

By Erin Ratigan

Photos by MARIAFLASH

When Yanira Borges speaks to a crowd, she does it imperfectly. “My name is Yanira, pronounced like ‘Ya need a’ cup of coffee?” She makes the Italian hand gesture known as a finger purse, laughs and flips her untamed brown hair. Her style of leadership is one of authenticity, not polish and pantsuits. This flows into her verbiage — her voice sounds casual and unrehearsed. She stumbles. She might mention how flustered she is from getting stuck in traffic on her way there or how ready she is for the weekend. But her candor doesn’t come from a place of insecurity. Quite the opposite; she does it to encourage everyone to be themselves. After all, that is what her organization is all about: daring to be true to yourself.

Yanira is the founder of She Dares Collective, a business and networking organization for women from all industries and backgrounds, including designers, healers, saleswomen and event planners. “I’ll be like, ‘Look at me, I’ve got a stain on my shirt’ or whatever, just to show humanity. Because I have seen the power. If they feel safe and they feel like ‘It doesn’t matter what I look like here,’ they do the damn thing, and they show up real hard,” she says, sounding awestruck.

“Women accelerating other women” is the group’s tagline, a play on words for being like an accelerator or incubator for women-owned businesses, and it’s a concept Yanira knows intimately. Born in Puerto Rico in 1980, she came to the U.S. when she was 2 and grew up in the Bronx in what she calls a “female island,” raised by her grandmother and 12 aunts. Her “female island” is a reference to the fictional island of Themyscira in DC Comics’ “Wonder Woman,” where amazon women train as warriors and care for one another without male involvement. Her comparison feels poignant, for Yanira’s father was noticeably absent much of her life, having left her mother for another woman when Yanira was a child. “There weren’t a lot of men around in my life, because it wasn’t only my father who wasn’t around — lots of other people’s fathers weren’t around,” she says.

Once they arrived in New York, her mother started going to nursing school, meaning Yanira spent most of her time with her grandmother and aunts. Despite not having access to many resources, these women taught her about determination, independence and how to build her own future. “I also gained a lot of strength and a lot of power from them, you know? If there’s a leak, if there’s a problem, guess who’s doing it? A woman was doing it! There was no dude to default to, to do repairs around the house or to figure out paperwork,” she says.



Yanira led the operations and launch of State Farm agencies in both New York City and later Texas starting in 2005. In 2008, she began working as the buyer and then the director of operations for a direct sales jewelry startup based in Texas. A year after her son was born in 2014, she founded a team training and accountability app called SidekickCheckins, which allows business administrators and employees to keep track of their assignments and workflow through check-ins and increased communication.

Being new to the area, she didn't have many friends. What she *did* have was stakes in multiple businesses. "The challenges I faced as a mom and CEO of a startup set me out looking for female peers who knew the struggle," she says.

With so much time and energy going into her work, she wanted to meet like-minded women who shared her passion for business and leadership and started visiting some local networking groups, including the Hispanic Chamber of Commerce. They were all too confined and conventional for her liking. Her ideal group was one where unpolished and authentic women like her could gather in an informal atmosphere. Somewhere comfortable and unimposing.

That was when she discovered FemCity Fort Worth, a local branch of the FemCity international women's networking group. There she felt comfortable and started forming meaningful connections with other local businesswomen. When the chapter closed two years after she joined, Yanira saw an opportunity to fill the space by forming a new kind of women's leadership group. Drawing inspiration from FemCity and inviting members from their now-closed chapter, she founded She Dares Collective in 2020. "I think I just showed up, and we created this space where, 'It's OK to be late, it's OK to be scared, just get in here.' And everyone's really kind and open. So, there's a culture of welcoming," she says.



From left to right:
Yanira and her mom; Yanira getting
ready for basketball; Yanira riding
her bike; Yanira and her grandmother
Photos courtesy of Yanira

Meghan Jarrell met Yanira through FemCity Fort Worth and owns Moxxie Concepts, an event management and consulting company. She's been a member of She Dares since its inception. "I needed to know that it's OK to be in your T-shirt and sports bra at 1 o'clock in the afternoon on a Monday, and you can still run a business. ... I don't go there feeling like I need to have on a pencil skirt," she says.

When Meghan met Yanira, she was struck by her energy and vivacity. She describes Yanira as a dreamer with a beautiful, creative mind. "She's just full of life and passion and energy. A little fireball," she says.

Through Yanira's guidance and mentorship, Meghan says she has developed confidence and new professional practices which have helped make her business stronger than ever before. Yanira also referred Meghan to her therapist, resulting in Meghan being diagnosed with ADHD — a diagnosis she says empowered her and changed her life for the better. By meeting Yanira, Meghan says she's gained not just professional experience — she's gained a friend. "She's incredible. I think she's slowly changing the world, but she literally changed my world," she says.

The Collective started in 2020 just before the pandemic forced businesses to close down (some temporarily, others permanently). Mentoring and supporting businesswomen during lockdown required Yanira to host meetings through Zoom, while happy hours were held either virtually or socially distanced outdoors. She says the group's program focus at the time was on keeping their businesses alive and thriving during the shutdown. She also encouraged members to take care of themselves despite the stresses and uncertainties of the pandemic. In a patriarchal society, Yanira says women

shouldn't be trapped by antiquated ideas about "powering through."

"Power through, I've learned, looks different. Doesn't always have to be with force. Sometimes it is with a pause. Sometimes it is with your breath. Sometimes it is with gentleness," Yanira says.



