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I was an adult when I fully grasped the value and meaning of a higher education. I was attending a business conference for my company at a luxury hotel in Florida, where my father had once worked as a dishwasher. He always tried to drive home the value of an education—his advice, now, made more sense.

I had been in the restaurant business for 20 years—where I started by mopping floors for a franchise company at age 14 to help my family, and rising to developing franchise systems for both large companies and small startups. It was long days and lots of travel, plenty of responsibility, and headaches to match.

I had always fantasized about becoming a professor. At first I thought I would become a psychologist—I had majored in psychology, and I'd had incredible teachers. The idea about teaching really came from my undergraduate experience, where I was inspired by really bright people who cared—that's when the light first turned on.

I put off becoming a professor, but I found myself gravitating towards teaching in my work—conducting customer service seminars, training franchisees and their managers during new product rollouts, and teaching managers how to implement marketing and cost control systems. While preparing for my MBA, I got The PhD Project mailer and I thought, "I could do this full time—and have a positive impact on peoples' lives." I had a good job then, but my mother was seriously ill at the time, and it made me reevaluate my priorities. The appeal to me with this career was that I could be an entrepreneur in a way—and once tenured, I would have even greater flexibility. I started contacting professors I knew, and building a network.

I went to the 2004 Project conference, and it was simply amazing. I sold my home to raise some cash, applied to seven schools and was accepted by three.

Now I teach at an institution with a large Hispanic population. I think that it's important for the students to have someone named Ramirez in front of the classroom. I am hoping to inspire students to dream big dreams.

I am also hoping to make an intellectual contribution to the field. I want to give back as well: I have promised to pay forward the generosity of those who have

helped me along. So, call or email me and I will gladly help you to see if becoming a professor is right for you.