



How Nina Terrero Groth Applies her Storytelling Skills to Reimagining the Future of Retail

This talented storyteller began her career in digital news at ABC, NBC and Entertainment Weekly, where her encyclopedic knowledge of entertainment and megawatt charm opened the door to on-air opportunities on platforms like The Today Show, The Wendy Williams Show and People NOW. Then, Nina made a big career jump into corporate communications at Target, where she then pivoted once again, taking on a role as Lead Pipeline Manager for Target Accelerators. Nina shares her best advice for aligning your values

and your skills, and the work she's doing to reimagine the future of retail.

Alicia Menendez: Nina Terrero Groth knows how to change course while continuing to move forward. She did it early on when she opted against law school and instead chose to pursue a master's in political science; then again, as she pursued a career in news that would take her through the halls of ABC, NBC, and Entertainment Weekly, digital opportunities that gave way to on-air opportunities, before Nina made the biggest pivot of all: picking up her young family and moving to Minneapolis to bring her love of storytelling to target corporate communications. And here's the thing. If you know Nina, which I do, we came up together through news, she is not a sit still type. She is continually reassessing how to best align her values and her skills, most recently making the leap to lead pipeline manager for Target Accelerators. Nina is here to share what she has learned from all of these pivots and the work she's doing to change the future of retail. Nina, thank you so much for doing this.

Nina Terrero Groth:

Thanks for having me.

Menendez: Nina, I realize as much as I know about your story, there's a key piece of it that I don't know, which is what it was about your upbringing that made you want to be a storyteller.

Terrero Groth: I fell in love with storytelling because I knew I had a story to tell. I think I was the beneficiary of hearing stories almost ad nauseum, if I'm being honest, around how my paternal grandfather, Fred Trujillo, he came from the Dominican Republic to Washington Heights with nothing. To this day, I don't even know really what's true in fact, beyond that simple fact, because he told his own story the way he wanted it to be understood and shared out. He created his own legacy, as did, I think, everyone in my family. And I'm the beneficiary of that. They made certain choices so that I could have the freedom and privilege to create my own story.

And truly, I think it was the simple things around my childhood that influenced my journey. My parents didn't let me watch a lot of TV as a kid. It was PBS and 60 Minutes. And so when I was a little kid, I have this really vivid memory of sitting down with my tape recorder, remember those, and recording myself doing fake newscasts like Peter Jennings, all the while not really connecting the dots and thinking I could do that.

Menendez: When did you finally give yourself permission to consider journalism as an actual option?

Terrero Groth: It was way back when. I had graduated from college. I had taken the LSAT when I realized I'd have to pay for said law school, and I wasn't really 110% engaged in that. I took some time to work. And I was working at a law firm as a paralegal. And at the time, it was the great recession, so I had all the time in the world to read the internets. And it was such a cool time. New York Magazine had launched a bunch of blogs. The New York Times was taking a more relaxed style to sharing out the news in tandem with really embracing the power of digital.

And honestly, Alicia, it was me reading and consuming content and being like, "I could totally do this. I could do this." And so I did apply for law school a second time, trying to get those scholarships. But I decided to simultaneously take the GRE and apply for my masters and take up some media internships. And that's the long story short around how I was able to accomplish my first pivot, the first of a few, and change the trajectory of my professional career.

Menendez: You talked about the first pivot. I would argue, and I wonder if you see it the same way, that the second pivot is getting into journalism, becoming a writer, doing a lot of work in the digital space, but then both opportunities organically coming to you to be on air, and then your own desire to be on air. I wonder, one, if you see it the same way, and two, if you can pull back the curtain on the amount of thought and effort that goes into that critical pivot.

Terrero Groth: I've really been the beneficiary of others seeing a lot of potential in me. And so it's then that coupling of being overly prepared, giving 110%, showing up and being old, but also being surrounded by the people who want the best for you and who want to push things for you.

I had worked at ABC for a while. I had been an assistant, eventually ended up in the digital newsroom, and had a variety of beats ranging from general news to entertainment. And the girl who had been covering the Kardashians went to cover Hillary Clinton. She was like, "I'm a serious reporter now. I'm not..." But all that to say, landed at NBC. And I was still very much doing digital writing, digital media, as you had mentioned. And the quote, unquote big break came when the singer Jenny Rivera had died. And I think it was a slow news day, there wasn't really else going on. And someone was like, "I hear this Jenny Rivera person was the big deal to the Latin... Latino? Latino community?"

And I think someone, probably in the broadcast space, the floor below me at 30 Rock, was googling the news, and they saw my headline and were like, "Oh, she's in the building." So my editor at the time, she literally slapped some lipstick on me. She's like, "Go downstairs. Tell them that you wrote the story. Tell them you know everything." And yeah, I did a couple of hits for NBC affiliates, and it all snowballed from there. And the fact that I was at NBC and I was an in-house asset and there were so many properties, whether it was NBC Learn or the affiliates, MSNBC, and I loved it.

