

SOUTH FLORIDA BUSINESS JOURNAL

June 17, 2022



SPRUILL ILLUSTRATION; GETTY IMAGES

'DIVERSE VOICES' HONORED FOR EXCELLENCE IN BUSINESS

Welcome to the *Business Journal's* 2022 Diverse Voices, a special section that honors two dozen diverse executives at the top of their games in their respective fields. 🗣️ The honors program is part of the *SFRJ's* ongoing Diversity, Equity & Inclusion initiative, which features panels on DE&I best practices and special sections on the conversations' main takeaways.

Our Diverse Voices section showcases how diverse executives help lead companies across the entire Ft. Lauderdale region to greater success and help enhance the fabric of our business community.

"These executives truly exemplify how valuing diversity and working to grow diverse employees into leadership positions not only benefits the employees, but also their employers," *SFRJ* President and Publisher Melanie Dickerson said.

Studies show that companies with diverse workers can benefit from their life experiences and perspectives, which can boost innovation, enhance decision-making and help grow their bottom lines. Additionally, job candidates

increasingly demand that employers be more socially conscious, and they often refuse to consider posts at companies without inclusive practices that help treat their employees equitably, surveys show.

I recently spoke with Germaine Smith Bough, CEO of the Urban League of Broward County, who shared:

"Smart companies understand the importance of creating environments where people can be who they are and bring their full selves to work. Because beyond this being the right thing to do, it's also smart business."

This is why it's been rewarding to see more companies up the ante



MEL MELÉNDEZ
Editor in Chief

when it comes to DE&I programs that help diversify their workplaces and foster environments where all employees can thrive.

Companies like the 16 businesses that partnered with us on our continuing DE&I initiative to highlight some of the winning strategies others can use as inspiration for their own efforts. (See our partners listed below.) We appreciate how these partners' programs could help others strengthen their workforces.

Similarly, a big thank you to our Diverse Voices supporters: corporate sponsor Wells Fargo, along with partners the Greater Fort Lauderdale LGBT Chamber of Commerce, the Miami-Dade Gay & Lesbian Chamber of Commerce, South Florida Hispanic Chamber of Commerce and the Urban League of Broward County.

And most importantly, congrats to our business, who underscore the diverse makeup of our burgeoning business community and how diversity continues to enhance our thriving economy.

Enjoy their profiles.



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DIVERSE VOICES

KATALINA CRUZ

COO, KW PROPERTY MANAGEMENT & CONSULTING

Residence: Miami



COURTESY OF KW PROPERTY MANAGEMENT & CONSULTING

Katalina Cruz was 7 when her family moved to Miami from Costa Rica. Within months, she picked up English. Soon, she was a model student, eventually attending college to earn her bachelor's degree, an MBA and CPA license. It's a progression she's proud of, and a legacy she believes sets her apart in the Miami marketplace. "Like other Hispanic and Costa Rica-born professionals, I am a hard-working, self-made and compassionate person who enjoys building relationships," said Cruz, a single mother of three and active marathoner. "My diversity has helped me relate to and understand our diverse clients and employees. It has also allowed me to embrace change and adapt to the ever-changing environment that we live in."

Diversity also helps her fit in in often challenging settings. As a Latin woman with experience sitting in a boardroom full of men, it has not always been easy, she said. She's had to overcome notions about her ability to get the job done.

"My diversity and experiences give me the confidence and self-esteem needed to overcome such challenges," she said. "It's important to never give up on your vision."

ANY ADVICE FOR DIVERSE EXECUTIVES HOPING TO RISE IN THE CORPORATE OR PROFESSIONAL WORLD?

Embrace your diversity and invest in yourself throughout your career. Continuing your education is critically important, as is getting involved with different initiatives – in leadership roles – within your organization and in your industry. Helping others grow with you is equally important, in the form of coaching and mentoring employees in your organization. Finally, surround yourself with diverse teams to allow creativity to flourish.

WHY IS IT IMPORTANT FOR BUSINESSES TO EMBRACE D&I INITIATIVES? So they can attract top talent, differentiate themselves and thrive against their competition. Having the leadership team embrace diversity will enhance the creativity in the

organization, which will result in better decision-making and an inclusive culture that will help employees feel empowered.

HOW CAN WE GET MORE ORGANIZATIONS ON BOARD WITH D&I?

We must showcase successful organizations with diverse leadership, and make the connection between the two clear to other organizations. The more these stories are out there, the more others will buy into the importance of diversity and inclusion in business.

HOW IMPORTANT IS IT TO HAVE DIVERSE EXECUTIVES IN TOP LEADERSHIP POSITIONS? It's vital. At KW Property Management & Consulting, six of the 12 owners are female, with several joining the company in its beginning stages and working their way up to the

partner level, myself included. Seven of the 16 partners are Latinx or BIPOC. Diverse leadership helps the entire organization be better connected with its people. In today's competitive talent environment, candidates are seeking out diverse companies.

HOW CAN COMPANIES SUCCESSFULLY GROW DIVERSE LEADERSHIP TEAMS?

Practice what you preach. Hire a diverse workforce and train your existing team members about diversity. That kind of training [will] help employees understand the benefits of such a workforce, along with the need to have open conversations with employees. Implement companywide coaching and mentoring initiatives to help diverse employees at all levels develop within the company and in their careers. That investment will pay off down the road.

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Image: South Florida Business Journal

ILLUSTRATION BY JAKE STEVENS/SFBJ; GETTY IMAGES



By **Jeff Zbar** – Correspondent, South Florida Business Journal
Jun 17, 2022

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– Mel Meléndez, Editor-in-Chief

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