

# Working with Hispanics

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# Table of Contents

Introduction . . . . .	1	Humor . . . . .	20
Generalization . . . . .	2	Giving Instructions . . . . .	20
Hispanic vs. Latino . . . . .	2	Driving Directions . . . . .	20
Hispanic Origin vs. Race . . . . .	3	Bilingual Leaders . . . . .	20
Demographic Profile . . . . .	4	The Language Barrier . . . . .	21
American vs. Americano . . . . .	5	Supervisors Learning Spanish . . . . .	21
Cultural Implications & Workplace Situations . . . . .	5	Using an Interpreter . . . . .	23
Education . . . . .	5	Written Materials . . . . .	23
Family . . . . .	7	Hiring and Administration . . . . .	24
Gender Roles . . . . .	10	Recruitment . . . . .	24
The Future . . . . .	11	Employment Forms . . . . .	25
Time . . . . .	12	Spanish Name Construction . . . . .	25
Group Loyalty and Trust . . . . .	13	Interviewing . . . . .	26
Working in Teams . . . . .	14	Important Changes in Government Agencies . . . . .	27
Unions . . . . .	14	Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986 . . . . .	27
Safety . . . . .	15	Form I-9 Employment Verification . . . . .	28
Role of Boss vs. Subordinate . . . . .	16	Social Security Number vs. Individual Taxpayer Identification Number (ITIN) . . . . .	28
Motivation and Rewards . . . . .	16	I-9 Maintenance . . . . .	29
Communication . . . . .	17	Coming to the U.S. Legally . . . . .	29
Importance of Respect . . . . .	17	Summary . . . . .	30
Harmony . . . . .	18	References . . . . .	31
Mannerisms . . . . .	19		
Giving Criticism . . . . .	19		

# Introduction

In the last decade, the United States has seen an unprecedented growth rate in the Hispanic Population. Immigrants from Latin America have come into this country on a grand scale driven by the need for economic survival and the hope of a better life. Their arrival is no surprise. Our success has made us the most powerful and affluent nation in the world both economically and politically. This success has created high demand for workers, particularly in the high labor-intensive industries - a demand in which many Hispanic immigrants are more than happy to fill.

Hispanic immigrants, the majority coming from areas just south of our border, have been inescapably exposed to the American Dream since childhood. Thanks to Hollywood and the media, these people come to us with great images and expectations of the U.S. and what life here is like. Unfortunately these preconceptions do not adequately prepare them for living in a foreign land with a different language, strange customs and laws. Trying to adapt to life in the U.S. can be overwhelming, especially for young undereducated Latin Americans, who often leave behind all the people that they love and the culture that they know to live and work among Americans who are often unappreciative of them.

Often working long hours at low wages in jobs that many Americans avoid, Hispanic laborers seek comfort and community at the end of the day, returning to *barrios* in which Spanish is the only language spoken, and where multiple families live together humbly in small apartments to save enough money to send a few dollars to loved ones across the border. Many come with the idea to earn enough money to pay off debts and one day return to their native lands to be with their families. For others, being separated from husbands, wives and children is too much to bear; so they reunite, joining each other here in the United States, and face the challenges of bringing up their children in a strange land, often with

no health insurance and no way to help them with their schooling. Even with both parents often working multiple jobs, over one quarter of Hispanic children in the U.S. live below the poverty level.<sup>1</sup>

As a result of this very rapid population growth, areas of this country that have been previously homogenous in terms of culture and ethnicity have transformed, seemingly overnight, into diverse communities whose citizens are just now getting used to the presence of these newcomers. For this reason it is no surprise that Americans often suffer from assumptions and misconceptions that make interacting with Hispanics difficult and uncomfortable.

Notwithstanding these obstacles, the relationship between Hispanic immigrants and American companies has quickly become a beneficial symbiosis, with many employers seeking out this very eager and available human resource. However, the differences in culture and language present significant barriers which impede the successful integration of Hispanics into the workforce. If these barriers are not adequately addressed, employers can expect persistent problems with safety, quality, and productivity which can negate virtually any other competitive advantage they may have.

Many American supervisors working with Hispanics on a daily basis find this group to be very hard working and dependable. But many supervisors lack an adequate understanding of these newcomers to effectively manage them. While typically appreciating the contribution their Spanish-speaking employees make, some supervisors are frustrated with the challenges they bring. "Why don't they learn English? They're in OUR country!" Statements like this are not uncommon coming from supervisors who do not fully understand the situation of their Hispanic employees. Supervisors must realize that it is incumbent upon *them*, as leaders, to take the steps necessary to insure their workplace is productive and efficient. As leaders they must reach out to their employees, be pro-active, and insure that the people who are responsible for making the product have the training, tools and information they need to be successful. This attitude

is the first essential element in breaking down barriers in the workplace and creating a productive efficient multicultural work environment.

The materials contained in this resource are designed to assist supervisors in understanding the similarities and commonalities that characterize a very large group of people that comprise the Hispanic ethnic group; how their culture, perspectives, and behaviors differ significantly from non-Hispanics; and, how these differences may affect the workplace.

## Generalization

It is important to recognize that when discussing the characteristics of any group that it will be necessary to *generalize*. Hispanics are a very diverse group of people from many different countries and subcultures. The individuals you encounter in the workplace will vary significantly depending on a number of factors:

- Country and region of origin
- Level of education
- Socio-economic level
- Length of time in this country
- Age
- Gender
- Personal experience

In our discussion of Hispanics we will be focusing on the common characteristics these people tend to share: language, values, socialization and cultural heritage. The use of generalization is a valuable tool in helping us to better understand and predict the behaviors of a group of people. However, it is important when interacting with any group, to consider each person as an individual.

An individual who has lived all his/her life in a metropolitan industrialized area will likely have different characteristics and mannerisms than someone from a rural farming community. Someone with a college degree will likely have a different outlook and expectations of life in America than someone who never finished primary school. An immigrant who has been in the U.S. for 10 years is likely to be more acculturated than someone having only been here for 2 months.

*Acculturation* is the process whereby an individual from one culture adapts themselves to a new culture<sup>2</sup>. During this processes an immigrant will absorb, to some degree, the surrounding cultures language, values, attitudes, and behavioral patterns. Some immigrants stay in close contact with people from their countries of origin and remain isolated from mainstream U.S. society, perhaps only going directly from home to work and back. These people are likely to remain at lower levels of acculturation. Others take on the challenge of integration and make a concerted effort to learn the new culture and language and are therefore more likely to acculturate at a faster pace. Hispanics at high levels of acculturation will behave differently than people at lower levels; therefore, acculturation is an important factor to consider when integrating them into the workforce.

## Hispanic vs. Latino

The word *Hispanic* is a word used to describe people from or descending from Spanish-speaking countries.<sup>3</sup> This includes people from Spain and 19 countries in Latin America (including the U.S. Commonwealth of Puerto Rico) that were once a part of the Spanish Empire. This also includes Equatorial Guinea, a small country on the west coast of Africa for a total of 21 different countries (see Table 1).

The term *Latino*, in the broadest sense, refers to people using languages derived from Latin including Spanish, French, Italian, Portuguese and Romanian. In a more narrow sense, *Latino* refers to people from or descending from Latin America. Latin America is broadly defined as the entire-western hemisphere south of the United States, but more specifically refers to those countries of the Americas that developed from the colonies of Spain, Portugal and France. This includes: Mexico, the Caribbean, and all countries in Central and South America with the exception of Belize, Guyana, and Suriname (These countries were colonized by the English and are typically treated differently by scholars).<sup>4</sup>

Table 1

<i>Region:</i>	Spanish-Speaking Countries					
	<i>Latin America</i>				<i>Europe</i>	<i>Africa</i>
	<i>North America</i>	<i>Central America</i>	<i>South America</i>	<i>Caribbean</i>		
<i>Country:</i>	Mexico	Costa Rica El Salvador Guatemala Honduras Nicaragua Panama	Argentina Bolivia Chile Colombia Ecuador Paraguay Peru Uruguay Venezuela	Cuba Dominican Republic Puerto Rico*	Spain	Equatorial Guinea

\* Denotes U.S. Commonwealth

A person from Mexico would be considered both Hispanic and Latino. However, someone from Brazil would be considered Latino but would not be considered Hispanic because their culture and language derive from Portugal rather than Spain. Though technically having two different meanings, the U.S. government, for reporting purposes, uses the two terms synonymously and interchangeably, as do the media and many other sources of information.

The term Hispanic will be used primarily throughout this text because it more accurately and specifically describes the people you will typically encounter. However, it is important to keep in mind that individuals have certain sensitivities about what they are called. Some prefer to be referred to as Hispanic and others Latino. Others still, may resent being grouped together, and prefer to be referred to by the country they are from. Because of the overwhelming number of Mexicans living in this country, a common error Americans make is to refer to all Hispanics as “Mexicans.” Another mistake is to call them all “Spanish” just because they predominantly speak Spanish. These errors, whether out of habit or

ignorance, can be offensive to Hispanics. Therefore it is important to learn where your employees are from and as to how they personally like to be referred.

### Hispanic Origin vs. Race

Another very common misconception is to think of people of Hispanic origin as a race. Hispanics are not a race of people but a people of many races and ethnic origins (see Table 2). The majority of Hispanics belong to a race called *mestizo* which is a mixture of the predominantly Caucasian Spanish European and the native inhabitants of the pre-Hispanic Americas or Amerindians. However, many Hispanics are also: *White, Black, Mulatto* and *Amerindian* (See Table 2).

Table 2

Hispanic Origin - Race/Ethnic Group by Countries Predominantly Found*	
<i>Race/ Ethnic Group</i>	<i>Hispanic Countries</i>
Caucasian/European decent (White)	Argentina, Costa Rica, Spain, Uruguay
African (Black) & Mulatto (African/Caucasian)	Cuba, Dominican Republic
Amerindian (Native American)	Bolivia, Guatemala, Peru,
Mestizo (Spanish European/Native American)	Chile, Ecuador, El Salvador, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, Paraguay

\* Note: This table is adapted from CIA - The World Factbook (2003).

This myth of the “Hispanic race” has been propagated in the U.S. by the fact that people of Hispanic origin, like Blacks, are considered one ethnic group entitled to minority status. The U.S. Census Bureau clearly separates the issue of race and Hispanic origin but data from these groups are presented together so often that people in the U.S. have grown to think of race as a question of being “White, Black, Hispanic, Asian, or Native American.”

### Demographic Profile

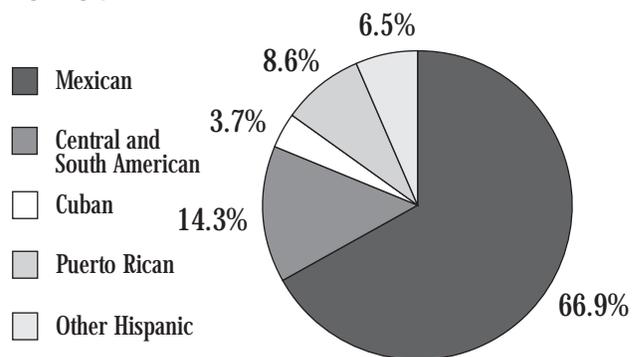
According to the Census Bureau (March 2002 CPS), Hispanics are now the largest minority group in the United States at over 37.4 million people (13.3% of the total population).<sup>1</sup> This represents an increase of approximately 67% since the 1990 census. Of this group, Mexicans comprise just over two thirds, making them the largest subgroup of the Hispanic population (see Figure 1).