Menendez: Before we move on to the next pivot, I know that you're saving all of your best celebrity stories for your forthcoming bestselling autobiography, but I do wonder, you had a lot of proximity to celebrity, and I wonder what that taught you or what you observed or how your relationship to celebrity changed by virtue of spending an ample amount of time with folks?

Terrero Groth: I love this question. This could be the whole episode. This is a really great question.

Menendez: Well come back. That'll be episode two.

Terrero Groth: Yeah. I think as a kid who doesn't come from money, you think that... I think this is probably a pretty universal truth. You think that, to a certain extent, money is what will solve all the

problems. You'll be happier, you'll have access. You will feel as though you're maybe not victim to circumstance. And I think that's all the more acute, if you come from an immigrant family.

When I was interviewing all these celebrities, I thought, wow, I actually don't ever want to be one. I thought I would never be the one to grant an access-all exclusive with the People magazine, the very outlet I was working with. Oh, I would never do that. I'm a little bit nervous. I would never want to let someone in like that and to feel as though my life is currency, dollars and cents. I wouldn't ever want to feel that.

And at the end of the day, I want to be remembered as someone who led with kindness and empathy. I never want to get to that place where I forget how important it is to lead with kindness or whatever it's worth. I want to grab life. And I want it again to just be of my own making. And I just can't imagine just waiting for the next role and hoping that maybe I don't have to wear a tight dress for yet another on-air hit about yet another movie that's going to flop at the podcast or box office or whatever it might be. I'm mixing up my genres. You know what I mean? Like-

Menendez: I do, I do.

Terrero Groth: ... "Oh, thank you."

Menendez: I remember very vividly a conversation that you and I had, Nina. I believe it was in 2013. I was still at HuffPost Live, I believe you were still at NBC Latino.

Terrero Groth: Oh, wow.

Menendez: You were still feeling your way through how to maximize on-air opportunities. And then I believe you went to People, and you were doing PeopleTV, which was this big streaming enterprise at People. And then I looked up. I think we were both pregnant or had just had babies 'cause we were pregnant at literally exactly the same time. Our firstborns are born a few days apart. And you were on a plane to Minneapolis.

Terrero Groth: Yeah.

Menendez: So fill in the gaps for me. What happened that instigated the move to Minneapolis and the pivot away from media?

Terrero Groth: Yeah. Some of it has to do with growing too comfortable. I was born and raised on the East Coast. I think my dad all about... He just stopped short of taking out a map and showing me how far away I could go. So I was like, "Okay, Ithaca it is." Three hours north.

Menendez: I was about to say, "Amazing you got to Ithaca."

Terrero Groth: Yeah. So I think I was looking for something different. If I don't move now, I might not ever do it. If I don't take up that next big challenge. And at the same time, professionally, there was this lingering awareness that it wasn't satisfying me. The work is glamorous, and I love the hair and makeup. Who doesn't love that? But I felt as though I was being paid what I was worth. I felt like there were a number of microaggressions that, on any given day or hour, I was swallowing down because I was too junior, I was too brown, and I wasn't enough based on other people's perceptions.

This was right before Me Too. This was right before that reckoning that came around the subject of unionization and the workplace and so on. And at the same time too, I felt a lot of my quote unquote success was around my personal rapport with talent and how I was showing up physically. And as you mentioned, I was pregnant, and I just thought about having a baby and becoming pregnant and then thinking about postpartum, I don't want to stuff myself in a dress as currency for success on someone else's terms. That was just unfathomable to me.

And at the same time too, what I was really loving about my job was the strategy piece, like: how do we think about storytelling differently? How do we think about driving a strategy that meets business goals and satisfies X, Y, Z metrics? And I didn't want to wait to have X amount of time as a journalist to get on the business side. That was not acceptable to me.

And so I would ask and really challenge anybody who's thinking about a pivot, what are those key things that are non-negotiables for you? What are the things that fill your cup, and what are the things that you want to really make as your brand? And so I took that exercise, and I thought, okay, long story short, I'm going to go to Target Corp, and I'm going to be a storyteller for one of the biggest mass retailers in the country.

Menendez: What was the biggest learning curve?

Terrero Groth: You know what? It was really working with the team. How do you work with a team? I think as a journalist, you're an individual contributor. You identify the story, you chase the story, you secure your sources. And ultimately for the most part, you architect it solo. You might work with an editor, you might bring in a producer or cameraman. But for the most part, you're largely driving the product from end-to-end. And I was really proud of how I did that as a journalist. To think about contributing and being part of a team and driving results that meet a broader goal than one based on a singular work stream, that was quite the learning curve for me.

Menendez: One of the things I'm always struck by, and I'm struck by it as I speak with you, is that part of corporate culture is a certain corporate speak, that I am a very casual person. So I know about myself that if I were to all of a sudden go into corporate life, I would have to readjust my self-presentation. I would have to readjust the way that I speak and present myself. I'm not sure that that was as big a jump for you, but it strikes me that there is definitely, every workplace has a culture. Every corporation has its own culture, but there is something about corporate culture overall that is very, very specific.

