



How Raquel Dominguez Develops Big Ideas Around Big Talent

She went from assistant to creative executive in just a few years, and now at OBB Media, she oversees content and strategy for Hailey Bieber, Kylie Jenner, Demi Lovato, and Kevin Hart. We talk about getting your foot in the door when you have no connections, learning by osmosis, and how to play it cool when you work with some of the biggest stars of your generation.

Alicia Menendez: Raquel Dominguez has had the type of ascent from assistant to creative executive that is the stuff of Hollywood lore. At OBB Media, she oversees content and strategy for Hailey Bieber, Kylie Jenner, Demi Lovato, and Kevin Hart. We talk about how she made the impossible leap and so quickly, her insights on developing ideas around talent, and how the simple act of offering to help set her apart. Raquel, thank you so much for being here.

Raquel Dominguez: Thanks for having me.

Menendez: I was reading your LinkedIn and laughing to myself about your BA from Notre Dame that is both in theater and political science. I identify very much with a person who didn't want to be forced to choose.

Dominguez: Yes. Well, that's funny that you checked my LinkedIn because I haven't updated that in forever, which is tip number one, update that. But in college, I went in thinking I wanted to be a lawyer, so I went in poli sci, econ, double major, and I was like, "Let's do this." And you have to take an elective at Notre Dame, a Fine Arts elective. And I took Intro to Film and TV and I was like, "Oh, this is a class? This is a job that people have? They work and they do this? Well, that's exciting." But as the years went on, it became just much more clear to me that I wanted to have a job where I could hopefully have a little bit of fun or be creative or have some balance of both. But I work with a lot of lawyers and need those people, so also, great job.

Menendez: I'm glad that you have not updated your LinkedIn because part of what it reveals as a sort of archive at this point are what those few years after college look like for someone who wants to break into entertainment but is not from LA, doesn't have those connections, which is I can almost sense you feeling your way through it. After you graduate, you do PR for a company, you get your foot in the door as an assistant at an independent film distributor, and I do love this line from your LinkedIn, which was, "Completed other miscellaneous tasks as needed," which is 90% of being an assistant. What I want to understand is how you make the leap into the industry, which is arguably the first leap that is hardest to make.

Dominguez:

Yeah. So I went to Notre Dame. At the end of my four years, I did not know what I was doing. I did not know where I wanted to live. And then spring break of senior year, our career center put on during spring break, a trip to LA and they had us meet with Disney and agencies and just people that took an hour out of their day to be kind and give us a talk of, "This is what we do here at NBC," etc. And that was the first time I had ever been on the West Coast period, and I was like, "Oh, well, this is where I have to be if I really want to give this a shot."

I definitely had a naiveté. I think people were saying, "Starting in entertainment or working in entertainment is really challenging, so it's not for the weak. It's not for the weak." You hear that a lot and then I feel like I was just so young that I was like, "Okay, people can tell me that, but obviously it's not going to be hard for me," which is, spoiler alert, not true. So I didn't have a job lined up at all when I graduated, moved back in with my parents and started working. I was working two jobs. My dad was kind enough to be like, "Hey, our company's looking for an intern." He works in oil refining, and I was planning their company picnics and stuff, and I was also after that working as a food runner in a restaurant. After that, I ended up living in Philadelphia for a year, and that's where I worked for the independent film distribution company and moved to LA with no job again, which was pretty scary I would say.

So I was applying to every kind of entry-level job that I could find online and got a job in the mail room at a talent agency. I was like, "Hey, I've heard this is one of the ways to get your foot in the door and hopefully just be a sponge and take it all in." Then I moved on to be actually on a desk and be an assistant. I was at the agency for I think all in all, it was a year and a half, and then I came to the company that I am now. So I came here to OBB Media and I started as the executive assistant to the CEO who also directs and produces a lot of our projects. And then I feel pretty blessed because then I was moved up to coordinator, then I was moved up to creative executive, and now I'm development and production executive here, and I've been here for, it'll be five years in June, so almost five years, which is kind of wild.

Menendez:

Wild. And it's part of why we wanted to talk to you because it is a rare and meteoric rise, and I will tell you how I see it from the outside, but before I do, I want to just talk about what it is that OBB Media does. It's described as a "vertically integrated content studio that is defining how a new generation of viewers consumes programming." In layman speak, what does that mean?

Dominguez:

Yeah. So my spiel is basically we're an independent production company. We make all kinds of content. I think something that sets us apart is we're making content for tons of different kinds of platforms, and I think we really make content that's for a millennial and Gen Z audience, younger. If I make an episode of something, I'm thinking about, "What is the clip on TikTok that comes from that episode that goes viral?" Because frankly, most people would see that over the full episode in just the world that we live in. So we're known most for premium documentaries, Justin Bieber's last three documentaries, a documentary with

Demi Lovato, Dancing with the Devil, which is my first associate producer credit, which is very exciting.

