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Interview no. 1539

Juan Bárcena

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THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT EL PASO INSTITUTE OF ORAL HISTORY

Interviewee: Juan Bárcena

Interviewer: Manuel Sanmiguel

Project: Hispanic Entrepreneurs Oral History Project

Location: El Paso, Texas

Date of Interview: March 3, 2009

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Transcript No.: 1539

Transcriber / Summary: Vanessa Pantoja

Juan Bárcena was one of 7 children born and raised in El Paso, Texas. His family immigrated from Mexico and settled in central/south El Paso. He graduated from Cathedral High School and attended East Texas High School before joining the airforce. Bárcena created his company ABA Labels printing inc which creates labels for all industries servicing the El Paso and Juarez area. He created this business at the age of 40, after her long term job began laying off people. Bárcena has 50 years of printing experience, now he specializes in creating food labels and computer printing. Through an SBA loan, Bárcena was able to purchase his first label machine. During the late 1970's, El Paso and Juarez had a high demand for labels, printing locally was more cost effective than sending printing to the east coast. His business began with manual printing in a small building on Yandel Street. As time went on, Bárcena was able to get loans from the bank which helped his business grow. As Juarez industrialized and more printers were available in the area, the cost of printing went up. Bárcena traveled to the east coast to stay ahead of the game. He learned how prices would change over time and anticipated it. Bárcena received financial assistance from Bank of the West, he also received four loans through SBA. When discussing challenges, Bárcena faced competition from other companies but even through recession, he was able to keep business going. He mentions the struggle of going through recessions, but the worst was the recession of 2001 to 2002. He prepared for the 2009 recession by saving money. Advice Bárcena offers is to learn about business and have at least three different options. Invest in your business and to be honest to yourself and employees. He also suggests to build a strong relationship with a bank and a banker.

Length of interview 64 minutes

Length of Transcript 21 pages

Name of Interviewee: Juan A. Bárcena
Date of Interview: March 3, 2009
Name of Interviewer: Manuel San Miguel

This is an interview with Juan Bárcena on March 3, 2009, in El Paso, Texas. The interviewer is Manuel San Miguel. This interview is part of the Paso del Norte entrepreneur's oral history project.

MS: Mr. Bárcena, when and where were you born?

JB: El Paso, Texas.

MS: When?

JB: Nineteen thirty-six.

MS: Did you grow up here?

JB: Yes.

MS: Can you tell me a little bit about your parents?

JB: My parents were both from Mexico. They were born and raised in Puebla, and they immigrated into the United States in the early, early, 1915, somewhere in there.

MS: What were their names?

JB: Before, we were, through my dad, Pasipuentes and my mother, Gonzales.

MS: What language was spoken at home during your childhood?

JB: A mix. We mixed it.

MS: Can you tell me about your education? Did you go to school here?

JB: Sure. I went to grade school, eight years, San Jacinto grade school here in El Paso, and then I went to Cathedral High School, four years. I attended East Texas State Teacher's College, two years, and did two years with the Air Force.

MS: Where is East Texas State, or west?

JB: East Texas State, Commerce, Texas. It's located eighty miles east of Dallas. That school is now known as Texas A&M at Commerce. They changed the name, maybe about fifteen years ago it became part of Texas A&M. Most of the professors there were students from Texas A&M. When I was there, we went through a lot of professors from Texas A&M.

MS: Did you receive a degree from there?

JB: No, I never did. I came back home.

MS: What were you studying? What were you studying?

JB: Architectural drawing, engineer.

MS: Why did you leave? Why did you [leave] school?

JB: A couple of things— the reason I went up there was because of the Air Force. My ambition was to become a pilot, and two years into it, when they found out I was having hearing problems, they offered me to stay, but I would not fly. So what I did, I just broke the commitment, and said, "If I can't fly, then I don't want to have anything to do." That brought me to leave the school because then there was no more free school, so I had to come back home. I tried to get into Texas

Western and New Mexico A&M, but the tuitions were too high. I could not afford it, so I just went on to work.

MS: How many brothers and sisters did you have?

JB: I had five brothers and one sister.

MS: Are you the oldest one?

JB: No, sir. I'm second to youngest.

