

San Jose State University

From the Selected Works of Dr. Michele A. L. Villagran

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Michele Lucero: Impact, Engagement, and Amazing Adaptability, Pt.2

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MICHELE LUCERO: IMPACT, ENGAGEMENT, AND AMAZING ADAPTABILITY, PT. 2

By *Kim Dority*

Last month Michele Lucero, Director of Client Development for LAC Group, described her highly eclectic information career path, beginning with an MLIS from University of North Texas. Never one to shy away from new challenges, Michele has charted her own career path but within organizations, rather than as an independent – in essence, she has created a multifaceted career that enables her to use and contribute all of her strengths and passions. How has she done such an amazing job of career development? Read on to learn more about her strategies and recommendations for other information professionals.

Key Competencies for Information Professionals

A large part of Michele's success has been built on the key professional strengths of collaboration; continually learning and applying new knowledge; and actively seeking out new opportunities and areas of responsibility beyond her existing comfort zone. But what other skills would she recommend for information professionals wanting to grow their professional opportunities?

In general, suggests Michele, look for ways to “translate” and leverage the skills that you've learned throughout your education. That may include, for example, making presentations or how to write a succinct and persuasive e-mail. Also learn how to become good at negotiations and how to manage these types of interaction or transaction.

She also feels that understanding sales is very important, especially in a role like hers. That entails learning about each client's sales cycle, what their process looks like, actively listening



Michele Lucero serves as
Director of Client
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Group.

to clients, understanding and finding out what their pain points are, etc.

Wisely, Michele points out that understanding the sales dynamic is a great professional skill for anyone, whether or not they're officially involved in sales, "because you may be selling your services or selling your actual information center. I'd also say that whatever organization you're a part of, it's important to understand and follow the industry and what's going on in your market. Find out what the trends are, even for libraries. Follow blogs and news in your associations." Additionally, Michele tries to leverage other areas where she's gained expertise and skills (for example, her work in conflict management and dispute resolution, where she did additional coursework). And along those lines, she highly recommends developing at least some formal knowledge in the areas of conflict management and dispute resolution because these two skills are increasingly important in the workplace.

Other business skills Michele would recommend? At the very least, change management and leadership, project management, and team leadership or participation. In her own work with LAC Group, she's built upon her existing skills to develop an expertise in recruiting, sales techniques, and developing a deep understanding of clients in order to most effectively meet their needs and build positive client relationships with them.

LIS Career as Roller-Coaster Ride

Clearly, Michele has done an amazing job of growing the original opportunities presented by her MLIS degree into an extraordinarily rewarding and diverse career. In fact, says Michele, "I would say it's been a roller coaster. It's been an adventure. I've always said that my career path has been that of a nontraditional librarian because that's exactly what it is.

"I did it start out in a public library, so I took that route for ten years, public librarianship. And then, I really wanted to focus on legal, which made me consider law school. I never went that route but instead ended up getting my library degree, focused on the legal side. And then I went to work at law firms. I loved working in law firms, even the stress, the pressure. I handle stress very well and it was a nice fit. And then I transitioned into work for a legal vendor, the publisher West. And that was more of the relationship/partnership side where I really learned a lot more about not just services, but also the relationship side when you're working with customers (rather than *being* the customer).

And then just before LAC, I had a very short stint with the Los Angeles Law Library, doing marketing and communications. That was a lot of fun, and a very different area for me. Even though I wasn't in a library capacity, I was working within a law library and able to really learn and leverage public relations skills through creating brochures and designs and colors and branding. So that was another example of a route that I never expected to take, but I learned many useful things from that choice."

Expanding Into Additional Opportunities – and Impact

Michele is a committed and active advocate for libraries, and it shows in the work she does outside of LAC Group. She's worked almost five years with one university that has partnered with a Southern California-based university to create a joint MLS program for which Michele is the local contact. (She helps put on professional development events for students and works as a liaison with faculty.) She especially enjoys that work because she's involved with the students as they're going through their coursework. She's also involved in recruiting for the profession.

In addition, Michele teaches numerous courses as an adjunct faculty member, including topics such as Law Librarianship and Economics as Information. She also teaches courses on organizational leadership and conflict resolution at another non-MLIS university program part-time (unfortunately, these courses aren't yet standard requirements in any of the MLIS programs).

Staying Ahead of the Trend Curve

When asked what tools and resources she relies on to stay current, Michele responded "There are so many! For law librarianship, several really great blogs that I follow regularly are Three Geeks in a Blog, the Dewey B Strategic Blog, and PinHawk. They cover industry news, what's going on with resources, hot topics, or things that might be coming down the pike. So, that's how I stay on top of trends and news in that area.

And then I also include books as part of my regular routine for staying current. There's a book I'm reading now called *Becoming a Conflict-Competent Leader* by Runde and Flanagan. (I would never have come across it if I hadn't decided to get certified in the specific conflict dynamics profile.) But it's a book that I suggest everyone read because it's filled with information on how to be a better leader. It covers dealing with conflict and what conflict entails, especially when you're in a leadership capacity. Even in a non-leadership capacity, there's conflict all around us. I'm also reading *Talk Like TED: The 9 Public Speaking Secrets of the World's Top Minds* by Carmine Gallo. This one is really useful, especially if you're involved in making presentations currently or might be in the future. Things like how to engage your audience, how to be passionate about a topic. It's the secrets behind how they do such great TED talks, and a great read.

Advice for Those Just Starting Out in Their Careers

When asked this question, Michele laughed and responded "this is a question I get asked almost daily, and I love it. It's my favorite question. I have so much advice, but there are some key things. I would say don't be afraid to take risks. I mean, I've moved from states. I've left family. I've taken pay cuts. I've taken a lot of risks to get to where I am. There's a lot involved with getting to this type of work and level of responsibility or even to go through this type of career path. I would say also be open to opportunities outside of the norm. A lot of the students I work with seem set or focused on a

single career path. And I think we all know that one path might be a dead-end. So, you need to learn how to” train hop” or jump ship to go to another opportunity if it’s better suited to you. Always look through all the windows around you.”

She also emphasized the strategic importance of becoming active in your professional associations. “There is so much benefit from networking, meeting colleagues. You might learn about a job that’s not posted, but is coming out soon. And that ties into the whole networking mantra: network, network, network. I can’t recommend strongly enough the importance of networking. And along those lines, I would strongly suggest working with a mentor or mentors. Whether it’s a professional or informal relationship, working with a mentor you can reach out to when you have a question or you need advice is invaluable.

“Last, I would say be ready to make an impact no matter what position you’re in. Be proactive. Wherever you go, you want to focus on being able to have that impact with clients or with your internal constituencies. Demonstrate how your expertise adds value to their goals. Be open to opportunities and then take responsibility and jump in feet first with your ideas and enthusiasm and passion.”

Key take-aways? Be a risk-taker. Deliver value. Find opportunities to be the solution. Become an active professional contributor. Be open to unforeseen niches. Be flexible, adaptable, resilient, open to change. And do it with all the enthusiasm and commitment you can muster. Sure, you’ll have off days now and then, but if you generally follow the line of Michele’s advice, you’re very likely to end up in the career you aspire to. *And* you’ll have a really good time doing it!



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