



with **Veronica Carrillo**, Fiscal Administrator
for the City of San Antonio, Texas

Veronica Carrillo grew up surrounded by family in a Hispanic neighborhood on the west side of San Antonio. Her home was on a block where many aunts, uncles, cousins, and grandparents lived just a yard over or down the block. GFOA's **Timothy Martin** spoke with Veronica as part of GFOA's FINE(ance) Fridays podcast series about how her tight-knit family kept her centered and grounded, how her father worked multiple jobs to ensure his children would have opportunities for a better life, and how his advice led her into a long, varied, and satisfying career with the City of San Antonio, Texas.

Let's start out by talking about a conversation you had with your dad.

I have shared this story with leaders and people I mentor because I think it's important. As leaders, we should make an effort to understand people's perspective "windows" and then look for ways to help open those windows to new opportunities.

I remember cleaning offices with my father and one night when we were emptying trash, he told me I should study accounting. When I asked why, he said he'd noticed a few things. We were working in the accounting area, and he had noticed that a lot of ladies worked there, they seemed to have reasonable hours, and they wore suits. I don't know if I would tell a young woman that today, but my father envisioned a better life for his daughter that included a better work environment and a position of respect. That was my dad's perspective window.

So, with my first job at the City of San Antonio, as a fiscal officer in the Finance Department, I thought that I had made it. My father's guidance got me there, but it could only take me so far. Thankfully, I have been fortunate to also have other mentors that have shared other "windows" that have helped guide me and further my career.



When you were in college, what were you thinking about the future? A lot of college students don't know what they want to do with their lives.

In my junior year of college, my father sat me down and told me his insurance would only cover me until I turned 21. He made sure I understood that I needed to find a job with insurance. That's a real "dad" piece of advice! I remember realizing that I needed to stay on task and on schedule, and that's what I did. When I graduated, I set out to find a job with good benefits and the opportunity for growth.

After college, you spent six years at Kroger. Were you in a corporate office or in a store?

At the time, I worked in-store operations, where I managed people on the front lines. I had just turned 21 and was responsible for about \$15 million in inventory, much of which was perishable. As part of a six-month training program, I learned about customer service, inventory management, cash controls, and how to manage and lead a team. At any

given time, I had between 150 and 200 employees and between six and eight division managers.

What did you learn from that experience?

One of the most valuable lessons I learned during my experience at Kroger was the power of my words. My first year on the job was not my shining moment. As a young manager, I said things then that I would not say today. I was fortunate that I learned early in my career that the choice and tone of my words can impact, inspire, and influence others.

It seems like your experience at Kroger was a good setup for where your career ultimately led.

Definitely. Eventually, we returned to San Antonio. It was important to me that our son experience the kind of family environment that I had experienced growing up, surrounded by cousins, aunts, and uncles. I will always be grateful to the Kroger Company for providing a solid foundation for my career. I carried over my skills in customer service, inventory management, cash

controls, and employee management to my positions here at the City of San Antonio. These are foundational skills for any organization, including local government.

What did your parents think about your career?

My parents are very proud of my career and service to the city. And my dad is aware that I still wear suits some days! They have also been very supportive and respectful of my decision to be a working mother.

You've talked about the importance of getting to know people and expanding that network. How important has that been for you?

It has been key. One of the first organizations I was introduced to when I began working for the City of San Antonio was GFOA. GFOA was introduced to me by our finance director, who was working on a bid for the 2005 annual conference. In the past, I have often said that I have grown up not only with the City of San Antonio, but also with my colleagues at GFOA. My involvement at GFOA has been gradual, starting with assisting

with the host committee, then serving on the budget committee, followed by serving on the nominating committee, and then serving on the executive board. Being part of GFOA has been a real honor.

As you climbed the ladder in San Antonio, you also climbed the ladder as a member of GFOA. It's great to see that you looked at and took advantage of the opportunities that members have with GFOA. Members can network as well as do more advanced things within the organization—and you're such a great example of how a member can start at the beginning and work their way up to even joining the board.

Thank you for saying that. I believe that success anywhere starts with getting involved and engaged. This has been a process over the last 20-plus years. My career has been more rewarding because I had the opportunity to work with incredibly bright individuals and provide service to our communities. These things give purpose to the work we do.

Looking at your 24-year career so far at San Antonio, you've had several positions: fiscal officer, public utilities manager, fiscal administrator, assistant director

of the city center development operations, all the way up to managing grant money for the city's COVID-19 Executive Office. You've had a lot of responsibilities and opportunities along the way. What are some of the most rewarding moments for you?

Throughout my 24-year career with the City of San Antonio, there have been a lot of career highlights. Implementing our city's fiscal shared services program is definitely at the top of the list. For this project, we had implemented SAP and were struggling with departments operating in silos. We implemented a shared services program to standardize our fiscal business processes across our organization. We also standardized positions and finance processes for functions including accounts payable and accounts receivables across the organization.

We have seen significant results with improved audits. I spent 10 years leading the fiscal shared services program, and it is a great honor to now see our fiscal administrators do so well. I find working with people and watching them develop and succeed incredibly rewarding. This program has provided a career path for individuals in fiscal operations, and it's great for our team members and the City of San Antonio.

Did you experience any pushback?

It is not always fun reapplying for new positions at work. There is always a lot of anxiety surrounding this, but we always try to take measures to mitigate stress. We kept a bigger picture in mind, and the success of shared services depended on collaboration, communication, and demonstrating the benefits of the program. Fiscal staff were able to see a career path and realized that everyone would be treated equitably across the organization. Many people ended up with opportunities for promotions. It took a little while, but after a year or two, team members and departments started getting excited about the program and the opportunities that were available to them.

To touch on another subject: You got your master's degree relatively recently, which had to be a challenge. Why did you decide to do it?

When I became a GFOA executive board member, I felt that my education credits needed to be better aligned with my professional career accomplishments. This was something I had always wanted to do, so I returned to the University of Texas in San Antonio and completed the Executive MBA program. As with most things in life, the second time around benefitted from my life experience and the perspective that comes with that experience. 📖

Timothy Martin is GFOA's senior manager for member engagement.

FINE(ance) Fridays



This interview was adapted and condensed from an episode of GFOA's **FINE(ance) Fridays**. Keep a look out for our new season, starting soon and available wherever you listen to podcasts.

➡ gfoa.org/fineance-fridays