

Jon Bernstein:

Welcome to PNC C-Speak, the Language of Executives. I'm Jon Bernstein, regional president for PNC Bank of New England, alongside my co-host, Carolyn Jones, market president and publisher of the Boston Business Journal.

Carolyn Jones:

Thank you, Jon. It's great to be with you on PNC C-Speak. Every podcast features local executives talking about relevant and timely business topics and sharing their insights on their leadership journey and observations on the Boston business community.

Jon Bernstein:

We are here today with Eneida Roman, president and CEO of Amplify Latinx

Carolyn Jones:

Eneida, welcome. It is so wonderful to have you with us today. We're really excited to hear about you and your journey and your views on leadership, but I wonder if we could start just by helping our listeners understand more about Amplify Latinx, it's inception and a little bit about its mission.

Eneida Roman:

Of course. Thank you so much. First of all. Thank you, Jon. Thank you Caroline for having me. I'm delighted to be here. And as you stated, I am the president and CEO of Amplify Latinx. I'm an attorney by training, and what really, the genesis of Amplify was actually the time when I was practicing law because there are very few and far between Latinas in the law and so that inspired me to start this very informal networking group called The Latina Circle and that little by little grew to be what is today Amplify Latinx, which is a business organization that is focused on advancing economic prosperity for Latinos in Massachusetts and beyond. We work at the intersection of three pillars, which is economic development, leadership representation, and policy advocacy because we understand that all three live in similar spaces and we need to make sure that we're advancing policy solutions that close opportunity gaps for disadvantaged communities.

Jon Bernstein:

And now you said you started as a lawyer, could you walk us a little bit through that journey from lawyer to government to the stages of your career?

Eneida Roman:

Of course, yes. No, so actually I'm an attorney, but I'm also an organizational psychologist. So I was born and raised in Puerto Rico and I studied psychology. I went to graduate school in Puerto Rico, and I became a licensed psychologist in Puerto Rico, an organizational psychologist. And then I thought, "Oh, I want to do something more." So then I went to law school and at that point is when I moved to Boston to go to law school and I had the opportunity to work as psychologist here. And for the first time in my life I saw certain discrepancies and just opportunity gaps for the Latino community, because again, I was born and raised in Puerto Rico. So everybody in Puerto Rico is Puerto Rican, everybody's Latino. So yes, there are socioeconomic differences in any community, in any society, in any country, island, state. But here it was more about the ethnicity, the difference of race and ethnicity that marked certain opportunities for people.

I heard it once, I love to repeat it, that talent is evenly distributed, but opportunity is not. So that really stuck with me. And when I graduated from law school, my parents asked me, "When are you coming

back home?" And I said, "I want to stay here a little longer because I feel like I want to do some work here and so that's when I started practicing law. But I always used my psychology background in everything that I do. When I first started practicing, it was quite isolating because I didn't see many people that looked like me that were other Latinos in the field and so that's when I became involved with the Hispanic National Bar Association, which was really my inspiration for Latina Circle because they commissioned a study actually called The Few and Far Between Latinas in the Law, and it basically offered recommendations for Latino attorneys to find networks that support to champion each other and to lift each other up and to seek allies that would support their professional growth as well. And so that was the start of the Latino Circle and the genesis of what Amplify is today.

Carolyn Jones:

Lucky for us, that is wonderful. I wonder if we can talk a little more about Amplify and the work that you're doing there because your career has taken so many turns and obviously your level of expertise and skill covers so many areas, but as you stated, and you just talked about this, Latinos are the youngest, the largest and the fastest growing community of color in our state and probably in the country. How do you leverage that when you're looking to impact business in Boston?

Eneida Roman:

That's a great question. The reality is that I always say that we're too big to fail. Remember 2008 when people said, "Oh, the banks are too big to fail, we have to bail them out." We're not talking about bailing out the Latino community, but we're talking about investing in the Latino community because the reality is that we're at a time in our history in America, in the United States, where there's been a backlash on making sure that we're leveling the playing field. And so I think it's our duty to push back and say, "Actually this is an investment because economic prosperity of the Latino community is American prosperity." We need to make sure that we're giving opportunities to Latinos, because there's very many talented people.

But I think all of us, and again, this is me wearing my psychology hat, we all have our own biases... And everybody does, I'm sure you've all seen that test that Harvard has of implicit bias, and it's really important that we're very aware of the biases that we have when we're hiring, when we're promoting, when we are making any business decision investing so that we understand the importance of investing in a community that is growing, that is starting businesses at a faster rate than any other group, that is contributing already. So what I always say is, imagine if we invested more how much larger the GDP and the contributions and the impact would be if we had more Latinos in positions of leadership or whether in government or in the private sector, in the non-profit sector anywhere. It's about investing so that we can grow and in banking and in Wall Street, you invest where the growth is and the growth is in the Latino community. Every 30 seconds, a Latino turns 18 in the United States, every 30 seconds.