Terrero Groth: At large, right. Yes, I hear what you're saying. It's funny too because I think, as a reporter... Of course this is not hard news. We're talking entertainment or lifestyle. You were encouraged to be really bubbly, bring the energy. And I think at times I was told, "You're a little too buttoned up. You're a little bit too formal." And here I am now. That's gold in the corporate world.

Menendez: It also strikes me though, that you were being told, "You are too button up, too formal, too whatever, during your time in media, because I've received all of those notes too. And I think part of what it ignores is the fact that media demands gravitas. But for those of us who are not white men, we're not assumed to have competence or gravitas. And so of course there's a little bit of an affectation that says, "I am a serious person. Take me seriously." Because you know that if you don't assert that, that it's not just simply going to be granted to you.

Terrero Groth: And I'm smiling. You can't see me now, listeners. I'm smiling at ear to ear because immigrant kid, right? My parents would ignore me if I ever said, "Yeah." If I ever dropped a "yeah," they would literally ignore me. I was modeling my speech after Diane Sawyer, Peter Jennings. And so for me, it wasn't an affectation to get taken seriously. It was just like, "[foreign language 00:13:51] like Spanglish at home. If you want me to do that in my work, that is when I'm going to be creating an affectation of myself. That is not a representation of myself. That's not being my full, true self.

Menendez: When you started at Target, you started by doing communications. You've made pivots within your time at Target, and I want to talk about what it is you're doing now because my sense is it's even more aligned with who you are and what you want to be in the world than where you started.

Terrero Groth: That's exactly right. I think as I've continued to evolve as a woman and as a person, so has my professional trajectory. And I would say that culture and team, it was something new to me when I joined Target, but it's what's kept me at Target. And I've actively sought out ways to continue my career trajectory here. And so I've had a number of different roles. Most of them, over the past five and a half years, are on the communications team. But recently I made another leap to our strategy pyramid, and now I lead all of recruiting and pipeline for Target Accelerators, which is such an exciting group of programs. For decades, Target has been really vocal about seeking out ways to work with and empower diverse suppliers. But now with Target Accelerators, which have been in place for a number of years, we're really able to double down on that commitment and offer full-spectrum support to entrepreneurs and early-stage founders. And we help them scale for success. We do that in a number of different ways through our website and educational content. We do that through our programs. But the essence of what we do and our purpose is to really help underserved and underfunded founders unlock the potential of their brand for mass success in retail shelves. And it's something that I'm really, really proud of being able to do at this point in my career because I get to have that dual-pronged approach of helping others who look like me, BIPOC founders, and I'm able to unlock the power of Target by virtue of all that I've learned about the corporation. And so it's a huge privilege. And if you're listening and if you're a small business owner, I hope that you will apply for Target Accelerators programs for 2023. There's going to be one application, and it opens in January. So please, please, please apply. We would love to have you in the door.

Menendez: There is that charm and that executive presence I know and love. I'm like, "I'm not even a small business owner, and I want to apply to your Accelerator."

Terrero Groth: Yes.

Menendez: Nina, there have been times in my own life where the pivot has felt very much of my own volition, and there have been times in my life where I felt that circumstances beyond my control were forcing me to pivot. When I look back at it now, it all feels empowering. It did not feel that way always at the time. What is your message to a Latina who is listening who may be on the brink of one of those pivots herself?

Terrero Groth: Life isn't one-size-fits-all and neither should your career journey. Whatever it is you choose to be and whatever spaces you choose to occupy, you should feel empowered. All women and all Latinas, we should feel empowered to take charge of our careers. As we change and shift and evolve to become closer to the women that we are meant to be, so should our careers.

I come from a place of privilege and circumstance. I do want to say that. Having graduated from certain universities and having made certain life decisions, like having delayed becoming a mom. But I really do feel strongly about this: my family struggled and made difficult choices so that I could thrive. I am the beneficiary of that privilege. And sure, there's generational trauma that comes too, from the choices that my family made. But I think what I have is the acute self-awareness that my family and my ancestors made

certain choices so that I could be empowered to choose which spaces that I take up in this world. And I don't take that lightly.

Menendez: I love that. Nina, thank you so much for taking the time to do this.

Terrero Groth: Thank you.

Menendez: Thanks for listening. Latina to Latina is executive produced and owned by Juleyka Lantigua and me, Alicia Menendez. Paulina Velasco is our producer. Kojin Tashiro is our lead producer. Tren Lightburn mixed this episode. We love hearing from you. Email us at hola@latinatolatina.com. Slide into our DMs on Instagram or tweet us at Latina to Latina. Check out our merchandise at latinatolatina.com/shop. And remember to subscribe or follow us on Radio Public, Apple Podcast, Google Podcast, Goodpods, wherever you're listening right now. Every time you share the podcast, every time you leave a review, you help us to grow as a community.

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