It is important to note that the Hispanic population is difficult to measure precisely. Many undocumented Hispanics may not have participated in the 2000 census for fear of deportation. However, the Current Population Survey Demographical data, compiled every March, are based on the statistical sampling of approximately 60,000 households and are therefore considered scientific estimates. In January of 2000, it was estimated that there were over 7 million undocumented aliens.<sup>5</sup> Roughly 82% were from Latin

America. This is an even more difficult population to measure as more illegal immigrants enter the country every day. Despite these limitations, the Census and CPS data are the most reliable sources available.

The Southwestern regions of the United States contain the highest concentrations of Hispanics.<sup>7</sup> However, the Hispanic population of the Southeast increased by approximately 71% from 1990 to 2000.<sup>6</sup> In fact, the Hispanic population of North Carolina increased 394% - the highest growth rate in the nation (see Table 3).<sup>7</sup> This tremendous growth can be attributed to several factors including high birthrates within the Hispanic community and increased immigration from

Figure 1  
Percent Distribution of Hispanics by Type: 2202



Source: Current Population Survey, March 2002 PGP-5

Table 3

## Hispanic Population By Type for Regions, States and Puerto Rico: 1990 and 2000

Area	1990			2000							
	Total Population	Hispanic population		Total Population	Hispanic population			Hispanic Type			
		Number	%		Number	%	% Change From 1990	Mexican	Puerto Rican	Cuban	Other Hispanic
United States	248,709,873	22,354,059	9.0%	281,421,906	35,305,818	12.5%	57.9%	20,640,711	3,406,178	1,241,685	10,017,244
<i>Region</i>											
Midwest	59,668,632	1,726,509	2.9%	64,392,776	3,124,532	4.9%	81.0%	2,200,196	325,363	45,305	553,668
Northeast	50,809,229	3,754,389	7.4%	53,594,378	5,254,087	9.8%	39.9%	479,169	2,074,574	168,959	2,531,385
South	85,445,930	6,767,021	7.9%	100,236,820	11,586,696	11.6%	71.2%	6,548,081	759,305	921,427	3,357,883
West	52,786,082	10,106,140	19.1%	63,197,932	15,340,503	24.3%	51.8%	11,413,265	246,936	105,994	3,574,308
<i>State</i>											
Alabama	4,040,587	24,629	0.6%	4,447,100	75,830	1.7%	207.9%	44,522	6,322	2,354	22,632
Alaska	550,043	17,803	3.2%	626,932	25,852	4.1%	45.2%	13,334	2,649	553	9,316
Arizona	3,665,228	688,338	18.8%	5,130,632	1,295,617	25.3%	88.2%	1,065,578	17,587	5,272	207,180
Arkansas	2,350,725	19,876	0.8%	2,673,400	86,866	3.2%	337.0%	61,204	2,473	950	22,239
California	29,760,021	7,687,938	25.8%	33,871,648	10,966,556	32.4%	42.6%	8,455,926	140,570	72,286	2,297,774
Colorado	3,294,394	424,302	12.9%	4,301,261	735,601	17.1%	73.4%	450,760	12,993	3,701	268,147
Connecticut	3,287,116	213,116	6.5%	3,405,565	320,323	9.4%	50.3%	23,484	194,443	7,101	95,295
Delaware	666,168	15,820	2.4%	783,600	37,277	4.8%	135.6%	12,986	14,005	932	9,354
District of Columbia	606,900	32,710	5.4%	572,059	44,953	7.9%	37.4%	5,098	2,328	1,101	36,426
Florida	12,937,926	1,574,143	12.2%	15,982,378	2,682,715	16.8%	70.4%	363,925	482,027	833,120	1,003,643
Georgia	6,478,216	108,922	1.7%	8,186,453	435,227	5.3%	299.6%	275,288	35,532	12,536	111,871
Hawaii	1,108,229	81,390	7.3%	1,211,537	87,699	7.2%	7.8%	19,820	30,005	711	37,163
Idaho	1,006,749	52,927	5.3%	1,293,953	101,690	7.9%	92.1%	79,324	1,509	408	20,449
Illinois	11,430,602	904,446	7.9%	12,419,293	1,530,262	12.3%	69.2%	1,144,390	157,851	18,438	209,583
Indiana	5,544,159	98,788	1.8%	6,080,485	214,536	3.5%	117.2%	153,042	19,678	2,754	39,062
Iowa	2,776,755	32,647	1.2%	2,926,324	82,473	2.8%	152.6%	61,154	2,690	750	17,879
Kansas	2,477,574	93,670	3.8%	2,688,418	188,252	7.0%	101.0%	148,270	5,237	1,680	33,065
Kentucky	3,685,296	21,984	0.6%	4,041,769	59,939	1.5%	172.6%	31,385	6,469	3,516	18,569
Louisiana	4,219,973	93,044	2.2%	4,468,976	107,738	2.4%	15.8%	32,267	7,670	8,448	59,353
Maine	1,227,928	6,829	0.6%	1,274,923	9,360	0.7%	37.1%	2,756	2,275	478	3,851
Maryland	4,781,468	125,102	2.6%	5,296,486	227,916	4.3%	82.2%	39,900	25,570	6,754	155,692
Massachusetts	6,016,425	287,549	4.8%	6,349,097	428,729	6.8%	49.1%	22,288	199,207	8,867	198,367
Michigan	69,295,297	201,596	0.3%	9,938,444	323,877	3.3%	60.7%	220,769	26,941	7,219	68,948
Minnesota	4,375,099	53,884	1.2%	4,919,479	143,382	2.9%	166.1%	95,613	6,616	2,527	38,626
Mississippi	2,573,216	15,931	0.6%	2,844,658	39,569	1.4%	148.4%	21,616	2,881	1,508	13,564
Missouri	5,117,073	61,702	1.2%	5,595,211	118,592	2.1%	92.2%	77,887	6,677	3,022	31,006
Montana	799,065	12,174	1.5%	902,195	18,081	2.0%	48.5%	11,735	931	285	5,130
Nebraska	1,578,385	36,969	2.3%	1,711,263	94,425	5.5%	155.4%	71,030	1,993	859	20,543
Nevada	1,201,833	124,419	10.4%	1,998,257	393,970	19.7%	216.6%	285,764	10,420	11,498	86,288
New Hampshire	1,109,252	11,333	1.0%	1,235,786	20,489	1.7%	80.8%	4,590	6,215	785	8,899
New Jersey	7,730,188	739,861	9.6%	8,414,350	1,117,191	13.3%	51.0%	102,929	366,788	77,337	570,137
New Mexico	1,515,069	579,224	38.2%	1,819,046	765,386	42.1%	32.1%	330,049	4,488	2,588	428,261
New York	17,990,455	2,214,026	12.3%	18,976,457	2,867,583	15.1%	29.5%	260,889	1,050,293	62,590	1,493,811
North Carolina	6,628,637	76,726	1.2%	8,049,313	378,963	4.7%	393.9%	246,545	31,117	7,389	93,912
North Dakota	638,800	4,665	0.7%	642,200	7,786	1.2%	66.9%	4,295	507	250	2,734
Ohio	10,847,115	139,696	1.3%	11,353,140	217,123	1.9%	55.4%	90,663	66,269	5,152	55,039
Oklahoma	3,145,585	86,160	2.7%	3,450,654	179,304	5.2%	108.1%	132,813	8,153	1,759	36,579
Oregon	2,842,321	112,707	4.0%	3,421,399	275,514	8.0%	144.3%	214,662	5,092	3,091	52,469
Pennsylvania	11,881,643	232,262	2.0%	12,281,054	394,088	3.2%	69.7%	55,178	228,557	10,363	99,990
Rhode Island	1,003,464	45,752	4.6%	1,048,319	90,820	8.7%	98.5%	5,881	25,422	1,128	58,389
South Carolina	3,486,703	30,551	0.9%	4,012,012	95,076	2.4%	211.2%	52,871	12,211	2,875	27,119
South Dakota	696,004	5,252	0.8%	754,844	10,903	1.4%	107.6%	6,364	637	163	3,739
Tennessee	4,877,185	32,741	0.7%	5,689,283	123,838	2.2%	278.2%	77,372	10,303	3,695	32,468
Texas	16,986,510	4,339,905	25.5%	20,851,820	6,669,666	32.0%	53.7%	5,071,963	69,504	25,705	1,502,494
Utah	1,722,850	84,597	4.9%	2,233,169	201,559	9.0%	138.3%	136,416	3,977	940	60,226
Vermont	562,758	3,661	0.7%	608,827	5,504	0.9%	50.3%	1,174	1,374	310	2,646
Virginia	6,187,358	160,288	2.6%	7,078,515	329,540	4.7%	105.6%	73,979	41,131	8,332	206,098
Washington	4,866,692	214,570	4.4%	5,894,121	441,509	7.5%	105.8%	329,934	16,140	4,501	90,934
West Virginia	1,793,477	8,489	0.5%	1,808,344	12,279	0.7%	44.6%	4,347	1,609	453	5,870
Wisconsin	4,891,769	93,194	1.9%	5,363,675	192,921	3.6%	107.0%	126,719	30,267	2,491	33,444
Wyoming	453,588	25,751	5.7%	493,782	31,669	6.4%	23.0%	19,963	575	160	10,971
Puerto Rico <sup>1</sup>	3,522,037	(NA)	(NA)	3,808,610	3,762,746	98.8%	(NA)	11,546	3,623,392	19,973	107,835

<sup>1</sup> Census 2000 was the first to ask a separate question on Hispanic origin in Puerto Rico. Source U.S. Census Bureau, Census 2000, Summary File.

Latin America and other parts of the United States. This migration was primarily due to increased employment and economic opportunities over the last several years.

Hispanics are more likely to live in larger cities than small rural areas because they prefer to live closer to economic opportunities. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, in March 2002, 91.3% of Hispanics lived in or around metropolitan areas and only 8.7% lived in rural non-metropolitan areas.<sup>1</sup>

The Hispanic population in the United States is younger than the non-Hispanic White population. One-third of Hispanics living in the U.S. are under 18 years old. Of this group, Mexicans are the youngest with 37% being younger than 18 years old.<sup>1</sup> This implies that the workforce of tomorrow will be comprised of a greater proportion of Hispanic workers.

Most Hispanic men are employed in “blue-collar” professions. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, in March 2002, 74.6% of Hispanic men were employed in farming, service and production, or as operators and laborers. However more than half (55.1%) of Hispanic women who were employed worked in “white-collar” professions - managerial, professional, technical and sales.

