



Amplify your influence

Transform how you communicate and lead

by Renè Rodriguez

It is difficult to image but LIFE has been an integral part of the CIMBA experience for almost 20 years now. From its very beginnings, the CIMBA LIFE Experience was intended to assist our graduates in managing the difficult transition from the individual nature that is education and academia, to the team environments that then, and certainly now, have come to dominate the work environment. Assisting our graduates in developing important skills and attributes that allow them to better regulate their emotions and manage stress has allowed many of them to move up much more rapidly into the upper ranks of important companies where they have made the difference in so many lives – the first and foremost characteristic defining success in this organization. Along the way, our LIFE Experience has also assisted them in understanding the important concept of psychological safety, something we referred to so many years ago as emotional safety. In just the last few years, its importance has finally come to be recognized as a fundamental ingredient in building productive, creative, and healthy team and work environments.

But in those 20 years, the world has changed much more rapidly than we had envisioned when we first created our LIFE experience. While transportation, communication, and digital technologies have and will continue to impact our world, the rate of change has accelerated diversity in the workplace far more than could have been envisioned by even the most profound futurist. In fact, if you read the works of Professor Peter Drucker from the 70s, the issues that we are facing now were not even contemplated. More specifically, 50 years ago when Drucker was in his prime as THE management guru, the overwhelming majority of us lived and worked within walking distance of where we were born. **We knew each other well.** That commonality of experience allowed us to make rapid and very reasonably accurate assessments about why someone was acting or behaving in a particular way, allowing us to respond accordingly. Now, just 50 years later, the number of people who are still living and working in and around the area in which they were born has dropped dramatically. Very rare is the organization that is not made of personnel from different races, religions, national origins, economic strata, and other important differentiating factors. And I cannot emphasize the following point any more vigorously: we simply do not know each other as well as we did then; but unfortunately, we have allowed ourselves to believe that in fact we do. And with troubling, unnecessary consequences to our very social fiber.

The narratives that we could build in our minds to explain the actions and behaviors of those that we knew well, no longer function in an environment where we do not know

the people in front of us. They have had different life experiences, different primary social groups, different family structures, a whole different way of life. But we ignore it, or at least we act as though we are. So suddenly, in a period of time that would represent little more than a single dot on the spectrum of the time that humans have lived together in groups, we have been swept along like the frog in water slowly brought to boil to find our social relationships to be far more difficult and troubling. The solution, in reality, is relatively simple. Instead of allowing the other person to build that narrative about you on the basis of their past experiences and almost certainly not yours, we need to be proactive in creating that narrative for them. If we do not, we risk confusion, false assumptions, troubled relationships, and the variety of other ailments associated with ineffective social relationships. Only in just the last 20 years have we seen the growth (I would say the very existence) in such topics as conflict management, difficult conversations, working with difficult people, bullies in the workplace, inclusion and diversity, difficult confrontations, change management, and a variety of other social interactions that are reflective of the fact that we are not taking the time to get to know and understand each other. But again, we so readily want to assume that in fact we do know each other when in fact we do not; while the person in front of you may look like other humans in your neighborhood, that is not paramount to assuming they share your same understanding of how the world works. We desperately need to learn how to influence the narratives of others, not manipulate, but build narratives about who we really are for the sake of civil, meaningful, productive social interactions.

So, why am I telling you this? Years ago, I had an exceptional student go through our LIFE Experience, René Rodriguez. He had a powerful LIFE Experience, but I did not realize how powerful until he asked me what I saw as being the next, most crucial, step in the evolution of our LIFE Experience. For me it was straightforward: influence, building narratives, learning how we can communicate to others who we are and what makes us unique. Little did I realize at the time, that René would put all of his formidable energies into creating a program called Amplifii, that does exactly that – and a whole lot more. While many of us will not have the opportunity to take his marvelous course in person, René has done us a great favor. On April 26th in the United States, and in late June here in Europe, René's new book, ***Amplify Your Influence***, will be released. Over the last year, I have had the great pleasure of working with René as he developed the book. More importantly, I was so taken by the power of his program and its impact on me, that CIMBA entered into a working agreement to bring it here, adapting it as an integral next step in our LIFE Experience series. So, this ABC serves two important purposes: (1) To strongly suggest you add this important book to your personal library and (2) to announce that beginning the end June, we will begin offering a new course in addition to our LIFE Experience, which we are calling ***LIFE II: Influence***.

