

Joe Zamora, SVP of Finance, STARZ: Integrity, attitude, and owning mistakes What he's learned after 20 years working at STARZ

Joe Zamora, the current Senior Vice President of Finance at STARZ, recently marked his 20th work anniversary at the company. He says he wakes up eager to go to work every day because there are always new challenges presented, and new processes to learn as the company has evolved over the years.

Zamora grew up in Denver, Colorado, and admits that it was not until his junior year of high school that he began to apply himself in his studies. He applied to the University of Colorado, unsure if he had the grades to get in, and was accepted. The summer after his freshman year, he started an internship offered through a minority internship program called INROADS, working at GE Capital. He continued interning for the remainder of his time at college. Because of his aptitude for math, he studied finance and ended up finishing at the top of his program, and graduated summa cum laude. It was then that he applied to a financial management program through GE Capital and upon being accepted, moved across the country to Stamford, CT.

Shortly before completing the two-and-a-half-year program, Zamora was attending his brother's high school graduation where he spoke to a senior executive of STARZ and from there landed an interview. He accepted the job as an analyst in the research group, and he and his wife moved back to Colorado. Today Zamora looks back on 20 years with STARZ, as he sat down for this interview to offer some advice for young professionals and college graduates.

Family, spirituality and work

When asked to list a few influential people in Zamora's life, he first names his father, who he says taught him about generosity and compassion. Second on his list is a man named David Swanson, Zamora says has been influential in his spiritual walk, and in some of his decisions of the kind of lifestyle he wants to live. Zamora says he watched decisions Swanson made, and things he chose to include in his life, and those choices were very influential in the way Zamora chose to do things in his own life.

On the bookshelf: Zamora's Three Favorite Books

Winning by Jack Welch is the first to be listed by Zamora. He explains that book finds its way into his top three because Welch discusses work-life balance, and how to set your career path. Next Zamora lists *The Big Short*

by Michael Lewis. His explanation is simple and straightforward: it's a cool book, and a crazy story. For his third choice, Zamora says he likes mystery novels as a genre. He says he loves that they keep you thinking and guessing as you read them. He names David Baldacci as one author in particular that he enjoys reading.

Have integrity and go the extra mile

Zamora says that in order to have a successful career in finance and accounting, that it is important to have integrity. He also says having a good work ethic is important. "Put your head down, work hard, and pay your dues," Zamora said. "If I need you here, you're here. So you're willing to go the extra mile when you need to, and do it with a good attitude, because that will make you stand out." He adds, "But then you have to back that up with good skills."

He says that he and his group treat the entire organization as a customer, and that they work hard to keep up a good reputation within the company. Zamora then connects this back to his earlier advice: "Don't just do what you're asked," he said, "Do what you're asked to do, but come up with some other things that you think might be helpful to who you're serving."

Later in the interview, Zamora returns to this idea, saying that in order to advance in the company, you need to do two things: do great work and differentiate yourself from others. "I need to make my boss look good, that's one of my most important jobs," Zamora said. "If he looks good and gets promoted, then that gives me an opportunity to get promoted."

When it comes to the advice he would offer his younger self, Zamora says he would consider getting more experience in accounting, and possibly getting a CPA. He says he has learned a lot over the years, but it's still not his area of expertise. He also suggests for students considering an MBA that it's better to have a few years of working experience before going back to school.

Own it and move forward

On the subject of mistakes, Zamora offers that everyone makes them. "But what I have found is when you make a mistake, you've got to own it, and just set things in place to prevent that mistake next time." Zamora adds, "People are going to make mistakes, and that's okay, it's not okay to continue to make the same mistake." He concludes that when he makes a mistake, he owns the mistake and then moves forward.

“Every day there is a different challenge”

Reflecting on how he keeps motivated to come to work every day, even after working for the same company for 20 years, Zamora credits both the ever-changing challenges he faces, and the people he works with. “It’s not mundane, every day there is a different challenge. And that’s definitely helped motivate. Plus I like working with people. I like coming to see the people I work with,” Zamora said. He points out that you spend more hours a week with the people at work than you do with your own family, so it’s important to establish good work relationships.

Have an opinion

When it comes to developing good leadership skills, Zamora says that you need to have an opinion. He says offering an opinion shows you add value, rather than simply taking up space in a meeting. “Educate yourself enough to have an opinion,” Zamora adds. He believes that leadership opportunities have opened up to him because he was able to offer an opinion in a respectful manner, and it got him noticed by executives.

Bottom line: Come to the meeting prepared and have the courage to speak up.