## American vs. Americano

It is important to note that though we in the United States refer to ourselves as *American*, most people from Latin America also consider themselves to be *Americans* as well, i.e., *South American*, *Central American*, *Mexican American* etc. If, in the presence of a Latin American, a person from the U.S. refers to him/herself as *Americano*, which is the literal translation of *American*, it can be considered presumptuous. The term used in Spanish to refer to people from the United States is *estadounidense* which comes from *Estados Unidos* which means “United States”. Unfortunately, *estadounidense* is a term unique to Spanish and has no direct translation into English. Some scholars writing about cultural issues, in an attempt to be politically correct, will use the term *North American* to refer to the U.S. and its

culture. But that term may also be considered presumptuous in that North America also includes Mexico, and Canada and Greenland. For lack of a more descriptive word when speaking or writing in English, I believe that the use of the term *American*, when referring to the culture and people of the United States, is appropriate.

# Cultural Implications & Workplace Situations

## Education

In Latin America, when someone is referred to as well-educated or *bien educado*, he/she is seldom referring to the amount of schooling someone has. Well-educated typically means that a person is well mannered and handles social situations well. Someone who is rude or crass might be referred to as *mal educado* or “ill-mannered”. Education in the classroom sense is generally referred to as *enseñanza*.

According to the Census Bureau, 43% of Hispanics living in the United States have less than a high-school diploma and 27% have less than a 9th grade education.<sup>1</sup> These statistics are affected by a large percentage of foreign-born Hispanics who come from regions where educational attainment is much lower, such as the poorer regions of Mexico and Central America. In Mexico the educational structure resembles that of the U.S. in that there are 12 years of formal education before college. *Primaria*, literally translated as “primary school”, is the first 6 years of education - the equivalent to elementary school in the U.S. *Secundaria* or “secondary school” is the next 3 years of schooling and is similar to middle school. Next is *Preparatoria*, or preparatory school, the final 3 years of formal education, equivalent to high school (see Table 4).<sup>8</sup>

Table 4

<i>Primaria</i> “Primary School”	First 6 years of formal education	Equivalent to Elementary School
<i>Secundaria</i> “Secondary School”	Next 3 years	Equivalent to Middle School
<i>Preparatoria</i> “Preparatory School”	Final 3 years	Equivalent to High School

Most Mexicans only have basic reading and writing skills owing to high dropout rates. Approximately 50% of Mexican children fail to complete primary school, only 40.1% ever go on to secondary school, and only 21.3% enter preparatory school.<sup>8</sup> Most of the children that drop out are from low-income families that live in the rural areas of Mexico. It is these same areas such as *Oaxaca*, *Guerrero*, and *Guanajuato* that produce the highest numbers of immigrants to the U.S.

Children of the upper class in all Latin American countries attend well-equipped private schools, but for the majority, schools often lack resources or there is no school at all. In Mexico, some schools in rural areas lack even the basic tools such as desks, paper and pencils. Teachers often have limited education, lack of specific training, and are overworked and underpaid. Primary school teachers are not even required to have a college degree.

In general, school in Latin America is more structured than in the U.S. Classes are taught on a more narrow scope and are generally limited to academic subjects with very few extracurricular activities. Teaching is more theory-based than hands-on with much less classroom participation from students than in the U.S.<sup>9</sup>

Employers may encounter Hispanics having difficulty when filling out job applications and employment forms. Many undereducated Hispanics, particularly those applying for jobs on the blue-collar level, are unaccustomed to filling out a lot of forms and some may not be able to read in their own language.

Employers should plan to assist them with this process by utilizing a translator or bilingual Human Resources Staff member (see *Hiring and Administration*).

Undereducated Hispanics, particularly those possessing no prior industrial experience, are more likely to be unaccustomed to following required specifications and measurements. Pinpoint accuracy may be a new concept for many Hispanics from rural areas. Even those who have had an adequate education in their own countries are unfamiliar with measurements in terms of feet and inches since the metric system is used in Latin America. Supervisors should take the time to explain to Hispanic employees why things have to be done a certain way and physically show them how to do it (see *Giving Instructions*).

## Family

In Latin America, the concept of family generally takes on a broader, more elaborate meaning than in the United States. For most Hispanics, family is the “center of life”. It is not only a source of emotional support and pride, but the primary means of economic and social stability.

Social scientists have been particularly fascinated with the Mexican family and its ability to survive and adapt throughout times of social and economic instability.<sup>8</sup> Family members rely on each other for economic and social support. It is not uncommon for several related nuclear families to live together in a two-room house in order to save housing expense and pool their

incomes. In general, programs such as social welfare are completely inadequate to be of much assistance, therefore survival depends upon the maintenance of an intricate personal network which includes immediate and extended family as well as non-kin relations.<sup>8</sup>

For generations, this tradition of the extended family network has been the primary means of survival and success for the lower economic classes. Through the extended family network, resources such as food, tools, childcare, clothing and other necessary items are exchanged, as well as information, job assistance, home construction etc. In middle and upper class society, the extended family is an integral means of connection in the political and business world involving prominent families and extensive personal networks. This tradition of the extended family is certainly evident in the lives of most Hispanics living in this country, particularly in the recently arriving immigrant groups.

Economic hardship and social stratification drive family members to many extremes; one of which is to completely relocate as far as the United States. On arriving, immigrants typically join an existing extended family or social network established by family and friendship connections. In the U.S., as in many parts of Latin America, these networks or *barrios* (literally neighborhoods) are their primary means of support, helping them with a place to stay, food, clothing and information as they start out to look for work.

For Hispanics, members of the extended family network are often just as important to them as members of their nuclear family. This includes grandparents, godparents, aunts, uncles, nieces, nephews, distant cousins and good friends. Hispanics feel a strong sense of obligation to this tight-knit group of people that have provided them continuing support and are extremely dedicated to them.

For Hispanic immigrants, moving to the U.S. almost always involves leaving behind some of these key family members. For them, being separated from their family is one of the most difficult things to bear. It is for this reason that many Hispanics oblige them-

selves to return home periodically, particularly around the holidays, to spend time with family members whom they may not have seen in a long time and for whom they have been working hard to support. These return trips to Latin America are often difficult for employers to accommodate because Hispanic employees sometimes leave without a word and/or they are gone for a month or more at a time. Most vacation policies only cover one to two weeks and an employer can seldom afford to grant leaves of absence for such extended periods of time. It is common for employers to experience a high turnover around Christmas time.

Maloney (2001) speaking about multicultural management in the Dairy Industry has this to say on the subject:

*“Successful employers acknowledge their employees’ strong family ties and desire to return home periodically. Successful employers develop staffing systems that are flexible enough to allow for employees to return home for a period of several weeks or months and then return to the job. Many [Hispanic] employees come to northeast dairy farms to earn money to support families at home and often send most of their earnings back to their family at home. These strong family ties also create a strong desire for employees to return home periodically. Managers often develop systems so that employees can have extended periods of time off and still fill the work\schedules on the farm as necessary.”<sup>10</sup>*

Maloney also recommends some management strategies for dealing with this challenging staffing situation:

- Assume from the beginning that positions will have to be refilled periodically.
- Ask employees when they start work to agree to give several weeks notice before leaving employment.
- Take advantage of strong family ties and friendship networks by involving employees in finding and training their own replacement.

- Encourage employees to return to the company upon returning from home.
- Always treat employees with respect and dignity and encourage them to become part of your team for the long term.<sup>10</sup>

Employers can also expect extended periods of absence when there is a death or emergency involving a family member living out of the country. This can be another challenge for employers, in that bereavement leave policies typically do not accommodate the deaths of those outside of an employee's immediate family such as cousins and godparents and rarely cover more than a few days. Employers wishing to retain good employees may want to consider more liberal leave policies when taking into account the needs of their immigrant workforce.

Hispanics, in general, tend to be very loyal to those whom they have grown to trust. As a supervisor/employer, if you make it a point to treat your Hispanic employees with dignity and respect, they are very likely to desire to come back and work for you again upon their return to the United States (see *Harmony & Group Loyalty and Trust*).

It is important for employers to remember that for Hispanics, family is the highest priority, everything else, including work, is secondary. Try to avoid putting your Hispanic employees in a position where they must choose between family and work. Instead, look for ways to take advantage of these strong familial tendencies as a source of motivation in the workplace. Miño (2003) suggests several ways of accomplishing this:<sup>11</sup>

- *Emphasize family in training and safety programs.* When trying to get Hispanics to follow safety procedures and use protective equipment, it is useful to remind them that they are very important to their family members. Putting pictures of family members in their work area along with messages of encouragement from them can motivate employees to work safer and remain focused doing a good job (see *Safety*).

- *Provide opportunities for employees to maintain contact with families.* Allow employees to call their families without extra expense. Giving out discount calling cards as a benefit or allowing employees to call home directly from your office is an excellent way of showing appreciation. Take the opportunity to speak directly to family members letting them know how valuable their son, daughter, father, wife, husband, etc. is to you.
- *Help employees wire money to their families.* For many Hispanic employees, sending money to family members is a high priority but can be expensive and inconvenient. Assisting in this processes makes a clear statement that you support them. Your employees' appreciation will be evident through their work performance and dedication.
- *Make family a part of company celebrations.* Involve family members in open-houses, banquets, and other activities. Hosting someone's family is looked on very positively in Hispanic Culture and is seen as a gesture of respect and solidarity.
- *Ask about employees' family members.* Learning the names of employees' family members and asking about them often will be well received. In Latin America discussion of family is common protocol when people greet each other (see *Mannerisms*).

Many U.S. companies tend to discourage the hiring of family members and have policies prohibiting or limiting it. In working with Hispanic immigrants, it can be a quite an asset when recruiting and getting Hispanics to take ownership in company objectives (see *Hiring and Administration*). According to Miño (2003), "When Hispanic employees work as a family unit they generally take care of your business as if it were their own. Provide opportunities for employees' family members and friends to apply for jobs with your business."<sup>11</sup>

Though Hispanic immigrants travel great distances to find work, they tend to move toward existing extended

family support groups. Employers who change locations may find Hispanic employees resistant or unwilling to relocate to new areas without this support group. Mendel (1980) found that non-Hispanic whites tended to migrate away from their families whereas Mexican Americans migrated toward places where they already had family.<sup>12</sup> When permanently moving their business to a new location, employers who wish to retain valuable Hispanic Employees should consider the following:

- *Is there a support network available for my employees?* Find out if there is a significant Hispanic population present at the new location and if affordable housing is available to accommodate your employees and their families. Find out if there are stores that cater to Spanish-speaking clientele. Also, religion is very important to most Hispanics. Find out if there are churches, Catholic and otherwise, that provide services in Spanish.
- *Are there resources available to help families adapt to the new area?* Find out if there are schools with bilingual assistance and ESL (English as a Second Language). Find out if there are any advocacy groups or community outreach programs that could help your employees with social services and information.
- *Can the local medical facilities accommodate your Spanish-speaking employees?* Find out if translation services are available at local clinics, doctor's offices and hospitals and what kinds of insurance and payment plans they offer. Also find out how well local law enforcement, ambulance and 911 services are prepared to assist those who speak no English.
- *How well will the community you are moving to accept the presence of people from another culture?* You may wish to contact public officials and make inquiries. It is good to get involved in the community. Speak to civic groups about your company and its goals. Groups such as the local Rotary club and the chamber of commerce can be very helpful in helping you to integrate your company and its employees into the community.

