

DEInsider

a diversity, equity, and inclusion periodical from Nukk-Freeman & Cerra, P.C.



BREAKING MLB BARRIERS:

THE FIRST FEMALE UMPIRE (AND SHE HAILES FROM NEW JERSEY!)

BY RACHEL M. MANNE

MLB baseball news is typically a little slow in early August. Trade deadlines have passed and so has the annual July All-Star Break with its home run derby excitement. This August, though, was a little different. While teams were gearing up for their respective playoff races to see who would survive the season beyond September, the spotlight was on MLB umpires. Why was this August different from any others, you may ask? Well, this August, the MLB had breaking news for one umpire in particular: Jen Pawol. On August 9, 2025, Pawol broke MLB history by becoming the first female to umpire a professional major league baseball game!

Not everyone needs to be a baseball fan to understand the historical impact of this news. I could not help but tune in further and learn more about Pawol. Here are some "fast facts" if you are as intrigued about her path to the majors as I am:

- She is 48 years old.
- She attended West Milford High School in West Milford, NJ (32 miles from the Chatham office).
- She played Division 1 softball for Hofstra University (shout out to Long Island, NY!).
- She started her career umping softball games. She did this for 11 years before joining the MLB Umpire Training Academy in 2016.
- She was an art teacher and has degrees from Pratt Institute and Hunter College.
- She has umped more than 1,200 minor league games.
- In 2024, Pawol became the third woman to ump a Spring Training game and was placed on the majors call up list (but was not called up).
- Finally, she got her break this August in a game between the Atlanta Braves and Miami Marlins.

And, a bit of background about the work of an MLB umpire: Umpires are assigned to "crews" where, over the course of a 3 or 4 game series, they rotate where they are positioned in the field. The most grueling position, of course, is crouching behind the plate as the home plate umpire responsible for calling balls and strikes (in this role, you can be either the hero or the villain!). Minor league/AAA umpires who are deemed qualified for MLB games, fill in for MLB umpires who are sick, injured or otherwise unavailable. In Pawol's debut, it was a five-game series between Atlanta and Miami that included a makeup of a postponed game. By rule, an umpire must rotate off the crew during such a lengthy series.

So – how did it go for Pawol?

In her first MLB game on August, 9 2025, Pawol worked the bases during a double header as part of her ump crew (in the first game she was at first base and in the second game she was at third). Then, the next day, on August 10th, she took center stage as the home plate umpire. It was not a perfect start for Pawol. She blew a call early in her first game. However, from what I have read, she ended up with a rating of approximately 91% (based on 139 of 152 correctly called pitches) which has been deemed in line with other rookie umpires by sports analysts, even if a bit lower than the average MLB umpire rating. Notably, the starting pitchers praised her performance and acknowledged her achievement. And, Marlins manager Clayton McCullough said she "handled and managed the game very well."

A couple of weeks later, an MLB umpire went on bereavement leave and Pawol got the chance, again, to show off her skills at the MLB level. This time it was a Pirates-Rockies series at PNC Park. In this series, Pawol was assigned to second base for the first game, first base for the second, and was behind the plate for the final game. While behind the plate, Pawol got hit hard by a foul ball (which broke her neck guard but not her neck, phew!) traveling 99 MPH but seemed unfazed. Her ump scorecard for this game was reported at 93%.

So, where is Jen Pawol now? Well, now it is baseball's off-season so Pawol is likely taking a well-earned rest and will, hopefully, await her next call up in 2025 and beyond! The MLB in 2025 will always be a season to remember due to Jen Pawol.

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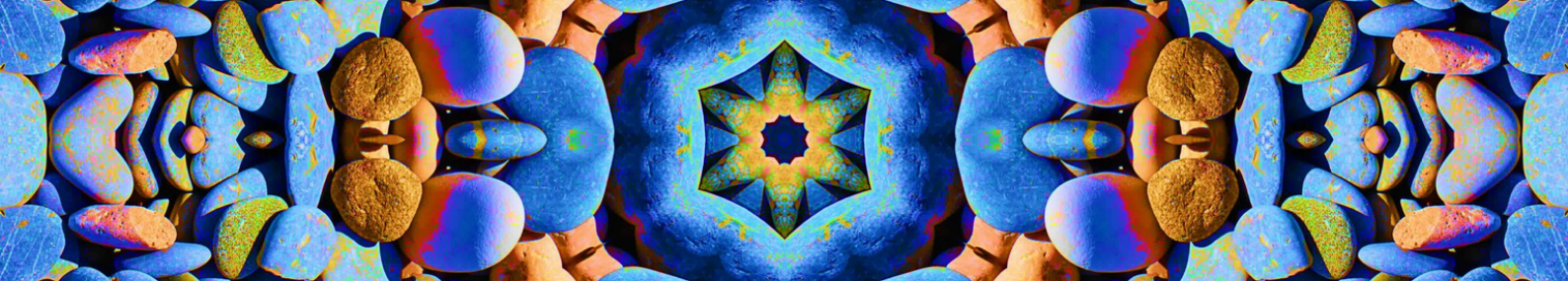
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MORE THAN PORTUGUESE:

BRAZIL'S LANGUAGE KALEIDOSCOPE

BY RAFAELA RODRIGUES

Brazil is often celebrated for its music, food, and football, but one of its most beautiful treasures lies in its language. While Portuguese is the official and most widely spoken language, Brazil's linguistic landscape is far more colorful, shaped by centuries of migration, colonization, and cultural blending.

