

Keep Pushing Forward



Rafaela Arriaga embarked on the adventure of starting a business in a period of her life she defined as *“el peor de su vida”* (the worst of her life). The journey started when one of Rafaela’s friends asked her to see the location where she wanted to open a new hair salon. Little did Rafaela know on that first trip that she would end up as the sole owner of the business.

It was not an easy start. There were several obstacles she was forced to overcome. First, she had to borrow money from family and friends because she did not have the funds to start the business. Secondly, and even more importantly, she was with an abusive husband which further affected her emotionally. Finally, she was a mother with a son and daughter to raise. The work ethic and decisive spirit she had developed as a child growing up in Mexico constantly reminded her that *“...doing the things you love helps you push harder every time...”* - and being a hair stylist was her passion. At startup she worked 10 hours a day, 7 days a week while taking care of her two children. She had only 2 or 3 clients per day, but she kept pushing.

Sometimes when she was not busy with customers, the thoughts about her personal problems made her sad, but when someone came in, she forced herself to smile, ask how they were doing, and take care of them. She started to notice that the work of styling hair distracted her and made her feel better about herself. Clients noted that even though *“...her eyes were sad, there was always a smile on her face...”* Her reputation and business grew as people could rely on her for a cheerful word as well as the style they wanted. Word of mouth brought more and more customers to the business. She has been able to pay her debts, pay her bills and earn the money she needed to obtain a divorce from her husband without looking back for lack of funds. Now Rafaela has employees, a steady flow of customers



every day, and plans to expand into nail care. She explained that her proudest moment came when her daughter looked directly into her eyes and said, "*Gracias por Disney World, mamá*" (Thanks for Disney World, Mom) as they were returning from the first vacation they had taken since arriving in the United States.

The advertising and marketing classes Urban Business Initiative presented at La Rosa Family Services made her think about new ideas to promote her business in the short, medium and long term. She would like more classes on how to understand taxes. Rafaela is just one example of the people UBI helps through programs aimed at victims of domestic violence. UBI wishes continued success to this woman who has proved that haircuts can change more than just looks.

