

Wichita Chamber Business Accelerator

Episode 139

Yolanda Camarena

Music: [00:00:00] When you hear the horns and drums, you know it's time for the Wichita Chamber Business Accelerator powered by Evergy. Join us as we explore the world of business, leadership and entrepreneurship in Wichita. Learn from local business leaders and owners on how they have built and grown their companies and the challenges and opportunities they met along the way.

Coming to you from the Evergy room at the Wichita Regional Chamber of Commerce. Here are your hosts, Don Sherman and Ebony Clemens of Jim.

Yolanda Camarena: Welcome to the



Don Sherman: WCBA, brought to you by Evergy. We got a special edition today. This is, uh, called Journey Unseen. We're gonna visit with a [00:01:00] local leader, and Ebony's going to introduce them right now.

You

Ebony Clemons-Ajibolade: know I am. Super excited about today. We get an opportunity to interview one of my personal sheroes, you know? Yeah. The reality is, I had, for a number of years, I had heard of this woman, this mysterious woman who just does work in the community, and I was like, is she real? I've never met her. I've never met her.

Then one day had an opportunity to meet her, um, as she was doing work. Um, so today we have Miss Yolanda Camarena with us in the building.

Yolanda Camarena: Oh, I am so glad to be here with both of you. I, I, uh, look at both of you as, uh, good community friends and, and personal friends as well. And so I'm excited. Haven't had a chance to see either of you in a while.

It's true. So I'm excited to finally get a chance to get back and seeing people again. So thank you so much for inviting me. Absolutely.

Ebony Clemons-Ajibolade: So Yolanda, tell us a little bit about you. I've always wanted to just sit

down, have a coffee, and now we have this [00:02:00] opportunity just to learn a little bit more, um, and dive a little bit deeper into your background.

So where are you from? Where'd you grow up?

Yolanda Camarena: Yeah. Um, I'm, um, originally from South Texas. Um, I was born in San Antonio and, uh, raised also in, uh, my family's from Corpus Christi, Texas as well. Hmm. And things and my parents were um, both also my mother was from a small town called Robs down Texas, which is just.

You know, like Wichita Andover type thing. Mm-hmm. You know, uh, they're of Corpus Christi. Um, I have five sisters, so there's six girls in my family. Um, no brothers. No brothers. Ooh. Every time there was a new baby, my dad would say, is it a girl or boy? And I'd say, we're gonna try one more time. And so, six girls, six.

And even, um, when my father had. I gotten ill. I even said there's a reason why dad, that you were blessed with six girls. Mm-hmm. Because no one would be here taking care of you the way your [00:03:00] daughters do, so, oh, I bet. Yeah. So that is, uh, that has really been a blessing. We're each other's best friends and.

And we're all very close. My mother still lives here in, uh, in Wichita, uh, but the rest of our family's in, in south Texas and things, and that's where all my family was from. Um, my father was in the military and he joined it very young. And, um, and my mother, uh, uh, you know, was a stay-at-home mom and had always, uh, been there to, to take care of us and kind of be, A military mom, but, um, you know, we grew, they grew up very, very humble.

Mm-hmm. They were very, very, uh, humble. My mother was a migrant worker mm-hmm. There in Texas, and, uh, grew up picking crops and things. Um, strawberries and beets, and they would travel and things. The family, she comes from a family of, uh, 14. Wow. Seven boys, seven girls. My father comes from a family of, um, of nine, you know, um, and things.

And so, They all had very [00:04:00] hardworking families and things. Um, so I grew up seeing, uh, what that was and, um, I. And in the summer times we would go and help with, uh, picking cotton in the summertime, you know, uh, when we were having our summer vacation basically was to go with my mom's family and stuff. And, and, um, for me it was never work.

It was always fun. Wow. 'cause I was with my family. Okay. And I was like about probably, maybe. Nine or 10 or something like that. Mm-hmm. And things, but the more people you had in the field, the more you know money you were gonna make and things too. Um, and I think because of that experience, it really did, uh, teach me the importance of family, um, the importance of, of what.

Hard work is all about. And, um, and what that can, um, how that really does form and [00:05:00] develop in you, in your work ethic and, and, and what you see. And the interesting

thing of all of that was in the early seventies when, um, Cesar Chavez. You know, and the Farm Workers Union, uh, was really being active. And I was in college at that time.

I was like, oh my gosh, that's my family. Mm. That's, you know. Mm-hmm. And so I think from a lot of that grew my passion also to help community and, and to help those, um, you know, who, um, who work hard and, um, really just kind of need those opportunities and someone to believe in them and, and, and, uh, support them.