When Portuguese explorers arrived in the 1500s, they encountered a land alive with hundreds of Indigenous languages spread across its vast territory. Many of these tongues, especially those from the Tupi-Guarani family left an enduring imprint. The Tupi-Guarani family, one of the largest Indigenous language groups in South America, is spoken across Brazil, Paraguay, Bolivia, and parts of Argentina and Peru. Early European settlers and missionaries often learned and used Old Tupi, which became known as *lingua franca*, the language adopted between Indigenous peoples and colonizers. Traces of these languages remain woven into modern Brazilian Portuguese. Visible in place names and everyday words such as *abacaxi* (pineapple), *jacaré* (alligator), and *tapioca*. Even in my mother's favorite word to describe someone feeling sad, *jururu*. Despite centuries of decline, more than 200 Indigenous languages are still spoken in Brazil today, preserving unique worldviews and profound ancestral knowledge.

"Despite centuries of decline, more than 200 Indigenous languages are still spoken in Brazil today, preserving unique worldviews and profound ancestral knowledge."



Over the centuries, waves of African, European, and Asian immigrants added their own linguistic colors. African influence, carried through the transatlantic slave trade, enriched Brazilian Portuguese with rhythm, vocabulary, and expressive storytelling traditions. Later, immigrants from Italy, Germany, Japan, Lebanon, and Eastern Europe brought their native languages, many of which still echo in regional dialects today—like *Talian* (a Venetian-based Italian dialect) and *Hunsrik* (a German dialect), both officially recognized in some southern towns of Brazil.

Modern Brazil also embraces global voices. English and Spanish increasingly weave through business, media, and education, reflecting the country's growing connection to the wider world. You might hear a child shout, "Let's go, bora!" where *bora* already means "let's go" in Portuguese, but the mix adds a playful touch of English flair. Or maybe a business owner closes a meeting with a confident "Deal fechado!" literally "deal closed," a perfect fusion of worlds. Yet beneath this global rhythm lies a deep commitment to preserving local and Indigenous languages which is an essential act of inclusion, pride, and respect for Brazil's beautifully multicultural identity.

Brazil's language kaleidoscope is more than a collection of words; it's a reflection of diversity, resilience, and belonging. Each language, whether widely spoken or whispered by only a few, adds its own color to the nation's vibrant mosaic. Together, they remind us that communication is not merely about words, but about connection—about honoring every voice that helps tell the story of who we are.



LETTING GO OF FOPO

COURTESY OF BLUE OCEAN BRAIN

Humans are usually aware that other people are forming opinions about them. Whether we like it or not, worrying about those external opinions is a common occurrence. But when people focus too much on the opinions of others, they can hold themselves back psychologically. Psychologist Michael Gervais calls this phenomenon the fear of people's opinions, or FOPO.

How do you know when you're experiencing FOPO, versus just having a healthy understanding of social cues and norms? According to Gervais, three phases of FOPO set it apart from other social interactions: anticipation, checking, and responding. Let's break them down:

The anticipation phase involves getting ready to participate in a social situation and becoming overwhelmed with anxious thoughts and feelings about what might or might not happen.

The checking phase involves constantly evaluating the other person's tone of voice, expression, and body language to interpret their thoughts and opinions. Ironically, in this phase, we usually aren't listening to what the other person is saying because we're so busy trying to figure out what they're thinking and feeling.

The responding phase involves adjusting behavior to match the perceived opinions of people around us. The idea is to laugh at jokes even if they aren't funny, shift opinions to match someone else's, or try anything that will make us seem like part of the group.

Does any of this sound familiar to you? If not, that's great! But if it does ring true, know you're not alone—and that you can address it head-on. Understanding what FOPO is and recognizing its signs are the first steps to making a change. Once you've identified the issue, you can take active steps to overcome this destructive habit.





The Grace to Listen, the Courage to Rethink

BY SUZANNE CERRA

"We favor the comfort of conviction over the discomfort of doubt."
– Adam Grant

At its best, conversation is how we connect, how we listen, challenge, and grow together. However, we are living in a time when simple conversation has become far more difficult. In our workplaces, communities, and even families, people are finding it harder to talk through their differences. Too often, we fall into the habit of talking at one another rather than with one another. We talk to convince, not to understand or to learn. Instead of healthy, respectful dialogue, many of us are having unhealthy disagreements that lead to isolation and division.

