

# Luiz Lobo

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## New City, Small Town, Big City

When Luiz Lobo was growing up in Brazil, a black and white picture was on his wall of a man he did not know. One day, at the age of nine, he asked his father whom the man was, assuming it was some distant relative. The picture was of U.S. President Abraham Lincoln, Luiz's father's hero.

Luiz's father grabbed the picture and sat with Luiz on his bed. He told Luiz the story of Lincoln—his values, his life, and his legacy. Luiz's father was a Mason, belonging to the local lodge and doing community work through the organization; he liked that Lincoln and the other Founding Fathers had been Masons as well. From that time onward, Luiz felt connected to the United States.

In school, Luiz did very well, and he decided to figure out how to get to the U.S. At the age of 16, he applied to a competitive foreign exchange student program called AFS Intercultural Programs (AFS). "There were 169 candidates for only five spots within the regional chapter," recalls Luiz. "It then became a national competition.

AFS began as the American Ambulance Field Service, a volunteer ambulance corps created in April 1915 by A. Piatt Andrew. It was transformed from a wartime humanitarian aid organization into a groundbreaking international secondary school exchange, volunteer and intercultural learning organization with a noble vision: to help build a more peaceful world by promoting understanding among cultures. "As drivers became friends, they decided to send their kids to live with each other's families because they didn't want something like this to ever happen again," explains Luiz.

As part of the competition, Luiz had to master history, reading and writing tests, and successfully debate other challengers. The contest lasted over a year and a half before Luiz was

finally admitted as an exchange student to the U.S. and sent to tiny Plainview, Minnesota.

"I was asking, Minne-what?" laughs Luiz. "I had heard of New York, Los Angeles, Chicago, and other big cities but was not aware of the state of Minnesota. What I learned when I came here was that it wasn't at all as you saw in the movies. There was that aura of the Heartland that I really believed in and the values I learned when I came here. The people in Plainview were honest and hardworking."

Luiz has written his own American success story as founder and CEO of Lobocast Communications. His career has included stints as a photographer, reporter, news anchor, producer and more. Today, he calls on the communications skills he honed during his journalism career to help individuals, corporations and organizations with their strategic communications needs.

Lobocast offers a variety of services. Individuals can use the firm to improve their verbal, non-verbal and vocal skills. Executives often seek them out ahead of important conferences and presentations. Corporations use Lobocast for crisis communications services; in other words, when a firm needs to represent itself well in the media, they turn to Lobocast to manage and guide their public presence.

Additionally, Luiz uses his years of experience in video production to assist companies with promotional or informational video projects. Firms approach with a project in mind, Luiz gathers a crew, writes the scripts, and serves as Senior Producer/Director of the final product.

Finally, he's established himself as a masterful event coordinator who can be counted on to pull off genuinely massive events. "I handle hard-to-accomplish events," Luiz explains. "I've been involved in global affairs that had over



240,000 people attending within four days. I was brought into that project about eleven months beforehand, and everything was chaotic. I like trouble shooting.

"I like to help people, organizations and governments struggling to accomplish what they were tasked with. They hire me to come in and get the house organized and tell them what they need to prioritize and focus upon."

The last three major projects Luiz worked on were all for the UN, including the world's first Indigenous Peoples' Games, which took place in both Brazil and Canada. Indigenous athletes from over 38 countries competed, including the U.S. Organizing the event involved directly liaising with the then-President of Brazil, the embassies, the U.S. Department of State and stakeholders worldwide.

Luiz has had a passion for journalism and communications since childhood. He was born in Brasilia, also referred to as "New City," in 1966. The city was new back then. Brazil had been contemplating moving the Capital inland from Rio de Janeiro for some time, and in 1960, they found Brasilia to be a strategic place. Today, it's home to over four million residents, but at the time, much of the city was still empty. Luiz remembers the city in the early 1970s as a Wonderland-like adventure park for a young kid. Everywhere he turned, there was construction, bulldozers, empty pipes and undeveloped open space. The dirt in Brasilia was red, and Luiz remembers coming home or arriving at his grandmother's house covered in the bright soil.

When he was only six years old, he received a tape recorder as a gift. It ignited his passion for interviewing. "Well, it was actually my mother who got the tape recorder as a gift from my father," laughs Luiz. "But right away, I decided that tape recorder was mine. I went around and interviewed everyone in the family, including my sisters and cousins. I asked them questions such as what's your name, how old you are, and what you like doing the most? I'm sure we still have those tapes somewhere."

