



FROM INTERN TO EXECUTIVE

EXECUTIVE ASSISTANT DIRECTOR ARLENE GAYLORD'S STORY OF GRIT AND RESILIENCE

By FBI Executive Assistant Director Arlene Gaylord, Information Management Division

Early in my FBI career, my father told me I would eventually be an FBI executive. Back in 1992, as we stood in the Hoover building courtyard, I told him it wasn't possible. Turns out, he was right.

In 2016, I was named the FBI's first Latina Assistant Director.

In 1991, I was an Honors Intern. My first job after the internship was as an FBI tour guide making about \$17,000. Over the last 31 years, I've worked in seven field offices and four headquarters divisions as a Spanish language specialist, intelligence analyst, program manager, and more. As an FBI executive, I've led in the fields of intelligence, human resources, equal employment, and information management.

How have I survived and thrived for 31 years? Grit and resilience.

Growing up in a tight-knit family in Puerto Rico, I learned leadership lessons from my father — an Army general—who taught me to have no fear, respectfully speak truth to power, and roll up my sleeves. My mother gave me unconditional support and taught me to have a positive mindset and always know my worth. That foundation propelled me into a career like no other. I love what I do.

It's been a journey with ups and downs. There were promotions I got, and opportunities denied. There were positions I wanted and some where I went because the mission required it. Through it all, I have bloomed where I was planted. Every position gave me a depth and breadth of experience that formed me into the executive I am today. I've also had the incredible privilege to share my lessons learned with hundreds of FBI employees who I've mentored over the years.

What Could an FBI Internship Mean for You?

It's a boarding pass (on an overbooked flight) to join a community of thinkers and doers — a chance to bring your skills and perspective to the table and take on new challenges as we keep the nation safe. If you come aboard, you will be able to "move about the cabin" and, eventually, go for your upgrade. Along the way, you will gain valuable networking tools and hands-on training.

Whatever you choose to do, I encourage you to find your passion, chase what feeds your soul, fear less, work hard, and be kind. Also, muster up a few seconds of crazy courage to ask someone you admire to mentor you. You don't have to go at it alone.

Be a Lifelong Learner

My advice to new professionals is READ. Here are three personal recommendations for books* that have helped shape my outlook and built my capacity to succeed and lead.

** Disclaimer: The books listed below are the author's personal recommendations and are neither being recommended for purchase nor otherwise endorsed by the FBI.*

- *Presence* by Amy Cuddy
- *Grit* by Angela Duckworth
- *Trade Up* by Rayona Sharpnack