I have been on a personal mission to break my own patterns contributing to this dynamic, which led me to pick up a book called *Think Again* by Adam Grant[1]. This book is one of the most impactful "self-help" books I have ever read. Its ideas challenged how I approach discussions and (and debate), and I found myself thinking it could be a powerful guide to help others navigate these challenging times. The lessons are simple, but are starting to help me reshape how I have conversations in my own life. I wanted to share some of the key "lessons" in the hope they might strengthen our workplace and expand your own communication tool kit.

LESSON ONE: FROM PREACHER, PROSECUTOR, OR POLITICIAN ... TO SCIENTIST

In his book, Grant notes that most of us tend to approach conversations as "preachers" (defending our beliefs), "prosecutors" (attacking others' beliefs), or "politicians" (seeking approval or confirmation of our beliefs). Assuming these roles puts us on the attack or the defense, and prevents us from having productive discussions. One of Grant's main themes is that, instead of pursuing conversations from these perspectives, a better mindset is for us to think like "scientists" – curious, grounded in evidence, and open to new information. When we approach discussions with this outlook, he says we are more willing to rethink or update our own views.

Having a "scientific" mindset can shift how we discuss topics at work and in our personal lives. By way of example, let's suppose our team is debating how to strengthen long-term client relationships at NFC. One person insists the firm should increase the frequency of webinars to stay top-of-mind. Another argues that clients are overwhelmed and prefer fewer, more personalized touchpoints. Instead of pushing for one side, you step in with a scientific mindset: "Let's test both ideas. What if we treat this as an experiment—pilot two approaches with a few key clients, gather feedback, and see which actually deepens engagement?" The tone of the meeting shifts instantly. Suddenly, it's not about who's right, but what's true. Ultimately, the group might agree to measure outcomes (e.g., client feedback scores and/or new matters opened) to see what works best; not who had the better idea.

By questioning rather than defending or attacking, we can turn potential friction into collaboration – and create a culture that values learning and seeking the best outcome together.

LESSON TWO: EMBRACE CONFIDENT HUMILITY AND THE JOY OF (POSSIBLY) BEING WRONG!

Grant argues that the highest form of intelligence is not knowing more than others; it is being willing to listen openly and change your mind when presented with compelling new evidence. Grant calls this "confident humility" – where we hold our beliefs and convictions firmly, but loosely enough to update them when presented with new data or evidence that is persuasive enough to sway us.

To implement this in our own conversations, Grants says it means replacing defensiveness with curiosity. By way of example, if someone raises a concern about an action you have taken, instead of getting defensive, the response might sound like this: "Thank you for sharing that. I hadn't thought of it that way—can you help me understand [how you see it, why it made you feel that way, etc.]" This response invites

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[1] Adam Grant is an organizational psychologist and professor at the Wharton School of the University of Pennsylvania, where he has been the school's top-rated faculty member for over a decade. He earned his B.A. from Harvard University and his Ph.D. in organizational psychology from the University of Michigan. He is the author of several New York Times bestsellers, including *Give and Take*, *Originals*, *Think Again*, and *Hidden Potential*, and hosts the TED podcasts *WorkLife* and *Re:Thinking*. He has been recognized as one of the world's ten most influential management thinkers

the other person to share their perspective and the honest exchange that will follow is more likely to lead to meaningful adjustments and greater trust. Listening and admitting we might be wrong is not a sign of weakness. It signals a commitment to learning, fosters trust, and is one of leadership's quiet strengths.

This simple shift can turn what would have been unhealthy conflict into gaining a deeper understanding and fostering greater connection with the other person.

LESSON THREE: WELCOME HEALTHY DISAGREEMENT

One of the key insights in *Think Again* is that disagreements – when handled respectfully – can lead to better outcomes. Grant's research

shows that teams who welcome respectful dissent make better decisions, with the added benefit of creating an environment where people feel heard. He shows that teams that invite dissent avoid groupthink and make more rigorous decisions. Typically, this means creating space for multiple voices and ensuring that challenging the status quo is welcomed, not penalized. Grant notes that healthy disagreement is not the enemy of unity, but rather a measure of trust.

In practice, try this test: when you feel absolutely sure you are right, ask yourself if you have sought evidence that could contradict you. If not, seek it out. In my own experience, seeking broader perspectives always yields better decisions and creates a stronger sense of inclusion at the same time. A true win-win.

Action Checklist: Putting “Think Again” into Practice

Here are some practical ways to apply the Think Again teachings in your everyday life:

- Have a learning mindset. Begin discussions with a reminder to yourself: “We are here to explore and test ideas, not defend or attack them.”
- Ask rethinking questions. Encourage participants to ask themselves and others: “What evidence would change my mind?”, “What might I be missing?”, or “How might I be wrong?” Treat plans as provisional rather than final.
- Invite respectful dissent. Celebrate those who raise tough questions or point out blind spots. In meetings, invite dissent explicitly: ask “What might we be wrong about?” or “What’s the blind spot we’re avoiding/missing?” This models intellectual humility and makes those around you more comfortable contributing ideas and challenging the status quo.
- Consider creating a “challenge network”: Grant offers the concept of creating a rotating “devil’s advocate” role in meetings – someone who is tasked with respectfully raising counterpoints or alternative perspectives.

