

John Caher: Welcome to Amici, News and Insight from the New York Judiciary and Unified Court System. I'm John Caher. For today's program we are again turning the microphone over to Susan Goodman with the Office of Workforce Diversity for another in a series of Diversity Dialogue interviews. Through these interviews, Susan focuses on individuals within the Unified Court System from diverse backgrounds who play a vital role in helping the court system achieve its goals and its mission. Today, Susan interviews Jose Cruzado.

Susan Goodman: Jose, nice to talk to you today. I wanted to talk to you about your current position as the chief clerk in Livingston County for the County and Supreme Courts. What three words would you use to describe your current role?

Jose 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 on any of those individual words?

Jose Cruzado: Oh gosh I can, sure. 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 in their lives and trying to help them through that I think kind of makes them better people and better employees overall.

Jose Cruzado: I think it's rewarding because you get to help the public. One of the few things that I think that we see in the courts really happens in adoption. But you know what? We deal with folks that are facing criminal charges, divorces. If you can help those folks through the system and make it better for them in some way, I think that's pretty rewarding.

Susan Goodman: You mentioned adoption. I missed what you were saying.

Jose Cruzado: One of the few good things happen in the courts are adoption, but they happen in family court, they don't really happen in the county court.

Susan Goodman: Right. You used two other words, challenging and-

Jose Cruzado: And demanding.

Susan Goodman: And demanding.

Jose Cruzado: Challenging in the sense that it's constantly, 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 different needs. So there's this constant negotiation that's going on. It's fun in many ways, but it can be challenging. I think it's great because it makes you work for it, it makes you earn it, it makes you become better at your job when you're faced with those challenges.

Jose Cruzado: And similar was demanding. Just busy. The duties are constantly varying. I'm a commissioner of jurors here, I'm a supervisor, but I also clerk in court. I greet jurors, do juror orientation. I'm working with chambers a lot. I work with the county clerk's office, probation, so it's very demanding. I'm mostly dealing with, not dealing with, but managing those relationships.

Susan Goodman: Since this whole program is about diversity, I wanted to ask you about your personal definition of diversity and how you encourage people to honor the uniqueness of each of their backgrounds. The first question is really what your definition of diversity is.

Jose Cruzado: A diverse workforce should include employees with different especially, perspectives, education, training. But it s should also include people from different cultural backgrounds, including LGBTQ community, Asian communities, people of color. I think that when you have a team that is diverse, you're providing the best customer service that you're trying to help. It gives different perspectives and understanding of the communities you work with.

Jose Cruzado: As far as the second part of the question, I think I'm' pretty fortunate to work in the seventh judicial district. They've been very generous, allowing me time to write articles, educational articles, talking about history, Latino history, African-American history, LGBTQ history. I think that our articles are pretty well read. I think that people enjoy them. At least I've gotten some very good feedback about that, and not just in the seventh but throughout the state. We host events, we host an event every year and we have guest speakers speaking about their career path. I just think that the seventh judicial district, I think that our administrative judge and our district executive and deputy district executive have been wonderful to allow us this opportunity.

Susan Goodman: Obviously, writing articles and working and encouraging a diverse workforce are major. How do you encourage people one on one to honor the uniqueness of their own backgrounds?

Jose Cruzado: Are you speaking about people of color?

Susan Goodman: People from all minority backgrounds, yes, of all kinds.

Jose Cruzado: When I speak to folks, I try to help them find those things that are ... I want to put that in the right sense. You're trying to bring out the best in people. You're helping them find what's great about them, what's unique about them, what do they bring to the table that's unique and helping them feel comfortable about them and participating.

Jose Cruzado: so one of the issues that we have, because we talk about diversity quite a bit. But one of the things that we don't talk about is inclusion. In my own experience, I've been shy about speaking up at meetings, speaking up about my own personal experiences for fear of being, I don't want to say ridiculed, that's a little bit of a harsh word, but being judged because I have that different background. I want to help people understand that it's important to share who they are, what they are, not only them but those that are listening to kind of listen with an open mind and accept that those experiences are not a hindrance to the committee or to the group, but a big contribution to the group.

Susan Goodman: I don't know if you can give an example perhaps of something, but if you can and if you feel like comfortable doing that, that would be great. If it's not something that you can come up just as we're talking, then I understand.

Jose Cruzado: I guess I can give an example of my own personal experience I guess, but that's something we should probably skip, if you don't mind.

Susan Goodman: Okay. No, not at all. It's up to you. In terms of encouraging people who are either outside the system or inside the system who are from minority backgrounds, diverse backgrounds, what would you say to them? What would be your advice to them?

Jose Cruzado: Encouraging them in what sense?

Susan Goodman: Encouraging them to move up in the ladder, encouraging them to apply for positions that they don't have yet, encouraging them to be open to being part of the system or being interested in working in the court system, that kind of thing.

Jose Cruzado: There are a couple things that I do. I speak to younger students. I speak to college level students. The college students are part of the educational opportunity program, they're incoming students into the college, and

then I speak again to high school students. When I'm speaking to maybe an older group of people, I ask them to come to the court actually, like students from the colleges. I bring them in. We have an entire day actually dedicated to careers and courts.

