

**00:01 What's your background and current job role?**

I am the co-founder of Sabor Latin Street Grill. My active role is that I participate in community engagement, so I direct that department for the company. I sit on different boards, just to be an advocate and a voice for our employees as an immigrant, as a small business owner. Other roles that I do is that I connect employees to resources in the community, whatever may arise, whether it is they have a financial need that they need to connect to someone who may offer financial assistance, or affordable housing. A lot of the partnerships I have are with either non-profits—it could be government agencies—or faith-based agencies.

**00:41 Why did you choose social work as a career?**

My interest in social work sparked in high school. I took an elective in psychology, and I really became interested in human behavior and how to connect people to resources or how our mind works. I did my undergrad in psychology, and I think the other big driver for me was how I was raised. My early years I was living with my grandparents in El Salvador, and my grandpa was a pastor, and he served his community in different ways. Even though we didn't have that many resources, the access that he felt he had, he shared it with the community, so I think that stayed with me and that sparked an interest in social work.

**01:23 How did your involvement with helping Sabor employees start?**

My involvement with helping Sabor employees started back in 2017. That was a pivotal moment for me when we had the crisis going on at the border and we were seeing families being separated, so we had the children and the parents being separated. Those were kids from my country, and I could really see myself in those families. I was born into situations that were probably similar to what these families were experiencing, whether it was persecution, whether it was poverty. I thought of my parents. They made a choice in the '80s to leave me behind and my siblings with my grandparents just to create an opportunity for us, and that really sparked something in me that was like: there's more I can do. I have this platform of Sabor, and I have this background in social work, and I just started engaging in community meetings. People were gathering to talk about "What are things you can do to help these families? What are things that are going on?" Kinda educating myself on what was really going on, not just watching the news, and this kinda led me to learning what was going on locally here in Charlotte. So as I continued to work with different community leaders, I learned there's a huge need for providing employment that could help people grow in whatever way that means for them.

**02:41 Can you give an example of the kinds of things you do to help Sabor employees?**

Some of the things I do to help Sabor employees is connecting them to resources. Because of the access I have with the different community leaders I've met, or people who work in different agencies, I'm able to learn firsthand resources that are available, and that allows me to do direct connections at times. So if someone comes to me and they have a need, I'm able either to contact the director, myself, or someone within the agency. A lot of times there are great programs in the community, but what becomes difficult is access. So reducing that barrier, we're able to see that our employees are able to access resources much easier. Another way we help employees is by creating opportunities for growth. We want to encourage our employees to build wealth. So this could be that employees start with us at whatever position it can be...it

could be as a dishwasher, it could be back of the house, it could be front of the house, but they come to us and they tell us we want to do more, we want to learn more, and we start creating the opportunity where, okay, let's start cross-training into this area. Then let's say they make it to management, and we're like, we really don't have flexibility for more positions, but what we do have that we can offer is an owner-operator model. In essence, what it does is that employees are able to share profits from the company, and the goal is that eventually they could have their own franchise. So there is a whole model. We have employees who are in that program, and we have seen that it's successful.

**04:09 Is there a particular employee that you've worked with that comes to mind as a success story from your work together?**

So an employee that I consider a success story because of the work we have done together with them is a manager in one of our stores. She started with us pretty much from the beginning. She was very young, she was also a fairly new immigrant to Charlotte, and that was one of the barriers she had. She had limited English skills. She started with us very inexperienced, we had her back and forth, how to train in this area, that area. What I see in her now 100% she has matured in so many ways we have seen her become a mom, we have seen her become a homeowner, and she's also now one of our owner-operators so she is sharing the profits from the company and we're seeing how she has taken ownership of her job and seeing it as like—this is something that her kids are watching her in that role being an owner, being somebody empowered, especially a woman in that area, and it's just amazing to see that evolved.

**05:12 In your opinion, what is an employer's role in caring for their employees?**

Leading with empathy, and seeing people as what they are as people humanizing their experiences. Part of the work that I do is to train my managers to be trauma-informed seeing people as people who may be struggling with something. Sometimes it's as little as asking a question "Is everything okay with you?" or "You were coming to work on time consistently and now you're coming to work late, has something changed? Is there something we can do to help that?" Something else I believe is important for an employer, especially if we're going to be working with agencies that refer community members who have a past history in whatever it is—it could be a criminal past history, it could be a history of homelessness, or history of mental health. Knowing that when we're getting that person, we are also getting a person that may need extra resources or just that extra help. As much as I want to give an opportunity, there is an extra step that I have to do as an employer, but also the agency, so working together knowing that they are placing a person for us to employ, but we might also need help with connecting them to different support systems or maybe even that ongoing mentorship that the agency was providing.

**06:30 When your employees think of Sabor, how do you want them to feel?**

I want them to feel that it's a place where they are cared for and where we honor their work. A lot of times people go into the hospitality industry because they are very passionate about food, or they love being around other people. So they're charismatic, they're very good within a team,

so we see that, and we value that, and that's something we want our employees to know. That we care for them, that we are a workplace that is working towards being equitable, towards seeing people and meeting them where they are. We want people to know that they can grow with us, that we see their talents, we see their hard work, we value that, and we're working alongside them to help them meet those goals. We're open about how we operate. If you wanna learn how to do inventory and you're a cashier, we'll teach you because it is a skill that eventually will help you either grow with us, or if eventually you want to move on somewhere else, it is a skill that is transferable to other workplaces.

**07:33 What does Sabor mean to you?**

I get to share my culture with other people. People build relationships around meals and I feel it's a non-threatening space to share, to talk, to learn about each other. If I invite you into that space, it's because I want you to learn about my culture; I feel comfortable enough to teach you or to share with you some of my experiences. So that's what Sabor means to me: a space where even though in this world we may have many differences—people get very passionate about their point of views about their values—but when we're sitting down at a table, I feel that our defenses could come down a little bit. We could have a shared experience, which allows for people to start talking. The community is exposed to my culture, to the culture that represents my employees, which is many countries. We have Dominican Republic, Colombia, Venezuela, El Salvador, Mexico...even though we speak the same language we are completely different, and being able to share that with the community is super important for me.