

Wednesday, January 27, 2010

SBA alumni at forefront of health care reform

When 4.7 million Americans tuned in to watch ABC-TV's primetime health care special in late June, George Corona, MBA '85, didn't have to turn up the volume on his television to hear what Barack Obama had to say about his plan for health care reform. Corona just pulled his chair a little closer to President Obama in the East Room of the White House.

Corona, executive vice president and chief operating officer of Kelly Services, Inc., was one of more than 160 guests handpicked for the "Questions for the President: Prescription for America" audience in late June 2009.

The group — a mix of physicians, students, business owners, Fortune 500 executives, and insured and uninsured individuals — mingled during a reception before the Q & A session moderated by Diane Sawyer and Charles Gibson. They also met the president.

"He is very engaging," says Corona. "During the commercial breaks, he would get up and talk with the audience. It was clear that he is very passionate about the subject and well-versed on the issues."

Kelly Services is a powerful advocate for health care reform; the company provides temporary help to more than 90 percent of the Fortune 500 companies and employs more than 650,000 people. Kelly's chief executive officer, Carl Camden, is a founding member of the Better Health Care Together coalition, an organization that advocates for significant changes in the U.S. health care system. "It's very important that our free agent workforce have access to health care and that it's affordable," Corona says.

People first

Corona got to his seat in the East Room through an unexpected route, not one he would have predicted as an accounting major at Wayne State University or as a graduate business student at Oakland. He started his career in finance, as planned, but when a position at Digital Equipment Corp. exposed him to other sides of the business, he was intrigued. Advised that a stint in sales would open the door to more business management opportunities, he walked away from his director-level finance job to start over as a sales representative.

"I am an analytical introvert and had to work hard to overcome that," he says of his career about-face. His efforts led Kelly, then a customer, to recruit him to work first in sales and later in regional management. Corona's work guiding the company's shift away from selling to smaller businesses to focus on large companies eventually led to his current position as chief operating officer.

Soft spoken and humble, Corona gives credit to his own hard work, determination and willingness to push himself outside his comfort zone, but says the major reason for his professional success is the people who work for him. "If you select good people, lay out the plan for them and let them do their jobs, you and the organization will do well," he says.

Corona should know. He researches how to attract and retain the best people so that Kelly can stay ahead of the competition. "Every study we've ever done about recruiting and retaining people shows that when employees leave, it's not because of pay or benefits. It's about how their direct manager treats them," he says. As a result, Kelly has invested heavily in leadership development.

Workforce savvy

This is especially critical, he says, as employers anticipate a global shortage of skilled labor.

"It's not obvious now because of the recession, but the skills shortage will be acute. The companies that win when that happens will have access to the best people in the marketplace. We want to get our fair share of them to run the Kelly business and to work at customer sites," he says.

A believer in the servant leadership philosophy that encourages managers to see themselves as working for employees, customers and shareholders, Corona is collaborative.

"If you involve the team in the decision making and allow them to have a seat at the table, you'll get better results because you'll have buy-in," he says.

While Corona enjoys impressive professional success in a Fortune 500 corporation, he's most proud of his ability to be a good husband and father for his two children, now in their teens. "Even with all my travels, I have always managed to attend their games, coach their teams and be there for the real milestones in their lives," he says. "That's the most important thing to me."

This story was originally published in the **Fall 2009 issue of OU Magazine**.

By: Sandra Beckwith, a freelance writer from Fairport, N.Y.

SUMMARY

When 4.7 million Americans tuned in to watch ABC-TV's primetime health care special in late June, George Corona, MBA '85, didn't have to turn up the volume on his television to hear what Barack Obama had to say about his plan for health care reform. Corona just pulled his chair a little closer to President Obama in the East Room of the White House.

Corona, executive vice president and chief operating officer of Kelly Services, Inc., was one of more than 160 guests handpicked for the "Questions for the President: Prescription for America" audience in late June 2009.

Created by Claudette Zolkowski-Brown (zolkowsk@oakland.edu) on Wednesday, January 27, 2010
Modified by Claudette Zolkowski-Brown (zolkowsk@oakland.edu) on Wednesday, January 27, 2010
Article Start Date: Wednesday, January 27, 2010