MS: Did your parents operate any business?

JB: No, they all just had jobs. My family, coming down from my grandfather, were cobblers. They were in the shoe business all the time, and at that time, it wasn't too easy to get your own business, so they always worked for somebody else.

MS: Let's talk about your business. What is the name of your company?

JB: A&B Labels and Printing, Inc.

MS: How many employees do you have?

JB: At this time, because of the bad situation in the economy, we're down to twelve. A year and a half ago, we were at forty-eight, so we have had a big loss. Our production dropped from 100 percent to 20, 25 percent. We've got it back up now to about 50 percent, very close to 50.

MS: What products do you offer? What is your service?

JB: We manufacture labels, all kinds of labels for all the different industries. We do a lot of form printing. We're very much into printing special instruction books for different types of products manufactured here and in Juárez. Instruction books, we do a lot of that, and then the label is really the big part of it. We're involved in the car business, the food business. When I say food, different products of food, the bottling and a lot of different types of little forms that stick-on, for the computer machines. We're big in providing computer labels.

MS: How old were you when you decided to start this business?

JB: I was forty years old.

MS: How long has this company been in existence?

JB: Thirty years.

MS: Why did you decide to go into business for yourself?

JB: I started looking around. I had a job where I had been twenty years, and the company was breaking apart. I figured I'd better search and see what else there was to do because our company, where I used to work, started laying off a lot of people and it was going under very fast. What I did, I started doing a lot of research into what portion, or what part of the printing area I would like to get into because I do have at least fifty years of printing experience. I did a little traveling to the East Coast to see what was new. We could see a lot of different things coming in to city with the twin plant business that were not done here, so I started going into the East Coast to see how it had been done. I had the expectation that this area would bloom with the twin plant business, that we would be reaching companies (rich in companies??) that just staying here and doing the same old thing like everybody else was not gonna get us in. So I did get real heavy into the clothing business. We got a lot of good contracts out of New

York from those designer labels. That kept us going for a while, then as we learned, we started going into other types of labeling. We did a lot of whiskey labels and a lot of the food business, we've been big in it. As we went about, we started learning, and then the industries started changing a lot with the computers, so we started catching up with it, and we were probably one of the first ones to start manufacturing labels in El Paso that would tie in with the computer business, which is what runs the world now. So that's been very helpful.

MS: Right after college, you mentioned that you had a job? What company was it for?

JB: Farah Manufacturing.

MS: Was it here in El Paso?

JB: Yes.

MS: And what did you do there?

JB: I was in charge of the printing department. We used to call it graphic arts. In there, I was pretty much one of the printers and in charge of it. When I was there, we went from two individuals to about fifty. I made that department grow to keep up with the production of that company. At one time, it was big. We were producing quite a bit of clothing.

MS: But the company closed its doors, right? And that's when you opened up your business?

JB: Before that, before it really folded up, I was already on my way into what I wanted to do. When I saw the fire getting real close, that's when I jumped off the boat. What I did, I started looking around, and I bought a bunch of old equipment. The label equipment's pretty expensive, so I started doing it the old-

fashioned way, until I put some good money into a machine. We got an SBA loan, which is what helped us get our first label machine. We went on, we paid that loan off, and we decided we needed another machine, so we went back to the SBA; they helped us out with it, and so on, until we had the third and fourth label machines, and most of the financing was done by the SBA.

MS: How did you determine the need for the business?

JB: The demand about doing certain products kept coming up, and then keeping your eyes open. Going into the twin plants in Juárez, we could see what was coming in from out of town, and I figured that could be done here, so that prompt me to keep looking on how to do it, and like I said, I did a lot of trips to the East Coast and that's where it was all at. Everything was coming from over there, and I went through and did a lot of research, and pricing and reinvesting to bring in the equipment I needed.

MS: You mentioned that you asked for a loan to buy new equipment. For how much was that loan?