At its core, Think Again is about learning to pause, respectfully question, and truly listen – especially when we believe we are right. It reminds us that progress comes when we are willing to learn from others and open to rethinking our own ideas. My hope in sharing these ideas is simple: that they inspire us to keep talking, listening, and learning from each other. If we can bring this mindset into every conversation, we will build an even stronger and more inclusive firm one conversation at a time.



NFC's DEI Calendar | December 2025 - May 2026

December

- 1st - World AIDS Day
- 3rd - International Day for Persons with Disabilities
- 7th - Pearl Harbor Day
- 10th - Human Rights Day
- 14th - Hanukkah (12/14/25 - 12/22/25)
- 24th - Noche Buena
- 25th - Christmas
- 26th - Boxing Day
- 26th - Kwanzaa (12/26/25 - 1/1/26)

March

MONTH LONG OBSERVATIONS: IRISH-AMERICAN HERITAGE MONTH WOMEN'S HISTORY MONTH

- 2nd - Granting of U.S. Citizenship to Puerto Ricans
- 2nd - Purim (3/2/26 - 3/3/26)
- 4th - Holi
- 6th - Harriet Tubman's Birthday
- 8th - International Women's Day
- 17th - St. Patrick's Day
- 19th - Eid al-Fitr (3/19/26 - 3/20/26)
- 19th - Navaratri (3/19/26 - 3/27/26)
- 21st - International Day - Elimination of Racial Discrimination
- 21st - World Down Syndrome Day
- 22nd - International Earth Day
- 31st - Cesar Chavez Day

January

MONTH LONG OBSERVATION: SLAVERY & HUMAN TRAFFICKING PREVENTION MONTH

- 1st - New Year's Day
- 6th - Three Kings Day
- 19th - Martin Luther King Jr. Day

April

MONTH LONG OBSERVATIONS: ARAB AMERICAN HERITAGE MONTH DALIT HISTORY MONTH

- 1st - Passover (4/1/26 - 4/9/26)
- 3rd - Good Friday
- 5th - Easter Sunday
- 7th - World Health Day
- 13th - Yom HaShoa (Holocaust Remembrance (4/13/26 - 4/14/26))
- 19th - Patriot's Day
- 22nd - Earth Day
- 24th - Arbor Day

February

MONTH LONG OBSERVATION: BLACK HISTORY MONTH

- 16th - President's Day
- 17th - Chinese New Year (2/17/26 - 3/3/26)
- 17th - Ramadan Begins (2/17/26 - 3/19/26)
- 17th - Mardi Gras (Fat Tuesday)
- 18th - Ash Wednesday

May

MONTH LONG OBSERVATIONS: ASIAN PACIFIC AMERICAN HERITAGE MONTH FLORES DE MAYO HAITIAN HERITAGE MONTH JEWISH AMERICAN HERITAGE MONTH SOUTH ASIAN HERITAGE MONTH

- 5th - Cinco de Mayo
- 8th - VE Day WWII
- 17th - Armed Forces Day
- 18th - Victoria Day
- 21st - World Day for Cultural Diversity
- 25th - Memorial Day (U.S.)

POPPY SAL'S RECIPE (PART IV)

HOLIDAY EDITION

Wishing everyone a joyous holiday season filled with good food, family, friends and shared traditions!
...Poppy Sal



BY PHILL LIPARI (...AND SAL LIPARI)

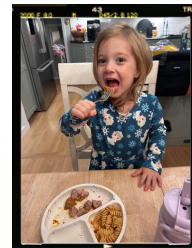
Note from Poppy Sal: For this edition of the DEI Insider, I'm sharing a recipe that's close to my heart - my parents' meatballs, a delicious blend of their Neapolitan and Sicilian heritages. We enjoyed these meatballs every Sunday morning, usually eating at least half of them right out of the frying pan before they could even make it into the Sunday sauce (or gravy!). In our family, these meatballs have always been more than just a dish on their own - they're the foundation that enhances so many of our favorites, from Sunday gravy to lasagna and baked macaroni. During the holidays, their familiar aroma fills the kitchen and reminds us how food has a way of bringing people together. I hope this recipe brings a little of that same warmth to your celebrations this season. Here is the recipe, with just a few modifications I've made over the years:

Ingredients:

- 8 slices of Italian sandwich bread (or white bread)
- 1 lb. ground beef (I use 85/15)
- ½ lb. ground pork
- ½ ground veal
- 2 eggs whisked
- 2 tablespoons fresh parsley chopped (or ~2 tbsp. dried)
- 1 cup Italian seasoned breadcrumbs
- 1/3 cup grated cheese
- 1 tsp garlic powder
- Salt and pepper to taste (if you don't taste raw meat, use ~ 1 tsp salt and 1/8 tsp black pepper)
- ½ tsp Good Seasons
- Optional: ¼ - 1 tsp good seasons Italian dressing (reduce salt accordingly if you use this secret ingredient).
- Note: For the meat you can alternatively use 1 lb meatloaf mix (a mix of beef, pork and veal) and 1 lb of ground beef. Don't stress over the ratios, the measurements don't have to be exact as long as you use more beef than pork and veal. My parents often used all beef.