And so, So, uh, that's, you know, kind of where my family came. My father, as I said, was in the military, and so we ended up in, um, 1970 getting stationed to Wichita, Kansas. Okay. And we're like, Wichita, Kansas. Are you serious? Uh, and we went to McConnell with the idea that we were gonna move back to Texas every year, and we never did.

And we ended up making Wichita home. [00:06:00] That's beautiful. And it's been, it's been a great place to, to, to grow up and, and to raise our family as well. That's

Ebony Clemons-Ajibolade: awesome. Mm-hmm. You know, you, you think about that story and, um, how you were able to take your experience of working in the, the field with your family and help using that to develop your leadership and your passion for the community.

Mm-hmm. Um, that's, that's beautiful. I re, you know, I remember as a kid going to, uh, The farm with my grandmother. Mm-hmm. And picking things and, and I hated it, number one. But it does bring back a lot of memories. And, and it does and speaks to what you're talking about with family. Mm-hmm. So you moved here to Wichita when you

Yolanda Camarena: were around what age?

Uh, I was just, uh, I was a, uh, junior in high school. That would've been around, yeah. 16, 17, when we came back to Wichita. Mm-hmm. We were stationed in Japan. Uh, for four years before we came to Wichita. Hmm. So, um, and [00:07:00] that in itself was a, an incredible experience. Mm-hmm. You know, to be able to live in another country and see that culture and, and traditions.

And I think also in the military we talk about diversity and inclusion and those kinds of things, but when you're in the military, I mean, it truly is. Kind of diversity, maybe work still needs to be done in inclusion on some levels and stuff, but, um, definitely diversity because of the fact that you're traveling all over the world, right?

And, and you're interacting with so many. Different people and culture and, and that was another, it's funny how things in our lives, you know, shape us along the way. Yeah. And that's where I love to travel and, and, um, experience, you know, other cultures and traditions and, and those kind of things. And a lot of it came from being in the military and just having to, to move all the time and stuff.

Mm-hmm. And, and my mom was great about it, but way she could, and I always laugh all the, and I tell my daughters who they don't agree, but I always say, if. We were to lose everything today. And, um, we had to [00:08:00] start all over again. I wouldn't have any problems with it. I said, because my mom always taught us that she could make a home out of a cardboard box.

Hmm. And so, and that's where we lived a lot of times, cardboard boxes. Hmm. Um, you know, Of just moving, you know, every two years. Mm-hmm. Yeah. Or three years or whatever in the military. I said, now my daughters on the other hand were like, Hmm, I don't know about that mom. You know, have a little bit more of the comforts and things, but, um, but I hope that some of that has rubbed off on them as well.

Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm. On what we try to teach our children. You know, so. Mm-hmm. That's

Ebony Clemons-Ajibolade: very nice. Mm-hmm. And so, you know, as we are looking back and you're talking about your, your family, um, you're a first generation college graduate. Yes. Is that

Yolanda Camarena: correct? My mother was, um, I think she had maybe fifth or sixth grade education.

And, um, my father also was like, I think middle school as well. What made you

Ebony Clemons-Ajibolade: think, uh, that you [00:09:00] wanted to go to

Yolanda Camarena: college? Well, it's really funny because I didn't, I wasn't thinking about going to college. Oh really? To tell you the truth. Um, I graduated from high school and then I kept thinking, God, what am I gonna do now?

Mm-hmm. You know? And, um, my oldest sister, even though we're first generation, she had started a year before and I thought, well, I guess that's what I do too. I, I, you know, I really hadn't, you know, had, you know, kind of the traditional route where you go and visit a college campus. Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm. You talk to recruiters and those kinds of things.

I mean, I think it was like in August, right before classes start, That I decided to go apply to Wichita State University. Um, not knowing what college credit meant, not knowing mm-hmm. Anything of what it was all about. And, um, getting accepted in there. And I'm meeting with a, with a, an advisor who tells me you're gonna be taking, you know, 14 college credits.

And I had no idea what that meant. I mean, it really truly took me almost, if [00:10:00] not the year, to figure out, you know, You know, what college credits was and how it works and, and the days that you're in there and, and those kinds of things. And what financial aid was and everything. 'cause it was all brand new.

