

PERLA VARGAS

DEPUTY DISTRICT CLERK DISTRICT CLERK'S OFFICE

There are moments in life that arrive quietly, almost unnoticed, before revealing themselves as turning points.

For Perla Vargas, one of those moments came after years of knowing what a healthy lifestyle looked like, only to realize she had slowly drifted away from it. The daughter of parents who made exercise and nutrition a lifelong priority, Vargas understood the value of taking care of herself. But understanding something and consistently living it are two different things.

Life has a way of filling every available space.

There was work. There were children. There was the exhaustion that settles in after long days and convinces you that tomorrow is a better day to start. There were difficult seasons, including fertility treatments that forced her to step away from the exercise routine she had loved for years. Gradually, healthy habits gave way to convenience, and convenience slowly became routine.

"It wasn't one thing," Vargas reflected. It was poor meal planning, unhealthy food choices and feeling too tired to make herself go to the gym. Those small decisions accumulated over time until they felt impossible to reverse.

That feeling is familiar to many people.

Wellness is often imagined as one dramatic transformation, but in reality, it is usually the result of hundreds of ordinary decisions: what to eat, whether to move, whether to believe that change is still possible after falling out of old routines.



"I motivate myself to be better for everybody around me."

For Vargas, the journey toward better health didn't begin with chasing a number on a scale. It began with asking a different question.

"What is really happening inside my body?"

That perspective is one of the reasons she values the Hidalgo County Employee Wellness Program. Rather than focusing solely on weight loss, she learned to understand body composition, muscle, hydration and body fat. The goal became understanding her health instead of simply shrinking a number. The foundation for that mindset stretches back much further.

As a child, Vargas wasn't interested in traditional sports. Instead, she found movement through dance, particularly

folklórico. Years later, after trying and quickly disliking the weight room at a gym, she wandered into a Zumba class. That decision would shape the next chapter of her life. She fell in love with it.

For more than a decade, Zumba became more than exercise. It became joy, community and confidence. Eventually, she even taught classes herself, helping others discover that fitness didn't have to feel like punishment. Then life interrupted.

“You're not going to be your best self for somebody else when you don't feel good yourself.”

After undergoing IVF treatment, Vargas stepped away from exercise. She gained weight and struggled to find her way back. The physical changes became emotional ones. She began telling herself she couldn't do it anymore. That inner voice may have been the hardest obstacle of all.

"It made me believe, 'No, I can't,'" she said.

Many wellness stories celebrate motivation. Vargas' story acknowledges something less glamorous but more universal: discouragement. The hardest battles often happen before anyone else notices them. They happen in quiet conversations people have with themselves. But those conversations can change.

Vargas' motivation today isn't rooted in appearance. It's rooted in possibility. She wants to run with her youngest son. She wants

to play at the park without becoming winded. She wants to be present for her family.

And perhaps most importantly, she wants to avoid becoming another chapter in a family history marked by heart disease, hypertension, and obesity.

Those concerns became painfully real when uncontrolled high blood pressure landed her in the hospital. Her blood pressure climbed into dangerous levels, and doctors warned she had come close to suffering a stroke. The experience changed her perspective.

As a single mother raising children whose ages span more than two decades, Vargas wasn't thinking only about herself. She was thinking about who depended on her.

"What if I can't function?" she remembered asking herself. The question wasn't abstract anymore. It was deeply personal.

That experience transformed wellness from something she hoped to improve someday into something she needed to prioritize immediately.

Today, Vargas describes her motivation in a way that initially surprised even her.

"Myself," she said. Then she explained what she meant.

If she is mentally and physically healthy, she can be the mother her children need, the daughter her parents deserve, the coworker her team depends on, and the person she wants to become.

It isn't selfishness. It's recognizing that caring for yourself often becomes one of the greatest ways to care for everyone else. That philosophy extends well beyond her own life.

When Vargas made healthier meals at home, she didn't lecture her children or demand immediate change. She simply led by example.

Breakfasts became healthier. Family walks became routine. Bike rides replaced time indoors. Trips to the gym became something the family did together.

The results were especially meaningful for her oldest son, who made dramatic changes to his own health after watching his mother's example.

She didn't push. She invited. Sometimes influence is strongest when it isn't announced at all. The same pattern appears at work.

Inside the District Clerk's jury division, Vargas and her coworkers have quietly built a culture of accountability.

One coworker prepares healthy meals for the team. They share workout routines, encourage one another, and celebrate progress instead of perfection. Their conversations about health eventually inspired Vargas to begin teaching Zumba again. Encouragement became contagious.

New employees are invited to meet with the county nutritionist. Coworkers motivate one another to sign up for 5Ks, attend wellness activities, and learn more about how their bodies work.

Seven or eight months after meeting with the Wellness Program's nutritionist, Vargas had lost approximately 25 pounds. More importantly, she had regained confidence. Her influence isn't limited to conversations about nutrition or exercise. It's often expressed through kindness.

When someone arrives at work frustrated or overwhelmed, Vargas rarely begins by asking what's wrong. Instead, she asks what they had for breakfast. Or whether they'd like coffee. Or yogurt. Or perhaps a short walk. The questions aren't random.

Years of helping her teenage son navigate emotional challenges taught her that sometimes people need space before they need solutions. Redirecting someone's attention, even briefly, can help emotions settle enough for real conversations to happen.

So when coworkers need a break, Vargas often steps in to help, allowing them time to regroup before returning to work. Wellness, in her view, includes emotional health just as much as physical health. She also believes workplaces have an important role to play.

Vargas credits District Clerk Laura Hinojosa with creating an environment where employees are encouraged to care for themselves as people, not simply as workers. Whether it's supporting health screenings, encouraging wellness activities or showing compassion during personal hardships, Vargas says those moments remind employees they matter beyond their job descriptions.

Feeling cared for makes it easier to care for yourself. And perhaps that is one of the quiet lessons running throughout her story.

Health rarely happens alone. Parents influence children. Coworkers influence one another. Leaders shape workplace culture.

One person's decision to prepare healthy meals can inspire an office. One invitation to take a short walk can improve someone's day. One conversation can change how a person thinks about their health.

Vargas has experienced each of those moments firsthand.

Looking back, she doesn't pretend the journey has been easy. She knows there will still be birthdays with cake, busy schedules, and days when motivation feels distant. But she has stopped believing that progress requires perfection.

Instead, she believes in something much more attainable. One healthier meal. One short walk. One better decision than yesterday.

Asked what advice she would offer someone beginning their own wellness journey, Vargas didn't talk about complicated workout plans or restrictive diets. She offered something simpler.

"Don't try to be perfect; just try to be better," she said. Then she added one final thought that captures the heart of her journey. "If you change one meal, you are adding one more day to your healthy life."

It's a reminder that lasting change often begins not with extraordinary effort, but with one ordinary decision repeated often enough to become a different life.