Carolyn Jones:

If I can just ask you absolutely to even take that question as maybe even more micro, how do you leverage that large impact? Is there anything specifically when you're doing business in Boston or how can we impact that power in Boston? Is there something you do specifically to leverage that?

Eneida Roman:

Absolutely. So what we do is that we have... Like I said earlier, we have three pillars, leadership representation, economic development and policy advocacy. But in the economic development piece, the program that is our signature program is our ALX business program where we meet businesses where they are. And so we have different levels, so we have businesses that really need core support, finance, accounting, marketing, website development, et cetera. And so we help them so that they can get to the

next level. Then we have businesses who are doing great, but they are so busy doing the work they do, so they need to get certified to have more access to procurement opportunities and so then we have strategic advisors who help them get certified. And then we have the third level, which is businesses that are certified that are doing great, that are already in the multimillion dollar space but are not necessarily getting the contracts. And so we leverage our access to resources and to government leaders and to private sector leaders to advance the procurement opportunities that they may have.

Now within the business program, we also have different verticals. And while all of them are important, we have food services, we have retail, we have professional services, et cetera. One of the ones that is closest to my heart is childcare because our childcare vertical, as we all know, is crucial to the economy, to the competitiveness of the economy of the state. And so what we do is that we, and our understanding based on data that we have, is that at least 30% of childcare providers are Latina and a larger chunk of women of color are immigrants. And so we provide culturally relevant and sometimes language relevant resources to these women who are business owners, but they don't necessarily see themselves as business owners.

And what we want is to equip them to learn and to grow and to scale so that they can also create jobs so that they can advance their economic status for themselves and for their families, for their communities, and for the state as a whole. Because we know that if we are able to close that opportunity gap in the childcare sector, then we're going to be able to attract more industry. We're going to be able to retain more people to stay here because they know that they're going to have qualified, high quality childcare providers to take care of their children.

Jon Bernstein:

Early childhood care and education is something that's teared up my heart personally, and the PNCs in our efforts, our Grow up Great Initiative. So yes, Eneida, thank you for that work in that space, much to be done there as well. Could you tell us a little bit about the ALX 100 campaign.

Eneida Roman:

At Amplify, we've been very intentional to elevate and highlight Latino leaders across sectors because precisely many times folks are like, "Oh, but we don't know the Latino leaders" and they're here, but they're not always given the visibility that they should be given, so we make sure that we do that.

And so we have this annual campaign, and we call it the ALX season, where for six months of the year we elevate and we give visibility and we honor a hundred Latino leaders across sectors across the Commonwealth. And so we launched it last year and we had a traveling exhibition. So this year it's going to be a sculpture that we commissioned with all of the names of the honorees. And so we're starting in Boston at the Museum of Science on October 11th, and then we're going to take the exhibition on tour. We're going to Springfield, Worcester, Lawrence, Salem and back to Boston. And so it's going to run from October to March, October of 2024 to March 2025 and that's where we close the traveling exhibition because we believe that it's not just important to showcase the talent to decision makers across sectors, but also to the communities where Latinos live so that the kids see themselves in these leaders and so that they feel that they can be inspired by these leaders across sectors.

Jon Bernstein:

Could you walk us through just some data on the scale and size of your organization? How many businesses do you touch? How many employees are there?

Eneida Roman:

That's another excellent question. If we look at from the beginning to now, we have served close to 500 businesses. So from when we started in 2020, and the organization actually started in 2017, but when we

started our business program, our high touch business program per se, was when the pandemic hit because there was a huge need for that. We've worked with 145 businesses in 2024 alone. And the data point that was fascinating to me was not that one. It was actually that the businesses that have registered for the program is double that number. And so that tells me a story, because what that tells me is that there's a huge need for this program, but because we don't have the financial resources to serve them, were basically putting them on a wait list because we don't have the capacity because our grants are specific to a certain number of businesses that we've already enrolled.

So it's very motivating for me to know, "My gosh, there's a huge need. There's all these businesses that want to sign up, but we can't offer the one-on-one." But those that are on the wait list, what we do is that we also offer digital virtual workshops, and so we don't want to leave them hanging. So what we do is that we offer them the virtual option because that is open to everyone and so that way they don't feel like they're just in a holding pattern, but we're engaging them in some way, shape or form pending the new funding that will allow for them to also get the one-on-one.

Carolyn Jones:

Eneida, you are a leader who has really significant impact on our business community here in Boston, can you tell us a little about your personal leadership philosophy? What drives you?

