



TECH STAR



## Holly Ramirez: The Digital Era's IT Project Manager

[By Akbar Ali]

As director of IT project management for Jenny Craig Inc., Holly Ramirez oversees the backbone of the industry leader's innovative technological approach to keeping its clients informed and motivated: the Jenny Craig Talent Management System (LMS), which can be accessed by all company employees nationwide and serves as both content-provider and trainer for those looking to reinvent themselves.

Ramirez has a long history as a project management leader, supervising other project managers, software developers, and quality assurance personnel, while maintaining responsibility for everything from rollout scheduling to coordinating professional teams which make company vision a reality for consumers.

Though she is undoubtedly a highly accomplished leader in her field, Ramirez wasn't always set on a career in technology. She attended college in Los Angeles and majored in art, hoping that life as an artist would satisfy her career goals.

"I had no desire or interest in technology in my early college years. My passion and desire was to become an artist and an illustrator of small children's books. I soon realized this was not a lucrative career and that I could end up a 'starving artist.'"

Looking for an alternative career, Ramirez asserts that it wasn't so much technology as it was her innate tendency toward orderliness and discipline which led her into her current line of work.

"I am an extremely organized person that loves to coordinate, make lists, and plan projects and events. I thrive on coordinating and participating in large projects with multiple people, teams, and dependencies. I also enjoy watching all the pieces come together for a successful end deliverable."

These rare skills have also brought benefits for Ramirez outside the office. "Not only do I

enjoy project coordination in my career, but also in my personal life when coordinating parties, fundraisers, and events for family and friends," she asserts.

It was after college that Ramirez began to consider a career in technology, looking for a way to be a part of the technological wave

and still utilizing her strong organizational skills.

"Project management was not as popular or recognized as a 'career focus' back then. I knew I was good at coordinating and organizing [and knew] I enjoyed working with technology focused people. I knew that this was a field I would enjoy, but after several digital imaging and multiple media courses and certificates, I knew I did not want to be a programmer but still loved working with programmers and network engineers. I started to lean toward managing and the management of technology, rather than becoming a programmer myself."

Of course, working as a project manager for a company like Jenny Craig isn't simply about bringing professionals together; it entails a great deal of individual introspection which connects her daily tasks with a common personal struggle.

"My father passed away at the young age of 47 after a massive heart attack which was related to weight and poor eating habits. His death left my mother, who was a homemaker, with three children and no full-time career of her own to support the family. I decided that I would work as hard as I could to build a career of my own no matter what it took."

The death of her father compelled Ramirez not only to define her future professional goals, but to reclaim control of her health as well.

**Q. What do you do for fun?**

**A.** I enjoy spending time in the mountains with my husband and dogs. I really enjoy wine tasting trips to Napa Valley, Paso Robles, and Santa Barbara. I like to entertain and throw parties for friends and family. I also enjoy attending rock concerts and coordinating charity events whenever possible.

**Q. What CD is in your CD player right now?**

**A.** *Aerosmith's Greatest Hits*

**Q. What is the last magazine you read?**

**A.** *Wine Enthusiast*

**Q. What is your favorite TV show?**

**A.** I love *Forensic Files* on *Court TV*. I would have loved to have gotten into forensic science, but have too weak of a stomach to do that kind of work in real life. I find forensics and DNA fascinating.



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"I had a weight problem as a child and struggled with being overweight. After my father passed away, I finally decided to lose weight and I knew that by losing weight and improving my appearance it would help me get ahead. I lost 65 pounds and then decided I wanted to help other people lose weight too. I started as a weight loss consultant at Jenny Craig in order to follow this dream."

In spite of her personal success, Ramirez arrived at the realization that counseling others through lifestyle transformation was not the best use of her abilities.

"As a weight loss counselor I soon realized that this would not be a lifetime career for me, so I switched my interest to computers and multi-media digital imaging. Computers and technology was a field that was continually growing, and I believed it would allow me to make a good living."

Ramirez successfully used her experience at Jenny Craig to reorient her career in the technological direction she now wanted to pursue, proving that it's never too late to form — and achieve — new goals.

"I started my career at Jenny Craig which was the stepping stone that lead to my project management and technology career. I left Jenny Craig in 1999 to pursue other opportunities in IT project management for several years and most recently came back to Jenny Craig as their director of IT project management. With beginning my career at Jenny Craig and using my weight loss consulting knowledge, I was able to start working in their IT department on the technical help desk. It was during this period that I was able to study and learn new technology and management skills. I was able to both work and go back to school for continued education courses in IT and project management."

Among her most memorable career

**Q. Who is your role model?**

**A.** Both my mother and my father served as role models for me growing up. My father worked very hard his whole life, without acceptance. He always put his family before everything else, no matter how tired he was, or how sick he may have felt, he got up and went to work every day. My mother has always shown me how to help and give to others less fortunate than I. Because my family did not have a lot of money, her focus was always around donating her personal time. She would work fundraisers, canned food drives, and meals on wheels for the elderly. Her hard work to help others has always set such a great example for me then and now. My mother taught me that you are never too busy or never too poor to stop and help someone else less fortunate than you are.

**Q. What makes you laugh?**

**A.** My husband's silly jokes when he is trying to cheer me up. Also, small children's observations and candid feedback of the world from their eyes.

accomplishments have been the various leadership positions she has assumed at different companies, honing her management skills and using her technology know-how to bring new services and products to the market.

"I served as the vice president of operations at ISD Corporation, which is a software development company. I joined the company and helped lead the company to increased revenue and efficiencies in 2006, which was its first profitable year in over 8 years.

"This experience taught me how to run a business and got me involved in all aspects of the business including sales and marketing, which was a new learning experience. At this company, I personally project managed the creation and implementation of an electronic filing product for the Superior Courts of California. This project was focused on the specific needs of complex litigation and general civil case filings and received electronic civil filings from law firms through several third parties.

"I also served as the director of technology services at New Horizons Computer Learning Centers. I personally project managed the development and deployment of a Learning Management System (LMS). The system is an ASP model accessed internationally and customized to provide content and training for over 2.5 million students per year.

"This project was a first for me in coordinating and changing vendors and project focus mid-stream due to company directives. Switching a project focus and a vendor mid-project without changing the project delivery date took a lot of team effort, risk management, and tough decision making in order to successfully meet company objectives and timelines. This particular project gave me a lot of experience in the detailed management of third party vendors and risk management."

Notwithstanding the weight of her achievements, Ramirez's story — of a successful woman in the technology business — remains an anomaly, highlighting the industry need to recruit more women into high profile positions and for established professionals to mentor those who follow them. Fortunately for Ramirez, she has had just that.

"I had two women that greatly influenced and mentored me. Both women were my



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managers at certain points in my career. One was a strong and opinionated woman that showed me how to always speak my mind and follow my heart. She taught me how to be a strong and proud business woman. The second was a woman who really showed me how to respect and manage people. She led

by example and showed me how to mentor, listen, guide, and empower others to be successful and to believe in themselves.

“Both of these women and their different management styles taught me how to connect with people, respect myself and

others, and to always show honesty and integrity when working and building teams.”

It’s fair to say that Ramirez has built more than professional teams — she’s created a distinguished career out of sheer ambition, motivation, and will.

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