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IMMIGRANT BUSINESS

IMMIGRANTS GUIDE TO SUCCESS IN THE US

Lessons of an Immigrant Entrepreneur



To succeed as a manager, you must find balance in everything you do, from finances, recruitment, dealing with investors, and empowering your staff.



Candelaria and Roberto Ortega and their children

In a recent interview with the editors of Immigrant Business, Roberto Ortega, CEO of KLA Schools in Miami, revealed some of the most important lessons he, and his wife Candelaria, KLA's Director of Pedagogy, had learned during their journey from South American emigrants to successful American entrepreneurs.

Lessons Learned

1. Doing a startup is much more difficult than you imagine when you start out. It means having to work endless hours in order to take something to the next level.
2. It's very difficult to manage people; it's really an art. Maintaining an equilibrium is the key to success. You have to be very fair and just in the decisions that you make, because you're dealing with people and people that talk amongst themselves. We're all human beings, and when you have to tell people that they must do certain things, sometimes its impossible to be diplomatic. Where do you draw the line?



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3. Sometimes you have to to make decisions that impact costs, but at the same time may impact the quality of your service or product. Again, keeping things balanced is the key. You have to make sure that, on the one hand, you are providing your staff with the resources they need, so that they can provide a quality product, but at the same time, since you are running a for profit organization, you must meet budgets and expectations.
4. You have to empower your top managers. Even though they're your employees, you want them to feel that the businesses — in our case, the schools — are theirs. Face it, there's no salary that will compensate for what a good director or manager will do. Personnel is key in the early childhood education industry, as in many others, and you must keep the staff happy to keep turnover low. It's critical, and it's one of the most challenging things we have to do.



Sometimes you make decisions based on your desire to fulfill your obligations to your investors rather than using your judgement and intuition.

5. You don't have to do everything at the beginning. We built in more overhead that we really needed at the beginning of KLA Schools. When you prepare for a startup and build a business plan, you have all these little boxes to fill in. Afterwards, you realize that all those boxes don't need to be filled in on Day One. When you deal with investors and families and friends, they tend to overestimate the resources that are needed. Sometimes you make decisions based on your desire to fulfill your obligations to your investors rather than using your judgement and intuition.