Yeah. Um, and, and so you just kind of, um, stumble and, and trip and get back up again and figure it out. And, uh, the blessing was having people there at that time. I don't know if you guys

when, but in the seventies when I went to, um, to college, um, there was a program called Their Project Together. Hmm. J Blake, uh, Joe Gardenhire, uh, those individuals were the ones who oversaw that program.

That was probably the first. That was the, the office. It had just started. Uh, and it was, was when the TRIO programs were just beginning Oh, okay. In the early, early seventies and things. And, um, it was a great time for me, um, because that is the time when I think what I [00:11:00] find myself, um, where I found my voice.

Mm. My voice in, um, in, uh, wanting to make a difference in wanting to. See how we can make change. Because the seventies were a big social change. You had the Vietnam War, so you had, you know, you had that going on. The, the peace rallies you had at that time. You had the Black Panthers, you had Chicano power.

Mm-hmm. You had, uh, so, um, oh, the Native American movement was really big at that time as well. And so there was so much social change that was going on, um, that, um, Because of that, I truly be, I became much more active on campus. Um, my one mentor who I love to this day is, uh, uh, Dean Rattigan. Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm.

You know, Jim Ragan, he saw this little tiny Mexicana on campus. Mm-hmm. You know, going from a whisper to, you know, Still a little [00:12:00] bit, getting a little louder and louder and things, um, and took me under his wing and said, okay, let's figure out how we can make this work for you. And got me involved in, uh, MEChA.

At that time it was MEChA. Now it's known as Halo. Okay. And so MEChA was el

It was like really radical, you know, it was so cool to say that it sounded good to, you felt, you felt really radical at that time. Um, now it's, it's Halo, which is Hispanic American, uh, leadership organization. Um, which is basically, you know, helping our Latino students, you know, make the adjustment to college being that support system and also, Encouraging that community service.

Mm-hmm. And things, and so, Uh,

Don Sherman: you hit on leadership. How do you define

Yolanda Camarena: leadership? For me, leadership is, um, kinda like what K I C always says, you know, it's kind of this action, it's your verb. Um, but for me, leadership, [00:13:00] I, I always look back at, um, Dolores Huerta and she, you know, was one of the founders with the Farm Workers Union, but Dolores Huerta was the one who coined the cry or the grito that we say of c.

You know, and that means yes you can. Mm-hmm. And I think because of that, I always looked at leadership as being that as, yes, you can, um, lead yes, you can, um, make change. Um, you can. And so I see leadership as an opportunity for you too. Affect change, but maybe be that person who can also help others to see that vision as well.

Mm-hmm. And things, um, and so, and I know there's so many, you know, there's your, you know, leaders who are the forefront and, and that kind of thing. And for me it was always about, Being there with, uh, the community, being there with individuals or [00:14:00] small group or whatever it is, and coming, uh, and agreeing to a common goal and, you know, not being in the forefront necessarily, but, um, but having everybody come alongside mm-hmm.

And making that change with you. Mm-hmm.

Don Sherman: Of all the characteristics you have in your leadership quiver, what is the one. That benefits you the

Yolanda Camarena: most? I think the fact that I can, um, that I try to be a leader that sees all points of views. I think it's important that you have listen, you have to be able to know, wait.

Your beliefs are and, and your passions and things, but also know what is the belief and passions of others. Mm-hmm. And look for that common goal. Um, [00:15:00] and so it is that a ability to negotiate, maybe ability to compromise, um, without giving up, you know, or without losing sight of your own, you know. Interest and, and, and concerns and things, but having that opportunity to be able to work, um, as a group together cohesiveness mm-hmm.

I think is the other thing. So I think hopefully to understand and to listen, you know, as a leader. Um, and then from there, work to how do we put all these differences together. Yeah. Um, and see if we can make it work, um, for a common good. Excellent. E

Ebony Clemons-Ajibolade: Well, you mentioned earlier, you know, you're, and, and I'm going back to this, but it's just really, truly amazing for me to hear, you know, as a first generation college, uh, student, not even knowing what college credits are mm-hmm.

To see in your [00:16:00] growth, um, you know, from. Saying, I don't know what I'm doing. Finding a mentor to, you know, from being quiet to roaring es essentially. Mm-hmm. And having a voice. Mm-hmm. Um, and then going off to Harvard. Right. Yep. Mm-hmm. So, um, kind of talk to us about that experience of going to Harvard, um, because, you know, especially coming from, from Wichita and it's gotten much better, um, and being a minority, being able to, uh, go into this Ivy League institution, you know, this premier institution of higher education.

