

# Sun-Sentinel

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## Ralph De La Cruz

LIFESTYLE COLUMNIST

### Advice and cheers aimed at Hispanics

A chef is cooking a big fish in a bigger pan in the hallway, right next to the musicians jostling for space as they wait to enter the studio.

"Dr. Camilo Cruz is here to give us tips on how to squeeze all the juice out of life," the TV host says in Spanish.

Cruz is making another appearance on the Univision television network's *Despierta America*, Spanish-language TV's version of *Good Morning America*.

By the time Cruz finishes talking about his 20/80 principle (20 percent of the things in your life make up 80 percent of what's really worthwhile), the show's cast mobs him, singing *Happy Birthday* in front of their national audience.

Cruz, now 44, is the Spanish-language version of Tony Robbins. A Colombian Dr. Phil.

Cruz arrived in the United States in 1980 at age 20 with \$200 in his pocket, a high school diploma and a two-week visa. In 24 years, he would go on to become a chemist, a 1990s dot-commer, and now, one of those rare people who makes a living giving advice.

"We need more cheerleaders," he says over café. "We already have enough realists."

"When [immigrants] get here," he continues, "the first thing we hear is, 'This is not Colombia. You'll be lucky to find work at a 7-Eleven.' Ten minutes after you arrive, community leaders are speaking to you about discrimination and how we're second-class citizens. Where are the cheerleaders?"

Cruz managed to put himself through New Jersey City University, then Seton Hall, where he earned a master's degree and a doctorate.

After graduating in 1989, Cruz married a Seton Hall classmate. After overstaying his two-week visa by seven years, he was finally legal.



He returned to New Jersey City University. This time as a professor. But he was unlike

any chemistry teacher you've ever heard.

"I walked into class the first day and they all had their books open," Cruz remembers. "I told them, 'Close your books and pull out a piece of paper. First thing I want you to do is write down the answer to this question: What do you want to do in your life?'"

That simple lesson would form one of the foundations of Cruz's principles for success: Define what you want in life and WRITE IT DOWN. The inability to make a decision and commit to that decision, the failure to clearly define your values and priorities, Cruz insists, are primary reasons people don't succeed.

Cruz began making a name for himself in the Northeast. He became the successful, well-educated Hispanic who appeared at rallies and on radio shows during Hispanic heritage month.

People started telling him it was a message Hispanics needed to hear. So, in between working at a chemical plant in the day and teaching at the college at night, he wrote a book, *In Search of the American Dream -- How to Succeed in the United States*.

"I found a publisher for my book, but they wanted me to buy half of the first printing -- and pay in advance," Cruz remembers. "I went to a friend who was my boss at the chemical plant and asked him, 'What do you think about this? It's going to take all the

money we've saved to buy a house.' "He said, 'A home will never buy you a business. But a business will buy you a home.'"

The book made it onto The Best-Sellers List among Spanish language books in New York, where it stayed for 42 weeks.

It would be the first of many Midas moments.

He and a friend who was computer savvy, Carlos Cardona, started a Spanish-language Web site called *yupi.com*. The week *Yupi* was to go public, the dot-com bubble burst. So, they pulled back the initial public offering and stayed private. It was a stroke of luck that allowed *Yupi* to survive while most of the other overextended dot-coms folded.

In 2001, Microsoft bought *Yupi* for \$20 million (the site is now *yupimsn.com*).

Which, in turn, allowed Cruz to develop his other main interest: his Plantation-based company, *Taller del Éxito Inc.*, which handles his self-improvement books and seminars. The company now employs his three brothers and his parents. Cruz and his wife moved from Parkland to Southern California a year ago with their three young children.

"At the age of 6, when they enter the school system, 86 percent of children think they're really good. But by the time they graduate from high school, that number has dropped to 18 percent. So, in those years of formal education, when supposedly we're trying to expand their vision of what they can do, the focus is on their limitations. From that point on, we accept mediocrity and rationalize it.

"If we get past our excuses, anything's possible."

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