

SAMANDA MORALES

Samanda Morales is a true example of the American dream.

As a young teen, she and her sister left the Dominican Republic with little more than the required papers to join their mother in New York. She spoke no English. They proceeded to move five times in seven years.

But what Samanda did have proved invaluable: A strong work ethic and an understanding of the importance of education. And with that, she set out to manifest her dreams of becoming a successful business woman.

Samanda graduated high school, and started working at age 17 so she could attend college.

She went on to earn her degree in business administration from Salem State University in 1998, and then quickly began rising through the ranks of the financial services industry.

Jobs with Bank of New York Mellon and State Street Bank & Trust Corporation followed over the course of the next 20 years.

In 2020, she used her own investments to found Ahora Inc. with her husband, David.

Ahora — which is Spanish for “now” — is a social enterprise organization that offers culturally appropriate financial coaching, education, and wealth-building services to moderate- and low-income earners.

The goal is to help clients develop a strong financial foundation on which to build self-reliance and financial confidence. Ahora has created an online proprietary tool designed to assist with the process.

A certified personal finance consultant and finance instructor, Samanda firmly believes in the opportunities that exist in America — that if people are given the proper tools, education and support, they, too, can improve their lives and achieve economic prosperity.

In her nomination of Samanda for a Diamond Award, Raminder Luther — the dean of the Bertolon School of Business who nominated Samanda for the Diamond Award — says her skills, combined with her passion and drive, set Samanda apart.

“Samanda is a wonderful and warm person dedicated to bettering the lives of others in ways that they may not have thought of,” Raminder says.

“She understands the value of collaboration and teamwork, and always contributes to advancing the mission of every organization she associates with.”

Along with her professional and family responsibilities, Samanda is pursuing her MBA through Northeastern University, which she is due to earn in 2024.

A proud American citizen today, Samanda also finds time to give back.

She was recently appointed by Gov Charlie Baker to the Board of Trustees of her alma mater — Salem State.

Samanda is on the board and serves as a deacon at Bethany Congregational Church in Lynn. She co-leads a Latina women's group that seeks to empower through counseling and mentorship.

She is a member of the North Shore Chamber and serves on the Advisory Council of The Chamber's Thrive initiative.

She was selected to be part of the inaugural cohort of LEADS North Shore — a diverse cross-section of leaders committed to driving change.

Being a leader — she says — is not about telling others what to do, but selflessly creating a space for others to grow to their full potential.

“Just as I was offered a pathway and opportunities to empowerment for a prosperous future, I want to do the same for others,” she says.

“I don’t see it as a job,” she adds. “I see it as a mission.”

It’s a lesson she and her husband seek to engrain in their two teenage sons — as well as others.

Samanda embraces every chance to mentor and counsel women and young people that they have a purpose in life — and that they possess the power to fulfill it through strength, faith and commitment.

She says, “Demonstrating values that will strengthen someone’s character with dignity and wisdom is our responsibility as those in a position to lead.”

Samanda’s approach is one borne of personal experience — of turning dreams into reality.