Susan Goodman: That's wonderful.

Jose Cruzado: They actually come in. They speak to someone from human resources. I have a court reporter speak to them. I have a judge come in and speak to them, an attorney. I try to include as many professions within the court system as I can. I encourage them to sign up, we have these e-mail blasts that go out to, our human resources has a list of folks that they send them out to. So I ask that they all give me their e-mail so I can provide them to our human resources. I ask them to tell their friends about the jobs. I ask them if anyone ever has a question, they can call me personally to learn more about the job. We have human resources talk about the benefits of the job, the retirement system, what different types of pay grades there are.

Jose Cruzado: I also talk about the value of having them actually working for the courts. Our family in the seventh judicial district, our numbers are low. I explain to them-

Susan Goodman: Numbers of?

Jose Cruzado: Minorities that actually are working.

Susan Goodman: Number of the percentage.

Jose Cruzado: The percentage, yeah, it's very low. I believe it was under 2% last time I checked. We talk about that a little bit. I get a lot of questions as to why that is and such. One of the things that I try to explain to them is that the courts don't have money to go out there and recruit people. They're not gonna advertise jobs. So it's up us and folks like me, folks like yourself to get out into the community and talk about the opportunity within the courts. I hope that answers your question.

Susan Goodman: No, it answers it very well, very well. Now getting back to what you do, the main part of your job. What would you say are the things you like most about your job? I know you talked about it being rewarding and challenging and demanding, and so you touched upon that. But maybe just expand upon what you specifically like about your job.

Jose Cruzado: I work in supreme and county court and it's civil matters, criminal matters. I'm the commissioner of jurors as well in this county. You are hands in in every aspect of the court, in every part of it. You are fully engaged. You have to be fully engaged. You have to know a little bit or a lot about every part of the court. And personally, I love that. I love that I'm constantly learning, and again, working with different people, working with different agencies. You are really just fully involved in the court.

Jose Cruzado: Besides that, you're implementing policy, you're creating procedures. Again, it's something that I love personally that I like to do and be involved in. You're part of a team. 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. I learn something every day. Because everyone has different responsibilities and might have a different way to approach things. I love my job.

Susan Goodman: It sounds like it. It really comes across. What would you characterize as your biggest achievement to date personally or professionally, or both?

Jose Cruzado: I guess professionally, I guess it's being hired as a chief clerk. So really briefly, I'll try to give you a little short history. so you know I started with the sheriff's office as a corrections officer or in the jail, and then I worked, I transferred over to the courts as a court security office. I knew 15 years ago that that was that job I wanted to have, 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.

Jose 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 particular jobs entailed, and I reapplied. And finally, I got a job with the Allegheny County Supreme and County Court as a deputy chief clerk. And two and a half years after that, I fulfilled I guess my longtime journey of being a chief clerk in the court.

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

Jose Cruzado: I can say something and then you can keep it out if you want to. 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 sheriff's office and then extremely

proud to be hired 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 amazing.

Jose Cruzado: Being a great example, a great person, someone who's ethically sound who they can really look up to for the rest of their life.

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

Jose 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 check to see and make that they don't need anything starting out the day. I address any staff shortages.

Jose 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 like to clerk every trial. 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.

Jose Cruzado: Throughout the day, meetings. I attend a lot of meetings. I belong to a lot of associations. I belong to the Commission of Jurors Association, the Administrative Budget Task Force, the Clerks Association, and then I'm on several committees as well. So we meet a lot and you do a lot for those committees.

Jose Cruzado: At the end of the day, I kind of shut down a little bit and make sure that any pending issues are resolved and hopefully start the next day fresh as I process of my filings and paperwork, you know, those chores that I take upon myself.

Susan Goodman: Who do you consider a mentor and why? It sounds like there are probably a bunch of people who you work with since you've worked with very knowledgeable people. But who would you specifically say are your mentors and why? It doesn't have to be current, but anyone in your life that you feel has been or is a mentor.

Jose Cruzado: I guess early on I was lucky enough to have people that really look an interest in my life. I have a gentleman, he was a teacher, he actually became a good friend. But when those folks in high school were telling me that I wasn't college material, this gentleman encouraged me, took me colleges. My parents worked two or three jobs, so they didn't have time to do all that. But this gentleman took the time to do that. And I still have a decent relationship with him and I still can talk to him and someone I can confide in for advice.

Jose Cruzado: Most recently, and again there are probably multiple folks that have played this role in my life, especially within the courts. Again, we're blessed to work with some really wonderful people. I've spoken and taken time to speak and ask about my own, how I can improve my interviewing skills. Maria Barrington, Ronald Palzac, these are all folks that are wanting to take the time to talk to you and they want to see you grow and improve.

Susan Goodman: What are their positions? What are their jobs?

Jose Cruzado: Maria Barrington, she's retired now, but she was chief of staff for the courts. Several times I spoke with her. It wasn't something that was very regular, but several times she was very helpful. And Ron Palzac is the district executive for the seventh judicial district.

