

Esther Martinez's Story

Esther Martinez was born in Illinois and raised in Texas by a single mom with a sixth grade education and later moved to Michigan. In 1997, Esther found herself sitting in an office where she worked as a laboratory receptionist in the medical field when she was handed a pink slip with her name on it. Immediately panic and fear set in. It was only months earlier that she gave birth to a daughter and left her baby's father so here she sat, unemployed, uneducated and a single parent.

Prior to being laid off, a friend of Esther's spoke very highly about a program called Focus: HOPE Machinist Training Program, so she decided to take a tour of the campus and ended up taking an entrance exam. A week later the phone rang. It was the Admitting department from the Focus program telling her she had passed the initial exam, wanting to know when she'd be able to start. She remembers telling the guy, "I have nothing but time." She knew she had six months of unemployment she could count on and this was an eight-month program so the sooner the better. Not only did Esther finish the program, she was one of very few that actually made it to the end of the program (26%) and graduated at the top of her class. She was offered a design engineering internship and within weeks she was working at General Motors (GM) Design Center.

She worked as an intern during the day and went to school at night completing her Associates Degree in Engineering followed two years later by her Bachelor's and is currently studying for her Master's in engineering. Accomplishing all this did not come easy. She had kids to raise and bills to pay. In her words, "Finding a way to balance my time between work, school, and my daughters was probably the biggest challenge that I faced. Having a strong support system was a key factor because it made the difference on the days where I just couldn't be with my daughters." But it was her daughters that kept her going. She knew they relied on her for all their basic needs in life, and the decisions she made would impact their future.

Esther attributes her success to "determination, hard work, and faith." It's this drive and focus that has made her a leading car designer for GM. But how did she possibly juggle

time between going to school, spending time with family and friends and working? Many single moms find that to be a huge challenge, but setting goals keeps them focused and on track because so many distracters in life can send them off in another direction. Goal setting helped Esther get through the many challenges she was faced with. , But she set them as milestones and saw them as one milestone at a time instead of focusing on the amount of work it would take to get the top of her career ladder, allowed her to tackle each one without becoming overwhelmed.

I know there are women reading Esther's story that are in similar situations now, are inspired by her story and wondering how they too can accomplish great things for themselves; but it all seems a little overwhelming. I recommend reading *What's Your Ladder Style* and *Goal Setting* articles in the career section of Pink Ladders website. Climbing one ladder at a time as Esther did makes the journey far more attainable and manageable and setting goals is a key to success. It reminds us daily why we are working so hard and how proud we will be as a woman to have accomplished our goals.

Esther continues to work on reaching her goals and feels her Master's degree will open doors for a management position in her industry. Her advice to other women on career climbing; " Believe in yourself because despite anything else going on in your life it's the core of who you are and what you believe in that will keep you going."