

DIVERSITY

Dialogues



José Cruzado, Chief Clerk, Livingston County Supreme & County Court

ON DIVERSITY: When you have a team that is diverse, you're providing the best service to the people you're trying to help.

Susan Goodman: José, nice to talk to you today. What three words would you use to describe your current role?

José Cruzado: Well rewarding, it's demanding, it's challenging, and a whole slew of other words I can probably slip in, but I think for the most part that covers it.

Susan Goodman: Can you elaborate?

José Cruzado: Rewarding in the sense that if you take the time to get to know your employees, you can really have a positive impact on their careers and their personal lives. Getting to know them, what challenges they have and trying to help them through makes them better people and better employees overall.

Also, rewarding because you get to assist the public. We deal with folks who are facing criminal charges, divorces. If you can guide them through the system and make it better for them in some way, I think that's pretty rewarding.

Challenging in the sense that it's evolving. Policy is changing. Laws are changing. Rules are changing. You're constantly creating procedures and changing procedures. You're working with different agencies and they

have different requirements and needs. There's this constant negotiation going on.

Susan Goodman: What is your personal definition of diversity and how do you encourage people to honor the uniqueness of their backgrounds.

José Cruzado: A diverse workforce should include employees with different perspectives, education, training. But it should also include people from different cultural backgrounds, including LGBTQ, Asian communities, people of color. I think that when you have a team that is diverse, you're providing the best service to those you're trying to help. I feel pretty fortunate to work in the Seventh Judicial District. They've been very generous, allowing me time to write educational articles talking about history--Latino history, African-American history, LGBTQ history. We host events, with diverse guest speakers speaking about their career path. Our Administrative Judge, District Executive and Deputy District Executive have been wonderful to allow us this opportunity.

Susan Goodman: How do you encourage people one-on-one to honor the uniqueness of their backgrounds?

José Cruzado: When I speak to folks, I try to help them find what's great about them, what's unique about them, what they bring to the table and helping them feel comfortable about participating.

As for encouraging careers in the courts, I speak to younger students, to college-level students. We have an entire day dedicated to careers in the courts. They hear from someone in human resources. I have a court reporter speak to them, a judge and an attorney. I try to include as many professions within the court system as I can.

Susan Goodman: What would you say are the things you like most about your job?

José Cruzado: Luckily, I'm part of a great team. I work with extremely knowledgeable people. I enjoy the fact that I'm constantly, consistently learning from them, from my staff, from the law clerks, from the judges to the secretaries.

Susan Goodman: What would you characterize as your biggest achievement to date personally or professionally, or both?

José Cruzado: I guess professionally, I guess it's being hired as a Chief Clerk. I started with the sheriff's office as a corrections officer, and then transferred over to the courts as a security officer. I knew 15 years ago that I wanted to be a Chief Clerk. I applied for it. I didn't get an interview. I started to research, okay, why? What am I missing? I started talking to people. I found different skills that I was lacking.

José Cruzado: I went back to school. I finished my bachelor's degree, I got my master's degree. I learned a little bit more about the court, what specific jobs entailed, and I reapplied. And finally, I got a job with the Alleghany County Supreme and County Court as a Deputy Chief Clerk. And two and a half years after that, I fulfilled my longtime journey of being a Chief Clerk.

Susan Goodman: That's wonderful. That's a great story. Did you want to go into a personal achievement as well?

José Cruzado: I grew up extremely poor in Rochester, New York. I spent most of my life there. My parents didn't have a lot of education. I was the first to go to college. I was extremely proud to be hired by the sheriff's office and then by the courts. But personally, it's setting that example for my children. I'm a firm believer that if you go to college, your children will follow. And you know what? I have five children. I'm down to my last one to get to college.

Susan Goodman: That's a great story. Thank you. Can you describe a typical day in your professional life?

José Cruzado: Sure. In this type of job, you're putting out fires all the time. You're dealing with chambers, some issues the chamber staff might have, the judge might have, your own staff, your partnering agencies. So, I come in, I check my emails, I check staffing, make sure that if someone has court, that they're here ready to go. I address any staff shortages.

José Cruzado: Sometimes I'm clerking. I work in a smaller court, so I might have to go into court that day. If we have trials, I'm the Commissioner of Jurors. I want to be engaged with the jurors. I want to be engaged with the folks that come in from our community. I want to make sure that they're being served as best they can.

Susan Goodman: Who do you consider a mentor and why?

José Cruzado: I guess early on I was lucky enough to have people that really took an interest in my life. When folks in high school were telling me that I wasn't college material, one of my teachers encouraged me, took me to colleges. My parents worked two or three jobs, so they didn't have time to do all that. But this one gentleman took the time to do it. And I still talk to him and go to him for advice.

José Cruzado: Maria Barrington, she's retired now, but she was Chief of Staff for the Deputy Chief Administrative Judge outside of New York City, and Ronald Pawelczak, the District Executive for the Seventh Judicial District.

The person I most confide in is Loreen Nash. Loreen is a Chief Clerk in Monroe County Family Court. I can always expect an honest answer to

questions and honest feedback, which I think is probably the most important thing.

Susan Goodman: Finally, before you leave this position, which hopefully will be a long time hence, what would you like your greatest achievement to be?

José Cruzado: I hope that in the future we see more people of color applying for jobs. I hope that I can reach out to people of modest means and share with them all the great, free services that the court has to offer. I think that for me, the relationship between the courts and the community is the most important aspect of my job.

Susan Goodman: So you're doing a lot to turn that around?

José Cruzado: Yeah, right. That's probably one of the most important things to me before I leave. I want to have programs in place that will help nurture those community relationships.

Susan Goodman: That's a great way to end. Thank you so much, Jose.