Right. Talk to

Yolanda Camarena: us about that journey. Um, that was a journey. Boy, let me, I look back on that. I'm thinking, dang. Uh, but, For me, I think it's always been about, uh, people who are put in our, in our paths. Um, when we come to that, uh, fork in the road and, you know, do I take this? Road or do I, you know, decide not to go the e like the like, um, Robert [00:17:00] Frost's poem, you know?

Mm-hmm. The Road Less Traveled. Mm-hmm. Um, but you, you think, um, you know, I, I go

back to Dean Madigan. I mean, like I said, he really mentored me. I think the people who were in Project together, we were really close and supported each other when. Um, and at that time it was real important to have that, um, because we were always told that we weren't gonna succeed.

Mm-hmm. You know, that we weren't gonna go to college, that we weren't gonna make, you know, anything of ourselves in a sense. Um, And you hear that enough and you start believing it, right? So you surround yourself with people who, um, who start believing in you, even when we don't believe in ourselves. Mm-hmm.

And, um, and so Dean Rattigan was one of those individuals. Um, there were of course other people along the way, but he really had a significant impact, as I said. And so he did teach me the, the importance of. Uh, of a leader and that kind of thing. Um, there was a very good friend of mine, Lisa [00:18:00] Ros, um, who was at that time working for a Harvard College and she, um, on, I was working at that time, it was, um, it was Kansas Newman.

Hmm. Uh, here in town. And I was in their admissions office. And we would travel on the road as admissions counselors, you know, we'd do all the college fairs and things. Well, on the road it's largely male. You know, and there were, you know, some females on the road as well, uh, but she, there was no Latinos on the road.

Yeah. Um, so her and I, and she was at that time, like I said, working at, at Harvard College, I was at Newman, but we would meet at some of these national college fairs that we would attend, and so we gravitated to each other. We became very, you know, good friends and, and, um, And continued to be friends even when we weren't traveling together.

Um, and so she called me one day, she said, there's a position open at the Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University, and you should apply for it. Wow. And so I gave her all the reasons why I wouldn't get [00:19:00] the job, and she gave me all the reasons of why I should apply and, uh, probably could get the job.

Mm-hmm. And, uh, even to this day, I still use the analogy that she gave me and she said, um, Yolanda, the only thing you're gonna be out is the stamp you put on that envelope. And that's it. Wow. Mm-hmm. And I said, you know what, Lisa, you're right. And so I applied, um, didn't hear for a while because they were in the process.

They were in the middle of their admissions process. Um, and I remember it was Cinco de Mayo weekend at Harvard College, and they had called and said, you know, we'd like to have you come up for an interview. And, um, I said, sure. And I'm thinking to myself, oh my God, where the heck is Harvard? You know, because, I mean, I truly would like, I know it's in Massachusetts.

Mm-hmm. But I'm not sure where in Massachusetts, you know, um, I had never been to the East coast and, um, at, not been really any farther east and maybe Kansas City or some other places in those areas and stuff too. Um, But she kept telling [00:20:00] me, you know, you, you gotta do

this, you gotta do this. You know, you'll never know what opportunities are gonna be available to you.

And um, I did, I went up there, did the, you know, intense interviewing and the last person I interviewed with was Dean Blackwell. And he is like the renowned, um, at that time at the Kennedy School, he was in, uh, nuclear warfare. Hmm. And so I walk into his office and he looks at me and he says, um, he says, well, I'm a shocker.

And I looked at him and I thought, okay, so, okay. Like, uh, I wasn't sure what he was saying, you know? And, um, I, I walked in and he said, see, and he points it up to his bookcase and there's the decanter of the wock that he had. So he was, uh, he had gone to W S U. Wow. He taught in the political science department at W SS U.

Wow. And so we just chitchatted about Wichita and people that we knew here and that kind [00:21:00] of thing. And, uh, he kept saying, well, do you think you're the only one that can be from the Midwest and be over here? You know? And so, uh, so, um, came back to, um, to, you know, Newman. Um, and they offered me the position and it's interesting how, um, When opportunities are, are presented to you, have you really have to stop and step back and really look at what's important to you.

Mm-hmm. So the dean calls me and he says, you know, we'd like to offer you the position at the Kennedy School, and it was a associate director, um, for their two year program, their master's programs. And I said, oh my gosh. I says, well, can I tell, can I. Can I have the weekend to think about it? And, and I'll call you on Monday.