## Gender Roles

The Hispanic world is still a largely patriarchal, male-dominated society, with both men and women adhering to very traditional gender roles. These roles are characterized by traditional behavioral ideals, which have existed since colonial times.

*Machismo*, is an internationally familiar concept referring to what is expected of a man in Latin America. Canak and Swanson (1998) describe the traditional macho man:

*Macho men are expected to demonstrate strength, aggressiveness, and fearlessness in their relationships with other men and patriarchal control over their spouses and children. Macho men have uncontrollable sexual appetites and engage in sexually aggressive relationships with their spouses as well as numerous sexual affairs. Personal and Family pride are the historical foundation of masculinity. Thus honorable men are the primary breadwinners of the family.*<sup>8</sup>

This characterization is a bit extreme, but vestiges of this behavioral ideal are still quite common throughout Latin America. The true meaning of *Machismo*, however, is described as a man's sense of duty, loyalty and honor and is a very important aspect of the Hispanic culture.

*Marianismo*, a term not as familiar or widely known as *Machismo*, is the corresponding traditional behavioral ideal for women. *Marianismo* refers to characteristics associated with the Virgin Mary such as patience, spiritual strength and moral superiority. Women in Latin America have traditionally been expected to be self-sacrificing, frugal, obedient and capable of almost infinite emotional and physical endurance.<sup>8</sup>

In the traditional Hispanic family it is the woman's responsibility to take care of the household. They are responsible for doing all the housework, taking care of the kids, cooking the meals and serving their husbands. The man's role is to make the decisions and provide for the family. Many Hispanic men do not

allow their wives to work, thinking that it reflects badly on their ability to provide for their families.

Today, in Latin America and especially in immigrant families living in the United States, more and more Hispanic women are entering the workforce and beginning to contribute to the “family economy.” In Mexico, many women work from their homes sewing garments for local factories at piece-rate wages. Others, especially in the northern border areas, work outside their homes at export zone factories called *maquila* or *maquiladora*. Women who work outside of the home, work what’s called a *doble jornada* (double shift) and are still expected to maintain their household responsibilities.<sup>8</sup>

Employers in the U.S. seeking to hire Hispanic women may find their work experience outside the home very limited or non-existent. However, they may also discover, that their desire and necessity to contribute to their family’s well being is unsurpassed, yielding a very dedicated employee with a strong work ethic. Keeping in mind that a Hispanic woman’s primary responsibility is to care for her family, employers should be prepared for the possibility of periodic absences related to sick family members and possibly higher turnover rates than those of Hispanic men.

As a side effect of *Machismo*, Hispanic men may resent working under a female supervisor, feeling that it is inappropriate. In working alongside women, Hispanic men may engage frequently in flirtatious behavior causing problems, particularly among non-Hispanic women who are unaccustomed and intolerant to this type of behavior. In Hispanic culture, as prescribed by *Machismo*, it is common and often accepted behavior, for men to be aggressive and sexually suggestive towards woman, sometimes even touching woman inappropriately. This can be a serious problem in that U.S. Sexual harassment policies do not provide for a cross-cultural understanding.

Sexual Harassment is a concept that is generally unknown in Latin America. Employers must thoroughly educate their workforce on what specific types

of behaviors can be construed as sexual harassment, why such behaviors are not allowed, and what the potential consequences are. When working with Hispanics, this type of training requires that participants understand the cultural differences, as well as the legal ones, and therefore should be performed by a capable bilingual professional.

## The Future

According to Maloney (2003), Latin Americans exhibit a trait known as uncertainty avoidance. Uncertainty avoidance “refers to the extent to which the members of a culture feel threatened or uncomfortable dealing with uncertain or unknown factors.” Maloney states that one of the ways that societies respond to this anxiety is to embrace religion:

*By embracing religion, people reduce anxiety by believing “my fate is in the hands of God.”<sup>13</sup>*

In Latin America, approximately 90% of the population is Roman Catholic.<sup>14</sup> The church plays a dominant role in the everyday lives of the Hispanic people, their families and their communities, giving spiritual meaning to the Hispanic culture. Hispanics, in general, tend to have a very strong faith in God and believe that God alone is in control of their destinies - that whatever happens to them, good or bad, is “God’s will.” Even for those that are not devoutly religious, this sense of fatalism significantly influences how they view life. For this reason, Hispanic people do not typically plan very far into the future. In fact, when they do make statements about the future, they quite often end it with the adage, “*Si Dios Quiere*” - “If God wants.” For example:

*I will come to see and see you next week... if God wants.*

Believing in the idea that the future is out of their control, Hispanics tend to place much more emphasis on the present. To a Hispanic, what is happening now, at the moment is far more important than what may happen in the future. For this reason, Hispanics do not tend to make specific plans very far into the future. Instead they are more likely to have a general

idea of what they would like to accomplish or do in the future but do not tend to concern themselves with the details beyond a day-to-day basis. For instance many Hispanic immigrants come into this country with the general idea of working, making enough money, and then returning to their homelands at some point. They don't know how long they will stay, where they will work and live, or what will happen during the time they are here.

Americans, on the other hand, do not tend to be fatalistic and are taught to take control of our lives. We are in the habit of making elaborate plans for the future such as what college we will go to, how much money we plan to make, how many kids we are going to have, what age we are going to retire, etc. Our day-to-day lives seem to revolve around this philosophy. For this reason, Hispanic's lack of planning for the future can be frustrating for employers and supervisors when trying to plan ahead for things such as their department's vacation schedule.

The fatalistic perspective can also have a significant impact in the enrollment levels of Hispanics in company benefits plans. Many do not understand why they should have money taken out of their paychecks to pay health insurance premiums when they are not sick; or, put money into a retirement account that they cannot use until they are "old". Their thinking is, "I'll worry about being sick if, and when, I get sick;" or, "Why should I worry about being old? I may not live to be old!"<sup>17</sup>

Many Hispanic immigrants come from poor rural areas where access to public health care is limited or nonexistent. Canak and Swanson (1998) state that 15 million Mexicans live in areas completely lacking in health care public or private.<sup>8</sup> Further, for many people in Latin America, health insurance is an unaffordable luxury, one which they are not accustomed to having. Health care in Latin America is much less expensive in general when compared to the United States, thus many immigrants are unprepared for the high costs involved when going to the doctor or emergency room here for the first time. Employers should stress the importance of having health

insurance in this country and encourage their Hispanic employees to take advantage of company benefits.

## Time

In the U.S. business world, we put a lot of pressure on ourselves to get as much work done in as little time as possible focusing on productivity and efficiency. We try to see how much we can accomplish between 8:00 am and 5:00 pm every day, often planning every hour precisely. In the Hispanic world, the concept of time is quite different. Stemming from the propensity toward *fatalism*, Hispanics tend to believe that what's happening right now, at this moment, is always of greater importance than what will happen in the future. For example: "The fact that I am not through mopping the floor takes precedence over the fact that I was supposed to meet my supervisor in his office 15 minutes ago." Hernandez (1999) has this to say about how Hispanics perceive time:

*"For the Hispanic, time is our servant, and there is always plenty of time to do things. Time should not control our lives according to this philosophy. Time stretches out into infinity, it is not chopped up into small bits that demand to be utilized to their maximum ability".*

Time is always flexible in the Hispanic world. Punctuality is not given a high degree of importance and can be virtually non-existent. When someone sets a time that they will be someplace, it simply means that the event will not begin before that time. Therefore an 8:00 am appointment might not start until 8:30 or later. Even the white-collar business world behavior is more sociable, personable and less fast moving, with meetings seldom starting exactly on time. According to an article in *The Financial Times* (March 2001), Chilean white-collar employees in the capital city of Santiago work more hours than anyone else in the world but are some of the least productive within those hours.<sup>15</sup>

One of the first things that Hispanic immigrants learn when they come to work in the U.S. is that Americans

take being on time very seriously, especially when work is concerned. However, employers should keep in mind that just because a Hispanic employee is late, doesn't necessarily mean that he/she is lazy or does not respect you. Employers should also remember that a deadline is not a finite timeframe for most Hispanics. Employers should take extra care in explaining the importance of deadlines and schedules and why things have to be done within certain time constraints. Once Hispanic employees understand why things happen from the big-picture perspective, they are likely to adjust their behaviors quickly.

## Group Loyalty and Trust

In the U.S. society, we place a lot of importance on personal accomplishment, individual achievement, and competition. Hispanics, on the other hand, put much more emphasis on group identification and loyalty, with the goals of the group or collective superceding individual goals. Hofstede (1980) describes the U.S. as an *individualist* culture whereas the cultures found in Latin America are described as *collectivist*.

*Individualism is defined as the extent to which people prefer to take care of themselves and their immediate families, remaining independent from groups and organizations. Collectivism refers to the extent to which people*

*from very early ages are integrated into strong cohesive, "in groups."*<sup>16</sup>

Because of these cultural distinctions, Latin Americans tend to possess markedly different values than people from the U.S. (see Table 5).

In studying work values of Navy recruits, Knouse et al (1992) concluded that Hispanics emphasize more interpersonal values such as helping and cooperation than did non-Hispanic recruits; and they prefer to conform to the group rather than stand out. He also found that Hispanics, in general, are more likely to have optimistic expectations when compared with non-Hispanics.<sup>2</sup>

Hispanics tend to see their extended family and friends as an extension of their "in-group". Group integrity is based on a concept called *confianza*, a sense of trust and respect that exists between its members. Metivier (1999) states that once you have *la confianza*, with a Hispanic person he/she is "devoutly" loyal to you.<sup>17</sup> The results of this can be seen in the social nature and cohesiveness of Hispanics within the workforce. It is important to understand, however, that trust, particularly in the Latin world is not given to just anybody - it must be earned. Americans tend to loosely use the word "friend" to describe people they interact with on a daily basis. Hispanics, in contrast tend to be very

Table 5

Individualist vs. Collectivist Characteristics*	
<b><i>American (Individualist)</i></b>	<b><i>Latin American (Collectivist)</i></b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Interests of the individual prevail over interests of the group</li> <li>• Children are taught to be independent</li> <li>• Individuals tend to take care of themselves rather than relying on groups</li> <li>• Work goals include personal time, freedom and challenge</li> <li>• Individuals see themselves as somewhat independent of the organization</li> <li>• People are managed as individuals</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Financial support of family is important and expected</li> <li>• Sense of belonging is intense yet limited to family and friends</li> <li>• People who are not family or close friends are often mistrusted</li> <li>• Interaction at work is important and expected.</li> <li>• Employees tend to be dependent on the organization</li> <li>• Relationships prevail over tasks</li> </ul>

\* Note: This table is adapted from Maloney, T. (2003) *Understanding the Dimensions of Culture: Learning to Relate to the Hispanic Employees*.<sup>13</sup>

selective of whom they call *amigo* or “friend”. Someone they interact with at work for example may only be considered a *conocido*, literally, “someone who is known to me” - an acquaintance, and would still address that person formally (see *Importance of Respect*). Only when a person has earned their trust, can he/she be considered an *amigo* or a member of the “in-group”. It is this same selectivity that dictates the group integrity.

