



Beth Cabrera, center, is committed to a well-being university. She joined Patrice Winter, life planning coordinator in Human Resources and Payroll, left, and Janet Walker, work life and communications coordinator in HR, at the recent Happy Heart Walk. Creative Services photo

Beth Cabrera loves her job and wants you to love yours, too.

An expert in organizational behavior and positive psychology, Cabrera works with organizations to maximize workplace positivity. Now at George Mason University, she is committed to helping the [Center for Consciousness and Transformation](#) (CCT) propel Mason's new Well-Being University Initiative.

Cabrera came to Mason last summer as its new first lady — the wife of recently hired President Ángel Cabrera. When Nance Lucas, PhD, CCT's executive director, learned that Cabrera was moving to Fairfax, she said, "With her background, Beth Cabrera just belongs at CCT." Lucas invited Cabrera to speak at the CCT and Mason Leads annual Leading to Well-Being Conference — her first professional appearance at Mason — and soon after, Cabrera found a home at Mason as a CCT senior scholar.

Although Cabrera views many of the varied twists along her career path as lucky opportunities, she says, "Self-knowledge guides me toward where I want to go." She believes in following a purpose while considering personal strengths, interests, and the opportunities that arise in life. She encourages those on a career path to ask themselves, "What problems do you see that you could help solve? How could you use your strengths to make a difference in something about which you care deeply?"

Cabrera feels strongly about the importance of lifelong learning — a passion instilled by her parents, who taught her to read and solve long division math problems at a young age. She has always loved to teach. "At the age of seven, I wanted to be just like my second-grade teacher," she says.

By the time she reached college, Cabrera had decided to pursue a business major; however, after taking an introductory psychology class, she became fascinated by the intersection of psychology and business. Close to graduation and interviewing for bank jobs, Cabrera instinctively knew that she was meant to help people in a more personal way. A talk with her career counselor led her to realize, "I wanted *her* job!" Cabrera decided to pursue a master's in counseling psychology at the University of Memphis.

It was at that point that her interests really started to converge. Becoming fascinated with business organizations, “I dreamed of inventing my own field combining organizational behavior, leadership, group dynamics, and motivation. Then I found out this field—organizational psychology—already existed,” she says, smiling.

While working on her master’s thesis, she discovered a passion for research and writing. “I’d never considered myself a writer before,” she admits, but “my passion for the subject had turned me into a writer.” Since then, Cabrera has published more than 30 articles in academic and professional journals. She also maintains a popular blog on her website.

While obtaining a PhD in psychology at the Georgia Institute of Technology, she met Ángel Cabrera. He was from Madrid, Spain, in Georgia on a Fulbright scholarship pursuing a psychology degree. “Something told me that I’d better learn Spanish,” she says.

But auditing a few Spanish classes did not prepare her for the total immersion in the Spanish language and culture she experienced once they married and moved to Madrid. She took more Spanish classes and became a professor at the Universidad Carlos III de Madrid.

Teaching an introductory business class completely in Spanish was a challenge, but her students appeared to be enjoying the class, often bringing friends to sit in. One day she told her husband, “They laugh a lot, even when I’m not trying to be funny.”

“Give me an example,” he said.

She told him about something she’d said that day, and, in between peals of laughter, Ángel explained that “while I thought I was telling them they were really good workers, I really told them that they were hot. I can laugh about it now,” she says, ruefully.

She eventually learned Spanish well enough to eradicate the malapropisms and enjoy teaching at the college level for the rest of the family’s nine years in Spain. “Every experience helps you learn what you like — and don’t like — to do,” she says.

In 2004, the couple and their two children moved to Scottsdale, Arizona, when Ángel accepted a job as president of Thunderbird University. Cabrera found teaching positions at Arizona State University, focusing on leadership and organizational behavior. She became fascinated with the study of positivity in the workplace. Her research indicated that many mothers, frustrated by inflexibility in their workplace, “opt out” by either slowing down or halting their career plans. Going with her sense of purpose, she decided to start her own company, Cabrera Insights, so that, through leadership workshops and talks, she could help organizations create and maintain positive workplace environments.

Using her strengths in synthesizing, simplifying, and communicating, Cabrera bridges the research and practice gap, helping managers put new positive workplace processes into place, sometimes producing changes as quickly as the next day. She asks them, “What can we do to create an environment where people thrive?”

Of her goal to make a difference at Mason, she says, “Being known as a well-being university will help Mason attract talented students, faculty, and staff. It’s a win-win situation. When you improve individuals’ lives, you improve the university itself.”

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