

In Their Own Words... Ken Trujillo

Anne Saporito 09 June 2011

Ken Trujillo is one of the founders of the law firm Trujillo Rodriguez & Richards, LLC. He served as the City Solicitor of Philadelphia and as an Assistant U.S. Attorney.

Throughout his career, Mr. Trujillo has been at the leading edge of some of the most important litigation in the country. In addition, as a business leader, Mr. Trujillo plays a major role in public and private economic development. He has been the board chair of Congreso for 20 years, and has been a member of the boards of directors of the Kimmel Center, National Council of La Raza, Community Legal Services, Inc. and Big Brothers/Big Sisters of Philadelphia, Inc. Mr. Trujillo served as a board member of the City of Philadelphia Board of Pensions and the Philadelphia Industrial Development Corporation and on the Board of Trustees of the University of the Arts. In 1997, he was named by Mayor Ed Rendell to serve as a member of the City of Philadelphia Police Corruption Task Force. In 1999, Mr. Trujillo was named one of the Philadelphia Business Journal's "40 Under 40." For several years, Law & Politics and the publishers of Philadelphia Magazine have named Mr. Trujillo a Philadelphia Superlawyer. In 2005, the Mexican government presented Mr. Trujillo with the Ohtli Award, one of the highest awards given to non-Mexican

citizens by the Mexican government.

We spent some time with Mr. Trujillo recently, discussing his ideas about generational leadership and Philadelphia:

You have been an entrepreneur and leader across Philadelphia's government, nonprofit, business and education sectors for over 20 years. Any thoughts about the future for our City?

Philadelphia is interesting because we have a tremendous pool of talent in the region, and there are those who are actively involved and regularly recruited to be part of this public life, and then there are others who are enormously talented but not called on to be actively involved. Take a city like New York, in education: there is tremendous involvement from business and the private equity community, producing incredible enterprises and services to the community. We have legions of those in Philadelphia who need to be brought into these types of important activities, so that Philadelphia can benefit from greater involvement by a range of talented people and committed institutions on boards and in the life of the city and region.

Throughout your career, your activity and commitment on boards have been extremely consistent. Can you share any insights from these experiences over time?

Expectations for board members are changing as organizations have become more cognizant of the role of the board and how to provide tools for boards

to do their jobs. I've seen the overall character of board members in nonprofit organizations become more professional and accountable. I also think it's important to note that not all nonprofit boards are the same. For example, the mission of the Chamber of Commerce is going to be very different from that of an arts organization or social services organization, or a university, and their Boards will, in turn reflect those differences. The fundamental question is: What is the purpose of this organization? I'm a board member for a health insurer, a nonprofit that grosses \$800-900 million, and its mission requires the board to reflect a high level of expertise, so assembling the right board is very deliberate. At the Chamber of Commerce, its consumers are not the public at large, but member organizations, and their mission is ensuring financial viability for those members. So board selection must be aligned. Generally speaking, board work is very rewarding, and I've been fortunate to be involved in transforming organizations by working with high-performing boards.

You have been the Chair of the Board of Congreso de Latinos Unidos for the past 20 years. What makes Congreso unique and how have you seen the organization evolve?

Congreso was formed in 1979 so it's not a new organization, but has constantly had to reinvent itself because so much of our funding is based on the changing political priorities. Essentially we provide

services by sub-contracting from government. Consequently, not just from one administration to the next, but also fiscal year to fiscal year, Congreso has needed to demonstrate what I often call the "ability to pivot." In other words, this is an organization with a capacity for anticipating and accommodating change, and as a board we have been successful with providing strategic direction while not sticking our fingers in execution. And as a result, Congreso is able to pivot, and to turn either slightly or substantially in new directions as necessary.

Congreso's staff tends to be young, primarily representing Generations X & Y. Does this affect the organization at the Board level?

In some ways, yes. The Congreso board is mostly comprised of baby boomers, so it's an interesting and, I think, healthy mix of perspectives. And there are certain service areas where the board steps back to let staff inform our objectives; for example, the board has little to no input on much of the organization's technology-based services. The importance of technology is something that we recognize fully, but we want to support staff and complement their expertise which, frankly, some of us baby boomers don't have.

Does this generational dynamic influence leadership in the other work environments you are familiar with?

Sure. There are some fields and professions in which experience is not only useful but highly valued. As an

attorney, I know that someone who is 2-5 years out of law school will not be turned to for their perspective because they lack the experience that is so valued in law. In other businesses, new thinking and innovative entrepreneurship are highly valued, so a younger staff may have an edge. Due to the pace of change in the workplace, the gaps in common experience are subject-based and knowledge-based. Technology is a great example of this. The perspectives and ideas generated by a Generation Y person are going to differ from those by a Generation X-er and certainly differ from those of a baby boomer; my peers and I have to play some catch-up on the technology side. But each generation brings something valuable to the table, and in terms of leadership, we have to integrate values in order to manage a well-rounded organization.

Anne Saporito, MPH, CPH, is a Philadelphia Social Innovations Journal Founding Contributor.