

## Missouri Career Mentor video transcript



### **Luis Cordova, MS, CSAC II**

Director of Community Programs  
Mattie Rhodes Center

My name is Luis Cordova. I was born in Mexico. First generation Latino in this country. Naturalized in 1982 as a U.S. citizen. I am currently the director of a mental health center in Kansas City, Missouri. We work with families who speak Spanish and normally would not be helped by the system we have today.

#### **Addiction Counseling**

Addiction counseling was not a field that I was planning on. I was a police officer in California, and after four or five years on the force I saw a lot of crimes, I saw what drugs do to communities. And when we moved to Missouri in '88, I brought my two kids with me, Shawn and Matthew. And I wanted them to live in a community that was safe, that was free from drugs, but I was living a lie because drugs are everywhere – whether you are in urban cities, whether you are in rural cities, drugs are present. I began counseling a group of offenders and they were Cuban refugees. And that was in Kansas City, Missouri. And it was then that I began to feel the importance of assisting those that wanted to help themselves. And through my years in addiction counseling – that's about 20 years – I found that if you really put forth an effort to help somebody understand a different lifestyle, and it's possible and you see the change – it's kinda like a personal addiction.

#### **Joys & Challenges**

Some of the things that I have enjoyed over the past 20 years in my career is the fact that when you help somebody – that most people would think that they're not worthy of society, that they're not going to be anything in life – those are the challenges that I really like to encounter. And I will never say to any youth – to anyone – that you can never be anything, because that is wrong. I believe that anyone who is willing to work at success can be successful. If you focus on the education component in your life, I guarantee you that you will be successful in anything you do.

#### **Lifelong Learning**

Knowledge to me is so important, that once you obtain knowledge no one can take it away from you. Once you obtain that degree, no one can take it away from you. Once I entered the higher education system, I began to work hard. Education is not easy. You have to give up a lot of things. But I had people around me who were positive influences in my life. And those are the people that I listened to. And those are the people that everyone should listen to – positive peer culture. And now I am just about done with my doctorate degree. So to me education is a life journey – not just an educational journey but a life journey.

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### **Early Influences**

My mom is by far the person who has influenced my life. I grew up without a father. Single parent, my mom worked to provide us with food and shelter. My mom had a sixth grade education when she immigrated to the United States. Back then it was a very different time of living. My mom saved me from the, I would say the influence, the negative influences, from the streets. And my mom always knew the importance of education. She is a wise woman. And I think that it's the traits that my mom had taught me – respect people, do not judge people, accept them for who they are. These are the traits that I think have helped me understand and connect with people of all nationalities, of all linguistic backgrounds, of all ethnicity, religion, whatever. That is the traits that my mom taught me.

### **High School Classes**

My high school classes prepared me for higher education. Reading. Writing. Communication. Speech. Social Work. Sociology. These are all classes that help me in my profession, and they are all connected. If you can't communicate in writing, you can't communicate. If you can't communicate verbally, you can't communicate. So to me it's important to understand that whatever they teach at the elementary and the high school level, they are equally important and they are preparing you for higher education.

### **In retrospect**

Knowing what I know now, and thinking back to my high school years – and even elementary school – I personally would pay more attention to my class studies. I was in sports, and I think sports helped me deviate from the negative influence in my neighborhood. However, I think I could have done better in school. So if I were to do it over again, I think that, for me, I would be more successful in academics. I would do more work in academics. I would study more. And I think that today we kinda get away from that – at least that's what I've seen.

### **Advice**

The advice I would give would be: study. Nothing comes easy in life. And I would be lying to those that said it's going to be easy studying. No it's not. It's a hard road. But I think that if you are willing to prepare yourself for the future, and if you are really willing to help others in this profession, I think it takes a special person. I realize that. It's not just a paycheck. The paycheck is secondary. You have to believe it, you have to feel it in your heart. And if this is a profession that you want and are wanting to do because you want to help somebody else then, yes, go forth. But study hard, and it's a long road ahead for what you are going to achieve in life.