## Working in Teams

Employers should keep in mind the Hispanic’s collectivist tendencies when developing work teams. It is true that Hispanics tend to value working together and cooperation, but individuals arbitrarily put into a new group may not necessarily display the same cohesiveness as they do with their original “in-group”. A common mistake employers make is to assume that just because a new employee speaks Spanish that he will be accepted by other Hispanic employees. Hispanics are very proud of their in-groups and very selective of whom they allow into it. People may not like each other simply because they are from different countries or even different regions within the same country. Historical rivalries, social classes and ethnic differences can divide Hispanics. For instance, a nationalistic Mexican might not relate with someone from Guatemala, or someone from a rural part of Mexico might not want to work with someone from Mexico City. Diversity among Hispanics must be taken into consideration when putting teams together.

It is also important to note that the concept of “Teamwork”, as we know it in the American workplace, characterized by each team member having their own individual role and responsibility, is not as familiar in Latin America and is a concept many Hispanics are simply not used to. Hispanics in general are more accustomed to a top-down, hierarchical form of management structure rather than a self-directed team approach (see *Role of Boss & Subordinate*). Supervisors wishing to initiate self-directed work teams with unacculturated Hispanics may need to employ significant training and hands-on attention to achieve the desired result.

## Unions

For an employer to gain la *confianza* of a Hispanic employee it is often simply a matter of being friendly and fair, since most Hispanics have a natural sense of respect for those in a position of power (see *Importance of Respect*). However, once that trust is broken, it may never be mended. Further, once trust is lost with one person, an employer can quickly lose the trust of the entire Hispanic workgroup which can prove to be devastating to companies who are particularly dependent upon this labor force.

In July 2001, a poultry processing plant in North Carolina fired 50 Hispanic employees who had apparently been discovered to have been working without “appropriate documentation.” According to a local newspaper, the employees, some of which had been working for the company for 10 years, were suddenly fired apparently without notice or having been given any opportunity to rectify their situations. As a result, 200 more Hispanic employees walked out in protest of what they perceived as “unjust” and “discriminatory” action on the part of their employer.

Though most employers are sympathetic to the plight of the Hispanic immigrant worker, preoccupation stemming from questionable legal status, and recent downward economic forecasts have caused some employers to terminate Hispanics. Other companies have been accused of exploitation of workers rights, especially in many of the more labor-intensive manufacturing industries where low wages and poor safety conditions come into play. These sentiments are sparking a resurgence in Labor Unions who see an opportunity to “rebuild membership and recover the muscle they exercised” for so many years back in the 1950s through the 1970s.<sup>18</sup> Parker (2001) states that, with the unprecedented number of immigrants that have flowed into the country over the last 10 years, unions have recruited hundreds of thousands of them regardless of their legal status. In fact, evidence exists now that unions will undertake extreme measures to persuade immigrants to join them. In the fall of 2000, the Service Employees International Union came to the aid of 7 undocumented hotel cleaning

staff who were fired from a Holiday Inn Express in Minneapolis after they voted to join the union. Apparently, after the election, the hotel manager called the Immigration and Naturalization Service which arrested them and threatened to deport them. The union intervened, and as a result the maids won a \$72,000 settlement and the right to remain in the country for a two-year period while they applied for legal documentation.<sup>18</sup>

Many unions have bilingual representatives and have been known to employ a number of tactics to recruit Hispanic employees:

- Going to local churches and talking to Spanish-speaking congregations
- Enlisting the support of local Hispanic leaders - including clergy, government officials
- Visiting employees' homes speaking with spouses and family members
- Sending representatives undercover to be hired on as employees with the intention of spreading union propaganda internally
- Aggressively recruiting a key bilingual Hispanic employee within the company who other employees look up to and will follow; and, who could be the only communication link between management and Spanish-speaking workers.

Immigrants, especially those who may be undocumented, undereducated or unable to speak English well, are for the most part, disposed to keeping a low profile and are therefore more susceptible to exploitation. Employers must be sensitive to this fact and not take advantage of their submissiveness, for the longer they stay in this country and the more acculturated they become, the greater the likelihood that they will be more sympathetic to union influences. Employers should make an effort to educate all management so that they are aware of the unique aspects of their Hispanic employees and to be sensitive to their needs. Management must be pro-active on this front by reaching out to their employees and earning their trust, their *confianza*. For if they do not, unions will.

## Safety

The Hispanic view on personal safety is very much related to their predominant tendency to believe that their fate rests solely "in the hands of God" (see *The Future*). Simply put, they believe if they are destined to get hurt on the job there really is nothing they can do to change that. Further, Hispanics tend to believe that their personal safety, like their destiny, is their own affair. Thus, they may feel that it should not matter whether they choose to wear safety equipment or not. For this reason, employers may encounter resistance when trying to enforce the use of safety goggles, earplugs and other equipment. Hispanics may remove such equipment if it restricts their movement, is uncomfortable, or if it in any way interferes with their job performance. Further, most Hispanics, especially those with little work experience in the United States, are not familiar with safety standards required by OSHA and why they must be strictly followed.

Employers may find that Hispanic employees tend to not report accidents when they occur. If the accident is minor, a Hispanic employee may feel that it is unimportant and is not necessary to bother his or her supervisor. For many Hispanic employees, accidents are just a normal consequence of being at work. If an accident occurs but they can continue to work, he/she may do so without complaining. Hispanics may fear that, if they cannot perform their duties, they will be terminated. Also, Hispanics unfamiliar with benefits such as worker's compensation, might not report an accident until the injury becomes unbearable.

Another dangerous situation can occur when supervisors rely on unqualified employees as interpreters. Employees, used to only communicating with that person, may only report the accident to the interpreter who may or may not relay the message to the supervisor (see *Using an Interpreter*).

Employers should emphasize to Hispanic employees the importance of safety rules (as well as workers compensation and other benefits), taking extra care to assure that they understand that their safety compliance affects more than just themselves personally. It must also be emphasized that it is their responsibility to report accidents when they occur and to the appropriate individual.

Employers should conduct safety training and orientation classes in Spanish using a Spanish-speaking trainer that has the appropriate background. Videos in Spanish are a good supplement but should not replace a live trainer who can reinforce important points, ask summary questions, and assure that the information is absorbed. Translated policies and handouts are easily signed and put aside, and are likely to go unread by the employee.

## Role of Boss vs. Subordinate

Throughout the Hispanic world there exists a fairly rigid socioeconomic class structure. According to Canak and Swanson (1998), Latin America has “one of the most inequitable distributions of wealth in the world system”.<sup>8</sup> The modern-day class structure is derived from a system dating back to the early colonial period when the Spanish conquistadores first began to dominate the indigenous populations. These newly conquered Amerindians became the working class labor force in the colonies. In order to reinforce and legitimize their dominance over this group, the Spanish exploited an existing Aztec custom called *compadrazgo* which required strict loyalty and obedience to those in authority.<sup>8</sup> Today this social stigma are still visible in the attitudes of many lower-class working Latin Americans who accept their position in society and give deference to those in higher classes.

This culturally-intrinsic concept, known by sociologists as power distance, can significantly affect a Hispanic employee’s perceived role in an American company. In the eyes of the Hispanic employee, the supervisor has a distinct role and is separate from the workers in terms of responsibility, authority, and

social-class. In Latin America, it would be unusual for a supervisor to socialize with his/her subordinates. Furthermore, Hispanic employees will typically maintain a sense of power distance from their superiors, showing them respect and obedience.<sup>2</sup>

As a result of this attitude, American supervisors may encounter difficulty when trying to get Hispanic employees to take initiative on certain tasks. They may be so accustomed to doing exactly what they are told, that when asked to take responsibility for a project that requires a certain degree of judgment or decision-making, they may not perform to a supervisors’ expectations. From the Hispanic employee’s perspective, decision-making is the responsibility of the boss who then tells them what is to be done.

This can also be an obstacle when seeking to promote an otherwise outstanding worker to a leadership position. Employers should make their selections carefully when promoting Hispanics out of the “rank and file”. The subordinate attitude may prove to be a formidable obstacle and may require extra training and mentoring, to establish a Hispanic person into a leadership role. In addition, employers should consider a candidate already well respected among his/her peers. Other Hispanic workers could resent someone of their own level suddenly being put into a position of power. If they perceive that this person now feels that he/she is better than they are and begins treating them differently, that new leader could lose his/her effectiveness.

## Motivation and Rewards

When trying to motivate your Hispanic employees, it is important to remember that Hispanics place more importance on the present than the future (see *The Future*). They are therefore more motivated by short-term goals and incentives. LaCalle (1998) writes:

*...The U.S. tendency toward future mindedness is not shared with many other cultures whose citizens are more fatalistic and are more comfortable with “the bird in the hand” rather than hopes for future success.<sup>19</sup>*

In the U.S., company rewards are usually based on individual effort as Americans value individual achievement. Because of their collective nature, Hispanics may shy away from lavish praise and personal recognition because it can make them feel uncomfortable to stand out from the group (see *Group Loyalty and Trust*). For this reason competition based incentive plans that involve employees having to “out do” another are typically not very effective with Hispanic workers.

Supervisors should reward Hispanics as a group or a team for meeting short-term goals, putting more stress on the team’s achievements rather than those of the individual. Rewards and incentives should be tangible things that will happen in the near future rather than far off promises. Social events and celebrations that can involve employees’ families are very well received and can be an effective tool for motivation. Food, music and dancing are enjoyed by most Hispanics and are always looked forward to. Short-term financial bonuses such as gift certificates to local stores such as Wal-Mart, grocery stores, etc. are much appreciated.

Content Hispanic employees who are pleased with their supervisors are likely to show their appreciation in subtle ways. Rather than telling you directly, they may offer to help you with a personal project outside of work, bring family and friends by to meet you, or bring you a special food dish that they or their spouse has prepared. When these things begin to happen it is a good indication that you have begun to earn their trust and respect.

## Communication

Effective communication with employees is essential to the success of any business. When working with people from outside the U.S., there are barriers that can prevent successful communication. The most obvious one that employers of Hispanics are quick to realize is the language barrier. It’s not uncommon to hear statements from supervisors such as, “If we could speak the other’s language everything would be fine.” What many supervisors fail to realize is that

there are many barriers to successful communication other than just the language barrier. To communicate successfully with Hispanic immigrants you must communicate cross-culturally. This involves understanding the people you are trying to communicate with, their verbal and non-verbal mannerisms, social tendencies and cultural idiosyncrasies, rather than just trying to substitute words in your language with words in another. In fact, when supervisors focus on the cultural barrier first, results from their efforts almost always come faster, putting them in a much better position of understanding their Hispanic employees while speaking little or no Spanish. Once this obstacle is crossed, the language barrier can be minimized at a significantly faster pace.

