Father’s five words shape young girl’s approach to life

It started as an ordinary car ride with her father. “I remember it like it is tattooed on my soul,” says Veronica Platoni, a Microsoft services practice leader in Santiago, Chile. She was around 10, the eldest of five children in her family and a natural thinker. On this day, Veronica had an unusual topic on her mind for a pre-teen — her family’s financial future.

“I was doing the math, thinking about the money needed to pay for educating all of us,” she says. “I asked my dad if he had ever thought about how he could have had money to spend on other things if he didn’t have five kids.” Veronica recalls seeing “a very mad look in the rear-view mirror” as he told her cost had nothing to do with him and their mother bringing a child into the world. He said it was something they wanted to do—the right thing to do. Those five words became the foundation for Veronica’s approach to life.

Changing course

“My parents asked a lot of me,” she says. “But I appreciated it because I think all of us have a lot to give.” Among the things they asked was that Veronica always try to do things right and give it her best effort, rather than the minimum required. But, as she learned, that was no guarantee for success. “I was supposed to be a successful architect,” she recalls with a rueful laugh. “My granddad was an architect. My mother is an architect. So that was the first career I tried. It did not turn out well. I tried, but it was really hard. One day a teacher told me that while I understood the concepts quite well, I had difficulty introducing them into my projects, and would probably be limited in my career—I’d be an average architect.”

Realizing even her best efforts were doomed to yield minimum results, Veronica switched gears—deciding it was, in her father’s words, the right thing to do. “I wanted a space where those same efforts using all my abilities could have a greater impact.” That’s when she turned to technology and doing what she could to help other women develop their own careers.
“I’m not a superwoman or anything like that,” Veronica says. “I’m a common person living at the bottom of South America who believes what I’ve done, others can do. I tell the women I mentor that it all depends on them—on their energy and beliefs. And that by being successful, we can show young girls here in Chile that there are no limits to what they can do, and the impact they can have in our communities.”

**Gathering smiles**

What drives her? What’s the reward for this commitment to the women of Chile? It can be something as simple as a smile. “When someone I’m mentoring has that a-ha moment—‘Oh, I can do that!’—it feels great,” Veronica says.

“Sometimes there’s a smile, or their eyes shine. That’s my reason why.” Seeking those smiles carries beyond the women she mentors—often into the grocery store. “When I’m in front of a cashier, I’ll ask how they are, how their day is going,” she says. “When they lift their head to look at me and realize I’m asking because I care, they smile; and that’s my paycheck. Those smiles have become like an addiction to me. I’m always trying to get more of them.” It’s something she recommends others do as well. “I think we need more compassion for others, more empathy. If we all do that—if we all do the right thing—we’ll see things flourish around us and be born in a better way.” There’s much more to Veronica’s story. Check it out on the *Powered by the People* podcast.