I also have a podcast division, also do a lot of branded content, and that's something that I'm involved with as well. And that can be traditional type of commercials or branded content to things that feel more organic. That is just a little sampling, I would say. I spearhead all of Hailey Bieber's content on her YouTube channel, and we have done everything from holiday specials to the iHeart Jingle Ball broadcast on ABC, but also I'm not above doing something for social, I guess.

Menendez:

Here's how your meteoric rise looks to me from the outside, if I were someone who was trying to deduce what the lesson is from you, which is to me you took a risk because OBB is less traditional than being at Warner Brothers or being on a lot somewhere. And you positioned yourself in a place where the fact that you were of the audience that they were attempting to reach gave you a very innate sense of expertise. And I have to imagine that the duality of those things is part of what propelled you. I'm sure there was a ton of hard work. I'm sure you were excellent at what you do. From what I am hearing from you, you also work for people who are willing to promote from within, which is a thing that we cannot control as employees. I wonder first if that comports with how you actually experienced it and what you would tell someone else who's like, "I don't want to get stuck as an assistant. I want to be an executive, but I don't know how to get from there to here."

Dominguez:

Yeah. I think that's interesting because I don't know if I looked at it quite that way. I think when I was leaving the agency, I had huge anxiety of will I be able to get another job? Will anybody hire me? I was interviewing for lots of different types of jobs. But I was very anxious and OBB was a very different company when I first joined to where I am now, where sometimes I even think, "I don't know if I would've gotten the job with the credentials that I had at the time if I was applying today," which is an imposter syndrome kind of thought, but it's also just like to a certain degree, I'm just very aware of how much luck is involved too and just perseverance.

But honestly, my number one thing, and it's also now something that I look at when I'm looking to hire somebody is, are you personable? Are you hardworking? And then also, do you think critically? Are you thinking critically? Are you not just doing something to get the task done, but are you trying to do it the best possible way? Are you thinking creatively, "Is there a better way to do this? Is there a more efficient way to do this? Is there a way we can do this that's more fun for the audience?" You can apply that to everything. You can apply it to just doing the miscellaneous tasks of being an assistant, and you can also apply it to just content that you're producing.

There's so much that I've learned over the years. I didn't have those skills when I first came, but just paying attention, and I think a lot of it's just access. I was very lucky that my boss would let me be on a ton of calls and listen and learn what are his notes? How is he noting cuts? I would've never known how to note a single

piece of video before I came here, and it's something that I was just blessed to be able to see and then really soak it in. What's the benefit of cutting the shot or adding this shot or doing this? You don't even realize that you're getting some of this knowledge until it's time to put it into practice.

And the other thing is just taking initiative. That was a big turning point for me. And I remember we were making the Demi Lovato documentary, and I was a fan from the Disney Channel days, so I was like, "We are a small team." I would say we've grown a lot over the years, but I would still describe us as a small team. I remember I reached out to two of the producers and I said, "Hey, do you need any help with research, anything like that?" And the secret is everybody is swamped. So a lot of people will say yes if you offer to help them. And then if you do get that opportunity, you have to make sure you're doing a really good job because that's their first impression of you.

So I took that opportunity, I did research, I ended up helping write interview questions and being able to watch cuts and give my opinion, give my thoughts. And I feel very blessed that I have a boss that was like, "Hey, you did a lot of work on this project. Let me talk to the network and fight to get you an associate producer credit." And he did. And that was my very first credit ever. And I was like, "Wow, that's really cool." And from there it was like once you can be trusted to do one thing, I think it just builds.

Menendez: I want you, Raquel, to pull back the curtain for me on development because you're talking about really huge stars: Hailey Bieber, Kylie Jenner, Demi Lovato. How does something go from concept to execution? And we are talking about stars at that level. How much of it is getting to know them, understanding their strengths and their talents and then building around them?

Dominguez: Yeah. I would say can come a variety of different ways. You can develop an idea from scratch or you can develop an idea that's like, "Oh, I know that if it's based around a celebrity talent, I know this person's interested in X hobby and I'm going to develop from there." And sometimes people come in with a nugget of an idea. It also just depends. If it's a branded thing, then usually that comes a lot more directive, I think, already from the jump. "This is what we want to promote, this is your budget, this is all kind of the parameters you have to work in." And then from there, it's being creative, whether they have a concept in mind or whether we're developing a concept from scratch, how can we think of, develop a fun, creative concept, something that people would be entertained to watch?

And anytime specifically with something branded, I always am thinking as an audience member of, "I don't want to be hit in the head with talking points or something like that." Those bother me very much. So I'm always like, "Well, branded content makes our content free for people to watch. So it's essential." And ideally, you're looking for brands that get this person's vision, that fit into the world, that we can weave in a very authentic and organic way. And I would say it varies. Sometimes you get something that's like, "Wow, that couldn't have been more seamless." Sometimes it's a little bit of more of an exercise to get to that point where it feels good creatively. Because I think just young audiences and

millennial, Gen Z, we're getting advertised to 24/7. And we know we're getting advertised to and we know that we're never not going to be advertised to. If that's going to happen, then at least can it be fun? But that's always also something that I have in mind.