JB: My first loan was for \$100,000, and what I did there, not being really experienced in business, was that that's what one of those label machines would cost. So the SBA just turned around and made me sign the check and gave it to the manufacturer of the machine because that way they would assure the loan. They always had the machine here to take back. So we brought that machine in, and we were undercapitalized and we just worked hard. We kept working and working, and paying as little as we could to ourselves to keep up with the operation. I went and borrowed money from some of my friends to keep the company going because, at that time, a recession came on and it got tough. But being that I knew the industry – I think that's the main thing, and I, myself, was the salesman and I did printing in the afternoons. Buying in the morning and then selling most of the day, I did a lot of trips to Juárez, and I got me a good bunch of companies from

Juárez to buy from me because they wanted a product here and not having to bring it in. That helped.

MS: Did you open the business by yourself?

JB: No. I had a guy that I had met before that was in the label business in the East Coast, and we talked about it. He used to come in and see me due to the fact that he was selling labeling to Farah Manufacturing, and it was me that was buying from him. We did talk a few times about starting something here and he came in from a very reputable label company, the only one in the industry, and he was willing to get involved and we did. He lasted about six, seven, eight months, then he just got the idea of being an owner of a company and not having to work, and I was having to do everything else. Selling, buying, and everything, so we sat down and talked about it, and I think since sales weren't that hot he had already been looking into going back to the east and selling there again, which he did. He just dropped the ball and ran away. After we started this company going good, he came back to sue me for his share of the business, but he had abandoned it and I fought him in court and I won because he did abandon the company. He left and never called back, then all of a sudden when he saw there was money coming in he came back and wanted his share, which he didn't have any because our agreement was that each of us was gonna put in ten grand for operating capital, and he never did put his in. He kept telling me, "It's in the mail." They saw that the whole thing was not right, so I won that case and that cleared him out and left me alone.

MS: What was his name?

JB: I would rather not bring names up.

MS: You opened up the business, what year exactly? What year exactly did you open this business?

JB: July 8 of '78. That's the day that we started something, but it was in a little shaggy house. It was old; it had about five inches of dirt on the floor. We had to shovel that out, we did a lot of cleaning, a lot of floor repairing because it was very old. And it was the old-fashioned printing until I got myself one of the small lead presses, which is offset, and started running little forms and stuff like that. With the equipment that I bought, you could really do very little. It was still manually typesetting by hand, letter-for-letter. I don't know if you've ever seen that, but it comes in cases, and you just have to put it all together and know how to make forms, and that was the old-fashioned way. I did a lot of that, but then I got a hold of a printing press and that helped. We started going, doing little stuff. We ran that press twenty-four hours a day.

MS: Where were you located at first?

JB: Our first location was on Yandell. I think it was 1710 Yandell, East Yandell. A shaggy old place – this old man was a printer, and he passed away, and since he died nobody had done nothing to it except let the dirt pile up. How that much dirt got in there, I don't know, but it did. The machines were not in very good shape but slowly I shaped it all up and started getting rid of the old stuff and bringing in new stuff. After about a year in there, I decided to move another house down, where there was more space, cleaner, and I kept bringing more equipment. Most of my pay, of what I got when I broke off [with] Farah, was used to support myself and the family. The rest, the profits, were used to reinvest in the equipment and buy supplies. In the printing business, the supplies are very expensive. The paper people are very tight. You get past thirty-five days of not paying them, you're out. They don't give you a break, you're out and you had to be very careful with it. You had to make sure your bills for the paper were paid. We took care of that. We never were cut out of getting paper.

MS: By the time that you opened this business, you had already bought the first equipment with the SBA loan, or that was after?

JB: No, my money.

MS: With the money that you earned from –

JB: From my pay at the other place.

MS: How long did it [take] you to buy it?

JB: About a year.

MS: A year's worth of pay?

JB: Yeah, when I decided I'd better get started, and I went and saw this equipment, I had a feeling it wasn't any good, but I had a feeling I could make it work and I went ahead and bought it. All that was all for junk (sold for junk?), but we still managed with what we had until I bought my first printing press and that was on credit from the bank. I just ran that machine as many hours as I could, myself, and when I stopped, it was because I went to sell, but then I went to sell when I was out of work. You've got to dedicate your life to it if you want to make it. It's not a matter of, I'll sit down and see what drops in. You gotta go get it, and you'd better have knowledge about what you're getting into. You just don't get into it. If you go to get in as a printer, right now, I guarantee you you won't make it, and I'll tell you why. The competition is big in the printing industry. We're not very many big printers, but there's a lot of what I call garage printers and they kill the pricing because they're not experienced. Most of the garage printers are people that worked for somebody and then they think, Well, I can make it too. So they go out there, and at one time it was fairly easy to get used printing equipment. Those guys that sell that equipment were very eager to sell. They'd go buy it in