And he's going, um, okay. Because I'm thinking, thinking this is how we're telling you. Do you want a job? You know, you're thinking about it. But it was interesting because for me it was like I was, you know, had dating my husband and, you know, had never really been away from the family. Mm-hmm. And, and, um, It was just so many things I needed to really [00:22:00] just kinda like stop and really think about do I really wanna do this, um, and things.

And so I, I, uh, of course called him on Monday and said, yes, we're gonna do it. I had the support from everybody that I really needed at that time and, um, said, I guess I'm going off to Harvard. I. You know, and it was so funny 'cause my mom goes, oh, you're gonna get the education that we could never give you.

I said, no, mama, I'm working there. I'm not gonna, I'm hoping to get my education later, but I'm not going to school there. I'm gonna be working there. You know? Um, so, um, that's how I ended up at Harvard. And I think the interesting thing that, um, my dean kept asking me all the time when I was there, he says, how are you feeling?

You know, are you okay? Are you feeling lonely? Are you get, and I told him, I says, you know, uh, Cal, I says, it's not. Feeling lonely. It's being only Mm mm It's the onliness, not the loneliness. Yeah. I said being the only Latina here at the graduate level, I mean, that was at, at

across the board at the university, um, and things, um, [00:23:00] and said, you know, this is what we've gotta really look at and change.

Um, So that we can start really creating this. And so we did. We started doing a lot of things at that time to, to kind of address that issue as well. So it was a great, I mean, Unbelievable learning experience. Um, you know, took the road that, uh, led to Harvard, I guess. And, and, um, and that again, you know, is where you find more growth in yourself and, and, um, and see, you know, the effects you have on students and, and, um, and what you can accomplish though.

It

Ebony Clemons-Ajibolade: was good. We wanna talk a little bit more about that, but right now we're gonna go in for a break so that we can hear a word from our sponsor and friends will be back to hear more of Yolanda's story.

Yolanda Camarena: Severe weather, whether it's hail, wind, rain, or snow. Storms can cause damages, inconveniences, and sometimes even power outages.

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Ebony Clemons-Ajibolade: Welcome back friends. We are here for a journey unseen with Ms.

Yolanda Camarena, and she is talking to us a little bit about her journey. Before the break, we were talking about her being the only one in the room, and as many of you know, her, uh, legacy is bringing others into the room. And I just kind of wanna talk about, um, that journey and why it's so important for her to, to reach back and help others be

Yolanda Camarena: there.

Well, you know, it's, um, I've been blessed over the years. I mean, to have, you know, the people who come into our lives and really do, um, changes and, and, um, teach us and help us grow. Um, I. For me, when I was talking about being the only, you know one, [00:25:00] um, there's a lot of individuals who have been the onlys, who have been the first, who have been, um, the, you know, the, you know, ground breakers.

Mm-hmm. The, uh, ceiling crashers and, and things, and um, and that's where change occurs. Yeah. You know, and so, um, when I went to college, I. The whole time I was there, I, you know, I, I kept telling myself, I don't want other kids to go through this. Mm-hmm. You know? Hmm. If I ever get in a position in where I can teach or whatever, uh, other young students who are wanting to go to college or something, then, you know, That's what we need to do is share our

experience.

Oh my gosh. You know, we need to, um, you know, find that one person, um, that we can mentor or, or, um, help or advise [00:26:00] or whatever it is that we can do. Because both my husband and I are both like that. I mean, he's his, you know, he is very, very much into doing that as well. We both, uh, love to mentor mm-hmm. Um, and things and so, I think it was be, I was in education, I was an elementary education major.

Um, but I knew I did, I wasn't gonna be a good teacher. I did my student teaching and realized, Hmm, this is probably not for me, but I wanted to stay in education. Mm-hmm. And so what I pursued was higher ed administration. And, and went the, the college route because I really wanted, I felt like that was the route in which I could, uh, talk to high school students and help them get into college.

And that's where I got into admissions and, and, and, you know, to help students look at, you know, how to apply for college. Mm-hmm. And what does that all mean? And, and that, and, and tell my story to those students. Who are very similar to me, who had similar backgrounds and they says, you know, you can [00:27:00] do it.

And I always say, even now with, um, with working with the Cancer, Hispanic Education and Development Foundation, you know, and working with those students over the years, it's that I always tell everybody, it just takes that one person to believe in you. That's. All it takes to be able to maybe change, um, that student's life or their family's life or whatever it is, because that's all it took for me was one person.

