

Understanding Hispanic Leaders in North America

Written by Jess Fairbanks, Hispanic People Groups Coordinator

According to the US Census, the Hispanic population of the United States is 45,504,311¹ which would make the United States the second largest Spanish speaking nation in the world, after Mexico.² If you add to this the Hispanic population in Canada, 304,245,³ you have a massive segment of the overall population of North America. What this means is that you have already come across some Hispanic leaders or are looking for one for any given Hispanic ministry in your local area; and if you have encountered Hispanic leadership you have found that we operate slightly different than the leadership in other cultures.

The last thirty years I have been developing Hispanic church leaders and have come to understand how we operate. Although there are many characteristics of leadership in any diverse culture, let me share with you a few areas where we are strong and a few where we could improve. I hope that this will help in your understanding of Hispanic leaders.

Areas of Strength

- **Service:** One of the greatest strengths of the Hispanic leader is our sense of service. We are there to meet the needs of those to whom we minister. Living in a culture full of great needs we are ready to help those that have social as well as spiritual needs.
- **Giving:** The Hispanic culture is a giving one and our leaders reflect it. I have seen sharing and generosity by some leaders taken to extremes that I have not often seen in other cultures. Some pastors live on very low incomes and still abundantly give of themselves and of their resources to those in need.
- **Family Involvement:** Our Hispanic culture places a high value on the family and consequently the ministry in the Hispanic church is often a family affair. A father will pastor, his wife will lead the women's ministries, the daughter will be in charge of the nursery, and the son will sing and lead music.

Areas of Improvement

- **Delegation:** The word leadership, and its derivatives, is not an original concept to the Hispanic world. In Spanish there are words like *jefe* (boss), *encargado* (one in charge), *el mero mero* (the main one), etc. The concept of leadership is a transplant from other cultures and not always understood in all its implications. I have observed that this sometimes produces leaders that are not very good at delegating and therefore teamwork, and some Hispanic pastors transfer this trait to their ministries thus limiting their congregation's growth to the pastor's abilities.
- **Income:** Due to the small size of Hispanic congregations and very limited sources of financial aid, income for Hispanic pastors is very low, and most Hispanic leaders are either bi-vocational or volunteer. I have personally seen cases where this situation has not allowed the leaders to be fully engaged in ministry.
- **Training:** Some Hispanic leaders are not proficient in English, and we do not have as many academic or skills development opportunities in Spanish as there are available in English. Most of what Hispanic leaders bring to ministry is from a-learn as you go experience or by adopting something they have seen modeled by another Hispanic leader!

In my opinion, in life there are skills that one can learn and others that are intuitive. Hispanic leaders, because of our culture, are blessed with an innate tendency to serve, give, and have a strong family unit. If you can encourage Hispanic leaders to see the need to delegate, develop stewardship emphasis in their churches, and seek training opportunities in Spanish, they will be more effective.

Of course there are always exceptions and when you find a Hispanic leader who delegates well, operates by sound financial principals, and takes advantage of available training in Spanish or English you have the "almost perfect" leader. This would also be true in any other culture.

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For the original article visit: <http://www.churchplantingvillage.net/churchplantingvillagepb.aspx?pageid=8589989804>

¹ U.S. Census Bureau. Population Estimates 2000-2007. www.census.gov, 10/12/2009.

² Wikipedia. Spanish in the United States. www.wikipedia.org, 10/12/2009.

³ Statistic Canada. 2006 Census. www.statcan.gc.ca, 10/12/2009.