New York, Chicago for one third of what it's worth, and come back over here and sell it almost like new. What these guys used to do is bring all that old equipment, wash it down and sell it very close to new price. The Maquila business was starting to get big, so everybody wanted a piece of it, so everybody bought a piece of old equipment. A lot of those are not around anymore, but they did a lot of damage because in my label business, when I started, I could sell a three by five label, a thousand of them, in rolls, with adhesive for \$300. After everybody started getting into it, we gotta sell them for \$36. There's a difference. That's why I made money because I jumped the gun on everybody. But once everybody got in, they killed us.

MS: Did you have any technical issues – technological issues to deal with at the beginning?

JB: I'd say yes, but not as big as other people had them. The reason was because I was too far ahead of everybody in here with technology. All those trips I made to the East Coast, I went to big places. I went to the manufacturer of the machines, and (really made out good with them??), and I learned from them a lot of the problems that I would be experiencing. And I went to a lot of seminars where I listened very carefully to what these people already knew about things that would happen in this kind of business and that was very helpful.

MS: Did you have a business plan?

JB: Again?

MS: Did you have a business plan?

JB: Yes.

MS: How did you formalize it?

JB: I sat down with a couple of guys that had graduated from UTEP, in the money and management. Since I was very knowledgeable in pricing, I could figure out prices that we didn't even have yet, and I could foresee the problems that we might have with it. But in telling them, in spending a lot of time with them, nights, going over projects and stuff that I would be looking for, we were able to put a plan together. Growth, how fast we could grow, adding people on and how to control the money, who to sell to, who I had to go after and we did all that, and it helped and that's one of the reasons, when I showed the SBA my plan for the future, that we really didn't have much trouble getting the first loan. Three years later, and I don't know if you, in the business, have ever heard, if you pass the three years you've made it. Well, you might make it, but three years – I was broke. And the reason for it was because we did go into a recession. Everybody slowed down. The thing that saved me was that I was not that big, and with a little bit [inaudible] getting, I could sustain going on, but in turn, what I had to do was go borrow more money. I borrowed \$75,000 out of the SBA, and I had paid that other loan (consistently. Well??), they were very willing to loan me the money just for operating capital and that made my cycle complete. By the time I used the last part of those \$75,000, the cycle was starting all over. We were coming out of the recession, I'd hired two more people and went on with it, and paid that loan back. After I paid that loan back, I decided that we were gonna buy another label machine, and they financed it. They were very glad to finance it. The other equipment, I did it with the Bank of the West. Mr. Rogers, he came in and looked me over and saw what I was doing. He was very impressed on my growth and what I was doing, that he said, "What do you want?" He opened the doors for me, and from there on every piece of equipment that I needed I'd go to him and he'd say, "Get it." It was a bank relation, after that, that really did it.

MS: How many loans have you asked for (both talking at once)

JB: Loans out of the SBA? Four, the last one was for this building. The last one was for a million point two. Of course, part of it went to the bank, and part of it to the SBA. This was thirteen years ago; we're just about finishing paying it. At this time, we haven't had a late payment. We kept up with it; the bank has worked very close with us. Any time we call, or I call, [I say,] "I'm gonna buy this," [and they say,] "Send us the bill." The only thing I check on is what kind of interest or what kind of terms we're gonna get on it. It's been a very workable situation with the bank because after Mr. Rogers, he was the CEO, President and owner of the bank, I guess before he passed away he must have instructed the bankers to work with us. Nowadays I still don't have no problems.

MS: What major obstacles did you encounter during the startup phase of your company?