Menendez: So I work at MSNBC. I've worked in the past at HuffPost Live, which was the streaming network that was on the Huffington Post. I worked at Fusion, which is the ABC Univision station, so a lot of Latin stars. And a thing I have found very hard to teach is how to be chill around celebrities and newsmakers. I remember reading Barbara Walters' autobiography and she talked about how the worst part of being famous is that nobody talks to you any more about anything other than yourself. So I wonder if as someone who spends a lot of time with the biggest stars of your own generation, how [do you] just act normal?

Dominguez: Wow, that's a great question because I feel like I have to remind myself to act normal sometimes, but just in general in life. But at the end of the day, everybody is a human being, so I try to keep that honestly top of mind. And usually if a celebrity is on set or around they are a client or a potential client, so I'm being nice, I'm being personable, I'm being professional. Having confidence in what you're doing makes it much easier. If I'm like, "Hey, I'm going to show you around the set and show you, 'This is what we're going to be doing today,'" the focus is less on, "Oh my God, I can't believe Ariana Grande is standing right next to me." It's more like she's a person, I'm a person. And yes, it's the on-camera talent, and I'm not going to be mean or crazy, but it's just important, I think, to keep yourself grounded and just be a normal human being, making them feel comfortable. Although there's definitely times that you get starstruck for sure, and I go home later and I'm like, "Wow, fun day."

Menendez: Here's sort of the flip part of having a meteoric rise and having an executive title when you were very young, which is there are rooms you walk into where people are aware of your merits and your work ethic and your greatness, and there is nothing to prove. And I have to imagine that there are other rooms you walk into where people are like, "Huh, she seems quite young. Hm, she's got a Latino surname." "There were just things I was not prepared for when I was imagining an executive would walk in," and how you one, don't internalize that, and two, how then you show up in those rooms.

Dominguez: I feel like a lot of, honestly, my self-doubt comes from myself a lot of the time. So because of that, I focus less on, "What could other people be thinking of me?" But it's all coming from internal, more than external, I guess. When I am on a project, even if I feel like, "Wow, this feels daunting, this feels like a challenge that I'm not a hundred percent confident in myself or I've never done this aspect of things," you have to learn very quickly.

This whole industry is all based in collaboration and nobody can do everything by themselves, period. I rely on so many people from crew to post-production to just people here at the office. There's so many aspects to just make one project, even if it feels like the smallest, most inconsequential shoot ever. So I think the biggest thing for me is I've never been a person that's afraid to ask questions or afraid to

ask for help, and I think when it comes to also creative choices, there's an infinite number of directions you can take, things that also just asking other people's opinions and getting other perspectives I think is just a key part of working successfully in this industry.

Menendez: First of all, I wonder if you're a person who likes to be in community with other Latinas and if you have found that in Hollywood, because there is a burgeoning group of young producers, young writers that share some of that life experience.

Dominguez: Yeah. My mom is from Spain, my dad from the States, but Cuban and Spanish and I am fluent in Spanish, have always been, but I've always lived places and gone to school places where there wasn't a lot of Latin people around. I look at every job I've ever had, I'm probably one of, if not the only one, and I feel like the restaurant's the only place that I'm like, "Yeah, the chef was Mexican." But I think I try not to be too mindful of, "I'm the only one here" and try to really focus on the work, but I would also say it certainly comes in handy and gives me a different perspective than other people, and I also choose to look at that as a strength because it is a strength.

And there have been times that, we do the show for Spotify called Billions Club, where every time an artist gets a song that passes a billion streams, they're inducted into this playlist, they get an award. And we did one episode with Bad Bunny who has 12 songs in the Billions Club, and that was a very exciting day for me because I am a big fan, and he wanted to do the whole interview in Spanish, and most of the crew, including the director, my boss, don't speak Spanish, so I was like, "Great, I am here translating." So that was very cool. That was the first time on set ever that I've been able to use that side of me. I look at that time and I'm like, "Oh, how do I do more of that?" I'm tapping into that side of myself and tapping into my culture. I'm almost directing, but not quite. I'm still producing. But continuing to grow is a huge thing that I'm always thinking about.

Menendez: Raquel, what did I miss?

Dominguez: I don't know. I think my biggest piece of advice for everybody is just to keep going because you'll always feel a little bit like an imposter. Even when you accomplish something, you're like, "I just did this cool thing, but can I do it again?" That self-doubt never truly goes away, probably. It's always there. You just have to reframe it constantly and keep persevering and keep going, because the more you do things, the more confidence you'll get. Even if it's a quiet confidence, even if there's new doubts that come in, then you're like, "I've done hard things before and I can do hard things again."

Menendez: Raquel, thank you so much for doing this. I cannot wait to watch your Hollywood takeover.

Dominguez: Wow. Thank you. Appreciate it.

Menendez: Thanks for listening. Latina to Latina is executive produced and owned by Juleyka Lantigua and me, Alicia Menendez. Virginia Lora is our producer, Kojin Tashiro is our lead producer, Tren Lightburn mixed this episode. We love hearing from you.

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