I will also readily admit to being both honored and humbled when René asked me to write the foreword to this important book. I would like to share that forward with you here:

Technology has advanced our society more than we could ever have imagined over the past few decades. Sadly, our interpersonal psychology has not advanced at the same pace. ***AMPLIFY YOUR INFLUENCE*** is the first book of its kind to finally take what we have learned in science and make it applicable and approachable not only to leaders, but anyone who needs to influence behavior. This book could not have come at a better time.

Years ago, I began my career at a leading U.S. university. In contrast to the typical business professor, I had already founded, managed, or actively participated in several businesses in addition to having the requisite academic credentials including a PHD and J.D. I saw this professorship as a

real opportunity to observe and get to know students, with the goal of attracting the best ones to work in those businesses. What I discovered surprised and disappointed me. While I found those students to be remarkably well educated on the functional aspects of business, “hard skills” like accounting, finance, marketing, and logistics, they struggled in important social interactions, with basic “soft skills” like building relationships, motivating their teams, and engaging others. I brought this to the attention of the MBA director, stating that if I were encountering these difficulties, so were the other companies who were hiring our graduates and that we should be including these skills in our curriculum. He looked at me somewhat confused and said: “You understand that we do axioms, theorems, formulas, and principles here, hard skills; we don't get into that “training stuff.” Almost in disbelief, I asked: “So, you want me to stand in front of 200 plus MBA students and tell them what it takes to be a great leader knowing we are setting them up for failure?” To which he responded: “Yes, as long as they pay tuition.” So, I did the only logical thing: I quit and started my own business school.

According to the president of the AACSB at that time, the major accrediting association for business schools, it was one of the very first business schools created by a private person. We began immediately to address these missing elements in leadership that I had observed and experienced. We engaged cognitive scientists, social psychologists, anthropologists, evolutionary biologists, instructional psychologists, and neuroscientists. Motivated and excited by the potential we observed in neuroscience, we organized the first ever NeuroLeadership Summit at our campus here in Italy (If you have the ability to create a business school, why not put it in a great location?). Shortly thereafter, we co-created the NeuroLeadership Institute, giving us access to some of the world's best neuroscientists. Among many discoveries and wonderful a-ha moments, we created a personal development program called LIFE. A dear friend and student of LIFE, Marcelo Montero, who was the President of Cargill Salt at the time, told me about this consultant he was working with who was applying neuroscience to help his leadership team communicate more effectively through storytelling, body language, and the science of influence. He referred him to our LIFE program and that is where I first met this barrel chested, deep voiced, statuesque person by the name of René Rodriguez. I was the teacher; René was the student. He sat in the front row, taking every note possible and asking every question he could. I was quite surprised, given what he did, that he was so engaged. All in all, René had a powerful LIFE experience, and we went our separate ways connecting from time-to-time hereafter.

A few years later I got a call from Marcelo saying that he felt that we should connect again. He told me that René was doing something new and interesting, and that it might fit in well with the research we were doing on leadership and personal development. Shortly thereafter, René and I connected again; immediately the ideas began to fly. He asked me an interesting question: Given my 40+ years of experience with researching leadership and personal development best practices, what did I see as being the next big step in leadership development? We had come up with a definition of leadership as being “a *group, an influential relationship, and a shared goal.*” Our program was meeting the needs of the “group” component in that definition, and the company strategy dictated the shared goal in most cases. I told René that what I felt was missing was the influential component. We agreed it was a complex area, and like many important personal and professional development needs, it had many “moving parts.”

René continued to ask a wide variety of thought-provoking questions. Given the diversity of those questions I could not image what he was up to, but I knew it was going to be interesting and important.