[ONE TO KNOW]

Even though businesses have since reopened, Yanira says the group still focuses heavily on mental health awareness and self-care. For her, being a well-rounded businesswoman requires balancing one's professional interests with one's emotional well-being. Yanira finds this balance in her extensive garden at home. She says this is her husband's love letter to her because it took time and it's a process. Strolling through her backyard garden, she gets excited when she gets to the tomatoes. She coos to the plants, like one would a family pet, reaching out to touch the leaves affectionately. Around her are pots filled with all manner of produce — peppers, sweet potatoes, watermelon, cucumbers. She points to a few pots with nothing in them but dirt. "This is the land of hope. I hope that something happens. We've got some things dying and some things growing," she says.

To find balance and extend this holistic approach to small business, She Dares has even hosted a discussion with a sex therapist, who presented on the correlation between sexual fulfillment and financial success. "That's the kind of thing that will not happen at your local networking group but will happen at She Dares Collective because if that's how we support the whole woman, we also have to talk about orgasms," she says.

Balance also means addressing the challenges women frequently encounter while trying to advance professionally — challenges which are usually social constructs. For example: money. Even though the women in Yanira's life were self-sufficient, held jobs and were used to taking care of themselves, she says they still never talked about finances, even though they were on welfare. She believes their hesitance was likely tied to antiquated beliefs that women shouldn't handle money. She says cultural influences were involved, as well. "Women had a certain role in the family, and it was only after the husband died or left that the women were forced to figure out money for survival," she says.

When women overcome their social constraints, she says, it's almost magical. She becomes wistful when

talking about the personal growth she's seen in She Dares members over the years, like the member who built up her confidence and decided to travel the world with her family. She says her members inspire and motivate her every day. When women collaborate and motivate one another, she says it has a snowball effect, increasing creativity and innovation for everyone involved. "I have seen collaborations happen. I have seen new products born out of it. I have seen new revenue streams; I have seen just gatherings and seen people evolving with each other, and that's really neat. So, there's some power, and I feel like the results are powerful," she says.

Some of the personal successes she's witnessed from members have included one woman getting her pilot's license and another leaving an unhealthy relationship. She does not take credit for helping them achieve these successes, but says having an encouraging, supportive group has helped foster growth in her members' lives.

Yanira has a holistic, almost spiritual approach to leadership that flavors her work with She Dares. It may be a business and networking group, but she says she ultimately wants her members to gain more than just contacts and business resources — she wants people to change their definitions of success to include their own happiness and emotional prosperity. "I want to change the metrics on how we measure success and how we define wealth. Like, I would spell wealth with W-E-L-L-T-H."

That mentality even seeps into Yanira's parenting style, which Meghan says she greatly admires. At one point, she picks up her phone to show an Instagram video from her birthday party the week before, which Yanira and her family attended. The video shows Yanira's 6-year-old daughter, Mila, in sparkly shoes and a tutu, holding a fake rifle and playing Duck Hunt. Meghan says seeing Mila's joy and free spirit speaks to how Yanira always promotes authenticity and freedom of spirit.



"The way that she parents and raises her kids is also, I believe, how she runs her business and loves on her friends. It's like, 'Be free. Be unapologetically you,'" she says.

Yanira says she wants her children to be comfortable with being themselves — something she said she never felt growing up. She remembers hiding in the closet when there were lots of people in the house because the noise was too loud and struggling to understand why she felt different from other kids. She also experienced sexual abuse as a child, something that made her feel shame and grief — and incapable of talking about it. "There was nobody to really walk me through that because there's so much shame. I was really little when it happened, and I didn't talk about it for years till I was a teenager in college. So why does that happen? Why does a little girl not feel safe to tell anybody?" she says.

She has since learned that she is on the autism spectrum, which she says has validated and encouraged her to stop hiding her voice. "Now, I'm not hiding shit!"

Meghan says she particularly appreciates that She Dares has been promoting mental health and awareness and neurodiversity in recent months. As someone with ADHD, Meghan says understanding how to run her business while embracing her neurodivergence is empowering and validating. "It's a place to still be professional but showing you that there's a different way to do it," she says.

Like Wonder Woman, Yanira's husband, Sloan Clark, says Yanira has a superpower: never angering people. Her natural positivity and generosity attract other positive people, he says, which sometimes leads to them having full conversations with waiters or baristas. He remembers a time when they received their order for free because Yanira had made the cashier's day. "It doesn't even make sense, 'cause I make people mad all the time ... I've never seen it happen that she's ever had a beef with anybody."

He believes Yanira's experience taking care of her chronically ill mother has made her an effective leader. He says she has mastered the art of nurturing others and is a strong advocate for him and their two children, Mateo (8) and Mila (6). He laughs and says sometimes it's like their kids are in She Dares. "She wants to make sure that they have confidence. Their self-confidence is very important and making sure that they're really getting behind their passion," he says.

What gave Yanira confidence during her own tough childhood was youth basketball. Through sports, she learned the value of having a troupe of girls her age who encouraged and motivated one another. She says the same was true of her family life; that though there were hard times in her life, she always had people to smile and laugh with. "I got through all this hard shit because I was on a team. I was on a basketball team. There was extracurricular activity. There was community," she says.

Perhaps it's no surprise that now that Yanira has another team — or that this time, she's the coach. 🍌

I got through all this hard shit because I was on a team. I was on a basketball team. There was extracurricular activity. There was community."

-Yanira Borges