



*Interview with David Escamilla*  
**2019 LEADERSHIP AUSTIN  
OUTSTANDING ALUMNUS**

**WHAT CHARACTERISTIC FROM YOUR SUPPORT NETWORK DO YOU SEE IN YOURSELF?**

*My parents came from modest means and were true believers and living examples of the American Dream that, with honesty and hard work, you could realize opportunities for advancement and success. They stressed this ethos in raising their three children, and were successful in ensuring that all of us attained college degrees. I've never lost faith in these ideals, believing that everyone should have the opportunity, with hard work, to succeed.*

**WHAT WAS THE BEST LEADERSHIP ADVICE RECEIVED & HOW DOES THAT IMPACT YOU?**

*Long ago, legendary District Attorney Ronnie Earle explained to me that at any given time, there were dozens of assistant district attorneys carrying on the work of his office on his behalf in assuring that justice was done. Obviously, he couldn't carry out the mission of his office alone, and that all he could do was hire and train good people, explain his vision, set expectations, and trust in these colleagues to carry out their parts of the plan. Today, as Travis County Attorney, I have many more employees than Ronnie had at the time, and I remember his advice that successful leaders must support and empower their colleagues to succeed.*

**WHAT IS ONE MISTAKE YOU THINK LEADERS MAKE ON A REGULAR BASIS?**

*Many leaders worry too much about what other people will think of them and miss out on opportunities because of a fear of criticism and failure. I confess that I still struggle with this from time to time, but as I grow older, to a much lesser degree.*

**WHAT PROJECT OR EFFORT ARE YOU MOST PROUD TO HAVE LED OR PLAYED A PART IN?**

*There are many projects for which I share deep satisfaction in my involvement such as the creation of the Family Violence Prosecution Division and the protection of Hamilton Pool from developer caused pollution, but I am particularly proud of my participation in the planning and implementation of the Balcones Canyonlands Conservation Plan (BCP) and the creation of the Balcones Canyonlands Preserve, a network of over 31,000 acres of protected habitat in Travis County designed to safeguard several rare and endangered plant and animal species. Because of the BCP, we are able to conserve endangered species and their habitat while still enabling economic growth and development to continue in western Travis County.*

**WHAT IS ONE THING YOU WOULD WANT TO SHARE THAT WE HAVE NOT DISCUSSED?**

*Many of my friends are aware of the fact that I attended high school in Tehran, Iran in the early 1970's during the Shah's reign. As a young Latino growing up in Corpus Christi, TX, I was fortunate in that I suffered from very few incidents of overt racial discrimination by other students, although I was certainly aware that such*

*discrimination existed around me. Moving to Tehran as a teenager and attending the Tehran American School, I was surprised to discover that such discrimination was almost nonexistent at the school. We shared a national heritage as Americans and we looked out for each other regardless of race. But I quickly discovered that this mutual respect and absence of racial prejudice did not always extend beyond the confines of our school. I observed several incidents of racial prejudice by some of my classmates directed against the Iranians in whose country we were the invited guests. Looking down upon our Iranian hosts appeared to be an easy practice to fall into among my classmates, myself included. But, thankfully, I soon mentally associated this behavior with the earlier treatment that I and other Latino classmates had endured back in Corpus Christi and quickly distanced myself from such behavior. It was an important teaching moment for me that I've never forgotten, how such a fine line can exist between suffering as a victim of racial discrimination and falling into a role of fostering racial discrimination.*