Um, and so there isn't any reason why we all can't be that one person mm-hmm. And things, and so that's why it became important for me to, to, you know, Mentor younger women, uh, to mentor students. Um, you know, um, anyone who's got a question and you know, how did you do it or something, you know, um, there'll be students who'll ask and say, so what book did you read for you guys to get?

I said, A lot of books. I read a lot of books, [00:28:00] nice. And did a lot of homework and did a lot of things, um, in order to, uh, to get to where you are. I says, but it's not the books. It's really your own desire, um, to, to, to really see what you can do. Along the way to make sure you always, always try to help somebody along the way.

I love that. You know, because you're so approachable. You just have to, you know, you just have to, you just have to, um, I, I think that's probably the greatest gift you can give, um, a young person is just your time. I

Ebony Clemons-Ajibolade: love that. 'cause you said, you know, just, you just need one person. Yeah. Um, to believe in you, but you've done so much.

I mean, like, you've created scholarships mm-hmm. And you created the foundation and it's still,

how many years has that been going

Yolanda Camarena: on? Oh my gosh. I think like, I wanna say 2007, 2009, something like that. Wow. It started and, and, um, but again, it's not something that you do yourself. It's something that you do with the help of a lot of [00:29:00] other people.

Mm-hmm. Who, um, who are kind of. You bring along with you that you know are going to help you achieve that goal. And, you know, we've had, um, our individuals on our boards have been phenomenal. We've got a great executive director right now and, and associate director. We've had, um, Erma Luna, who has been Irma.

Strength. Yeah. Miss, Ms. Luna, who was, you know, she was definitely the backbone and the strength of the organization from day one and, um, and built a great foundation, uh, for us to grow from. And so those are the individuals that you just kind of have to keep working with and, and, um, and, um, you see everybody else, uh, you know, e each little step.

We took says, okay, I think we can do better. You know, we do another program. Okay. I think we can do maybe this other program. Yeah. And, and, um, went from one scholarship. Um, to this year we gave out 61 [00:30:00] scholarships. That is huge. That's beautiful. Over the years. And we've given almost, um, over a million dollars in, in, in, um, scholarship money already.

I was gonna ask you

Don Sherman: that, but I believe that's when I first met you. Mm-hmm. Yeah. When you came on board. Yep. And K H E D F. Yep. And I came back and told e well, Ebony and I both decided mm-hmm. West our energy at that time. We need to be, be part of this to invest. And

Yolanda Camarena: that's exactly what we said, supportive.

We need to grow with this support. And I tell you, um, some of our students this year, I mean, we're getting our students who are now getting accepted. We've got one student, I think he's from North High, who's going to Yale. That's, wow. Beautiful. Yale. Yeah. I'm like, it was, and I mean, he. So humble and stuff.

And, and, uh, and we've had a student who just graduated, um, uh, and is, um, I wanna say John Hopkins, and I think that's where he graduated from. Uh, who's gonna go into, well, he wants to be kind of a neurosurgeon, and we've got, um, students who've done their internships at [00:31:00] nasa. And, um, one of our students in fact did the internship at NASA and was working on the helicopter.

That's right now in, uh, is it Mars and stuff where Wow. You know, right now, Things. And so these are incredible experiences that we see them start when they're freshmen. Mm-hmm. Yeah. And have no idea what they're getting into and when they've completed their education and what they've been able to accomplish for themselves and their families is.

You know, unbelievable. And so, and, and I think every letter you, thank you letter you get or, or call you get from them or, Hey, I wanna give you an update what I'm doing, or whatever it is. That's your motivating factor right there. Mm-hmm.

Don Sherman: Excellent. And like I said, that was the first time I met you. I don't know if you had met her before.

Mm-hmm. But mm-hmm. Ebony and I had a conversation. We just said, we have to grow with this organization and we, we Yeah.

Yolanda Camarena: And you guys were, and you guys, and. Westar at that time was probably one of the very first corporate, uh, sponsors that we had.

Don Sherman: It was very impress, very [00:32:00] impressive first impression.

Yolanda Camarena: That meant a lot to us.

And, um, and continue, you know, to, um, reach out to the community. The thing about our community, uh, particularly the Latino community, is that. Our kids wanna stay here. Yeah. Mm. They don't want to move. Mm-hmm. They don't want to go to a bigger city or whatever. They wanna stay right here in Wichita, get their education in Kansas.

