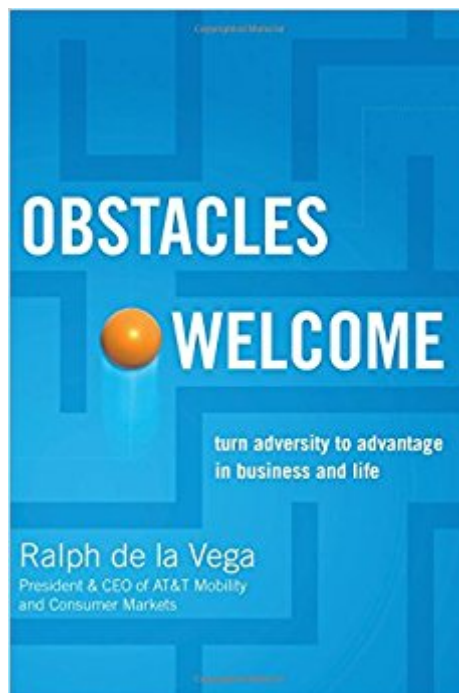




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# Obstacles Welcome: How To Turn Adversity Into Advantage In Business And In Life



## Synopsis

Ralph de la Vega, President and CEO of AT&T Mobility and Consumer Markets, shares the lessons learned in business and in life along the journey from Cuba to Corporate America. Ralph de la Vega arrived in the United States from Cuba in 1962. He was alone. He was scared. He was 10.

Separated from his parents by Cuban authorities just moments before they were to board a plane to Miami, de la Vega was baptized early—and abruptly—in the waters of adversity. It would be four long years before his mother, father, and sister gained legal passage to America. But while the boy would never have chosen such circumstance, it's the man who can look back and say he would not have changed it. In *Obstacles Welcome*, de la Vega recounts his journey as a young Cuban immigrant to president and CEO of AT&T Mobility and Consumer Markets, a subsidiary of AT&T Inc. (NYSE: T). A frontliner in the converging worlds of technology and communications, de la Vega takes readers behind the scenes of the Internet revolution, shares insights from the nation's top technology companies, and chronicles the incredible obstacles intrinsic to successfully merging the largest wireless operations in U.S. history—those of Cingular Wireless and AT&T Wireless. *Obstacles Welcome* is an innovation manifesto for those committed to bigger thinking and greater results both professionally and personally. He clearly defines how to:

- \* Create a detailed action plan to boost success
- \* Identify and take calculated risks without fear
- \* Create a values-centric, decisive leadership style
- \* Transform vision into measurable results
- \* Recognize opportunities and overcome obstacles
- \* Communicate well and build alignment
- \* Unlearn thinking that hinders innovation
- \* Dream big and throw off mental limits once and for all

Opening a powerful cache of business strategy and in-the-trenches wisdom, de la Vega illustrates that within each obstacle we encounter, there's an opportunity that carries the potential to transform our thinking, our organizations, our communities, and our world. PRAISE FOR *OBSTACLES WELCOME*

“Through his compelling story, Ralph shows how to turn almost any challenge into the opportunity of a lifetime. This is great insight for any professional or any young person aspiring to learn how to overcome obstacles and accept new challenges.”

—Randall Stephenson, Chairman & CEO, AT&T, Inc.

“I recommend this book to those looking to improve their opportunities, as well as those providing leadership in this diverse society.”

—Ambassador Andrew Young, former U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations, former Mayor of Atlanta, former president of the National Council of Churches

“His journey is an inspirational story of leadership vision and the ability to achieve success in the face of enormous challenges and obstacles.”

—Gerry Czarnecki, President, CEO & Managing Partner, O2Media

“This book is a must-read for anyone not afraid to make your dreams come true, regardless of where you are in

your professional or personal life. • Ernest Bromley, Chairman and CEO, Bromley Communications, LLC “Without a doubt, this is one of the most inspiring books and one of the best business publications that I’ve read in my 40-plus years in the communications business.” • John Graham, Chairman, Fleishman-Hillard Inc. “Ralph de la Vega tells an All-American story for our times.” • Henry Cisneros, Executive Chairman, CityView; former U.S. Secretary of Housing and Urban Development; former Mayor of San Antonio

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Ralph de la Vega, President and CEO of AT&T Mobility and Consumer Markets, is responsible for all consumer marketing, sales, content and converged services, customer care and operations for wireless and wireline services. He also represents AT&T’s entire wireless business.

I work for the same company as Ralph. I’ve never met him, saw him speak several times on various training videos and the virtual leadership summit. When I heard he wrote a book I wanted to check it out. I’m glad I did. It’s an interesting one and I learned a lot about the man and his personal life. Many leadership pointers in this one too.

