

Consultant forges connections between Latino businesses

By [Amy Rolph](#)
Herald Writer

Lourdes Sampera-Tsukada took a personality test a few months back, trying to pinpoint her strengths. Turns out, she's an extrovert.

No kidding. The founder and CEO of "Opening Latino Doors" knows how to work a room. She interviews everyone she meets, asking what community service they're involved with, about how their line of work is growing or declining, what background they're from.

She sees opportunities everywhere she looks.

"I'm always seeing things as, 'Why not,'" the 49-year-old said while sipping coffee at the start of a whirlwind day packed with meetings. "Why not create a bridge."

Sampera-Tsukada started her consulting firm in 2001. She started Opening Latino Doors with an intent to bolster Latino businesses in the Puget Sound region by getting them connected with one another.

But Sampera-Tsukada doesn't like thinking of herself as a modern-day matchmaker for companies looking to expand. To her, that sounds too much like being the time-keeper in a round of small-business speed dating.

"I'm a bridge -- that's what my company does," she said.

Sometimes, that means finding a broker to work with a real estate agent seeking new connections. Sometimes it means matching a small advertising firm to a large-scale corporation based in South America.

She hops from meeting to meeting most days, refueling with Starbucks coffee when she can. She'll meet with anywhere from one to four clients in an average day, trying to track down the right contractor for each.

And though based out of Seattle, she has big plans for Snohomish County, creating a network of small Latino-owned businesses.

This career path came to Sampera-Tsukada after she spent years as a mortgage broker. About 10 years ago, she realized she spent much of her free time introducing business associates and forging connections.

Why not network on behalf of Latino businesses full time, she wondered?

A Cuban native by birth, she had lived in Venezuela, Argentina, France and Italy as a young person, then she attended college in Akron, Ohio. More recently, she was selected to participate in the National Hispana Leadership Institute's executive leadership program for 2009.

Sampera-Tsukada said she sees a great need for education within business communities. She works with the Washington State Hispanic Chamber of Commerce and a number of other groups, trying to find resources for her clients to tap into.

"There's a lot of education in that, in sharing knowledge," she said. "And some people are going to find they don't click, and that's OK."

Sampera-Tsukada said her mindset stems from a conscious decision to avoid labeling problems as such.

"Honestly, I don't see challenges," she said. "If you start focusing on the negative, you're not creating opportunities."

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