Mm-hmm. Nice. And want to come back here to improve their community. To improve their family, you know, uh, their personal wealth, their, you know, to create, um, an opportunity for themselves. And I think that's what a lot of our, you know, when we look at the Chamber and, um, other organizations, you know, really have to see who they, who our young people are, and how do we nurture that and how do we help them see the potential they have, as well as the contributions that they're gonna make.

Mm-hmm. And things, um, [00:33:00] To the city, um, and to the, and to their community and to the workforce, and. With our demographics changing the way they are, uh, we have to be able to, to, uh, embrace that. Absolutely. And that is where the diversity and inclusion, uh, in our workforce is going to be critical.

Don Sherman: And let, and you've taken us on a journey and let's, let's fast forward to, well, a few weeks ago.

I need to get this shout out and congratulations on your induction to the Junior Achievement Hall of Fame. Thank you. Thank you. Back on June 15th, so congratulations on that. But let's talk about right now where you are, right here, right now in your leadership journey. How would you define this

Yolanda Camarena: moment? I.

You know, satisfying, satisfying in the sense that, um, and, um, feeling accomplished in the sense that I'm on the downhill now. I don't need to be on every single board anymore. Okay. I don't need to be, [00:34:00] I'm

Don Sherman: with you on that. Yeah. Did I say that out? I'm sorry. That came out. That came out.

Yolanda Camarena: In that I feel like I have in my leadership role, I, I hope I have established some kind of groundwork or foundation or whatever, um, and be the one that no longer has. When we ask the question, why are there not any other. You know, people of color on this board. Mm-hmm. Or there's color in your company or in your leadership or whatever, and you get kind of the people who kinda roll their eyes, get you all.

So what I should say is that there's less eye rolling right. And more, uh, allies and support. And, um, great change still needs to be accomplished. [00:35:00] Um, I think the dialogue is there. I think the opportunity to listen and, uh, bring about understanding is there. Um, we just now need to create the passion mm-hmm.

In a sense, uh, for that and more than anything to understand that. Um, It isn't to the detriment of a community, it's to the betterment of a community. Amen. And things. There is a quote that, uh, Caesar Chavez, and it's probably the one thing that I probably always go back to and read and, and have, uh, kinda based for both, for both for Jean and I, my husband and I.

Mm-hmm. Uh, that we base what we do. Um, and it just says, um, We cannot seek achievement for ourselves and forget about progress and prosperity for our community. Our ambitions must be broad enough to [00:36:00] include the aspirations and the needs of others for their sakes and for our own. So really, it's our responsibility as members of a community to help improve the lives of all of our citizens because when we do that, We not just only improve their lives, but we improve our lives as well.

Hmm. And I think that's what, um, so I think as a leader, that's kind of where I, I now see myself, um, in seeing that we have an opportunity here to finally have those conversations. And, um, those difficult conversations always lead to better change. And we just have to have those conversations now. You know.

Excellent. At least a start of them. That's

Ebony Clemons-Ajibolade: powerful. It's a powerful quote. It is. It really

Yolanda Camarena: is. That's one, one of my

Don Sherman: favorites. I mean, I don't know how to wrap it up better than that. I mean, that,

Ebony Clemons-Ajibolade: that is amazing. Um, and, and you know, it really does, it's a

testament [00:37:00] to who you are and I don't know that people actually realize that you've helped and inspired Oh my.

And assisted hundreds and hundreds of individuals from young to old. It's not just that you're, um, helping those who are in high school and in college on their journey, but you're inspiring grown adults, you know, as well, right? And, and you don't, it's just not about the talk for you because you don't really talk about it, right?

It's all about what you, the work that you put in. And I admire that so very. Much. So thank you for all that you've done and that you're doing well. Thank you.

Yolanda Camarena: Thank you.

Ebony Clemons-Ajibolade: Absolutely. So if you were to write a biography Nice. What would the title of

Yolanda Camarena: that book be? Oh my gosh. Yeah. I don't know. I've never thought about that.

If I were to write a biography, um, I think it would be. The dash. The dash. So the dash would be, you know, we [00:38:00] always hear the people always say kind of the dash. Mm-hmm. So you see, you see the end result, but you never see the journey. Mm-hmm. You see the beginning, you know, you see the ends of where we are and people see.

Or successes or whatever it is, but people don't understand the journey and the sacrifice that was made along the way. Mm-hmm. So it's kind of like, it's that that dash and that dash would represent kind of the journey. Love that of, of what you, you know, of what you accomplish and you never stop. Maybe you just keep adding more dashes, you know, along the way or whatever.

