

**May 8, 2013 – PRINTED IN INSIDE TUCSON BUSINESS**

**Does our Leadership reflect our community?**

By Lea Marquez Peterson, President/CEO Tucson Hispanic Chamber of Commerce

Dear Chairman of the Board,

This is a tough conversation we need to have with one another. Topics like this are not always comfortable. But... really.... You've been serving on that Board of Directors for a while now..... how diverse is the makeup of the people on the board? Are you really representing the people you serve? I'm not just talking about different ethnicities, but women and people under 50 years old.

Why does it matter? I've served on several Boards and Commissions in our community and I've seen this disparity in non-profit and business-related organizations. Key decisions in our region are made by the boards of these organizations. These boards have a lot of influence on policy decisions being made in our state, elected officials, and the allocation of resources. The Alliance in Board Diversity reported that in 2010, Men held close to 85 percent of all board seats. White men dominated the board room, holding 77.6 percent of board seats. Minority men held 6.8 percent. White women held 12.7 percent. Minority women held 3.0 percent.

A diverse board brings a different perspective – maybe an idea you've not thought of before. A board of directors directs the policy of a board but also represents the organization in the greater community and assists with fundraising. When those whom you serve, or the customers you sell to, see the board, do they see someone that looks like them?

I serve on a local high profile Board in our community. At a recent public meeting, a past Chairman asked us to take a moment to take a look around the tables at which we were sitting. He paused for a moment and then asked us each whether our organization was reflective of our community. There were many uneasy glances around the room. I admire his directness and believe the organization will be better positioned in the future because of it.

The 2010 U.S. Census stated that Hispanics are the largest minority group in the U.S. and, thus, may have the largest buying power of any minority group. Yet, Hispanics are the most underrepresented group in corporate America and board leadership. Studies support the benefits of diversity and the positive financial impact it has to the bottom line. This information needs to be utilized considering the Hispanic purchasing power is projected to reach \$1.5 trillion by 2015. I know the boards that I've participated on are always looking for new connections for fund raising in Arizona. A diverse board of directors could bring that to the organization. We need to develop the next generation of leaders from and for this community.

Where can you find new board members? There are a number of organizations that are training new leaders – check our Hispanic Leadership Institute – Tucson rosters, United Way Young Leaders Society and 40 under 40 Alumni to name a few. I also know that there is a tendency for board candidates to be chosen based on certain industries and connections. Please be aware that often people are selected who look and think exactly like those making the selection choices. Consider adding someone younger, from a different industry, from a different neighborhood.

Ultimately, the responsibility lies on your shoulders. As the Chairman of the Board, you can designate a Board Development committee. Make this a strategic priority for your organization.

I'm sure that you are aware of the demographic trends in our state. By 2030, a majority of Pima County will be Hispanic – that's 51%. Many of our non-profit organizations serve a primarily Hispanic client population. It would be a benefit to the organization to also have that "voice" represented around the Board table. According to Korn/Ferry Senior Client Partner Victor Arias, "as our country climbs out of a recession, growth opportunities and financial success should absolutely include tapping into the Hispanic market. Companies that overlook having Latinos on their boards risk missing those opportunities."

Bottom line: There is a significant gap between the fast growing Hispanic population and the number of Hispanics serving on Boards in the state and the nation. At the Tucson Hispanic Chamber, we've created a **Leadership Board** on our website ([www.TucsonHispanicChamber.org](http://www.TucsonHispanicChamber.org)). Non-Profit organizations may send us their Board Qualifications and Organizational information and we will assist with matchmaking potential board members with organizations.

Mr. Chairman, with all due respect, it's time to take a look at your organization's board leadership. Demographic shift is happening. How relevant will your organization be in 10, 15 or 20 years if you do not start now to cultivate the new generation of leaders?