Luiz's father was a pharmaceutical salesman while he was growing up and would often be on the road for long periods, sometimes a month or longer. He drove across the country in an old VW Beetle. Luiz's mother, meanwhile, was primarily a homemaker, but over time began a side business making cakes, sweets and other baked

goods for parties, weddings and birthdays. Although it was the 1970s, she showed a flair for entrepreneurship, and women began showing up at the house to take her culinary lessons.

When Luiz was nine, his father took him on one of his long business trips which became another wonderful memory for Luiz. He has three younger sisters, and he notes that his home life was very matriarchal. He had a seemingly infinite number of aunts and female cousins. Some male bonding time with dad was exhilarating.

Luiz excelled academically, and on the athletic side, he became a strong sprinter for the track team. His exchange year in Minnesota began after graduating from high school in Brazil, meaning he repeated his senior year. He wanted to finish high school in the U.S. and use the opportunity to learn English, with which he was only passingly familiar before his trip.

Adjusting to a new country, new home and new language was hard, but Luiz was equal to the task. His host parents were working-class, simple people, not upper-middle-class and certainly not wealthy. His host father was a farmer, and his host mother did hair out of the home, somewhat reminiscent of his own mother's entrepreneurial skills. Some of the other kids teased him, particularly about his language skills and accent, but he found a mentor in his English teacher, Mr. Gerzevske.

Mr. Gerzevske was tough, and most of the students were afraid of him. He loved Shakespeare and addressed students formally, referring to Luiz as "Mr. Lobo." On Luiz's first paper, Mr. Gerzevske gave him an "F." Another time, he tasked Luiz to write a report about the book *The Old Man and the Sea*. Struggling with the text, Luiz wrote his report about the movie adaptation instead, which he had already seen. Mr. Gerzevske asked Luiz to stay after class, but instead of punishing him, he offered his help. "He told me if you want to learn English the way we speak it in America, come to my office every day after school," remembers Luiz. "I'll teach you anything you want to learn." So he did; he mentored me. He even taught me slang and curse words. At the end of the year, he invited me to have dinner with him and his wife. I was probably one of the few students who ever went to his house. I graduated with an A- in his class."

While in Minnesota, Luiz wanted to make some extra money over and above the small

stipend he received from the exchange program and was able to get a job in the news industry. He walked into the local newspaper's office, announced that he was a photographer, and the paper hired him at \$20 per photo they used.

After his year in the AFS exchange program, Luiz returned to Brazil. With his improved English language skills, he spent a year teaching English in a private school before moving on to radio broadcasting. He liked the work but wanted to return to the U.S. Luiz reached out to a friend, Matthew Garber. Matt was also an AFS student, who had lived with Luiz's family in Brazil. Luiz went to San Francisco for a year before Matt's parents invited him to stay with them in Corydon, Iowa.

Matt's hometown was tiny—even smaller than Plainview, Minnesota. Once again, Luiz found himself back in small-town America. "Matt and I played the guitar. I taught him and he is now much better than I am. We used to play at home gatherings and parties. Luiz began working at a grocery store and later as a bartender in a small Italian restaurant. His new host mother—whom he refers to as "Mama Garber"—owned beehives and produced honey. Luiz helped develop a logo for her business and traveled to other small towns to sell and deliver her honey products to nearby stores.

After some time in Iowa, Luiz returned to Brazil to start college. He entered a radio broadcast journalism program. At the age of 20, he did his first national story for television, a biographical piece about a Holocaust survivor, Stanislaw Szmajzner. "Szlomo" was one of 58 known prisoners to escape the Sobibór extermination camp in Poland successfully. Inspired by his story and legacy, Luiz remembers this interview well. At around this time, he also married his first wife.

With some experience in the journalism field under his belt, Luiz returned to the U.S. to begin a communications program at the University of Iowa. Shortly after, he started his graduate work in Multimedia. Luiz took a job as an executive producer for PBS Iowa. At PBS, he began co-producing fascinating documentaries about nature and history. The U.S. Department of Education awarded Luiz and his team a \$4.5 million grant to develop interactive videos and other multimedia educational projects about the Mississippi River. "With that and another local grant, I was about to develop a three-and-a-half-year project," nods

Luiz. "I became something of a pioneer in digital television and produced the very first 16x9 broadcast in the U.S., working with engineers."