But, um, And I think that's the important thing, and that's the important thing that I always try to, to tell young people because they will, you know, we have, we try to have a lot of functions at our home and things, you know, um, so that, not because you're wanting people to see where you are, what you know, but it's just, just also know that, you know, We all [00:39:00] have our own definition of success.

Mm-hmm. And it's important that you know what your definition of success, that what it means to you and how important that is to you. Because not everybody's success is the same, right? Mm-hmm. And it can mean so many different things to so many people, but your success should go along with what, um, your passion is as well.

Mm-hmm. And how you can also. Influence others and make change and try to improve the lives of others as well along the way so they can have their success. Mm-hmm. Nice, nice.

Don Sherman: Makes sense. Well, we truly appreciate you being with us today, but we have one more question. Okay. Actually it's about seven of them, but this is a fun part.

Uh, just word association. Okay. Give you one word to give us one word back. Oh gosh. It's not wrong because it's your word. Right? Okay. Leader.

Yolanda Camarena: Dolores

Don Sherman: Wichita. Change [00:40:00] vacation.

Yolanda Camarena: Oh gosh. Mexico Entrepreneur. Uh, Jean Caina. I would concur with that. Good answer. Yeah.

Don Sherman: Be interested in this one. Failure.

Yolanda Camarena: Uh, failure.

Failure. Failure. Gosh. Um, maybe education in a sense that. I would, I would've liked to have gone to law school. Okay. And I didn't do that. Family. Oh my gosh. Uh, familia, there's family and then there's familia. Gotcha. Difference.

Don Sherman: Very different. There's a difference. There's a difference. I'm another show. I'm sure Chamber

Yolanda Camarena: Growing understanding, I'm gonna give you more words for that.

But the chamber,

Don Sherman: uh, beverage.

Yolanda Camarena: Uh, margarita.

Don Sherman: Oh, I like how she rolled that. And last but not least, fun. Friends. Excellent.

Yolanda Camarena: Thank you for being here. I do have to say one thing. Uh [00:41:00] oh. Um, when we're talking about, uh, just real quick, when we're talking about, um, being on boards and this kind of thing and, and, um, I was just telling a friend of mine, I said, I now choose very carefully the boards that I wanna be on.

Mm-hmm. Yep. Because, um, before you choose boards because of networking opportunities, meeting people mm-hmm. Doing those kind of things. Mine is now the people that are on the board. Bingo. So I always say, Are these individuals somebody I wanna go out and have a drink with or not? Mm-hmm. Exactly. Mm-hmm. And if they are, then you know what?

I'm gonna be on that board, if not, not gonna

Don Sherman: be on that board and let the records show that Yolanda and I are on the Wichita Community Foundation Board. I'm just just saying can't have drinks. Okay. She could be talking about me, but maybe not.

Yolanda Camarena: And I love, in fact, I'm coming off of that board and I keep saying, is there.

Anywhere I can stay. That's one of my favorite boards. That's one of them.

Don Sherman: That's one of them boards. I'm sorry. That's right. I digress. So

Yolanda Camarena: anyway, they Me too. Not your fault doc.

Ebony Clemons-Ajibolade: No, this is great.[00:42:00]

I can only aspire

Yolanda Camarena: to be like two. Here we go. So I think we're having drinks in other, we're drinks. Like

Don Sherman: we're all having drinks. We can make that

Yolanda Camarena: happen.

Ebony Clemons-Ajibolade: Friends, we have come to that time, we're at the end of this journey where we've. Been able to have a wonderful conversation with Miss Yolanda Camarena and she has ex, you know, shared with us her journey unseen.

So thank you for listening. And Yolanda, thank you for being here with us.

Yolanda Camarena: This is really fun. I really enjoyed it. It was kind of nice to go back and revisit your life a little bit and then figure out where you're going from here.

Ebony Clemons-Ajibolade: I love it. I love it. Till next time guys, make sure that you follow us and that you subscribe and that you share with your friends and family and your network like

Don Sherman: us.

Love us, share us. Thank you for tuning in peace.

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Don Sherman: We're glad you're here today and we wanna remind you to like us, love us, share us. We got a great growing listenership and it's all because of Youi. Well, not because of you, but I was handing it off to you. Oh, I, you know, I see. Not because of me, it's because of our listeners handing it off to you. Oh, okay.

Ebony Clemons-Ajibolade: Thank you. Thank you for

Yolanda Camarena: that clarification

Ebony Clemons-Ajibolade: because

Don Sherman: you was gonna go on that, so No, I appreciate it.