Jose Cruzado: I think the person I most reach out to that I can most confide in is Loreen Nash. Loreen is a chief clerk in [inaudible 00:21:17] County family court. I've been interviewed by her several times and I've sat on interview panels with her several times, so I've really learned a lot. She's someone that I respect, I trust, I have great faith in. She has always made herself available to answer questions, give advice, offer a word of encouragement. I can always expect an honest answer to questions and honest feedback, which I think is probably the most important thing.

Susan Goodman: What kinds of things do you go to her with?

Jose Cruzado: She's interviewed me in the past. I've asked her about that. Where can I improve? How can I be better? How can I have answered questions better? How were my mannerisms? Things like that that you don't think sometimes are important. Like, I tended to talk with my hands a lot. She said you might not want to do that so much, you know? Keep it professional. Don't be too friendly. She just had a different perspective. And again, I learned so much from her.

Jose Cruzado: Again, there are a lot of folks in the district office that are extremely helpful, a lot of leaders, a lot of managers. We have a lot of managers and folks that really want to see you grow and be better, be a better employee.

Susan Goodman: That's great that you have those people. Finally, before you leave this position, which hopefully will be a long time hence, what would you like your greatest achievement to be?

Jose Cruzado: I do a lot of community outreach and as I said I work a lot with students and the community. I hope that in the future we see more people of color applying for jobs. I want to continue what I'm doing. I want to do more, if I can, but I'd love to see more people applying and more people of color being hired in the courts, especially in our district.

Jose Cruzado: I also do a lot of community outreach as far as the access to justice program, court help, and I hope that I have reached out to every agency in [Monroe 00:23:48] County at least and let them know about those programs, about the do it yourself programs. I hope that I can reach out to people of modest means and share with them everything that the court has to offer that you don't have to pay for. I think a lot of people avoid courts because they think that they can't afford it. They can't afford to file for a name change.

Susan Goodman: Can you elaborate a little bit on the access to justice program in your area and how it works maybe just very briefly?

Jose Cruzado: Well, the access to justice program is not my program. It's our seventh judicial district's program. The office of court initiatives, it's their program.

Susan Goodman: Right. But how it works in your community.

Jose Cruzado: You have to guide me here a little bit. I'm not sure what exactly you're ...

Susan Goodman: Okay. I guess what I'm trying to get at is you're very behind this program and feel that it's a good thing for the community and for people of modest means. How does your involvement with it make it something that is expanding or that you're helping to expand or that you're helping to make people more aware of? Your involvement with it and how it's making things better.

Jose Cruzado: In Monroe County, we held a mini-concert. We invited many local agencies, family services, center for dispute settlement, several of the

colleges that had campuses in town, in the city. We invited members of the police report, members of probation. We just reached out to a whole slew of agencies and asked them to come into the courthouse and presented what the access to justice program meant. We had Judge Fisher and Tracy McNeil presented everything that the access to justice program does and programs were available, for example court help. The glossaries, the do it yourself forms, the explanation of what exactly small claims is and how you file a small claim. All of these things that are out there for folks that they could do for themselves without hiring an attorney since a lot of them have clients that can't afford to hire an attorney. It was critical that they know that these services were out there for them.

Jose Cruzado: We hope then that those agencies went out into the community, back to their clients, to the folks that they're serving, and take back that information to them. I in turn followed up and went and spoke to their employees, sort of trained them as to what the access to justice program was and what court help provided.

Jose Cruzado: One of the other things that's a big success in the seventh judicial district is the help desk for folks come and sort of have a attorney from volunteer legal services try to help them and try to answer questions, speak to them as a procedure. Again, services that are available that so many don't know about and that the court can't really advertise to the public because they don't have the funds to do that.

Susan Goodman: You see this is an important part of your legacy, if you can reach out and make people more aware of these kinds of things in the community?

Jose Cruzado: Yeah, of course, of course. I think that for me, the relationship between the courts and the community is probably the most important relationship that the courts have that they ... I apologize for lack of a better word. They don't embrace as much as they could. I think that those folks that are in the community, the ones, the 75% of the people that you serve are coming from this section of Monroe County, this area. We don't really embrace that too much. We really don't try to improve those relationships, nurture those relationships. Really to me, that's the most important aspect of my job.

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

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

Susan Goodman: With the community?

Jose Cruzado: With the community. We have a program that's called just law that Judge Craig Dorn, our administrative judge, has been fully supporting where we are asking students to write about what justice means to me. We recently had 500 essays that we had to review from students in the the Rochester City School District. Those students are being honored at a ceremony in March. They're receiving prizes.

Jose Cruzado: But to me, I know that that's important that they learn about careers in the the courts, about everything that we do in the courts. But the fact that it gives them a voice, and hopefully someone hears how the court system affected them, to me that's an important thing, that again we're reaching out to the community and trying to understand our community a little bit better.

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

Jose Cruzado: Thank you.

Susan Goodman: I really appreciate you talking to us today. I hope that your legacy with your work in the community continues and thoughts and prayers.

Jose Cruzado: If I have anything to say about it, it will.

Susan Goodman: Okay.

Jose Cruzado: Thank you so much.

Susan Goodman: Thank you.

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