My curiosity was finally satisfied when René told me he had something he wanted me to see, to experience, something he called *Amplifii*. He told me it was focused on the “influence component” that was missing in leadership and personal development programs. He told me it would transform how we communicate and interact with others in our many important social events. Among other many very interesting findings, he explained with an enthusiasm that only René possesses, how he had effectively tied the persuasion models of Aristotle to relevant neuroscience research. He explained how he had linked together the importance of framing, a concept made famous in its financial applications by Nobel Laureate professor Daniel Kahneman, with brain “sequencing” to offer his students a truly comprehensible, practical guide to narrative-building and, thus, their influence abilities.

He explained to me convincingly how narrative gaps in disparate and remote workforces created new opportunities for leaders to leverage social media in novel ways. He persuaded me that personal branding was no longer just about sales and marketing efforts; it is now essential in leadership and other communications, something we, too, had been studying from a difference perspective. We, the science community, had identified a problem; René has had a solution for close to 20 years! -- a solution based on the very science upon which we based our personal development system. We had learned the power of science in giving learners the confidence to take those important first few difficult steps that often inhibit personal development efforts and we knew what was needed, what was truly missing, was that essential influence component. René’s *Amplifii* could not have arrived at a more important moment for all of us.

In the 30 years since I left academia proper to start my own business school, things have changed significantly in our need for soft skill development tools. While technology has certainly made our lives better, those improvements have not been without significant side effects. Just 50 years ago, most of us died very close to where we were born. Rapid, unprecedented developments in transportation, communications, and digital technologies have slowly and steadily allowed us to willingly move apart from each other while simultaneously throwing us together, mixing cultures, integrating nationalities, and transforming our former “local” worlds into one world that is global in all important aspects. The days of living in the same community for a lifetime, going to the same schools, churches, grocery stores, and barber shops as our friends and neighbors, our parents and grandparents, our teachers and their teachers are over. As a consequence, we really don't know each other but we still want to believe we do. Those common unspoken narrative gaps in our conversations that our brains could so easily and effectively fill in based on our shared “local” life experiences, are now often wholly inappropriate and inapplicable in our new heterogeneous “global” living environment.

How are you and I experiencing this? That same technology making our lives better has also spawned such recent phenomena as working with difficult people, conflict management, difficult conversations, difficult confrontations, bullies in the workplace, change management, and a host of other ineffective social interactions. The requisite social interaction skills, an

essential human skill, have not developed like they did in our past “local” lives – through face-to-face conversations, storytelling, narrative building, through effective, interpersonal influence. We now need to learn how to create those narratives more than ever before. Since we cannot rely on a base of shared-in-common experiences, we need to tell each other, to ask each other, to learn how to build those narratives both in ourselves and in others. And every day that passes in our new “global” environment, that need gets greater and greater.

In this new “global” environment, it is not at all surprising, then, that those so fortunate to go through René’s *Amplifii* in person feel like they have been given a new lease on life, a renewed ability to connect in meaningful ways with family, friends, and colleagues, in addition to clients and customers. We are truly wired to be social, one of the very few positive lessons we have learned from COVID. Those of us less fortunate, there is *this* wonderful, poignant book that guides and supports us through the process, to reunite us with those important social skills.

As to my personal experience? Learning the Amplifii methodologies was a profound experience for me – and this time, René was the teacher; I was the student, a very attentive student. I am a scientist, who spends far too much time on *Logos*, the data, statistics, numbers, and other logical components of discovery in attempts to be persuasive. René patiently taught me that I was “failing myself” because I was leaving out the *Pathos*, the heart, the emotion, the reason why others would feel the need or desire to listen. Importantly, I observed and experienced that his message reached beyond influence to one empowering people to do good in the world. Sometimes I wonder if René disguises his true intentions of making this world a better place under the cloak of business so he can reach the highly influential people of the world who can make that good happen. With a mother who was a former nun, I don’t think that’s a far stretch. If you ever get a chance to meet him in person, I think you’ll agree that he is different, and that his heart is truly in the right place.

One year ago, I would have written this forward from my scientist view of the world, and you very likely would not have read this far into it. *Amplifii* did that for me; I share its cherished skills with others every day through my interactions and communications. Every student of mine, whether undergraduate, graduate, MBA, or executive, will be enjoying a copy of this book. René is the teacher; we are his students. And now, thanks to this book and the energy René has put into it in delivering his important message, you, too, can be one of his students.