Eneida Roman:

I would say that one of the things that drive me the most is making sure that we're elevating the next generation. And when we started The Latina Circle, we always said, "You're a woman on the go, bring a woman on the rise." At that point, it was only for women. Now I say, "You're a person on the go, bring a person on the rise," because it's about elevating the next generation. Particularly in the Latina community, we're a younger community. I don't have the exact median age, but it's much younger than other races or ethnicities. And we just want to make sure that we're elevating other people, but also working at the intersection of economic development, leadership, representation, and policy advocacy because none of them lives on its own and we want to make sure that that we're also working in partnership with leaders like Jon in the private sector and leaders in governments like the mayor of Boston or the governor and her team, because we cannot advance anything without making sure that we're working in partnership with others.

And a perfect example of that is the recent Frances Perkins Act that will be signed this week by the governor. We worked with them for the last three years to make sure that we were educating the legislature on the importance of making sure that we have this transparency so that we can make sure that we're elevating more people into leadership roles, and that sometimes we're not even aware of some of the things that we're doing, but that we become aware with the data because data is very powerful. And that's something that I'm also very proud of that, that we incorporated when I came in to make sure we did research in the past, but now everything we do is driven by research. I always say that we commission research so that we can have the data so that we can champion solutions that will make Massachusetts more competitive because we're trying to level the playing field for all Massachusetts residents.

Carolyn Jones:

You're certainly doing a great job with that. That is for sure.

Jon Bernstein:

I love your quote, "If you are a person on the go, bring a person on the rise." It goes to the next question, which is, mentorship, it's such an important piece of creating a diverse talent pipeline. If you could share one piece of advice with your younger self, what would it be?

Eneida Roman:

I would say, don't be so shy. Ask questions. Make sure that you are in rooms where you don't feel that your question is going to be a dumb question, because I think the older I've gotten, the more questions I ask. And when I was younger, I was too afraid to ask questions because I didn't want to sound like I didn't know what I was saying. And now as I've gotten older, I feel like it's okay not to know. It's actually great not to know because then you're learning.

And I've learned to ask many questions and to just make sure that, to be more vulnerable, because I think when we're young, we just want to prove ourselves so much that we're afraid to feel vulnerable, and it's okay. It's okay to feel vulnerable and to ask questions because precisely the reason that we're able to do the good work that we're doing is because I've asked so many questions of where the needs are and where the opportunity gaps are. And then I've thought, "Okay, this is where we need to be." This is the space because we need to make sure that we're working to advance the economy and to make Massachusetts more competitive and to make Massachusetts more affordable, which is something the governor always says, and equitable. Because at the end of the day, the United States is more diverse today.

Carolyn Jones:

Just to take that, and you mentioned this a little bit earlier in your statement, but let me ask this question. So obviously you told us about your background. You came here from Puerto Rico, but you are firmly embedded in the community, the culture of Boston, the business community. So tell us a little bit about what do you love about our region and why is Massachusetts a great place to work, to live, to lead a business? And then you've talked a little bit about this, but maybe more specifically, what troubles you or what do we need to work on?

Eneida Roman:

Oh, wow. Okay. First of all, the positive. I love Boston. Boston is my second home. My family's still in Puerto Rico. They're still waiting for me 25 years later. Keep waiting. I think they... Yeah, I married a Bostonian, Boston is home for me. And yes, I go home and visit my family, and we spend holidays sometimes there and just balancing it out.

The reason initially that I decided to stay here was because I saw that there was a need for more Latino professionals, more cultural competence in professionals that were here serving the community, but that was 25 years ago. In Massachusetts that has shifted significantly and right now, depending on the data you look at, the Massachusetts community is anywhere between 13% and 14%. And I say sometimes a lot of Latino communities are not necessarily fully counted, so there's a chance the numbers might be a little bit higher, but counted we're roughly 14% of the population and growing. Back then, I don't think it was that large. I don't know the data back then, I don't remember what the numbers were. But I remember feeling, "My gosh, there's not enough people that culturally understand huge segments of the community," particularly in gateway communities.

And even though I lived close to Boston and in the Greater Boston area, there are many gateway communities outside of 495 that are heavily Latino, Springfield, like Lawrence, Worcester, and other communities in the South Shore. To answer your question about what I love about Boston, I've always felt welcomed. I've always felt that we have leaders that get it, that understand the importance of embracing the diversity of our community and that want to pay it forward and that want to make Massachusetts... That understands, that understands that making Massachusetts more competitive requires being inclusive, requires thinking of everybody who lives here. So that I love. I'm privileged that I'm a professional, I'm privileged that I speak English, that I have access to people like Jon and to other business leaders, and you, and many others, that get it and that want to make sure that we're opening doors. So that I love, and I still think there's a lot of work to be done, and I'm very appreciative to leaders

like you all that understanding that are willing to open doors and then are willing to expand opportunities for all residents of Massachusetts.

Jon Bernstein:

Was there a pivotal moment in your career that helped you gain that confidence to be more assertive and the leader that you've become today?

