

# Nely Galán, Latina Dynamo

By Sylvia Mendoza

**F**acing off with mega entrepreneur Donald Trump in the television show *The Celebrity Apprentice* didn't much faze **Nely Galán**. Dubbed the "Tropical Tycoon" by *The New York Times Magazine*, she was a self-made media mogul herself, earning her first six figures before she was 30 years old. As owner and president of Galán Entertainment, she had already been quite successful as a television producer of more than 600 different types of shows in English and Spanish, including the acclaimed *The Swan*.

As the first Latina president of Telemundo – and one of the first Latina producers in Hollywood – she was all about constantly challenging herself professionally, which gave her a springboard for paying it forward in areas that mattered to her personally. Trump's show, for example, gave her a chance to earn \$250,000 for her charity of choice, Count Me In. Since then, Galán has started many new ventures, including her latest – The Adelante Movement, an organization dedicated to empower, inspire, and mentor Latinas to become financially independent entrepreneurs and community leaders.

"I'm about changing with the times and finding your own emerging markets," Galán explains. "If you keep doing what's comfortable, you're not changing with the times, you're not growing."

Featured in HBO's *The Latino List* documentary as one of the most influential voices in the Latino community, she founded The Adelante Movement to provide a forum for Latinas to aspire to bigger and better – in voice, presence, income, and impact. "The Adelante Movement was created for all of us to unite socially, economically and politically," Galán says. "I've learned that the world is our oyster, ours to truly have – but only if we are bold enough to take it."

The mission of The Adelante Movement is stated

on its website in a way that brings a personal element to its global outreach: "We are now the emerging economic market in this country. We need to take ourselves to a higher place for the sake of our children. We need to own more businesses, raise more money, bring franchises to our families, pay for our children's colleges and become a powerful voice for our community."

Serving on the board of the Coca-Cola Advisory



Nely Galán

Committee for three years, Galán learned from Coca-Cola research that Latinas are the economic emerging market in this country and that they control \$1 trillion dollars in purchasing power, she explains.

“There’s no traditional way of looking at things any more. You have to take a leap of faith to find your own path and make an impact,” says Galán.

She wants Latinas to be financially savvy and responsible for their own futures, their own happiness and their own fulfillment – and be a voice in their communities by voting. There is a place for Latina entrepreneurs in the American business arena. “There’s power in Latina influence but we need to segue into mainstream America while being authentic in both worlds. The advantage is that you win in both worlds.”

### The Leap of Faith

It wasn’t an easy path for Galán, who, as a first generation immigrant from Cuba, credits her parents’ work ethic and faith for her own. “I had the choice at 25 to start a business. I had the choice at 29 to not give up. Then I had to take the leap of faith. I had no mortgage, no kids. At 29 when my efforts weren’t working, I had a conversation with God and asked, ‘Really? You’re not going to even throw me a bone?’ but there was a deep faith in me where I believed, even in those difficult times, that bad things happen

for a reason and things would work out for the best.”

And they did. After years of tireless effort and risk taking, her business and reputation grew solid and strong. Now, with The Adelante Movement, she can share her journey, her highs and lows, accomplishments and hard lessons learned to help other Latinas invest in themselves and in their futures. Patience, hard work, long hours and getting over instant gratification are the keys.

“The missing piece of the puzzle is sacrifice. Live beneath your means to help yourself in your future.”

It may be extreme for many, but it obviously worked for Galán. For five years, she rotated five outfits, lived in a four-story walk up in New York, never took a vacation, and started investing and saving. “If you don’t have a year’s salary in the bank, you need to find another way to make money – no fun stuff until you reach that goal,” she says.

Even now, her early practices are habits.

“I never pay retail for clothes. Ever. I could fly first class and I do sometimes, but when I fly with my kid, I never fly first class. I don’t ever want him to feel entitled. I look at young girls now who vacation two or three times a year and I ask them, why? How? *¿Qué es eso?* You have to take care of yourself financially first, then have faith in the road you choose, then have fun.”