Instructions:

1. Preheat oven to 375 F (My parents and grandparents fried them in olive oil).
2. Line cookie sheet with parchment paper and coat with a little olive oil.
3. Soak the bread in cold milk for about 5 minutes (enough to just cover the bread completely). Ring out the excess liquid and shred the bread your fingers.
4. Combine the meat, eggs, and parsley in a large bowl. Add the bread, dry breadcrumbs, parmesan cheese, and all the seasonings.
5. Combine all ingredients by mixing well (I think the only way to do this is with your hands).
6. Using a cookie scoop or just judging by sight and feel, form meatballs and roll them into similar sized balls. As you roll each meatball, place it on the prepared cookie sheet, making sure the meatballs are not touching. When the tray, is full spray the meatballs with olive oil.
7. Bake for 30 minutes or until read 160 F on a meat thermometer.



Poppy's "Little Meatballs" savoring his homemade creations... pictured from bottom left to right: Eva (5 yrs), Cecelia (4 yrs), Vienne (3 yrs), Elise (1 yr) and Nico (1 yr).

Note from Phill: This is another highly confidential and proprietary Lipari-family recipe. We take these meatballs very seriously, and they truly have spanned generations. Now, whenever my father visits my sister or me, he brings bags (literally bags) of these meatballs, because they are his grandchildren's favorite. Eva, Vienne, and Nico (and their cousins, Cecilia and Elise) have been raised on this recipe. Salute!

BROADWAY REVIEW

"BUENA VISTA SOCIAL CLUB"

BY DEANNA EDWARDS

On September 13th my family and I went to the Gerald Schoenfeld Theatre to see the Broadway Play, *Buena Vista Social Club*. The play instantly transports you into the heart of Cuba, from the gorgeous costumes, to the incredible dancers, and electric music. The show flows between 1950s and 1990s Havana that focuses on the story of musicians reuniting to create an album together.

The production of the show features a live band that plays authentic Afro-Cuban music that will have you dancing in your seat. The show is split into two stories that are woven together. The first story follows Omara and her sister as they seek a recording contract that will allow them to leave Cuba and move to the United States. Instead, Omara falls in love with a fellow musician and the story then focuses on an older version of Omara and other musicians as they are brought back together to face memories and regrets shown through the power of music while they come together to record the album.

The story is inspired by true events which include the real musicians and the famous album that they created together. I would recommend this show to anyone who loves Latin music, big live bands and dancing, and wants to immerse themselves in the sound and ambiance. One thing I noticed about this play during intermission was how diverse the crowd was – the crowd ranged from all ages and races but when you looked around you could see the joy on everyone's faces.

Rather than a show that relies on strictly dialogue, this show lets the music tell the story while honoring the real Cuban musicians who inspired the global phenomenon. With a run time of 2 hours and 10 minutes, it felt like no time had passed because I was instantly hooked to the story. I would highly recommend this show to any Broadway lover. You won't regret it!



The *Buena Vista Social Club* musical won five Tony Awards in 2025, including a Special Tony Award for the band



SPOTLIGHT: ZAKAT

THE UNIVERSAL LANGUAGE OF COMPASSION

BY SOUNDIOUS BOUCHOUAR

What is zakat and who does it apply to?

Zakat – which roughly translates to “that which purifies” – is a mandatory annual charity required by all Muslims who meet certain threshold requirements. This practice underscores the values of equity, compassion, and social responsibility.

Those threshold requirements are:

- Must be a free adult (free meaning not enslaved);
- Must have complete ownership and control of your wealth;
- Possession of wealth above the “Nisab” threshold; and
- Must be free from debt. If you have debt, you can deduct your debt from your assets.

Historically, Nisab was calculated using gold or silver. In contemporary times, however, the calculation includes other forms of wealth including cash, savings, investments, and rental income. As of 2025, the Nisab threshold is equivalent to \$7,462.

Once you've calculated your net zakatable wealth, 2.5% of that is the zakat requirement. For example, if your total assets (including cash savings, gold, stocks, etc.) – offset by any debts – totals \$10,000, then the obligatory zakat (which is 2.5% of \$10,000) is \$250. In other words, if your wealth for the year is \$10,000, then your mandatory charitable obligation that year is only \$250.



Who can receive zakat?

According to majority of Islam scholars, zakat must generally be given to Muslims only – however, this is not a requirement I abide by. This is also not mainstream practice, at least for Muslims in the U.S. So, setting this aside, the following is a non-exhaustive list of those eligible to receive zakat:

- Those who do not possess enough wealth to meet their basic needs;
- Those who face financial hardship but have some resources that insufficient to cover their necessities;
- Those in bondage (slaves and captives);
- Those in debt who cannot settle their debts with their current resources; and
- Travelers or strangers who are in need while away from their homes.
- Donations to immediate family members (parents, grandparents, children, grandchildren) do not count toward zakat.