JB: Major obstacles? The availability of people and the main thing is printers. Our equipment is very complicated and there's no training here for it, and every time that we lose somebody, we lose a lot because nobody's trained. There are some, but they're too tied up with the big companies. The big companies, I don't steal nobody from them and they don't steal nobody from me. We're very kind of respectable in that. We lose to smaller guys, or we lose to guys that think they can go do it by themselves. It's the biggest obstacle, and I have pushed it and put it in front of Congressman Reyes because the community college could be doing it. They could be training printers. They have the equipment. At one time, they had better equipment than I have, and they could never find a suitable person to operate it, to run that particular area. Consequently, it started diving down and it got to the point where all they were doing was internal work, and they weren't really pitching printing or hiring people that already knew about it. It eventually got to the point where they just got rid of everything and dropped it. That's one of our biggest obstacles. It's been bigger than trying to get money.

MS: What factors helped your business grow?

JB: Service. Service and quality, we're very good at delivery dates, we're very good in quality.

MS: Which years would you consider to be your best, financially speaking?

JB: The end of '08.

MS: And the worst?

JB: Two thousand and eight.

MS: That's the best? And then the worst?

JB: Now.

MS: Can you describe major successes you have experienced as a business owner?

JB: Let me see. What kind of a – break me into it; I'm not catching that one.

MS: Major successes, some accomplishments: that you grew 10 percent, or did you go to a new building, those accomplishments, those turning points in your company.

JB: Well, moving into this building, because when we moved into this building we doubled our business of what we were doing before. Getting into other areas of printing, we have been very successful in coming out with new types of labels, new materials, of course, that's through cooperation of the people that supply us the materials. One of our best successes, I think, is that I have five of my family here, and that's big-time for a business. We consider it a family business, but according to a good friend of mine, Dr. Hoyt, they rarely make it. And I said, "This one will work." And I have been very successful in keeping three of my

children here and three nephews, two grandsons, and they all have an area, and that makes me feel like being very successful in maintaining a family business.

MS: What role does your family play?

JB: Okay, my daughter is on the board. She is in charge of financing. Then, my first son is all around, if anything should happen to me, he's the one that's (gonna go??). I tried to calling him the vice president, but he don't want a title, he's just [says], "Let me work." My next son, is production and purchasing. My nephew is in charge of expediting back there. My grandson does everything that nobody else will do because he's in school. He comes in on a part-time basis. That, to me, is very successful because if you see businesses that are family, there's a lot of problems. They don't show up in front, but I haven't been completely clean. I've had my problems, but I have managed to keep it straight.

MS: What challenges have you faced growing a business as a Hispanic?

JB: Challenges that have failed?

MS: That you've faced.

JB: I think the biggest one is competition because we started a whole new process in the printing that never existed, and very soon, everybody in town started copying us. That rolled out to nationwide, the way I was doing it, because what I did, I combined two different types of printing. So what has happened, mostly in the recession, we've been through four, or a slowdown in business. It doesn't have to necessarily be a recession, or when we lose a (big??) customer. One section will hold up the other, the other will hold up the other, and it switches over. That has worked for us. We're ready for either side, and I had it all in my hand until everybody started copying our way of doing things. There's about maybe four or five label companies in town that went all-label. Well, if I go take all the labels,

where are they? Or if they take all the labels, where am I? I always had that other process to fall back, which is what we call offset printing. One is offset; the other is flexography. The offset is something everybody does, but most everybody is small-scale, and the offset business – you also have to fall into a category like, do nothing but color work. When you do nothing but color work, then you've got to get very expensive equipment. When you fall back into the other category, which is just plain printing, you can fall into two different categories, which is small or medium. The medium, where we are, we can produce just about anything except color work. Like these things here, we ran them here. This is the size of the sheet we can run. We can run color, but this is one color at a time or two colors at a time. All my machines are two colors. A small printer can only run one color in smaller sheets. Now, the bigger printers are in the color, run stuff like this. This stuff is not readily available anywhere, and it's expensive, so that's part of what has happened.

MS: How many machines do you have overall?

