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Look, if I open the window and they're not shooting at me, it's a good day.

As told to Matt Alderton

When **Fabiana Lacerca-Allen** was just six years old, Argentine guerillas tried—on three separate occasions—to kidnap her. The daughter of Carlos Lacerca, an Argentine politician working to unseat the National Reorganization Process (a military dictatorship that controlled Argentina from 1976 until 1983), she was not an easy target. Not only did the attempted kidnappings fail, but they transformed Lacerca-Allen into a lifelong crusader for all things fair, just, and good. Now a chief compliance officer in the United States, she continues to draw on her radical childhood experiences to guide her through a different kind of tumult: corporate America.

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I grew up in Argentina, when Argentina was a dictatorship. My father was the first state secretary of industry in Raúl Alfonsín's [democratically elected] government after the military dictatorship. So, from a very young age, I learned the value of doing the right thing for the right reasons, despite the obvious dangers.

I always knew I wanted to make a difference. When the first attempted kidnapping happened, I came to school and the teacher asked me, “What do you want to be when you're older?” I said, “A queen.” The teacher looked at me and said, “Why?” I said, “Well, to make things right.” She said, “You cannot be a queen.” She explained to me the reasons why and asked, “What else do you want to be?” I said, “A lawyer.” Again, she said, “Why?” I said, “For the same reason.” I always wanted to change things that were not right. It was natural to want to be a lawyer.

I have a very acute understanding of what's right and wrong because I've seen right and I've seen wrong. My father had a lot of friends and a lot of enemies. One of his very good friends was the head of a very well-known newspaper. He one day came to meet with my father and when they went to the living room I hid behind a sofa to listen to what they had to say. He said, “Carlos, I think they're following me. They want to kill me.” My father said, “Are you sure?” He said, “I'm positive.” My father said, “Lay low. Let me see if I can find something out.” A week later he was shot and killed.

My upbringing prepared me well for corporate America. I have great instincts. I am very self-assured. I trust what I see. I trust my gut feeling. That's a great lesson for corporate America: trust yourself and do the right thing. It has consequences, but they're worth it.

I became a lawyer in Argentina. However, my father said, “You and I have a deal. The deal is, you have to study at the best universities. Until you do that, you have a debt with me.” He and I agreed that I was going to come to the United States and study at the best universities. So I came to the United States and chose UCLA [University of California, Los Angeles]. It was the first time I'd ever been outside of a very protected environment on my own. I loved school and did really well, so I decided to finish my master's in law, which took over a year, then my thesis. Then I got a job offer. I remember calling my daddy and I said, “I have a great job offer here, what should I do?” He said, “I'm going to give you the toughest advice a father gives a daughter: don't collect regrets. Never look back and say, ‘What if?’ Do it for six months and that will give you an idea of what it's truly all about.” It's been 15 years.

I've spent my career working for Fortune 100 and Fortune 500 companies in legal and compliance roles. Many of the leadership qualities I get recognized for come from my upbringing. For example, my background prepared me to be very calm in crises. My boss not long ago was telling me, “I cannot believe you remained so calm in this crisis.” I said, “Look, if I open the window and they're not shooting at me, it's a good day.”

It's very important for me to share my experiences [with young people]. I tell them: be passionate about doing the right thing. Don't hesitate to ask questions. Look for the right answer, even if it's not the easiest answer. Seek advice from the experts. Ask for somebody that you respect and admire in your industry to mentor you. Look globally at how other people do things. Always think: how is this going to impact the company? Yourself? Your reputation and your company's reputation? How would you explain this to your kids? Would you be able to say that you applied your values consistently? If you're doing all of that, you're a hell of a compliance lawyer and I'd like to meet you.

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LAW

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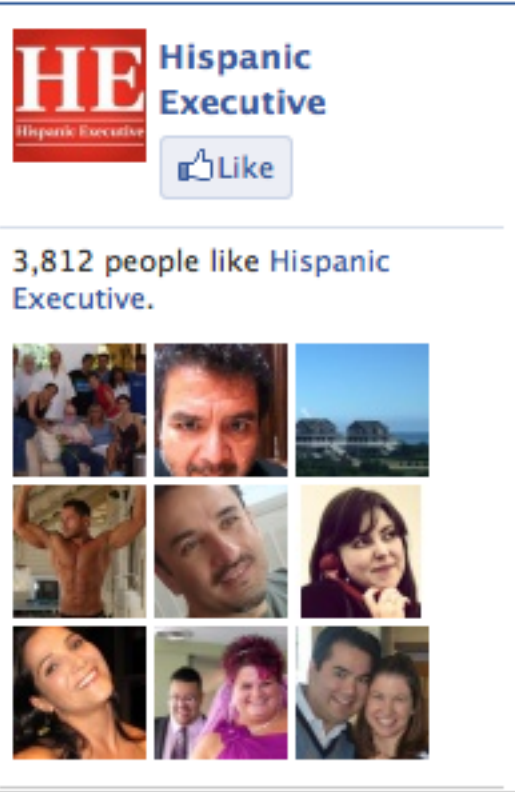
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