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## CORPORATE GIANTS ARE CLIENTS, BUT CONSULTANT REMEMBERS HIS ROOTS



MARK MIRKO/THE HARTFORD COURANT

**ANTONIO R. RODRIGUEZ** says the “joy” of his management consulting company’s work is making a difference at the clients it serves.

# PROBLEM SOLVER

A CONVERSATION WITH

## **Antonio R. Rodriguez**

President, Daniel Penn Associates

**Age:** 49

**Home:** West Hartford

**Family:** wife, Berta, and two daughters

**Civic activities:** Rotary Club of West Hartford, and on boards of the Greater Hartford YMCA, Flagg Road United Church of Christ, and West Hartford Community Television

**Approach to problem solving:**

Identify the root cause, find a team solution and implement

**What he misses most about**

**Puerto Rico:** the night music of the coqui (tiny tree frogs)

**BY BARBARA NAGY**  
COURANT STAFF WRITER

Antonio R. Rodriguez was 10 years old in May 1963 when his family moved from Puerto Rico to the “center of the universe.”

No, not New York City. Waterbury.

His father, a construction laborer, had been coming to the mainland for work every spring and summer since 1951. Eventually, the

family came with him and settled permanently in Waterbury, where they had relatives.

Rodriguez worked his way through college and into a management consulting business, Daniel Penn Associates. He bought the company 20 years later, in 1998, and consolidated in Hartford.

His clients include some of the world’s largest, most demanding, buttoned-down

companies, such as Merck & Co., United Technologies Corp. and Motorola Inc.

But scratch just a little below the surface, and you find that Tony Rodriguez has not forgotten his roots. He’s a frequent volunteer in local civic projects. A relentless optimist, he is grateful for what he has. And he loves going back to Puerto Rico and helping out on his uncle’s coffee farm.

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The warm sun, physical labor and smell of the earth remind him of what's important in life.

"If you know where our roots are from, then you always appreciate what you have," Rodriguez said during a recent interview at his New Park Avenue office in a red-brick brass foundry that was converted to business suites in 1986. "I consider myself to be pretty lucky."

Rodriguez, who now lives in West Hartford, worked at a printing company when he was in college. A consulting firm was doing an assignment there, and Rodriguez got to know the project manager. In 1976, two years after graduation, the manager called and asked him to join the firm as a junior partner.

He joined Daniel Penn as a partner in 1978 when its main office was in Pennsylvania, and opened the company's first Hartford area office.

But Rodriguez still has ties to Waterbury. His father, now 81, lives there, and he has sisters and brothers there, too. Rodriguez has been active in Waterbury politics, running as a Republican for the

state legislature in 1976. He narrowly lost.

These days Rodriguez, with two teenage daughters and a business that operates in a world of increasingly complex expectations, has little time for politics.

At Daniel Penn, each assignment brings a new challenge, a new set of problems, new faces and new personalities.

"You have to be on your toes," said Rodriguez, who has ties to 139 specialists who can be called in for projects. Eleven are currently on staff.

At UTC, Rodriguez helped managers figure out how to do more business with minority-owned suppliers. At Merck, he analyzed the efficiency of the maintenance operation at the company's 208-acre research complex in New Jersey.

Rodriguez said most of the managers he works with have similar problems: They are looking for ways to cut costs, become more efficient, or make better use of technology and the Internet.

Managers often rush to make changes without understanding fully what their business needs, Rodriguez

said. And they don't make sure the technology they're buying can do what they want it to do. So they're disappointed with the results, he said.

"In many companies, they're not getting the benefits," Rodriguez said, because they don't know how to use technology to meet their needs.

Finding solutions isn't hard, but figuring out how to put them into place is, he said. Every company has a different culture, different ways of doing things, different personalities and different competitors.

"They all come into play," Rodriguez said. He said it's critical to figure out the "lay of the land" quickly when going into a company. Company culture, personalities, financial condition — all help determine how amenable the managers will be to change. Sometimes they say no to recommendations, or will only agree to adopt part of them.

Asked to describe a typical problem, Rodriguez said one client installed a new computer system, thinking it would save money and cut delivery times. Instead, costs were

mounting and customers were angry.

"Getting stuff to the customer — it's critical," Rodriguez said. "Everybody was frustrated." To make deliveries, the company had to increase inventories significantly. But Rodriguez discovered that the list of items in stock was not accurate.

"They were not ordering the right parts," he said, adding that employees also had not been trained and did not know how to use the system. Employees tried to solve the problem by working overtime and trying harder, to no avail.

"They were making decisions based upon data that was not accurate," Rodriguez said. The system ground to a slow halt as a crisis developed. "You need to make a profit. Otherwise, you don't stay in business," he said.

Rodriguez, working with two teams of specialists, cut inventory in half, updated the database, changed how the system was used, and trained employees. It took five months.

"I feel like I made a difference," Rodriguez said. "That's the joy of our work."