JB: Right now? I can't (can??) give you a number depending on the definition of machines. I'll show you in a minute. I'll give you a tour. The printing business encompass a lot of little machines for a lot of different stuff, like punching holes, like stapling, like folding, like numbering. There's big machines to do that, there's small machines to do that, we combine it all, that's more or less what you're looking at in numbered machines. We do have two, which are the only ones here in the city, eight-color machines for labels. Those things are touching two million[dollars] apiece. We do have two color printing presses like this, which will run you \$400,000 apiece when they're brand new. We do have three smaller machines that are two-color printers that will run you \$150,000, \$200,000 depending what it will do. We do have an array of cutting dyes for the label machine. Every label, different design, different cut and we have to buy those cylinders. They're cylinders and those are expensive, very expensive. We have cylinders there that cost \$30,000 just to cut a label. Now, what we used to do

before, we used to pass the price onto the company [that] was ordering it. When these other people came in that really didn't know what to do, they never did include the cost of your dyes. There was a price for each color of ink. Now, they don't know about it. They just charge all four colors; it'll cost you the same as one color. It don't work like that. You gotta charge for what you use, even staples. When you staple something, you gotta charge them for the staple, for the operation.

MS: Have you experienced any discrimination for being a Hispanic business owner? In what ways?

JB: In getting orders from the big companies. I'll tell you how we know, and I'm not just accusing people. I'm a very well known guy. Everybody in the city knows me. I've done a lot of work. I volunteer. I was board member for the City of El Paso at the Parks and Recreation department for nine years. I was the chairman for seven. I was under three mayors. I've done the YMCA, I've done the hospitalization company, Tenet, with Sierra Providence. I've done a lot of work for different entities like charity. We've done a lot of it. I've been involved in a lot of stuff. So consequently, I have known a lot of people. The bids that we used to put in to the big companies and we knew we were low bidders, yet they wouldn't give us any work. The buyer was Anglo. Now, they could never give me an excuse why we couldn't get work and the only excuse they used, Oh, your pricing. It wasn't so because I already knew from inside. I could have pulled out some good discrimination suits because I already knew from the inside what I was bidding for and that tells me that it wasn't nothing but discrimination. I'll tell you how I verified that with this one company. I hired an Anglo salesman and the minute he went in there, he got us a lot of work. The day I fired him, they took it all away. You would have no problem fighting anybody in court with something like that, and getting a ton of money, but I looked at it in the long run. We'll be blackballed, so I ate it, and I said, "There'll be somebody else." It does happen, it's there, you just have to be very careful with it and perform. We are ISO in two

classes, the 1900 and the 2009, two-thousand nine, and one is for the automobile industry and the other one is for, in general, most anything, and we have to maintain it. If you are aware of ISO, they're tough. They're very tough and very expensive. Every time they show up, it runs us \$6,000 for two days for an audit. And they bring in guys from Argentina and this is what pisses me off the most. It's not people from here, people coming from other countries to audit our company, and then we gotta pay the room and board, and then give them a big old check when they leave in order to maintain that little banner that says ISO. The reason for ISO was to make you a quality certified supplier. In Mexico, where the maquila business is, it's not so because it works – the compadre will give his compadre the work, and that I can verify because some of that ends up here with me. They might have a garage operation, and they get it even if they're not ISO or nothing, and they kicked ISO aside to buy from their compadres, and that's big in Mexico. It happens here too. We go to a company, they say, Let's see your folder on your company. We're HUB, Historically Underutilized Business which is state-certified. We're certified nationwide, we're an SBA minority nationwide. That's the best you can have and you have to have them to stay in business nowadays. That's one of the reasons we've done fairly well. We maintain that. We had engineers from UTEP come in here, help us set it up, and they did a beautiful job for us.

MS: Have you expanded your market beyond the local area?

JB: Yes.

MS: You do business in Juárez?

JB: Yes. That's another good one because one got expanded voluntarily, not by choice. But I don't know what you would call it, but we ship to China, and that's going the wrong way. China's supposed to be coming this way, but we ship that way. We ship to Okinawa. At one time we were shipping to Saudi Arabia,

Kuwait, Lebanon, France. You know what we were shipping? Taco labels, but it was all put in French, in Arabic, in Japanese, and that happened by those companies coming to us to ship over there.

MS: You mentioned that you provide labels for the car industry, for the food industry. What sort of labels for the car industry?

JB: Well, every car has a thousand parts, no? So every part has to be marked, so that's what they use our labels. In the car business, the last one that we had was Delphi. Delphi was doing work for Chrysler, Ford, General Motors and Mercedes. They were putting all the labels in Juárez, to parts that were being made in Juárez to ship to those guys, so that's part of it.