Eneida Roman:

Yes. That's a great question, Jon, and thank you for asking that because we all have those pivotal moments in our lives. And for me, it was when I was a younger attorney and I was involved with the Hispanic National Bar Association. And the reason that I joined was because I felt a need for community. I felt that I didn't have enough other lawyers, Hispanic lawyers close in Boston that I knew, and I wanted to expand my network. And so I went to their meetings and to their organization, I became involved with their national board, so I became a board member, and then I became a co-chair of The Latina Commission, which is the commission that published the studies around Latinas in the law.

And so when I saw that data and I said, "Oh my God, only..." Because by the way, only 4% of all attorneys are Latino or Latina. And at that time, less than 2% were Latina. So I thought to myself, "Okay, so I'm not crazy in thinking that there's not many of me around, because the data is clear. This is obviously national data." But it's pretty uniform across the different states in the United States.

And so I thought, "I have to do something about this. I have to do something about this." I can't just stand still and just sit around and say, "Okay, I'm one of the few. Okay." I said, "No." So I became super involved with The Latina Commission. And so what I started doing at the time, this was like 2009, we would travel to different cities across the union, across the United States, and we would look for groups where we could meet young girls to show them that we were Latino lawyers and that they could also become lawyers. And so that's when I first dipped my toes into this space.

So I approached some colleagues and I said, our friends, they were hosting these cafecitos, and cafecito is like little coffees, getting together and just sharing best practices, championing each other. And I said, "We should do the same in Boston because I'm going around the nation promoting this, but I'm not doing anything at home." I was involved with other organizations, but not in this. I've always been very, very passionate about women and girls issues so I was on the Big Sister board and I was on other boards, but with Latina professionals per se, I was not doing anything specific to the work that I was doing at the national level. So I decided to bring it home and that's when The Latina Circle was born in 2012. And then we did The Latina Circle from 2012 to 2016, and in 2017 we launched Amplify. I hope that answered your question, but it was basically 2009, that pivotal moment.

Jon Bernstein:

That's great. All right, we like to close with some rapid fire questions. So are you ready?

Eneida Roman:

Yes.

Jon Bernstein:

What is on your bucket list?

Eneida Roman:

Going to Tokyo.

Jon Bernstein:

How do you relax or turn off your brain?

Eneida Roman:

Oh Lord, that is so hard. But, you know what, I love reading. I love reading books because that helps me just be in another space. So that's a way to relax, on a day-to-day basis.

Jon Bernstein:

And the next question is, what are you currently reading?

Eneida Roman:

I'm reading Give and Take by Adam Grant. I love Adam Grant. He's a fellow organizational psychologist, so love, love his work.

Jon Bernstein:

Who's a Boston leader or organization that we should watch?

Eneida Roman:

Well, someone who works very closely with me is a young woman named Daliza Nova, and she's certainly someone to watch.

Carolyn Jones:

She's awesome. She's awesome.

Eneida Roman:

[inaudible 00:22:53]. She's awesome, yes.

Jon Bernstein:

What's your favorite spot in our city?

Eneida Roman:

Oh my God, I have so many. I have to say, the Public Gardens, it's such a Zen space. I love going to the... Every time I'm in Back Bay, I make a point to walk into the gardens and just sit down and take it all in.

Jon Bernstein:

And what makes you laugh?

Eneida Roman:

You know what, children's laughter just gives me so much joy. And also my puppy makes me laugh, but kids laugh... I just-

Jon Bernstein:

What type of dog do you have?

Eneida Roman:

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I have a Havanese and she's so cute. I don't know if you're familiar with Havanese, but she's silly and she's funny and she's adorable. And things that kids come up with, it's just inevitable, the joy that they have is contagious.

Jon Bernstein:

And finally, what's a wish you have for Boston?

Eneida Roman:

My wish is for us to just organically continue moving the needle to make Massachusetts more equitable and more competitive down the line. And I think that takes... It takes a lot of work, it will continue taking a lot of work, but also it will continue us thinking outside of the 128 loop. We have to think of Massachusetts as a whole, not just Greater Boston. And that is my wish for us too, to see all of Massachusetts as a whole, not just Greater Boston. Because I'm guilty of it, we all are. We just focus on Greater Boston and there's so much more to Massachusetts than our space.

Jon Bernstein:

And that wraps up another episode. Thank you so much for joining us, Eneida and for sharing your insights.

Eneida Roman:

Thank you, Jon. And thank you, Caroline. Thank you for having me. It's been delightful to be in community with you and to have this great conversation and to answer all your questions, gracias.

Jon Bernstein:

I'm Jon Bernstein.

Carolyn Jones:

I'm Carolyn Jones, and this is PNC C-Speak, the Language of Executives. Our guest today was Eneida Roman, president and CEO of Amplify Latinx.

Jon Bernstein:

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