

DENNIS F. BONILLA

Author • Keynote Speaker • Filmmaker • Philanthropist • Executive Learning Leader

FULL BIOGRAPHY

Dennis F. “Debo” Bonilla’s story starts in the Bronx and runs 400 feet below the ocean’s surface. As a young sailor in the U.S. Navy’s nuclear submarine service aboard the USS Casimir Pulaski, he learned the lessons that would define everything after: that trust is a survival skill, that no one leads alone, and that pressure doesn’t break people so much as reveal what they’re made of.

What followed was anything but a straight line — and that’s the point. Over five decades, Debo co-founded an energy training company, served as Vice President of Oracle University, ran learning and consulting businesses across healthcare and manufacturing industries, and led P&Ls ranging from \$150 million to \$600 million. As Executive Dean at the University of Phoenix, he was responsible for the university’s three largest schools — more than 200,000 students and 2,000 faculty. As Dean of the Wiley Edge Global Academy, he built a technical academy from a blank page into a global institution graduating and placing over 1,300 alumni a year. He returned to New York at 40 to earn his M.B.A. at Pace University — proof of his conviction that reinvention has no expiration date.

Today Debo is in his most creative chapter yet. He is a contributing author of the #1 Amazon bestselling anthology *Wings of Purpose*, and his memoir, *Bent, Twisted, But Never Broken*, arrives in September 2026. As an executive producer, his film credits include *The Lost Music of Peru*, *De La Cruz*, and *Action! Action!*, with an associate producer credit on *Desert Fiends*. From the stage, his signature keynotes — *The Wreckage Principle*, *The Diamond and the Bent Tree*, *The Wreckage Beneath You*, and *Leadership at the Edge* — make one argument in different keys: the wreckage beneath your success story is not what you survived. It’s what you were built from.

His philanthropy carries the same mission. He is co-founder of the Guardians of Culture and Arts Foundation, whose *Lost Music of Peru* initiative is reviving rediscovered musical works for performance at Cathedrals in The Americas, and CEO and co-founder of the Whole Brain Foundation, advancing personalized consumer education. Closer to home, he serves on the Civilian Review Board of the Phoenix Police Department, the Board of Trustees of Xavier College Preparatory, and the Arizona Diamondbacks’ Hispanic Ambassadors Council.

A licensed pilot, musician, and working stand-up comedian, Debo is fluent in English and Spanish and equally at home in a boardroom, on a stage, or on a set. His signature line doubles as his thesis: “Success is what we achieve for ourselves. Purpose is what survives us.”

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dfbonilla@icloud.com | +1 702-885-5814 | linkedin.com/in/dennisbonillait