



TECH STAR



Sabrina Sanchez: Opening the Window to Technology

[By Akbar Ali]

As CEO and founder of Ventana Public Relations, Sabrina Sanchez has established herself as one of the market leaders in bridging technology and communication to produce business success. Her company, a full-service marketing and technology public relations firm in Silicon Valley, has successfully launched and branded many of the industry's most breakthrough technologies in a wide range of software, including enterprise, security, storage, and wireless systems. More than that, however, Sanchez has proven herself to be a self-actualized professional virtuoso, successfully reinventing her career path to utilize her innate personal strengths and passion.

Though her experience in the technology industry spans over two decades, Sanchez never anticipated a career in the field until her early 20s. Her academic strengths, she admits, were of a decidedly non-technical nature during her formative years.

"I always loved to write and to express myself in high school, but never really thought I'd have a direct path in a career of this nature," she says. "At 18 years old, I don't know if any of us knows what we want to do when we grow up. I guess that's why I'm still creating myself and my passions at 48 years old. I'm on my third career and loving the ride."

She attended Saint Mary's College in Moraga, CA, where she earned her bachelor's in business management, graduating with honors. The academic environment at the school proved to be fertile ground for an aspiring entrepreneur brimming with ambition and ideas.

"It was a great school, and I enjoyed the business program immensely and knew I would have a solid career in business," she affirms.

After graduating, Sanchez found a position with Hewlett Packard, helping develop what was then a nascent form of today's technology industry. Her early years would be defined by not only her own technical development and leadership skills, but by her challenges to the established gender norms of the business.

"Hewlett Packard was a great place to cut my

Q. What do you do for fun?

A. Travel the world. My favorite places are Egypt, Greece, Italy, Spain, Morocco, and Mexico. I love to hike and to be in nature and to hang with my kids.

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

A. *Cold Play*

Q. What is the last magazine you read?

A. *Vanity Fair*

Q. What is your favorite TV show?

A. *The Colbert Report*. I love the political satire. In these times, we need to lighten up and laugh at ourselves a bit.

Q. Who is your role model?

A. My mom. She became a widow at age 30 with 4 kids under the age of 10 and we had nothing. She rebuilt a life for us and provided us with all the love and support we could have asked for. I learned from my mom that anything is possible as long as you love one another and stick together and take things one step at a time, the rest will follow.

Q. What makes you laugh?

A. My kids! I have two beautiful boys and they wake up laughing. It reminds me to laugh more and breathe in the abundance of life. Life is so good!

teeth and learn the business in Silicon Valley. I started my career as a technical writer and graphics designer and made my way up to an IT Director position which was predominantly a male position at the time. My role really had nothing to do with my ability to configure and support systems, but rather my ability to build strong teams and secure consensus across various groups in the organization."

"My last project there was to implement SAP across the business units within the procurement organizations," she continues. "Anyone who knows HP realizes this is not an easy task. The divisions in many cases operate like separate business units, and this can make standardization across the company a slow process. However, I really enjoyed creating consensus across the HP divisions and saw that I had a real talent in blending my technology skills with organizational management to make a positive impact."

After spending the better part of two decades with HP, building her reputation as a bonafide natural leader, Sanchez decided the time was ripe for change. Of course, that kind of experience is not without its important lessons, many of which have helped shape Sanchez's own perceptions of what was possible for her career.

"What I have found over the years is not to ignore the small voice inside of you. Don't let *anyone* tell you that you can't realize your dreams. I remember when I left HP after 16 years at the top of my career I was told by my boss that I would NEVER find a better position and that I was crazy to leave.



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"Even though I was at the top of my game/career, I knew there had to be more to life than commuting 4 hours a day with my baby in the backseat of a car. This isn't quality of life! HP was a great place, but being an IT manager just wasn't my calling. It is so important to experiment and to find out what you love. Take risks, work hard, and believe in yourself."

Upon leaving her post at HP, Sanchez initially planned to extract herself from the workforce and return to school, this time to complete her master's in organizational psychology. Her life, it turned out, has something else planned — and the results have been spectacular.

"I started consulting in Silicon Valley with technology companies doing public relations and marketing. I was able to bridge my understanding of technology and my writing skills to make a rapid impact on their businesses. This was very exciting, and I loved consulting."

"After two years I landed as a vice president of a PR agency and helped to build the business for the next seven years," she continues. "I took that as far as I could go and realized my dream two years ago with the launch of my own company Ventana Public Relations."

"In just two years, we have grown the business to 11 clients, 15 employees, and revenues of over \$1 million," she esteems. "People said I was nuts to launch a company as a woman at 46 years old. I ignored the critics, listened to my inner voice, and knew my dream was possible."

Redirecting one's career with as much skill and success as Sanchez has demonstrated could not have been possible without the help of several influential mentors who have taught her not only career fundamentals, but invaluable life lessons, as well.

"Mentors are so important in life and it is such a reward and a gift to learn from people we admire and respect that can show us the way. I have had several wonderful mentors at all stages in my career. Working with a life coach has been one of the most rewarding experiences for me. She reminds me to continue to do what brings me passion, and the rest will follow."

"Share your experience and share your good fortune with others. Don't lose sight that you can make an impact in the world," she continues. "If you get lost in just making a buck, you will lose sight of the bigger picture. Surround yourself with great talent and those that want to make a difference, and you can create something very impacting together. We aren't in this thing alone."

To the next generation of tech professionals and entrepreneurs, Sanchez advocates a dual approach of communication and vision, cognizant of the fact that technology exists for one reason alone: to make the impossible *possible*.

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"When I left my VP position two years ago, I knew exactly what I would name my company: Ventana," she says. "'Ventana' in Spanish means 'window.' This name has significant meaning for me personally and professionally. For my clients, Ventana means 'Expanding your window of opportunity.' For myself, it has spiritual significance: 'Where God closes a door, he opens a window.'"

"Don't forget that we are empowered, that we each have unique gifts, and we can make a difference in our careers, in our community, and in our world," she continues. "If you are true to yourself, committed to your work, and committed to your dreams, anything is possible. Even for a gal starting her third career at 46 years old."

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