## Importance of Respect

When communicating with Hispanics, it is important to understand the significance of respect. In Latin America, trust is earned, but respect should be given to everyone. LaCalle (1996) states:

*Among Hispanics, dignity and respect for the individual is inherent and not earned. For Hispanics, to be human or “ser humano” is enough to merit respect.<sup>20</sup>*

Hispanics place a great deal of importance on respect. For this reason, they always maintain a sense of formality when addressing people in a position of authority, people they don’t know well, and older people. In Spanish there are two separate words for “you” - *tu* and *usted*. *Usted* is used to address people formally. *Tu* is used informally among friends, family, and people you know well. When getting to know a Hispanic person it is prudent to wait until he/she gives you permission before addressing them using the word *Tu*. Further, it would be inappropriate in Hispanic culture for an employee to call their supervisor or a member of management by their first name. He/she would instead use the word *Señor* or *Señora*, meaning “Sir” or “Ma’am”. These titles are used alone or they can precede someone’s last name thus also being used as “Mr.” or “Mrs.” Also, it is not uncommon for Hispanics to address people in certain

professions by their title such as, *Licenciado* - for a lawyer, *Doctor* - for a doctor, and *Jefe* or *Patrón* - for a boss or supervisor. Employers should not insist on being addressed on a first name basis as this could make a Hispanic subordinate feel uncomfortable.

Another tradition of respect in Hispanic culture is the conveying of greetings. In Latin America, when someone enters the room he/she is responsible for greeting the others who are present. If a supervisor comes into the work area and immediately asks a work related question to someone he may not have talked to all day, it can be seen as a lack of respect and the employee could be offended. Though the employee will likely answer him/her; in this scenario, an American supervisor could negatively affect their relationship without even being aware of it. Supervisors should make a point to greet their Hispanic employees before getting down to business. A simple but earnest, "Hello. How are you?" will usually suffice. It would be especially respectful if you can take the time to briefly ask about their family as well. This simple gesture can make a big difference in the relationship you have with your Hispanic employees. They will respect you more because you have shown them respect as human beings. Even if you speak little or know Spanish, learning how to say "Hola. Como Estás?" can go a long way.

### Harmony

An important aspect of Hispanic culture is a general tendency toward maintaining harmony in interpersonal relations. This tendency, known as *simpatía*, is characterized by a trend among Hispanics to avoid conflict, confrontation and negative situations and instead focus on positive, more agreeable behaviors and interactions.<sup>2</sup> Americans, particularly in the

workplace, tend to be more direct and straightforward in a conversation; Hispanics tend to be more passive, less confrontational and more accommodating (see Table 6).

As a result of this desire to maintain harmony, Hispanics, in a conversation, may tell you what you want to hear, exaggerating or euphemizing the truth in order to maintain good relations with you. They may make statements or promises to make the listener feel better or to avoid spoiling the moment. This can be a serious issue in the work environment when the exact facts of a situation are needed. Employers may find Hispanic employees resistant to giving them "bad news" and employers might have to "dig" a bit more to uncover the facts. Especially in situations when someone close to the employee may be involved, such as in an accident investigation or a performance appraisal, they may, out of a sense of loyalty, be a bit vague in order not to betray the *confianza* of a friend. Also out of a sense of respect, Hispanic subordinates will almost always agree with their supervisors especially in the presence of others. In Latin America, to disagree with, or openly question someone in authority would be a severe breach of etiquette and could carry negative consequences (see *Role of Boss and Subordinate*).

When questioning Hispanic employees, supervisors may find it helpful to use specific, open-ended questions whenever possible to avoid nebulous and/or exaggerated answers as well as the simple "yes" or "no" responses. For example, instead of asking:

*Was Tomás doing anything unusual?*

The question could better be phrased:

*What exactly did you see Tomás doing at the rip saw immediately before the accident happened?*

Table 6

General Communication Tendencies	
<i>American</i>	<i>Latin American</i>
Direct Assertive Straightforward Deference to Self	Indirect Passive Non-confrontational Accommodating

## Mannerisms

In Latin America, business is conducted on a more personal basis. It is quite common for a conversation at work to shift back and forth between business and personal issues. Further, it is often difficult for a Hispanic person to separate his/her personal feelings from the job they are doing. This is evident in the enthusiasm often displayed by Hispanic employees working together on the job. It is not unusual for the group to be extremely effusive and animated, sometimes speaking very loudly and excitedly. Hispanics also have a greater tendency to use a lot of gestures and to speak with their hands. This behavior can sometimes be misinterpreted by non-Hispanics as anger or aggression (especially when they are speaking in Spanish), when it is most often simply their expressive nature.

It is important to note that people from Hispanic countries do not share the same concept of personal space and distance as we do here in the U.S. During a conversation it is quite common for someone to use a gesture that may involve touching someone on the arm or the shoulder. In public places it is completely normal for people to be pressed up against one another such as on a bus or in a Taxi. In most Spanish-speaking countries it is normal for people greet members of the opposite gender with a kiss on the cheek even if meeting for the first time. Americans, unused to this type of behavior, may feel uncomfortable around Hispanics whom they perceive as invading their personal space. Hispanics, on the other hand, may interpret an American moving away from him/her as being rude, especially if they are talking to them.

Also, when conversing with a supervisor, a Hispanic subordinate may avoid making eye contact. This should not be interpreted as disinterest or defiance. In the Hispanic world, it is a sign of respect and a means of giving deference to person in a higher position of authority (see *Importance of Respect*). More direct eye contact may come later as trust develops in the relationship and Hispanic employees get used to a less-hierarchical management style (see *Role of Boss and Subordinate*).

Gestures are a normal part of everyday communication in the Hispanic culture. Gestures vary from country to country, however, and carry different meanings. Some gestures, such as snapping of fingers are generally considered rude and should not be used to direct work activities. It would be advisable for employers to be careful when using gestures while communicating with people from Hispanic countries to avoid possible misunderstandings.

## Giving Criticism

Employers should consider the inextricable influence of personal feelings and emotions when giving criticism to Hispanic employees. Hispanics tend to take a lot of pride in their work, seeing it as a reflection of who they are. To the American supervisor, Hispanics may seem to be overly sensitive. However, supervisors must maintain a cross-cultural perspective and remember the high emphasis Hispanics place on respect and personal dignity. Criticism, handled the wrong way, can have undesirable results. LaCalle (1996) states:

*In the culture of the U.S., an abrasive reprimand from the boss is taken seriously, but employees are likely to look beyond the reprimand to the greater context. "Was the boss having a bad day or under unusual pressure?"...Hispanics find such behavior on the part of the manager highly unacceptable and are less forgiving of a boss who loses control and speaks disrespectfully to them. Such a reprimand is taken personally. If it occurs in the presence of a co-worker the reprimand becomes an extreme affront to the dignity of the worker.<sup>20</sup>*

As a general rule, a supervisor should never criticize a Hispanic employee in the presence of others, especially their co-workers. This could cause the employee to "lose face" in the eyes of his/her peers. The Hispanic culture is very image conscious; to lose face is seen as losing the respect of the group. Once you have caused a Hispanic to lose face, particularly a male (see *Machismo*), he will most likely lose respect for you. Criticism should be made in private,

one-on-one, focusing on specific behaviors and making a clear distinction between the individual as a person and his/her work.

## Humor

Employers should be careful when using humor around their Hispanic employees. In a multicultural environment, humor can rarely be translated. In Hispanic culture, Humor is usually more physical or slapstick; whereas in America, humor often tends to be more intellectual than physical. Hispanics may not understand certain forms of teasing and witticisms common to American humor. Even though they are likely to laugh politely, they could easily misinterpret something and take offense by it. For example, even something as innocent as saying “he eats like a horse” can be insulting to Hispanics. For many Hispanics, being compared to an animal is very insulting.

## Giving Instructions

Many Hispanic immigrants entering into the workforce today are from the poorer, more rural areas of Mexico and Central America and often are lacking in education, literacy, and formal work experience (see *Education*). For this reason, Supervisors, when directing activities and giving instructions to newly-hired Hispanic employees, need to be prepared to use a more careful and detailed approach in order to avoid certain problems.

To many Hispanics, exact precision may be an unfamiliar concept especially to those lacking formal work experience. In an industry where pinpoint accuracy and exact measurements are required, Supervisors may need to take extra time to explain why being exact is so important. Even those employees who may have had formal work experience in their native countries, are accustomed to using the metric system and are not used to thinking in terms of feet and inches (see *Education*). Supervisors and trainers may need to spend extra time explaining to them how to use certain measuring devices to ensure that they understand the required product specifications.

When given verbal instructions, Hispanic employees have a tendency to say that they understand even when they don't. This comes from the idea of “saving face” (see *Harmony*). The employee does not want you to think he/she doesn't know how to do something for fear that you might lose faith in him/her. They are likely to take the philosophy, “I will figure it out as I go along.” When giving instructions to Hispanic employees, supervisors should be as specific as possible. Physically showing them how to do a task is quite often the most effective way of assuring that they understand completely and will perform the task correctly.

## Driving Directions

When giving driving directions to Hispanics, employers may find the use of landmarks to be much more effective than simply giving street names and numbers. Local road signs and maps written in English, may not be much help. As with other task instructions, employers should be very specific with driving directions, using things they are familiar with as landmarks. Again, the best solution may be to have them follow the leader or supervisor to the worksite the first time, showing them exactly where to go.

## Bilingual Leaders

The ideal situation is to have as much direct communication between the supervisor and the employee as possible. A fully trained, bilingual supervisor with employees reporting directly to him/her is the best scenario to have. Unfortunately, there is a shortage of individuals who possess both the bilingual skills and the relevant industry experience and knowledge that would qualify them for such a position. A good internal training program and succession plan to promote bilingual individuals into those positions is a good approach as long as the candidates possess the leadership ability and knowledge of the industry. Promoting someone for their bilingual ability alone can prove to be a costly mistake.

Many companies promote bilingual employees to team leader or lead person positions, thus justifying their involvement in the management of that particular area or department. This can be an adequate solution provided that the employee truly understands his/her responsibility and role in the organization. However, some of the problems mentioned earlier may still exist, in that there remains a “middleman” in the communication pathway.

## The Language Barrier

Teaching all supervisors to speak fluent Spanish is an often-employed tactic used by many companies. This goal is difficult to attain because, to achieve proficiency in another language, an individual must be personally motivated to do so. In reality, supervisors seldom have the time necessary, or an environment conducive to learning a new language. A more practical solution is to educate supervisors on the cultural aspects of their employees and teach them the basic Spanish vocabulary and phrases unique to working situations in their particular industry. At the same time, Spanish-speaking employees should be educated with respect to American culture and relevant language as it applies to them in their work environment - the idea being that the two cultures meet each other “halfway”, thus significantly reducing the language barrier. With the focus shifted away from attaining fluency and narrowed to a more useful and relevant training program, dollars otherwise spent would go much further, yielding an obvious, immediate, and more measurable return on investment.

