



FLEENOR PAPER COMPANY

Fleenor Story

Presents

Ramon Cazares

**From Groundwork to Leadership:
The Path to Chief Operating Officer**

Discover the incredible story of Ramon Cazares, who rose from humble beginnings to a seat at the executive table. This is the journey to becoming our Chief Operating Officer—a tale of perseverance, strategic thinking, and exceptional leadership that continues to inspire us all.

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It's not every day you save a life at work – people like Ramon Cazares make sure you never have to. For people like Ramon, safety isn't just a responsibility; it's a philosophy. For him, every day is an opportunity to ensure that others stay protected and never face unnecessary risks.

Born and raised in Loz Guajes, Michoacan, Mexico, Ramon started his career in construction and leather crafting. In 1981, he immigrated from Mexico to the Coachella Valley and began working in agriculture. Despite not speaking English at the time, he was quickly promoted to supervisor and successfully managed operations.

When he noticed that his employees weren't receiving proper PPE for handling pesticides, he approached the supervisor to address concerns about their safety. When the supervisor dismissed his concerns, stating there was no evidence of anyone dying from pesticide exposure, he made the difficult decision to resign. For him, if he couldn't advocate for his crew and ensure their protection, he couldn't continue working there.

In January 1985, Ramon moved to the California Bay Area. He began

working for a roofing company and immediately found safety concerns. Ramon discussed the situation with the supervisor and was met with the same response – indifference. Ramon resigned, unwilling to work in an environment that made anyone unsafe. On February 27, 1985, Fleenor Paper Company was fortunate enough to hire Ramon. He walked into a facility and the Manager asked when he could start – Ramon said, “Right now.”

He was handed a pair of goggles, a steel saw, and a box of nails. His first job was to repair broken pallets – recover good boards and replace the broken. When he realized he wasn't making good progress he stopped by the on-site machine shop and asked for help. Armed with custom-machined tools Ramon made quick work of the pallets. From there, he transitioned to operating the paper guillotine. When a supervisor didn't come to work one day, Ramon stepped up to fill the role, organizing and problem solving for everyone on the factory floor.

Bill Fleenor, our president at the time, noticed the plant continued to run smoothly despite the supervisor's absence. Bill promoted Ramon to supervisor after only four weeks on the job. Due to the language barrier, Ramon decided to learn English and gain as much knowledge as he could about paper. He spoke to people and spent time studying the product. From there he moved to the machines – what did they do? What else could they be configured to do? He tried to see the potential in each machine, as well as potential safety issues.

When Bill Fleenor listened to and addressed his concerns, Ramon knew he had found the right company. Safety was his philosophy, and he felt that the business shared his ideals. After witnessing the respect and transparency employees were treated with, he realized he wanted to stay with Fleenor long term.

The more he learned, the more opportunities he found. He was promoted to Supervisor, overseeing production, then to Operations Manager in 2000. Ramon was integral to establishing Fleenor's Georgia and Mira Loma facilities, training the staff as well as designing the floor plan. In August 2012, Ramon was promoted to Chief

Operations Officer, a position he has held since.

Thanks to Ramon and the employees he has trained, Fleenor Company has the ability to modify and fabricate our own machines. Ramon values relationships, cares about other people, and loves sharing his knowledge. Countless employees across Fleenor have received advice, training, and lessons from Ramon that they carry them beyond the business' walls.

For Ramon, work is about helping people be better and it's something he truly enjoys. He takes great pride in seeing employees rise through the company and contribute to its improvement from within. "When you spend time with your people – you give them your respect and loyalty to earn their respect and loyalty. Even if you disagree with someone – that's not important. It is important to encourage people to do things right. Negativity is rarely helpful in a professional context."

Ramon wakes up excited for work every day. After forty years with Fleenor, he continues to love being part of the company and seeks opportunities for both self-improvement and helping others succeed.

Throughout this time, he has consistently encouraged people to do better, often saying, “If you can encourage one, it’s a win!”

He fondly recalls meeting countless employees during his time at Fleenor and remembers almost all of them. Many former employees still call or write to him, even years after their paths diverged. Reflecting on his experience, he says, “When I come to different Fleenor locations it feels like I’m coming home.”

Ramon’s contributions to Fleenor are incredible and the transformations he’s made to the company immeasurable. When Ramon was hired every job on the floor was physically demanding. All packages were fifty to one hundred pounds, and Fleenor had very few women working the floor. Ramon modified processes to reduce the weight of individual packages, making the work on the floor easier for everyone. He created a box ladder to lift boxes, eliminating the need for heavy lifting and streamlining operations for all employees. This directly improved the gender disparity, increasing the proportion of women at Fleenor plants to nearly fifty percent.

“You have the ability to appreciate everything. Every day is a new day, and it comes with new opportunities. The hard

part is seeing where the opportunities are. Keep your eyes open – sometimes people have a lot of potential, they just don’t know how to use it. The moment you get a job, that’s your biggest opportunity. Demonstrate. Appreciate.”

Ramon credits his parents as the greatest influence in his life and career. They taught him to be respectful to everyone, to pursue the things he wanted without fear of failure, and to persevere. His family has always inspired him, and the biggest lesson he has learned along his journey is to “learn to listen, be observant, and share with others.” He acknowledges that he wouldn’t have been able to achieve all he has without the unwavering support of his family, especially his wife, who understands how much he loves his work.

A company isn’t just an enterprise – it’s a collection of individuals working together towards a common goal. Too often, companies prioritize needs of business over the safety of employees, but it shouldn’t be this way. Employees like Ramon ensure it isn’t, and Fleenor Company could not be more fortunate or proud to have him on the team.