



2017  
profiles  
IN POWER  
CENTRAL TEXAS WOMEN OF INFLUENCE



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Winner

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Rebecca  
Contreras



## PROFILES IN POWER

# Family first, community a close second

INFLUENTIAL AUSTINITE STEERS THRIVING BUSINESS AND NONPROFIT

Rebecca Contreras runs a certified small business in Austin that has branched into Washington, D.C. Her team's business: consulting services related to human resources, organizational development, operations and information technology.

Separately, in 2008, Contreras and her husband founded LaunchPad, a nonprofit foundation that has supported outreach to hundreds of at-risk, inner city youth and their families in Austin. Over the past eight years, LaunchPad has served and empowered more than 500 sixth, seventh and eighth graders and their families, experiencing a 90 percent success rate from 2009-2016.

**Aside from serving as chairwoman of LaunchPad, do you have time for any community/volunteer involvement?**

Absolutely, my core is community philanthropy. It is integrated into my life since I grew up poor in the inner city as a teen mom with no father – so I simply cannot forget to give back and am so thankful. I also volunteer my time as a board member for the American Bible Society, a global organization that provides hundreds of millions of dollars to combat poverty and deliver trauma healing training and clinics to war-torn countries such as Sudan, Iraq, Afghanistan, and other parts of the Middle East that have been ravaged by ISIS.

**What are your career goals?** I want to dedicate my life to coaching women and helping them develop in their career journey. I also want to continue my investment into the inner city community and Latina girls. One day I hope to sell my business and invest my life into my passion.

**What advice would you give women trying to move into leadership roles?**

The most important factor for me in my leadership development and growth has been the mentors that have been key in my life and career journey. I don't believe anyone is "an island" on their own, we all need people to help us achieve success. I would surround yourself with people that encourage you, build you up, challenge you to stretch in your personal and career goals – women and men you aspire to be



ARNOLD WELLS / STAFF

## WINNER REBECCA CONTRERAS

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like. The second most important thing is to focus on your growth and development as a deliberate process. We get so busy sometimes climbing the ladder that we neglect to take care of ourselves and focus on our growth. Don't neglect this but be tenacious about your development as a leader.

**What was a challenging moment in your career and how did you overcome that obstacle?** The one that comes to mind is when I was asked to join the Bush White House team and

we had just built our new home in Round Rock.

My son was in first grade and daughter was in eighth grade, and my husband had just gotten his dream job here in Austin at Applied Materials as an instructor with stock options. When we made the decision to join the administration, and believe me it was a joint decision as a couple, I was asked to be in D.C. by that next week.

We made the decision that, yes, I would go and he would stay behind,

resign his job to be there for the kids and focus on getting the house sold and kids out of school – and then he would join me with the kids after the inauguration in 2001. Well that was a long six weeks in D.C. by myself. My middle school daughter was not happy: I was working seven days a week and 12-14 hour days in a new city with no family or support system in a new job that I was learning the ropes – a very difficult role. I was one of five commissioned officers in charge of helping the new president staff his personnel appointments. It was probably one of the most difficult times in my career. I felt alone, vulnerable and many times just plain exhausted. But one thing I knew that I had the full support of my husband and confidence of my new boss, Clay Johnson (also a mentor for 15 plus years). I did a lot of personal reflection, praying and reaching out to my mentors in those days. In the end my husband and kids joined me, he got a job in the administration months later and that began a new career for him. We found a home in Manassas and the amazing life changing journey began "together as a family" so things got much better. Although I have achieved tremendous success in my career, my family has always been No. 1 and central to my success. That saying "if mama isn't happy no one is happy" is true.

**What is the most important trait for a successful leader to have?** I believe the most important trait is loving people and serving those around you. I am in the people business, without people I do not succeed. People in my mind make or break your business. As a leader, building the right team around you is super critical. But when you build the team, they have to know they are loved and you care about them individually.

**When you are hiring, what's the most important attribute you look for?** I hire for "heart" first then skill. I have hired literally hundreds of people in my career. I would much rather have people around me who are smart, have great attitude and heart and train them in the job than someone who is highly skilled and knows the job but has no heart and a stinky attitude with people or life.