This type of approach should not be seen as a substitute for having qualified, fully bilingual staff members. It does, however, create a more comfortable working environment, increasing direct communication between supervisors and employees, making them less dependent on interpreters for the day-to-day business routine. Within this environment, fully bilingual staff members would be best utilized in neutral, flexible roles such as training and human resources, where they would not have a direct reporting relationship with employees, but would maintain a position of authority and serve as an intermediary.

## Supervisors Learning Spanish

Supervisors should always be encouraged to learn as much Spanish as possible. Taking away the pressure of requiring them to become fluent or speak perfectly and educating them about the Hispanic culture can have a motivating effect on supervisors. For supervisors who are motivated to learn Spanish there are a number of resources available:

- *Language Tapes* - Tapes are available for beginning levels, all the way to more advanced students, and are a convenient way for supervisors to listen and learn “on the go” and at their own pace. They feature native speakers and emphasize listening and repetition of phrases. Lesson books usually accompany these tape sets and provide a good framework for supervisors who are dedicated to learning the language. These Spanish language tapes are usually available at your local library.
- *Computer Programs* - Software programs are an excellent and inexpensive way for supervisors to learn and practice Spanish. Like tapes, they allow students to learn at their own pace but in an enhanced environment. Typically, students can listen to words and phrases spoken by a native speaker as they appear on the screen while the computer records and analyses their pronunciation. Also, there are typically a multitude of interactive lessons, exercises, and quizzes to help build vocabulary and fluency.
- *Spanish Classes* - Spanish classes, lead by a competent professional instructor, provide an interactive environment where the student can ask questions and receive individual help. Many local community colleges offer affordable courses designed for working individuals. Regular attendance is essential to the learning process, however, and supervisors may have difficulty attending classes several times a week while managing work and family. Also, community college courses are usually heavily focused on grammar and general vocabulary instead focusing on industry-specific phrases and terminology that are more essential to the

supervisor. Spanish classes are best taught onsite, at your facility, by a private instructor who can tailor the material and class schedule to meet the specific needs of your supervisors. Ideally, the instructor you choose should be a native speaker of the language and familiar with your particular industry.

- *Immersion Courses* - The fastest and most effective way to learn Spanish is for students to completely immerse themselves in the language and culture of a Spanish-speaking country. Various language institutes, such as Berlitz, offer immersion courses to various parts of the Spanish-speaking world. These courses are expensive and require the supervisor to be away from work for a considerable amount of time (typically 4 to 6 weeks), but are very successful and highly motivating for participants. A supervisor, who speaks little or no Spanish, can return from this experience at a conversational level and with an enhanced knowledge of Hispanic culture and customs.

The single most important element in learning any language is interaction with native speakers. Supervisors must practice speaking Spanish with their Hispanic employees regardless of the method by which they are studying. No matter what their level of fluency, supervisors should be extroverted with their Hispanic employees, asking them how to say things and to correct their mistakes. This kind of interaction is invaluable in the learning process and will foster trust and positive relations with your Spanish-speaking employees.

## Employees Learning English

The primary responsibility of overcoming the “language barrier” should lie with the management. Supervisors should set the example by making a concerted effort to learn Spanish. As these efforts are recognized, Spanish-speaking employees will naturally feel more motivated to learn or improve upon their English. Also, according to Smith & Ramos (2001), some employees who already speak some English will

be more inclined to use it as they see the “employee/supervisor relationship” improve.

*Employees, in general, often feel a certain amount of apprehension when talking to their supervisor. When the language barrier is added to the relationship, the employees feel even more apprehension. Typically, the Hispanic workers tend to shy away from speaking English to their supervisors, including those who are capable of speaking a basic level of English, because they don't want to look uneducated in front of “the Boss.”*<sup>21</sup>

Economic incentives are a good way to motivate Hispanic employees to attend classes and improve their English. If they see that they can earn more money by speaking English better, they are likely to make an effort to learn (see *Motivation*).

English as a second language (ESL) classes can be very beneficial in improving the English skills of motivated Hispanics. ESL should be taught by a qualified instructor who is familiar with your industry and its terminology. The classes should be scheduled at a time that is convenient for you and your employees. You may experience difficulty getting Hispanic employees to attend if, at the end of their shift, they must choose the classroom over spending time with their families. Also, finding childcare can be another obstacle. In order to solve this problem, employers should invite employee's families to attend the classes with them. Offer childcare for younger children while Spouses and older children can attend the class. Making this a family activity will be seen as an added company benefit because you are offering to help their families. As an employer it is an excellent way of showing appreciation (see *Family*).

As Hispanics efforts to learn English become evident, supervisors should continuously encourage them. Be patient with them and offer to help them learn important new words and phrases as situations arise at work. Enjoy learning each other's language together.

## Using an Interpreter

Employers should use caution when selecting or using an interpreter to communicate with their non-English speaking employees. Interpretation and translation are more than just substituting words in one language for words in the other. It involves an understanding of the cultural intricacies of both languages. It should be noted that translation is the process of converting written words from one language to another. Interpretation is the conversion of spoken words into another language.

Ideally the interpreter or translator you hire should not only be completely fluent in both languages but also be familiar with the local derivations of certain Spanish words and phrases from the individual countries represented in your workforce. Though Spanish is one language and is not divided into dialects such as Mandarin and Cantonese, regional differences in words, expressions and pronunciation do exist much like the differences in American, British, and Australian English. Misunderstandings can and do occur between Spanish speakers from Mexico and Spain, particularly when slang terms and expressions are used. For this reason, make sure that the translators or interpreters you hire can compensate effectively for this.

Employers should try to avoid, if at all possible, using a co-worker to interpret for another employee of the same level. This can create the following problems:

- *Conveying information inaccurately.* If the person is not qualified to be an interpreter and lacks sufficient fluency in one language or the other, you can never be assured that that person is conveying accurately what you are trying to communicate. A misunderstanding of even a small detail can cause more problems than you are trying to fix.
- *The employee being communicated to may feel uncomfortable.* If you are counseling an employee about a personal situation or giving criticism, that employee may feel uncomfortable or embarrassed discussing it in front of a co-worker. They could become reticent and respond to your questions with submissive “Yes, Sir” and “No, Sir” answers, thus significantly limiting two-way communication.
- *The employee interpreting may feel uncomfortable finding him/herself under pressure or in a compromising situation that they would rather not be involved in.* Even though they are officially just interpreting, they can suddenly become involved when, for

Table 7

Guidelines when working with an interpreter*
<b><i>For the Supervisor</i></b>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Speak clearly and use short simple sentences.</li> <li>2. Look at and speak directly to your employee rather than the interpreter.</li> <li>3. Listen carefully to the employee and watch them for non-verbal cues.</li> <li>4. Be careful when using technical terminology and be sure that the interpreter and employee correctly understand you.</li> <li>5. Use clarification questions such as “...Did I understand you correctly...” and “Tell me more about...” to avoid misinterpretation.</li> </ol>
<b><i>For the Interpreter</i></b>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Avoid inserting or omitting information.</li> <li>2. Use the supervisors and employees own words whenever possible.</li> <li>3. Have the Hispanic workers repeat important instructions or other aspects of the conversation to check that they thoroughly understand.</li> </ol>

\* Note: This table is adapted from Smith and Ramos (2001) Communicating with Hispanic Workers 21

example, their co-worker suddenly accuses them of not telling his/her superior what really happened; or, of withholding information from them. This can create tension among employees, especially those working closely together.

- *Employee interpreter feels a position of power.* Often the interpreter is perceived as being in a position of power in the eyes of the employee for whom he/she is interpreting. The employee may start to consciously or subconsciously think of this person as their supervisor. The interpreter may also start to think of his/herself as a leader, a position that he/she may not be qualified for, and thus start to meddle in matters that are not his/her responsibility. Consequently, the employer may find that employees are going to that person for direction, information, and even to report accidents. This is a dangerous situation, in that it could, in effect, sever communication between the supervisor and the workforce.

Employers should also use caution when using computer translation programs. These programs are useful in helping in the translation process but only translate literally. They attempt to discern the context of what you are attempting to translate but often fail. Since words have multiple meanings depending on the context used, all computer generated translations should first be reviewed by a native speaker for accuracy before put into use. Relying on computer programs exclusively can cause confusion and misunderstandings.

## Written Materials

The translation of written materials into Spanish is a very important step to effectively communicate important policies and procedures to Hispanics. Translating employee handbooks, signs, training materials, employment forms, etc. should be done to ensure Spanish-speaking employees are well informed. However, care should be taken in how these items are translated.

The education level of many Hispanic immigrants from poorer countries may not be very high (see

*Education*). Some may not be able to read very well and others not at all. When presented with a lot of written material, Hispanics are likely to say they understand, even if they don't, to avoid personal embarrassment (see *Giving instructions*).

Materials should be translated into simple Spanish using smaller, less technical words that are understood by the multiple nationalities represented in your workforce. These materials should then be presented to Spanish-speakers in groups. This will allow the more educated employees to assist those who are having difficulties without drawing extra attention to them.

# Hiring and Administration

Employers who habitually hire Hispanics can expect to encounter some challenges in the administration process as well. These challenges can be prepared for adequately by becoming familiar with Hispanic culture and mannerisms. Employers may find it necessary to have a fully bilingual professional to assist with the hiring processes. Whether he/she is interpreting or conducting the interviews themselves, this person should be trained in the Human Resources function to assure that they understand the important aspects of the hiring and the administrative processes.

## Recruitment

Employers seeking to fill hourly workforce positions, particularly in the southern and western metropolitan areas of the U.S., can usually find high numbers of Hispanic applicants willing and ready. According to the Census Bureau, a higher percentage of Hispanics seek jobs as production workers, service workers, operators, and laborers, than any other group.<sup>22</sup> Like most other information within the Hispanic community, job openings are best disseminated by word of mouth. Due to their collective nature,



Often a Hispanic person will have a *segundo nombre*, or second name (middle name).

Note the following example:

First name	Second name	Father's family name	Mother's family name
Carlos	Manuel	González	Martínez
		Primary last name	

In the above example, the *segundo nombre* is “**Manuel.**” Sometimes Hispanics are called by both their first and their second names. As in this example, “**Carlos Manuel**” is a popular name in Mexico. However, the first name and second name are always treated separately on official forms and records.

On occasion you will find Hispanics with a second name consisting of more than one word such as in the following name:

Lorena del Pilar	Muñoz	Herrera
	Second name	

In this example, “**del Pilar**” is the *segundo nombre*. The word “**del**”, which is quite common in Spanish names, is a contraction of the Spanish words “**de**” & “**el**” which means “of the”. In this example the second name literally means “of the Pillar.”