While rooted in religious tradition, zakat embodies a universal principle: thriving communities depend on generosity and care of one another. Charitable giving—whether through zakat or other ways – is a meaningful way to strengthen human connection, helps to address socioeconomic inequalities in our communities, and builds a culture of empathy and inclusion.



From Mom's Recipe to Dad's Memory

KEEPING OUR FAMILY TRADITIONS ON THE TABLE



Sindhi Koki

BY REEMA CHANDNANI

In my family, my dad was always the better cook. However, there was one dish that I preferred my mom to make over my dad. It is the Koki, which is a crispy flatbread that Sindhi Indians often eat for breakfast with yogurt, lemon achar (pickled lemon), and papadam (like a wafer/cracker). One of my biggest regrets is not having my dad teach me how to make my favorite Indian recipes. Since I didn't have the chance to learn how to make these recipes with my dad, I'm making the active effort to do so with my mom, and now, I'm excited to share one of them with all of you. It's my way of keeping these family traditions alive while creating new memories in the kitchen.

SERVES: 6

Ingredients:

- 1 ½ cups of wheat flour
- 1-2 green chili peppers (based on your spice tolerance)
- 1 teaspoon of salt
- ½ cup of parsley
- ¼ of a large onion (any kind works)
- 3 tablespoons of olive oil (will need more to cook)
- About 1/3 cup of water

Instructions:

1. Finely chop the onion, chili pepper(s), and parsley.
2. Combine flour, onion, chili pepper(s), parsley, salt, and oil until fully mixed.
3. Once mixed, slowly add in water as you knead the mixture. Add enough water to make a stiff dough. DO NOT over knead the mixture or add too much water. You do not want the dough to be soft.
4. Make 6 equal balls.
5. Roll each one out into 5-6 inch circles.
6. Heat pan/cast iron skillet (we use a tawa which is a concave cast iron pan) with olive oil/olive oil spray. Once heated, add rolled out dough onto the pan. May need to add more oil to ensure the dough doesn't stick to the pan.
7. Cook for approximately two minutes on each side. Once golden-brown spots appear on both sides, transfer to plate for serving.
8. Serve with yogurt, achar, or papadam.



Herding Cats

An Unusual but Useful Skill Set

COURTESY OF BLUE OCEAN BRAIN

Why do I feel like I'm herding cats? This is a common question among leaders and something you've likely experienced if you've ever managed a team. It's tough to keep many parts moving forward and bring everyone together on time and on budget.

The Cat-Like Attributes

Check out these cat-like tendencies that may pop up in your team. Some of them will need more management than others!



Cats are solitary creatures. They don't naturally herd together, and tend to shy away from groups. Some of your colleagues may have the same preference. In order to effectively manage a group project, you must convince your team that they can do more together than they can on their own. Gather the group for well-planned meetings and communicate progress. Otherwise, some people will fall back into the go-it-alone mentality.



Cats appear to be aloof. They can come off as uncaring some of the time. In the world of work, people can also behave this way. Get your people emotionally engaged by relating the project specifically to their personal goals.



Cats are highly distractible. Throw a ball of string in front of them, and they immediately start playing. People are often the same because we live in a world of constant distractions. As a leader, be sure to model focused behavior if you're often distracted by your phone, worries, or interruptions. You can't fix this problem on your team until you fix it in your own life.

Although cats tend to prefer solitary adventures, people in general like to feel included. Tap into that inclination when you need to make a change.

Research from the University of Rochester has shown that we are much more inclined to buy in when we believe we are part of the process.

BAD BUNNY'S "NO ME QUIERO IR DE AQUÍ":

FINDING A HOME IN WHO WE ARE

BY JULIE S. ALARCÓN



Bad Bunny's No Me Quiero Ir de Aquí residency in Puerto Rico was not an ordinary residency by any stretch of the imagination. The residency was a manifesto about identity, belonging, and the refusal to be displaced from one's roots - a demonstration of power in remaining rooted in who you are.

On the surface, the residency's title No Me Quiero Ir de Aquí was a love letter to Bad Bunny's home and creative heartbeat, Puerto Rico. However, beneath that, the title spoke to a broader experience shared by many immigrants and first-generation Latinos—a desire to belong fully in spaces without having to compromise who we are.

Bad Bunny was able to capture that feeling and experience perfectly by having his residency exclusively in Puerto Rico at San Juan's José Miguel Agrelot Coliseum (aka El Choli). Across 30 shows in 10 weeks, Bad Bunny transformed the venue into a sanctuary of cultural pride – a

place where his fans, many of whom are Latinos, could be themselves by speaking Spanish, rapping in Spanish, dancing to salsa, reggaeton, and shouting at the top of their lungs that they are from "P F*kn R" (even though not everyone in attendance was from Puerto Rico, the sentiment was that, while at the residency, they were all Puerto Ricans).