And you have to stay focused, she says. Her favorite book is *Rich Dad, Poor Dad*. Her favorite investment

***The Adelante Movement was created for all of us to unite socially, economically and politically. I’ve learned that the world is our oyster, ours to truly have – but only if we are bold enough to take it.”***

**Nely Galán**



is in real estate – preconstruction, dorms, city sales, foreclosures. “It’s like playing Monopoly. The day an investment closes, flip it and double your investment.” Her favorite slogan is “Don’t buy shoes. Buy buildings.” Her favorite part of The Adelante Tour is securing powerful guest speakers from all walks of life such as Nobel Peace Prize Laureate Rigoberta Menchu, Treasurer of the United States Rosie Rios, and best-selling author Sandra Cisneros – and seeing the impact of their stories on young audiences.

For those just venturing into the world of entrepreneurship and community leadership, there will be risks, she says. It will be scary and there will be setbacks. But they almost always move a woman and a business forward.

She brings up Richard Branson, Virgin Group founder, whose first privatized Virgin Galactic space flight crashed last year. “It’s just a setback,” says Galán. “In the quest for something that will be huge, of course there will be setbacks.”

But setbacks are a chance to get things right. “Sometimes even I feel like I’m going backwards. Estas loca, right? All you have to do is stop and reassess. If you don’t stop and reboot, you won’t learn.”

### Filling the Void

Not having completed her higher education, Galán felt a void in her heart and life. Taking another leap of faith a few years ago, she stopped working completely and dedicated herself to school, financing her own education.

“I was so advanced career-wise but I skipped the developmental stages of my life. I felt 65, not 45. At 18, I went to work and didn’t go through the rites of passage that allow you to grow with that perspective of youth. I thought, ‘How can I be so smart about business but still feel the void?’”

Finishing her bachelor’s degree and earning her master’s and doctorate in clinical and cultural psychology, she found her voice on an entirely different level. Her dissertation was developing a hyper-focused entrepreneurial program for Latinas that was the core idea for The Adelante Movement.

“I finally felt congruent – a grown woman, solid and mature, two parts coming together. I knew the timing was right. Three graduations in four years. It was such a magical experience to walk.”

When she earned her PhD, her gift to herself was a trip around the world in a private jet. “For once I felt it was finally okay to splurge.”

In true Galán style, the trip brought more than

R&R and celebration. It brought a new perspective and great appreciation for her life, bringing her full circle to her beliefs and mission. “What I saw in all these countries I visited was that there is no place in the world like here, where the American Dream is alive and well. So what are we waiting for? What is the void you need to fill?”

### Walking The Walk

Galán believes it is never too late, no matter your age, to become your own best advocate for acquiring abundance. “Ground yourself,” she says. “Your life can change in two years, dramatically. It takes just two years to radically shift your life.”

She emphasizes that it doesn’t have to be a linear path, just a path that is congruent to self-growth. Another big lesson she learned while in school was from an 80-year-old, who was a foremost expert on Freud. She told Galán, “Be a super expert on something. One thing. What is it for you?”

“Finally I can say it’s mastering entrepreneurship. I feel like I walk the walk. This is the purest place of me. I’m more grounded with a humility that’s an important Latino aspect of success. Not to be ‘pobrecito’ but to harness power from a sense of what’s important.”

She wants to follow in the footsteps of Mazal Renford, Israeli diplomat to the United Nations’ Commission on the Status of Women, who travels the world initiating programs that help empower women to become financially stable and a foundation of their communities. She has started that mission with The Adelante Movement.

Galán returns to her belief that Latinas have so much going for them – but they have to believe that, too, and that their lives can be rich in every way. “We have to get out of the thought that we can’t live a life of abundance, that it’s unattainable. It’s attainable. We will reframe what the word means and make it tangible for Latinas.”

Her own life is an example of abundance that also affects thought, work ethic, mission and mentorship. Being featured on *Celebrity Apprentice* lit a fire in Galán that she hopes translates to The Adelante Movement. “I was the only Latina entrepreneur and I had to get over the feeling of being ‘less than.’ I was never less than. I’m an entrepreneur. That’s a constant in my life. We have to aspire to not be marginalized. That’s what I want Latinas to know from The Adelante Movement.” 