Women, in Spanish-speaking countries do not traditionally change their last names when they marry. Therefore, if **Lorena Muñoz Herrera** married **Juan Guzman Altamirano** she would officially remain **Lorena Muñoz Herrera** for all official purposes. However, it is traditional in some Spanish-speaking countries, when referring to a married woman to add one or both of the husband's family names preceded by the prefix “de”. Thus Lorena's complete name could be:

Lorena	del Pilar	Muñoz	Herrera	de	Guzmán
First name	Second name	Father's family name	Mother's family name	Husband's family name	

A common mistake that administrators make when dealing with Spanish names is to assume that the mother's name is a person's last name because it appears last in his/her full name. When looking at a Hispanic person's full name, administrators, as a general rule, should look at the second-to-last name as the person's primary last name. **Carlos González Martínez** should always be filed under “G” for Gonzalez. Employers may find it helpful to hyphenate the two last names (consolidating González Martínez into **Gonzalez-Martínez**) when creating personnel files, thus avoiding the unconscious temptation of looking at the wrong name.

Some Hispanic job applicants have learned that companies often use the wrong name and have become accustomed to giving employers their mother's last name thinking that is the one they need. Also, some Hispanics that have been born in the U.S. or have married into an American family, are now using only one last name. Further, many American institutions including local, state, and federal agencies have been known to erroneously juxtapose Spanish last names causing inconsistencies on official documents. For this reason it is a good idea for employers ask for a candidate's full name as it appears on their social security card. This will be their official name as it pertains to government reporting and withholding and should be the official name used for their employment. (Be sure not to ask to see the Social Security Card specifically as it can be considered document abuse under the anti-discrimination provisions of IRCA.23) An employer can then discern a candidate's name correctly and utilize it without causing any further confusion.

## Interviewing

When interviewing Hispanic candidates, the interviewer should keep in mind that many Hispanic immigrants, unaccustomed to the elaborate hiring processes that we have in this country, may never have been through a formal job interview before. For this reason, it is important, when asking questions, to be as specific as possible. Remember, Hispanics will often tell you what you want to hear (*see Harmony*).

For example, when asking about certain job experiences and skills, avoid asking general closed-end questions such as:

*“Do you have any carpentry experience?”*

The Hispanic candidate may respond “yes” even if his/her only experience may have been working on a rural carpentry shop - completely different from working in a high-tech manufacturing plant. A better question might be: *“Tell me about your experience working in the furniture industry.”*

*“Do you know how to finish furniture?”*

He/she may respond “yes” never having finished furniture before, but may be familiar with the concept and confident that he can figure it out once he gets started. A better question may be:

*“What specific type of finishing did you do?”*

In other typical interview questions, Hispanics may not understand what the interviewer is asking such as:

*“Why should we hire you?”*

It may be obvious to a fully, acculturated American that the interviewer would like the candidate to tell about his/her good work habits and qualities. However, taken more literally, a Hispanic person might respond. *“Because you need workers, and I need a job!”*

*“What would your last boss say about you?”*

A Hispanic candidate, unaccustomed to this type of question may be confused and reply:

*“I don’t know.”*

From their perspective, he/she may be thinking, *“How do I know what my ex-boss would say about me? You would have to ask him!”*

For the most part interviewers should remember to be specific and try to see the interview from the Hispanic candidate’s perspective.

## Important Changes in Government Agencies

On March 1, 2003, services formerly provided by the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) transitioned into the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) under U.S. Citizenship & Immigration Services (USCIS). This new Bureau includes approximately 15,000 employees and contractors, and is headed by the Director of USCIS, who reports directly to the Deputy Secretary for Homeland Security. USCIS processes all immigrant and non-immigrant benefits provided to visitors of the United States, including: Family and employment-based petitions, Asylum and Refugee processing, Naturalization, and document issuance and renewal.

A separate agency, the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), also under DHS, is now responsible for apprehending, detaining and deporting individuals who have managed to enter the country illegally. Raids and investigations into the presence of undocumented workers, formerly conducted by the INS, are now conducted by this Agency.

Employer’s responsibilities, however, still fall under the Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986 (IRCA) and have not changed as a result of the formation of DHS.

***DISCLAIMER: The following sections are for informational purposes and should not be considered a substitute for legal advice or council.***

## Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986

Probably one of the biggest pieces of legislation to affect the employment of Hispanic immigrants was the Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986 (IRCA). This law put into effect, for the first time, civil and criminal sanctions against employers for the knowing hire of unauthorized aliens and requires employers to verify the employment eligibility and identity of all

newly hired employees. The law also expressly forbids employment discrimination on the basis of national origin or citizenship status. The law has been changed and amended over the years but still presents a barrier to employers wishing to hire immigrants who may or may not be authorized to work in the United States.<sup>23</sup>

The U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS), formerly the Immigration and Naturalization Service, is responsible for enforcing all of the provisions of this law and is empowered to:

- Investigate complaints of alleged violations of the law
- Inspect and examine all evidence including employee records
- Issue administrative subpoenas requiring employers to produce for inspection all I-9 employment verification forms
- Prosecute employers for alleged employment of unauthorized (illegal) aliens

Employers found to have knowingly hired unauthorized aliens can be fined for each unauthorized alien up to \$2,200 on the first offense, up to \$5,500 on the second offense, and up to \$11,000 on the third offense. Any employer convicted of engaging in a pattern or practice of violations can be sentenced to up to 6 months in prison and be fined up to \$3,300 for each unauthorized alien.<sup>23</sup>

## Form I-9 Employment Verification

Pursuant to IRCA, all employers are required to verify the employment authorization and identity of each new employee and maintain records documenting such verification. This process is completed using the Form I-9 “Employment Eligibility Verification” document available at the USCIS website:

### **Form I-9 Employment Eligibility Verification**

<http://uscis.gov/graphics/formsfee/forms/files/i-9.pdf>  
USCIS Office of Business Liaison offers an excellent step by step guide for employers to follow in completing this process:

### **Employer Information Bulletin 102. “The I-9 Process in a Nutshell”**

<http://uscis.gov/graphics/services/employerinfo/EIB102rdln.pdf>

In completing Section 2: “Employer Review and Verification.” of the form, many employers have doubts about what documents they can and cannot accept and how to make that determination legally. For this reason, the Office of Business Liaison has published as separate bulletin addressing this specific issue:

### **Employer Information Bulletin 103. “I-9 Document Review”**

[http://uscis.gov/graphics/lawsregs/handbook/OBL\\_103.pdf](http://uscis.gov/graphics/lawsregs/handbook/OBL_103.pdf)

It should be noted that **employers are not expected to be “document experts.”** Under the Anti-Discrimination provisions of IRCA, employers should accept list A, B, and C documents presented to them during this processes as long they “appear to be genuine and relate to the person presenting it.” However many employers find it helpful to familiarize themselves with common travel and identity documents to assist them in the review process:

### **A guide to Selected U.S. Travel/Identity Documents for Law Enforcement Officers. Form M-396**

<http://www.fels.org/insforms/insdocs.htm>

## Social Security Number vs. Individual Taxpayer Identification Number (ITIN)

Many employers have encountered employees wishing to submit an Individual Taxpayer Identification Number (ITIN) in place of a valid Social Security Number. An ITIN is a tax processing number issued by the Internal Revenue Service. It is a nine-digit number that always begins with the number 9 and has a 7 or 8 in the fourth digit, example 9XX-7X-XXXX. Social

Security numbers never start with a “9” as the first number. ITINs are issued regardless of immigration status because both resident and nonresident aliens may have U.S. tax return and payment responsibilities under the Internal Revenue Code. **The ITIN is for federal tax reporting only, and does not authorize work in the U.S., provide eligibility for Social Security benefits, nor is it a valid identification outside the tax system.**<sup>24</sup>

ITIN's should not be accepted in place of Social Security numbers in Section 1, nor as proof of identification or work eligibility in Section 2.

## I-9 Maintenance

Employers are required to retain the I-9 form for a period of one year after termination of employment, or three years from the date of hire, whichever is later. A good practice for employers is to maintain I-9 forms separate from the employee's personnel file, in a series of three-ring-binders arranged alphabetically, and separated according to “active” and “inactive” employees. This practice will allow forms to be easily produced when needed (as during an ICE audit or routine maintenance), and will reduce the chance that an I-9 is misplaced or lost.<sup>23</sup>

Some employers find it useful to photocopy documents submitted by employees at the time of completion of Section 2 so that they may refer to them at a later time if a clerical error is discovered on the form. While this is a well-intentioned practice it can yield unexpected consequences. Though employers are not required or considered to be document experts, photocopying a document that is later found to be an “obvious” forgery can nullify an employer's good faith defense during an ICE audit. Since the U.S. government does not require employers to photocopy documents, it may be preferable not to do so unless the employer is confident that all company representatives involved in the I-9 verification process are sufficiently trained. If the employer chooses to photocopy the documents for one employee, documents for all employees should be copied. Copied documents should be attached to the I-9 form.<sup>23</sup>

In general, it is advisable that employers limit the number of staff members responsible for completing and maintaining the I-9 forms, only allowing trained personnel to complete the process. Typically, the fewer people involved in the system, the fewer the mistakes made. Every error or omission on an I-9 form constitutes a separate potential violation that could result in monetary fines ranging from \$110 to \$1,100 each.<sup>23</sup>

## Coming to the U.S. Legally

Many employers can become frustrated with the fact that there are so many good Hispanic workers available but that they may have questionable legal status. When a loyal and dedicated Hispanic employee who has worked for you for a long time, is suddenly discovered to be undocumented, many employers seek ways to employ him/her legally. Unfortunately, the employer has few recourses in this situation and the employee must be terminated. Various periodic amnesties have allowed for certain illegal immigrant groups to file for legal status while remaining in this country, but no amnesties have allowed for illegal immigrants to be employed during the application process.

Employers can sponsor certain candidates if they meet specific criteria and they can receive temporary visa status allowing them to work. Acceptance and processing time varies greatly depending on the candidate's preference category. In most cases, employers are required to obtain labor certification from the U.S. Department of Labor indicating there is an absence of available and qualified U.S. workers to fill the position. It is extremely difficult for employers to obtain visas for unskilled laborers and the waiting list is tremendously long.<sup>23</sup>

Family-based immigration is also a very challenging process especially after the events of 9/11/2001. Obtaining resident alien status or a “Green Card”, is also based on a preference system and the numbers of visas granted are strictly limited annually by quotas. A foreign national who does not have specific family members of citizenship or legal residency status has little or no chance of immigrating to the U.S. legally. Even those in the higher preference category often have to wait for several years before their applications are processed and approved.

The residency application process is very complicated and includes completing multiple forms, legal and health requirements. Even for the well educated immigrant the task is daunting. Additionally, the processing fees required for submitting the applications are significant and can be one of the main reasons that immigrants can not apply for residency.

Employers should consult legal council for more information on obtaining visas and before taking adverse action against an employee who is suspected of working illegally. More information is available at the USCIS website:

<http://uscis.gov/graphics/services/employerinfo/index.htm#h1binfo>

## Summary

Many labor-intensive industries have increasingly turned to hiring Hispanic workers to maintain a competitive edge. The growing Hispanic population in this country has created a workforce that is ideal to the needs of many companies. Most companies that have employed Hispanic workers are pleased with their productivity and hard work; however, with these benefits there are also some challenges. We hope that this resource has provided you with a more complete understanding of the Hispanic culture and the unique situation of your employees. With this information we trust that you are better prepared, and motivated, to assist these workers succeed in the American Dream.

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