

ANDREA BAZAN-MANSON ON

Building Strong Foundations: The First 100 Days

“I was surprised at how much I had to learn....”



EDITOR'S NOTE: Andrea Bazan-Manson became Executive Director of [Triangle Community Foundation](#), a public charity serving Chapel Hill, Durham, Raleigh and other contiguous North Carolina communities, in September 2005. Until then, Andrea had been the founder, Executive Director and chief lobbyist of El Pueblo, a statewide advocacy organization committed to strengthening the Latino community in North Carolina.

A native of Argentina, Andrea Bazan-Manson immigrated to New Orleans from Argentina as a young teenager. Her family settled in New Orleans, where she went to high school (and where she first learned she was “Latina,” a term she had not heard before). She moved to North Carolina for graduate school, and the state has been her home ever since. Today, Andrea is the chief professional officer of a highly regarded foundation with assets of over \$100 million.

BoardWalk Consulting had the privilege of recruiting Andrea Bazan-Manson to become head of the Triangle Community Foundation last year. We are grateful that she has agreed to participate in our ongoing series on leadership and transitions, “Building Strong Foundations: The First 100 Days.”

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**BOARDWALK:** Once you accepted the new role at Triangle, how did you prepare for your transition?

**ANDREA BAZAN-MANSON:** My first order of business was leaving my current organization [[El Pueblo](#)] in good order. And answering the many calls, emails, and press requests regarding my leaving!

I had been one of the founders of the nonprofit I was leaving, and wanted to make sure to cross all my t's and dot all my i's—from leaving staff with action

plans to raising as much funding as I could before leaving. Most of my time before beginning my new role, therefore, was spent thinking about that organization and not as much about my new role. I had three months of that, and they were very busy ones. I felt that I couldn't really focus on my new role until I felt comfortable that I was leaving things as prepared as possible for the person who was succeeding me. And in the end, I felt that I accomplished what I wanted.

I then took a vacation, but it was peppered with unexpected events—from a cold that kept me in for several days, to the fact that my four-year-old broke her arm. But most of all, I was preoccupied with Hurricane Katrina, since I grew up in New Orleans and my family was among those evacuated. It was a difficult period, and I must say that I was somewhat relieved to begin my new job in search of some daily 'normalcy.'

**BOARDWALK:** From your first day to your 100th, how did your priorities evolve?

**BAZAN-MANSON:** Initially my priorities were focused on the programming and external aspects of our foundation, but eventually they evolved into more internal priorities—activities having to do with our staff capacity, systems and processes, and the Board roles. During my first Board meeting, we decided to embark on a Strategic Planning process, so that became my number one priority.

**BOARDWALK:** What was the biggest surprise you encountered during those early weeks?

**BAZAN-MANSON:** I was surprised at how much I had to learn.

The community foundation field is a very evolved one. Although each foundation is unique, there's quite a lot of collaboration and opportunities to discuss models with colleagues. Philanthropy as a whole has its own particular culture, and I was surprised how long it took me to understand the language, terms, and the many organizations that are out there—locally but also nationally—to support philanthropy. We spend quite a lot of time evaluating and planning things on this side of philanthropy, and I was used to more action-oriented work.

**“Philanthropy as a whole has its own particular culture.”**

I was also interested in seeing how collaborative community foundations are. I was welcomed by colleagues both here in NC but also across the US, and many of them continue to offer me regular guidance and counsel.

**BOARDWALK:** In hindsight, what proved to be the most impactful action you took or decision you made during that time?

**BAZAN-MANSON:** That I would prioritize getting to know my staff and Board, before getting out and representing the Foundation. There were a lot of requests for me to attend meetings and talk about the Foundation after I began my new role, but I decided I needed to 'stay home' for the first few weeks. I did a lot of reading, learning, and listening during those first few weeks.

**“I did a lot of reading, learning, and listening during those first few weeks.”**

I conducted one-on-one meetings with each Board member, as well as several key former Board members, and I met individually with staff for extended periods of time. I think this helped me get a clearer idea of what everyone wanted out of this leadership transition—and it helped me forge personal relationships I needed to eventually carry my vision.

**BOARDWALK:** What did you learn about yourself during the transition?

**BAZAN-MANSON:** That I *can* be patient! Really, this is not a virtue that I thought I held to a high degree. I have always worked in quick-paced environments, from state government, to nonprofits, and even academia, and philanthropy can often be not so. I have appreciated having the time to get to know my staff and board—and also to learn.

**“...I *can* be patient!”**

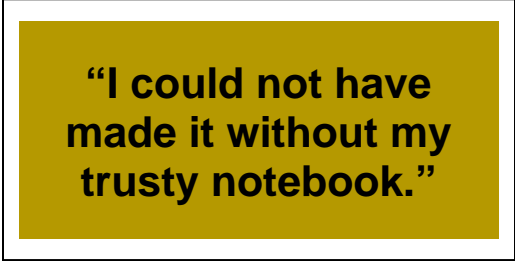
**BOARDWALK:** Is there anything you wish you could change about your first 100 days?

**BAZAN-MANSON:** That there were more hours to the day!

**BOARDWALK:** What advice do you have for others facing their own transition?

**BAZAN-MANSON:** Identify staff, board members, and/or other people related to your new organization who can provide the sense of history. I have tried to not come in and change certain things just because I think they can be done differently; differently may not always be better.

As a new leader, I believe it's important to develop trust and demonstrate your own leadership style before asking too much of others. Ask lots of questions. Admit ignorance. Take your staff to lunch. And write everything down! I could not have made it without my trusty notebook.



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