The concerts were more than performances; they were collective affirmations of identity. At a time when the media spotlighted mass deportations and anti-Latino sentiment in the U.S., Bad Bunny's stage became a site of empowerment, reminding audiences that joy itself can be resistance, that visibility is political, and that community is power.

As he takes the Super Bowl stage, Bad Bunny will likely be delivering the same message to the thousands of spectators, your roots are not an obstacle but a superpower to be celebrated and shared!



Photo captions: **Left picture** – Julie's sister, Jennifer with friend Ana posing at a Bad Bunny concert. **Middle picture** - "Debí tirar más fotos" translates to "I should have taken more photos" and represents a call to appreciate the present moment and the people in it. For the artist Bad Bunny and his album of the same name, the phrase has deeper meanings including an appreciation for his Puerto Rican culture, history, and roots, as well as themes of loss and nostalgia. **Right picture** - Julie's sister, Jennifer, poses in front of a promotion for Bunny's album — a title that stirs deep emotion in the Puerto Rican superstar.

Together at the Table

NFC'S COAST-TO-COAST POTLUCK CELEBRATION

BY CHRISTINA CASSIDY

Last month our NFC family came together from both coasts for a special Potluck Celebration filled with amazing food, laughter, and friendly competition. It was a wonderful reminder of how food brings people together whether we're sharing recipes, swapping stories, or teaming up for some good-natured trivia!

Across our New Jersey and California offices, tables were filled with homemade dishes, store-bought favorites, and a whole lot of love. Everyone's creativity and effort truly shined, making the event not only delicious but also heartwarming.

Of course, a little NFC competition spiced things up! Congratulations to our culinary and trivia champions:

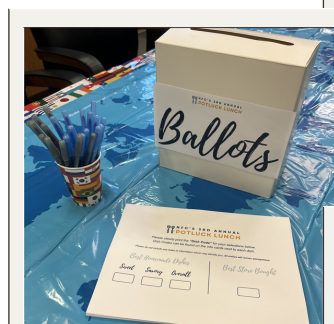
NFC East Winners

- **Best Homemade Sweet:** Brenda – Cream Puffs
- **Best Homemade Savory:** Corasi – Pollo Guisado*
- **Best Homemade Overall:** Corasi (double winner for Pollo Guisado!)
- **Best Store-Bought Dish:** Julie – Pernil
- **Trivia Winner:** Corasi (with Isabella coming in a close second!)

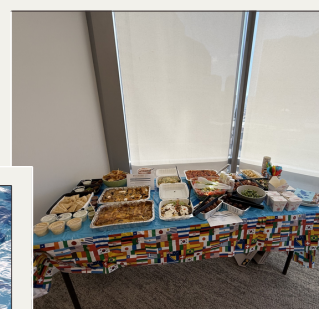
NFC West Winners

- **Best Homemade Savory:** Scott – Enchiladas
- **Best Homemade Sweet:** Selah – Meatballs
- **Trivia Winner:** Scott

A huge thank you to everyone who participated from cooking and baking to tasting and cheering each other on. Events like these remind us that our diversity extends beyond our work. It's in our flavors, our stories, and the connections we build together.



Winners on the left were selected via official ballots



NFC West's spread!



...and NFC East's array!

NFC'S POTLUCK LUNCH RECIPE SPOTLIGHT:

Corasi's Famous Pollo Guisado (Chicken Stew from Puerto Rico)

RECIPE BY CORASI FIGUEROA AKA CORASI SR.
MADE BY CORASI CAICEDO FIGUEROA AKA CORASI JR.



Ingredients:

- 1.5 lb chicken thighs, boneless and skinless
- 2 tsp adobo, all-purpose seasoning
- 2 Tbsp cooking oil
- 1 yellow onion, large dice
- 3 cloves garlic, finely chopped
- 1/2 cup sofrito (see below for separate recipe)
- 8 oz tomato sauce
- 1 packet sazón seasoning with annatto
- 2 bay leaves
- 2 tsp oregano
- 1 large potato, 2-inch dice (about 1 cup)
- 2 large carrots, 1/4-inch rounds (about 1 cup)
- 1/4 cup of manzanilla olives – pimento stuffed (optional)
- 3 cups chicken stock

Instructions:

1. Dry the chicken thighs thoroughly with paper towels. Cut into 2-inch cubes. Season with Adobo.
2. Set a large pot over medium-high heat. Add the oil. Once it has warmed, add the chicken in one layer and brown.
3. Once the chicken has browned, remove it from the pot and set it aside. Add the onion to the pot, and cook until translucent, about 2 minutes. Add the garlic and cook until fragrant, about 1 minute.
4. Add the sofrito and tomato sauce. Cook for 2 to 3 minutes until it is thick and bubbly.
5. Add the sazón, bay leaves, oregano, olives, potatoes, carrots, and chicken broth. Bring the mixture to a boil.
6. Add the chicken back into the pot. Lower the heat, cover the pot, and simmer for 40-50 minutes until the chicken is cooked through.
7. If you find your broth to be too watery, you can make a cornstarch slurry. Mix one tablespoon of cornstarch with two tablespoons of cold water. Add it to the stew, then bring the stew to a boil for one minute while continuously stirring.
8. Take the stew off the heat, sample it, and add salt and pepper to taste. Remove the bay leaves before serving. Serve over rice.

