

Interview: Francisco García - Executive Director, PRMA, Puerto Rico



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Francisco García was appointed as the executive director for the Puerto Rico Manufacturers Association (PRMA) in August 2015. He stresses the importance of developing Puerto Rico's entrepreneurial talent and startup clusters as his main initiatives.

As you have recently taken over as executive director of PRMA, could you outline the changes you plan to bring to this organization?

I am concentrating on a few areas, in particular looking at clusters and trying to see how we can help to develop and connect the supply chain with local companies as well as developing our local entrepreneurs who offer great service. Some of these companies are providing services outside of Puerto Rico, and we want to expand that as part of our economic development. This work includes the life sciences area.

We also want to continue developing our people. In addition to the technical component of people development, there are the soft skills of people development that focus on teamwork, self-esteem, and capability. We want to make sure that we have a balance, and that people are not only being developed technically, which Puerto Rico has always had due to local FDA requirements while meeting the challenges of cost competition. Local operations have been able to do both. That

component of balancing personal and technical aspects, in terms of quality and control, has truly helped Puerto Rico. Being able to communicate virtually is part of the country's development to interact with other operations seamlessly, and we have the capability to teach people how to compete internationally. Being able to communicate and interact with other operations allows for seamless technical or commercial transfers. The depth of the working population in Puerto Rico is so immense, you can group leaders can pull off a product transfer without any difficulty. To me, that demonstrates the capabilities and strength of our operations in Puerto Rico.

When a company creates a good environment, its people are very committed. Puerto Rico is strong in the concept of family in terms of closeness and responsiveness. When you start running an operation, you spend a lot of time working and being with your people. People look out for each other and develop relationships here. Many companies feel like a family. A CEO can create an environment in which the people feel good about themselves and if this is managed well, it gives you a strength that others cannot match. Companies compete not only on their technical abilities but also learning abilities, in terms of learning from each other. The faster you learn, the more competitive you become, and the more operations you can transfer or stabilize. That is part of the mystique and ability that operations here have been able to utilize in Puerto Rico. If you tap into the feeling of people who are contributing and learning from each other, you will have a very successful operation and working environment.

What is your assessment of the cluster situation in terms of capability to thrive in this environment and relationship with larger companies by whom they can be supported?

Companies have learned that they need to be very selective in the supply chain and who is supplying services and products. Companies today have a lot more evaluation in their processes for who they select and why they select them. That turns out to be an opportunity in the making because many companies here have operations in other parts of the world. They are recommending suppliers here be given the opportunity to offer services outside of Puerto Rico. Those companies that give good services here have a chance to make the connection and start exporting their services. That is a win-win situation; the clusters and their supply chain then become very meaningful. The stronger the cluster, the stronger the interactions of the supply chain, the more experience you have internationally, and the better service you can get here.

How do you see the idea of Puerto Rican entrepreneurship evolving in the coming years?

We are starting to see a wave of new entrepreneurs that have decided to start their own operations, and there are many entities in the ecosystem that are supporting entrepreneurship. It is being taught not only at the high school level but also universities, making students aware that there is an opportunity to start your own company and that there is learning required to becoming an entrepreneur. We are becoming more sophisticated in that regard, and people take their understanding and knowledge and apply it in this case to the life sciences cluster and then do the same outside of Puerto Rico. There is a large ecosystem that is trying to help people learn how to export, work outside Puerto Rico and how to manage that work. Now we are developing the financial part in terms of being able to capitalize and get financial help for being able to grow. People who do consultations or installations outside Puerto Rico have costs of living and travelling before they can be refunded. You have to be able to deal with cash flow and financial management. Puerto Rico is finally getting that wave effect of a mindset in that becoming an entrepreneur is good. The mindset in my generation was to get a job and work for someone else. That is changing, and the people who are going in that direction are getting more recognition for doing the right thing. We still have some things to improve, but the overall situation is getting better.

What do you want to achieve during your tenure here?

PRMA is going to open up to use more technology for communicating with our members for developing webinars, virtual communication and actual training and development. We are thinking about developing webinars we can use to train people outside Puerto Rico in Spanish with the latest techniques. We are heading in the direction of incorporating and taking advantage of the knowledge base that we have and use that for members here and abroad. We are starting to look at the people who have left Puerto Rico as part of our community, and how we can tie them in and ensure they can contribute or come back to establish operations in Puerto Rico. This association is also going to help the entrepreneurial ecosystem; we will see those companies that have started up operations in manufacturing that want to become part of the supply chain and service products to the life sciences and give them support. We will also shift to understand marketing and social media capabilities more, so that people sell and develop sales and marketing, understand and are up-to-date in social media. We are taking a step beyond manufacturing and get more involved with sales and marketing and how we can support our members in that sense.

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