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EMERGING LEADER



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GEORGIANNA MELENDEZ

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Growing diversity through Compact's Talent Source

By Keith Regan | Special to the Journal

In June, Commonwealth Compact will launch Talent Source, an online database of diverse professionals aimed at helping companies in the region find board members and senior executives to advance their own diversity initiatives.

For Commonwealth Compact Co-director Georgianna Melendez, the launch is a major part of the answer to the "connection gap" that has contributed to Boston's lingering image as a city unwelcoming to diversity. "We are very excited about this," she said.

For Melendez, diversity and helping those in need have been her focus since her undergraduate days at Bentley University and throughout a career, which took her from overseeing a domestic violence hotline that is now used thousands of times a year by women statewide, to a position as assistant commissioner of the state's Department of Transitional Assistance.

Now closing in on her master's degree at the University of Massachusetts Boston — most of her classes are a short walk from her office at the Compact — Melendez remains open to finding new opportunities to expand her own career while being of service to others.

What are your top three goals for the year?

To help increase the visibility of and access to professionals of color in Massachusetts through the launching of the Talent Source. ... Also, to help shift perceptions about Massachusetts as a place that is indeed welcoming to people of color and, personally, to finish my master's in public affairs.

What are your guiding principles for good management?

Transparency, teamwork, leadership and organization. You have to believe in what you are doing in order to manage well, be willing to share information, get ideas and share in the work. You also have to follow through with what you commit to doing.

What is the best business decision you've made?

I once ran a domestic violence hotline program where I had to get 24-hour coverage using limited resources and existing staff across multiple locations. I decided that using people whose primary function was something other than answering the hotline was not going to give the quality service callers deserved. I started with a strong volunteer component and by tracking the demographic and key service information

from all calls — then began making my case for full-time employees. Having this structure increased call volume from 100 a month to 800 a month, and the data helped in advocating for state funding. This program is now the Statewide Hotline for Domestic Violence known as SafeLink at Casa Myrna Vazquez, which now takes approximately 2,300 calls a month.

What is the toughest business decision you've made?

Layoffs, definitely. It is tough even when you know it is necessary and critical to the viability of your organization. The human element is the draw for me in my career path of helping others, so it is not easy to make a decision that impacts someone's livelihood even when it is the right thing for the business. I learned that as a manager you are only as good as your current decision — all the good things you have done in the past don't come into consideration when you're cutting someone's job.

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