What I appreciated most about *Obstacles Welcome* is that it inspires you professionally and personally - and in a simplistic way. You’ll come away with how to make decisions at work, at home

and everywhere along the way. This isn't your traditional business book - think of it as a inspiring roadmap for operating and continually improving yourself. This book provides a frankly much needed reminder that we all will be faced with challenges - they might be different, but they will be there. The key is how you deal with them. De la Vega takes you down a road and shows you first hand how that by having a plan, you can win. One of my favorite lines is "Hope is not a strategy." You'll walk away with the perspective you must have a game plan for life just like you do at work .I found *Obstacles Welcome* encouraging from a business perspective but what even made it more fascinating was the courage of de la Vega, especially after the challenges he faced as a young child. He tells a vivid story of how having the right mindset, you can be successful . He makes it clear, it's not without risks, obstacles and roadblocks - and he offers a fresh (and proven based on his success) perspective while articulating in a way anyone could grasp those sure fire elements you'll need along the way - like good communications, a focus on results and getting all the best out of people - and of vital importance, and the hardest thing to do - "be comfortable with being uncomfortable." To get the most out of life, you have to move out of your comfort zone.I liked the way *Obstacles Welcome* was organized - it's clear, "glide through" reading - I especially appreciated the "Takeaway Messages" at the end of each chapter. The writing style and tone grabs you and takes you in as you become more and more intrigued about Ralph de la Vega's path and how he rose to be head of a major corporation. You'll find yourself saying throughout the book, "I've been there but I didn't think of that way to handle it."De la Vega makes it clear you will always have to make sacrifices to get further in life. I moved away from my family and friends for a job in my mid 20s - it was one of the hardest things I have ever done - but after four years, I landed a dream job back home in Atlanta - and only through the experience I gained while in Charlotte, North Carolina could I have ever done that. This book gives you that perspective.*Obstacles Welcome* is a story but it's one of those books you'll want to continually pick up and reference, if you're feeling frustrated or just need a reminder that we all must take responsibility for ourselves. De la Vega clearly conveys "it's about mindset" - we have choices and we can choose to move forward or we can avoid risk and just stay in our comfort zone. He really makes you think about, as he says, are you a "passenger" or the "driver?"After reading it, I gave it to two people graduating from college and to two friends who are going through career changes later in life. *Obstacles Welcome* is one you'll love reading from cover to cover - and it's one of those you'll want to pass on to others for encouragement and inspiration.

Full disclosure: the author of this book is an executive manager in the company that employees me.

We've been taking "leadership workshops" at work and they mentioned this book as part of the workshop. I decided to check it out. Summary: Obviously, as a business book, there's no plot. Well, not quite. There is a bit of plot in that de la Vega chronicles his career throughout the book. Keeping up with his different positions, projects, and goals provides a nice framework for him to impart the business advice he wants to impart. Mainly, it boils down to this: work hard, make sacrifices, get outside your comfort zone, and you will be happy with your advancements at work. It's pretty standard fare as far as this kind of advice goes, the thing that helps keep it engaging is how de la Vega interweaves his own personal story and passion throughout the book. I came away from the book feeling more like I had a conversation with de la Vega instead of simply reading a dry business book. What I thought: Meh. It wasn't bad, but it wasn't outstanding. As I mentioned before, the advice was commonplace. There really wasn't anything new. The main thrust is reduced to the cliché "obstacles are opportunities." It's really about finding ways to overcome the obstacles, turn them into opportunities, and capitalize on them. When you strip away the fancy words, you're left with working hard and making sacrifices. I'm glad I read the book, and I think it may have given me some inspiration to try things differently at work to help advance my career the way I want it to advance. There are no easy answers here, but good food for thought. Here's some quotes from the book that I found interesting: I was learning, at a much younger age than most people, the meaning of sacrifice . . . and the power of making sacrifices in the present for the sake of a better future. No matter who you are, or what you do, there are going to be obstacles that you will need to face. As you will understand by now, "opportunity" to me usually means a difficult situation that many people would think of as a problem and avoid if possible. Avoidance is a mistake. When disaster hits, put your own people first. That's the surest way to take care of your customers and get the business back up and running as fast as possible. In fact, I believe it's the only way. If you feel underutilized in your current situation, change it! If your boss has treated you in a way that cuts off exciting possibilities you want to pursue, find a new boss. That's a tough message, I know. But when someone stands in the way of your dreams, drastic action may be called for to get past the obstacle.

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