



*Diego Leonardo*

Throughout HISPANIC HERITAGE MONTH, CTI will feature profiles of local Hispanic leaders to celebrate [#LowellHispanicExcellence](#) by learning about their experiences, perspectives, and the wisdom they share in our local communities.

**Hispanic Heritage Month 9/15-10/15  
An Interview with DIEGO LEONARDO**

Nominated by **Karonika Pholy Brown**, Job Developer, Financial Education Center at CTI

**What is your title/organization and/or involvement in the community, and what accomplishment are you most proud of?**

Executive Director/ Latinx Community Center for Empowerment - I'm really proud of the visibility work we are doing to the Latinx Community, bringing light to immigrant issues, breaking the language barrier to blue collar workers, collecting oral history of Latino leaders to change the narrative about latinos, civic engagement, and celebration of culture with the Lowell Hispanic & Latinx Festival.

**What does Hispanic Heritage Month mean to you?**

It means a time to reflect about what are latinos doing in the United States, means a time to celebrate our culture, time to share our diversity and also a space to share how diverse we are in the latino/hispanic community.

**What was one of the most difficult obstacles you have had to overcome?**

One of the most challenging obstacles I've faced was overcoming the language barrier when I first came to the US. I had to start from scratch in learning English at MCC. However, with determination and a strong support system, I not only completed my bachelor's degree but am now pursuing an MBA. This experience underscores that with belief and the right support, we can conquer even the most daunting challenges. We are capable; we just need to enable the right channels for success.

## **In your leadership role, how do you actively promote inclusivity and equity?**

In my leadership role at LCCE, I actively promote inclusivity and equity through a multifaceted approach that aligns with the organization's core values of prioritizing equity and including youth voices. Here are some of the key strategies and initiatives I employ:

- Youth Involvement
- Equity as a Core Value
- Inclusive Communication
- Undocumented Student and Immigrant Advocacy
- Diversity Training
- Equitable Resource Allocation
- Collaboration and Partnerships
- Continuous Learning

My approach to promoting inclusivity and equity in my leadership role at LCCE is rooted in a strong commitment to the organization's values. I actively engage youth voices, prioritize equity in all aspects of our work, foster inclusive communication, advocate for vulnerable communities, and continuously strive for improvement through education and collaboration.

## **What legacy do you hope to leave behind?**

I aspire to create a legacy that shines a beacon of hope for a brighter future, one where education opportunities are abundant for people of color, especially within the Latinx community. In this vision, our city thrives on collaboration, and every support system flourishes through partnerships. These collaborations inspire more individuals to generously share their resources and opportunities.

In this future, Latino leaders are not just counted but are part of a rich tapestry of representation. Their concerns are addressed with a sense of purpose, offering a tangible hope of resolution. This, in turn, encourages greater participation in volunteerism, fostering a culture of giving back and rewriting the narrative about Latinos in Lowell. Together, we are dedicated to building a more prosperous, inclusive, and civically vibrant Lowell, fueled by our collective efforts and determination.

## **Looking back on your leadership journey, what would you tell your younger self about embracing your identity and stepping into a leadership role with confidence?**

I will tell my younger self, to not be afraid of change, there is a lot to learn, and there is always good people whiling to help.

**How has being Hispanic influenced your work and your life?**

It shows me that there is a world of possibilities and history talks about the different groups that migrate to the US and now we are the ones being in the focus of the story, this means there is a chance to create our own narrative of hope, success, and support.

**What experiences or individuals have been your biggest sources of inspiration in your journey as a leader?**

I take a lot of inspiration from those that are willing to mentor me and help me without wanting anything back, those that give their time selflessly to volunteering and are passionate about the journey. Mostly from my dad, changing careers and coming to a different country with a happy mindset changes the way you see things especially when there is no more hope to live than 15 days and you turns those around and make it a life time, never giving up and showing that everything is possible with a smile or his face, that inspire me to be better than him if I ever could.

**What can the community do more of to recognize Hispanic heritage throughout the year?**

Allowing peoples voices to the decision-making tables, such as council, leadership roles and effort to allow for more information to Spanish/Portuguese speakers.

**What has been the most rewarding part of your commitment to the community?**

Helping people to create their own success story.

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