



SUPPLY CHAIN ASSOCIATE SPOTLIGHT

Associate Spotlight: Hector Zambrano



Hector's father left, Hector right

Demand Planner Hector Zambrano didn't have an easy journey to success. He was met with many challenges along the way. So how did this Mexico native go from living in a foreign country with little money, no contacts and unable to utter a single word of English to a well-educated, successful demand planner? Through belief in himself and unwavering dedication to achieving his dreams.

Hector was born and raised in Mexico to a family of limited means and limitless challenges. By the end of his sixth-grade year, he was selling produce at a local market to help support his family. Still, even as a child, Hector had hopes for a better life, and a true passion for knowledge. It was not until a few years later however, that he would discover a path to greatness and a lifelong home in the United States.

When Hector was a teenager, he was close with a neighboring family who frequently traveled to the US for work. The children in the family were raised bilingual, speaking both Spanish and English. They would tell Hector stories of the US; of the opportunities, the rich culture and the beauty that laid at its borders. It was those stories that ignited Hector's love affair with America, and he knew that the better life he'd been dreaming of awaited him there.

Hector continued to apply himself in school, taking great pride in being a straight A student. Although he held tight to his dream of a college education, financial challenges kept him from pursuing it. By the age of 22, a close friend who also traveled to the US for work suggested that Hector move to the US and take a job at his restaurant. "I was afraid to leave my family," Hector recalls. "But I was also excited. I told my mom I would only be gone for six months, but 26 years later I'm still here!"



Hector as a baby

Living in America posed a series of challenges for Hector. He spoke no English, had no family, and shared a two-bedroom apartment in Centerville, Ohio with eight others. He worked full-time as a dish washer for Las Piramides restaurant, and sent nearly every penny he earned back to his family in Mexico. Yet despite a rough entrance into his new life in the US, Hector was not dissuaded. The opportunities that laid ahead for him blurred all doubts and despairs, and he quickly fell in love with the abundant beauty that surrounded him. "I'd always known I wanted to come to America," he recalls. "But it was truly love at first sight once I got here! The country, the culture. I loved everything and I wanted to be a part of it all!"



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Hector knew early on that if he truly wished to immerse himself, he would first need to learn the language, and so he took part in free, basic English classes offered at a local church. After an eight-month stint, the teachers there recommended he enroll in more advanced classes, and Hector soon found himself at



Lindsey (left), Luke (middle), Lainey (right)

Sinclair college. As he advanced in the English language, he also advanced in his career, being promoted from dishwasher to kitchen helper, then to server, and eventually manager at Las Piramides. Hector also found himself lucky in love. "I met my ex-wife (Angela) around that time," he says. "She had two girls. Lindsey (now 27) and Lainey (now 26). Neither Angela nor the girls spoke Spanish, so Hector took every opportunity with them to practice and perfect his English.

Amid a budding career and a romance, opportunity continued to knock on Hector's door, and he soon befriended two individuals who frequented Las Piramides; Sukanya Madlinger (former Kroger Cincinnati Division President) and Rick Madlinger (former Kroger zone manager). "They would always invite me to apply for the Kroger lobby manager position," Hector recalls. "But I declined every time they asked." At

the time, Hector was enjoying the freedom and fun that came with his restaurant management position. However, as his relationship with Angela evolved into marriage and a family, including a son Luke (now 20), Hector's priorities shifted, and he finally accepted Sukanya and Rick's invitation to apply at Kroger and pursue a new career.

For most, the pressure of a new job and a growing family would deter them from adding anything else to their plate, but Hector Zambrano isn't most people. He knew that building a beautiful life would require work, and he welcomed the challenge. "I wanted to do something bigger than what I was doing. I wanted to do something better for the company and for my family," he says. "I knew I would need a degree to do that, so that's what I did."

While still taking English classes at Sinclair, Hector also earned an associate degree. Although proud of his accomplishment, he was not quite satisfied, and soon found himself enrolled at Franklin University in Columbus, Ohio in pursuit of his bachelor's degree. In order to balance home, work and school, Hector worked third shift at Kroger and commuted almost daily from Dayton to Columbus to earn his degree. However, as Hector so warmly recalls, "it wasn't enough," and he went on to earn a master's degree in business and finance.

After earning his master's, and after nine years of working in stores, Hector accepted a financial analyst role at the general office in Cincinnati, Ohio. But in true form, Hector still wasn't ready to settle.



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After much success in his financial analyst role, he soon went on to become a top buyer for Kroger, and most recently accepted his newest role as a demand planner at KP1.

While Hector's love of numbers and measurable metrics kept him pushing forward in his career, he says it's the culture and the people that kept him coming back every day. "Kroger has been great to me and my family," he says. "I can't say with words what I owe to this company. Kroger has given me opportunities to get my degrees, to better myself and challenge myself. The people here are fantastic. Everyone I've worked with has always encouraged me to do better and to be better."

In line with Our Purpose to Feed the Human Spirit, Hector pays his blessings forward through community involvement. Three years ago, he found himself on familiar ground, volunteering to teach English and culture acclimation to individuals in his community who were new to the US.

Today Hector still gives back through local community events, frequent blood donations, and his volunteer work with Kroger's KePasa ARG (Associate Relations Group).

While Hector remains dedicated to his work at Kroger, it is his family that makes his face truly light up. He speaks with complete pride and adoration of his children Lindsey, Lainey and Luke and his grandchildren, Jayda (6) and Jonah (born October 19).

Hector Zambrano's road to success was not an easy one, but he has no regrets. His advice to others looking to follow in his footsteps is, "Take the opportunities as they come, and never waste them. Learn the language, get an education and make the most of everything that comes your way. Be consistent, and never give up. Sometimes we may not get the results we want, but we need to get up the next day and try again."



Hector and Jonah