Note: The recipe calls for olives, but I don't like olives, so I skip them.

Sofrito

Sofrito is a blend of herbs and vegetables that is used as a base for most Puerto Rican dishes. Every family has their own version, this is ours:

Ingredients:

- 1 large yellow onion
- 1 head of garlic
- 1 large cubanelle pepper (or 2 small ones)
- 1 bunch of cilantro (usually found in Latin or international supermarkets)
- A few sprigs of parsley (optional)
- A pinch of salt as a preservative

Instructions:

Blend all the ingredients together until you reach a frappe-like texture. Pour into ice cube trays and freeze overnight. You can pop them out and store them in a freezer safe Ziploc bag for up to six months.

NOTE: Use ice cube trays that you don't mind staining because it WILL stain. Personally, I freeze it in a large Ziploc bag laid flat on top of a baking sheet and then I split off chunks as needed.



Cilantro and culantro are both herbs with similar flavors but different appearances, and typical uses.
Left: Cilantro
Below: Culantro



As for our other winners... their dishes remain top-secret family recipes, guarded with love and pride (and maybe just a hint of mystery)! Here's to more shared moments and meals ahead!

Art, Accountability, and Access:

WHY MAURITSHUIS IS MY FAVORITE MUSEUM

BY VICTORIA SAVAGE (SUMMER ASSOCIATE)

As someone who loves museums, whether art, science, or history, the Mauritshuis in The Hague, Netherlands, stands out as my favorite in the world. While studying abroad in The Hague, I visited this museum many times and thoroughly enjoyed each visit.

Nestled beside the Dutch parliament, the Mauritshuis is most famous for housing Johannes Vermeer's "Girl with a Pearl Earring," along with a remarkable collection of Dutch and Flemish Golden Age works from the 17th century, including a number of works from important women artists of the time. What makes this museum exceptional is not just its paintings but how it tells a deeper, more inclusive story.



Located in the heart of The Hague, the political capital of the Netherlands and home to the International Court of Justice and the International Criminal Court, the Mauritshuis occupies a meaningful place at the crossroads of history, law, and culture. Its proximity to the Dutch Parliament underscores the museum's relevance, not just as a cultural site, but as a public institution engaged in critical dialogue about national and global identity. In a city where justice and governance are central themes, the Mauritshuis serves as a powerful reminder that art, too, can be a forum for reckoning with power, memory, and truth.

The Mauritshuis is deeply committed to contextualizing the art it displays. Through thoughtful exhibits, it weaves in essential histories, including Dutch colonialism, the transatlantic slave trade, and the spread of disease, while also connecting to present-day conversations about racial justice, public health, and the diverse composition of Dutch society today. Some of the museum's collection even includes artworks that the Nazis once looted and the Dutch government later recovered; the museum is actively engaged in efforts to research provenance and aid heirs in the restitution of stolen art.



Upon entering, visitors are met with the image of Count Johan Maurits, for whom the museum is named. But rather than glorify him uncritically, the museum presents an honest biography of Maurits, a key figure in Dutch colonial history and a participant in the slave trade. Many of the works on display reflect colonial life in Dutch Brazil, offering visual evidence of colonialism and its consequences.

What sets Mauritshuis apart is its approach: it does not tell museum patrons what to think. The museum prompts inquiry, inviting visitors to reflect, question, and form their own views. In an era when anti-DEI rhetoric often accuses institutions of "indoctrination," the Mauritshuis stands as a powerful counterexample. It embraces diversity, equity, and inclusion without telling visitors what to believe.

The museum also ensures that its commitment to inclusion goes beyond historical context. It actively works to create a welcoming and accessible environment for all, especially for those with disabilities and for children. The museum continuously reevaluates how it can be more inclusive in both its programming and curatorial practices through its DEIA policies.

In addition to its social commitments, the Mauritshuis also prioritizes sustainability. It holds a BREEAM rating of "Very Good/Excellent," a certification used in over 80 countries to assess buildings based on environmental impact, health, and resource use across categories like energy, water, transport, and ecology.

With more than 250 works of art and a mission to "make everyone feel at home here; to be moved and inspired," the Mauritshuis proves that a museum can be both a keeper of tradition and a catalyst for change.



Photo captions: **Top left picture** – Gallery inside Mauritshuis; **Bottom left picture** – "Study of Two Brazilian Tortoises" by Albert Eckhout (1640) (Note: this is Victoria's favorite painting in the museum, especially because it depicts the tortoises with teeth – tortoises do not have teeth); **Above top picture** – Girl with a Pearl Earring by Johannes Vermeer (1665) and **above bottom picture** – exterior of Mauritshuis