For 14 years, Luiz remained in the U.S. His two daughters were born in Iowa. He spent time in Atlanta and Chicago, continuing to pursue a successful career in TV journalism, before realizing he would return to Brazil. His youngest sister, 31, had just passed away. His parents were distraught. Luiz felt the need to be closer to the whole family. A year later, his mother also passed away at the age of 62. Luiz was divorced by this time.

"When I went back, I began producing stories for networks, including CNN International," Luiz relates. "When they needed a story in Central Brazil, they would often call me. I would produce interviews and stories in English, and they would air it here on CNN or CNN International. I also did pieces for Discovery Channel and was a local producer on a show for the History Channel, called "Searching for the Truth," a series where we went around the world to find the truth about the history of different places."

He also continued his focus on environmental topics, spending more than four years working on a documentary project about the Amazon Rainforest with four friends from Iowa. "Partly because of that and because of my other experience, I got a phone call," recalls Luiz. "It was from one of the most famous anchors in Brazil, Ana Paula Padrão. She asked me to come to Sao Paulo and fill a position at the station as a weatherman and special assignment environment reporter."

For the role, Luiz was sent to exotic, far-flung locations to report, even doing a series on Antarctica where he visited the scientific stations of U.S., Chilean and Brazilian researchers. Then one day, Ana had another question for him. "She told me she was exhausted and needed to take a break," Luiz describes. "She said she needed someone to replace her and that I had to get in the studio right away. So I became a national news anchor in Brazil just like that."

Around this time, Luiz's daughters often visited Brazil and decided they wanted to move full-time for a while. They were still young—12 and 14. Their decision to come live with their father provoked another move. Luiz decided to return to where he was born, Brasilia, where he still had extended family. He knew that while he

worked his high-powered job, he wouldn't be able to keep a close enough eye on his girls in fast-paced Sao Paulo. He went back to Brazil's Capital, the once-New City.

The girls stayed in Brazil until it was time to graduate high school; at that point, Luiz insisted they go back to get an American high school degree. He stayed behind for several more years to finish out some outstanding projects, including the UN's massive Sustainable Development Conference, Rio + 20. Lobocast was up and running, and Luiz had already expanded into the events space. He also produced several corporate videos, working with private and government agencies.

In the process of planning the First World Games of Indigenous People in 2015, Luiz came to D.C. Almost immediately, he fell in love again with a large city and knew he wanted to stay. "I visited the State Department by invitation of the U.S. Embassy in Brazil to talk about the UN endeavor with the Games," Luiz recalls. "This is where I knew I wanted to live," he said.

Luiz remarried a few weeks later in Brazil, to his wife, Cintia. Soon after their marriage, the couple relocated to the D.C. area. "I met her through common interests, such as ice cream," says Luiz with a smile. "But that is another story. She is a significant influence and inspiration in my life. Everyone in her family is very successful and hardworking.

Both of his parents have also been important role models in his life and career. "My father is hardworking, is very ethical and is devoted to the family," Luiz describes. "And from my mother, I got tenacity. She was a fighter; she was a cancer survivor for over 23 years before she ultimately died from it. She was writing a book about her life, and when she died, we published the book. I get through tough times with faith, friends, family, love and prayers. I always look up to the memory of my mother and how well she

fought. I admire her optimism and positivity."

As a leader, Luiz considers himself strategic, with a coaching mindset. "I want to make sure everybody on the team gets what's best for them," he reflects. "I try to get everyone in the place where they belong. One of the things I've had to do many times in the various roles I have filled is to build strong teams. I love building a team and seeing them work together."

Luiz emphasizes that young folks entering the working world should focus on quality over perfection and continue developing a skill set. "Whether it's your first day or whether you're a senior executive, everyone needs to continue to develop their communications skills."

Today, Luiz is happily settled in Washington, D.C., and as a bonus, he could finally bring his father to see an important landmark—the Lincoln Memorial. "He was so proud, he cried," smiles Luiz. "Whatever kind of connection he has with Lincoln, it's strong. I feel that connection with the U.S., as well. The most important place to me is where my heart and values are. And that's here."

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