MS: Are you a member of the El Paso Chamber of Commerce?

JB: Yes.

MS: And the Hispanic Chamber of Commerce?

JB: Yes.

MS: How would you characterize the relationship of these two Chambers?

JB: The El Paso Chamber is mostly, Give me your money and we'll put your name somewhere, or give you a seal for the door. I think it's a very well needed little outfit. They're not little, you know that, but it's all within themselves. The Hispanic [Chamber of Commerce] has been more loose. [The] Hispanic [Chamber of Commerce], you can walk in there today and tell them your problems and someone will try and help you. I relate more to them because I'm Hispanic, and I like what they're doing.

MS: Looking back on your business, what would you have done differently, if anything?

JB: Not grown so fast. Slow down a little more, but we done it. When you grow as fast as I did and then you have a recession, you normally will find yourself in a big hole. If you grow gradually and something comes up, bad business or whatever, then I think you can survive it and come out and keep on going like I did in the first two recessions. The third one was hard because nobody expected it. After 9/11, nobody expected a recession. I think that 9/11 caused a recession. This one, we knew that three years ago it was gonna come. It was due, so what we'd been doing was putting money aside to keep the cycle. It's a savings, but at this point, we're using it. We have our doors open, we brought it up to 50 percent, hopefully in the next seven months, eight months we can be up at 100 percent. And that money, that we had set aside for that, is the one that's doing it. Of course, we had to cut down a lot on people, and a lot of little benefits that we had. We found cheaper insurance and you go out and dig to survive or you won't make it.

MS: What dreams do you have for the future?

JB: Retiring.

MS: What advice would you offer Hispanics starting a business today?

JB: First of all, [it] would be learn about it. Get all the information that you can about what you wanna do, or look at two, three different options. Don't jump into something you don't know. Learn your business. When you go in there, you know what you're doing, and stay on it. Dedicate yourself to it, reinvest in it. Reinvest in it, do a good job, follow through on everything you do and be honest to yourself and to the people you work with. You tell them the truth about where their job is, or where whatever is going, and people will work with you. Have

somewhere where you can fall back on finances, build a good relationship with a bank and a banker so that he'll understand what you're doing and you don't have that chance that you go there and they say, Mr. Bárcena, I can't help you. A lot of the big banks will do that. Thing is, I don't know if you are aware, but in the banking business, most of these banks here don't have the final say-so. It all comes from the big corporate. I've seen it happen with a few banks here where the president can't sign a loan. He's got to send it to Houston, San Francisco, New York. That's something you've gotta prepare yourself very well with. Good credit and a good relationship with a bank. It's not all work and orders, you've gotta have a bank, a bank that will understand what you're doing and how you work.

MS: Do you feel the business climate today is better or worse for Hispanic business owners than when you started your company?

JB: Better.

MS: Why?

JB: Because we're more now, and like they say now, the small business really runs a country. And that's true because we've got a lot of people involved and doing little things. Look at what happened to all the major companies, the major banks all going under. In essence, that gives the small guy a better chance and when you say small, not just a garage operation. You get into it; watch your growth like I said before. Watch your growth and go slow, and don't try and get too big too quick.

MS: Finally, do you consider yourself a pioneer?

JB: High risk?

MS: Do you consider yourself a pioneer?

MS: Oh! In the Hispanic business? No, no. In the label business, yes, but not in the printing business. In the printing business, I've known a lot of printers that are pioneers here in town. I tell you what, we're the last ones to learn anything. We're so far away from everything, that the first time I went out and saw the machines that we have here, I didn't realize they existed. The pioneers were over there. All we did was bought them and bring them here and started learning, but of course, that made me a pioneer in the business here. Not nationwide. We start competing against Avery, which is the biggest thing there is, Monroe, that's another big one in the form business and the label business. There's some biggies.

MS: Mr. Bárcena, is there anything else you would like to say? Comments or questions?

JB: No, all your questions were good. I like them. Follow through with some of this that I said, get prepared, study what you're gonna do, learn about it, study the market, get you good financing, and work hard.

MS: Mr. Bárcena, thank you so much for your time.

End of interview