Through war and conquest, pandemics and political upheavals, Hispanics have defined what it means to be resilient. Now, as we confront the biggest global challenge in a generation in COVID-19, our community—indeed, the whole of humanity—is once again being put to the test.

For my organization, the Society of Hispanic Professional Engineers (SHPE), the crisis is already hitting home. We’ve had to cancel four of our seven Regional Leadership Development Conferences. Chapter meetings are being put on hold. Our entire national team is working remotely. And while we continue to lay the groundwork for our National Institute for Leadership Advancement Conference (July 31 – August 1) and our 2020 National Convention (October 28 – November 1)—both of which will be held in Denver—we know those plans could change at a moment’s notice.

This is a challenge unlike any SHPE has faced—and the single most important event of our lifetimes. But for all fear and uncertainty COVID-19 has caused, these past few weeks have given me a chance to reflect on another word that has long defined our organization—and the Hispanic community writ large.

Familia.

With schools closed and millions of Americans forced to work from home, the idea of Familia has taken on a deeper meaning. Families everywhere are having to reinvent their lives: setting up workstations, homeschooling the kids—often in tight quarters. For those who’ve lost their jobs, the challenges are even more profound; the sense of uncertainty, all-consuming.

As Hispanics, we’re no strangers to trials like these. We’re used to making do; to sacrificing; to rallying together around a common cause. Now more than ever, we need that strength, that resiliency. Not only for our families and community; but for the good of the country—and the world.

During the past few weeks, I’ve seen our organization embrace both values—resiliency and Familia—with unflinching conviction. Between canceling events and virtualizing our operations, there was every reason for people to panic. Instead, we rallied together. We’re keeping ourselves informed and engaged. We’re being mindful of the cadence and content of our communications. I’m so proud of how my lean, mighty and nimble team has come together and responded. They exemplify what SHPE is all about.

For our members, we’re designing and hosting our first-ever virtual career fair. We’re rolling out new online certification programs. We’re making our ongoing virtual learning series—latinxfactor—more robust. We’re hosting virtual town halls and ramping up communications across the board, while giving regional leaders chapter presidents the tools they need to engage their respective members.

I have no doubt that this resiliency and sense of Familia will get us through—and past—this crisis. But these values will be just as critical to figuring out what comes next. It’s my belief that the organizations that thrive will be the ones with the vision and courage to embrace new ideas. Not just new ideas, but a new workforce—one that’s resolute, resilient and resourceful.

Hispanics are that workforce. Our mission at SHPE is to give student and professional members the tools and skills they need to meet the unique demands of our future—specifically, a STEM-driven economy. By 2024, Hispanics will make up 20% of the U.S. labor force.

My vision—for SHPE Members specifically, and Hispanics generally—is to be in the vanguard of the next STEM-related breakthroughs. Improving sustainability and reducing our carbon footprint in manufacturing; identifying viable alternative energy sources and addressing climate change; safeguarding our national infrastructure (like electric grids) as well as our personal data from cyberattacks; feeding our ever-growing population and improving our health and well-being; identifying a vaccine to keep super viruses like COVID-19 at bay; and so much more.

Hispanics can play a part in all these innovations. If our institutions have the foresight to see our incredible potential—and give us the space to contribute and grow.

Hispanics are resilient. We believe in the collective power of Familia—in our homes, our communities, our Nation and the world. These two values are integral to who we are as a people. With them, we will move past the challenges of today, so we can create the opportunities of tomorrow.

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