

Behind the Scenes at C-MA Empresarial 2026: A Case Study in Heart Intelligence and Coherence

By Cheche — Luis Felipe Avella Villegas

I arrived unprepared. I needed a meditative break before taking the stage at the C-MA Empresarial 2026 at the Bogotá Chamber of Commerce — a strategic gathering designed for CEOs, CFOs, CHROs, and organizational leaders from across Latin America. I found an almost empty speakers' lounge, an available armchair, and the silence I was looking for. What I didn't expect was that the only other person in the room would be Tal Ben-Shahar — Harvard's leading professor of the happiness course, who had opened the event that morning before nearly 1,000 leaders with a conference on positive leadership and the science of happiness, drawing from Martin Seligman's positive psychology and beyond.

We introduced ourselves. And something in that shared silence told me there was real time and presence for a conversation.

I told him a story I've carried for almost two decades. Back then, I had been co-author of the book *Achievements and Challenges of Social Responsibility in Colombia*, and we had just come out of an Ashoka event sharing testimonies from outstanding social entrepreneurs. One of them was Silvio — a leader of hundreds of waste collectors in Bogotá — who described how whenever his ego got the better of him, he made a radical decision: he left his car, his phone, and his good clothes behind, put on his working clothes again, and spent a full week as a wandering waste collector. Long walks through the streets of Bogotá pushing his wooden cart with ball-bearing wheels, like a true collector at heart, grateful for the humility he recharged through that noble work.

On the bus back from the south of Bogotá to Universidad de los Andes, I was lucky enough to sit next to James Austin — senior professor at Harvard, a lifelong champion of the case method, and leader of the Social Enterprise Knowledge Network (SEKN) across Latin America. A man whose entire academic life had been devoted to systematizing the knowledge that others generated by living. And without further preamble, I put it to him directly:

—James, are you aware that these social entrepreneurs — like Silvio — are the ones who generate, through their full attention and action in the present, the social innovation about which we write cases? Do you know that they will never read those cases, and yet they, and others who will come after them, will keep generating the seed of knowledge that we systematize to teach others about social entrepreneurship? What is it inside them that allows them to produce that natural knowledge? Perhaps that answer is more relevant to the world than the outcome of our cases.

The master of the case method — the man who had devoted his life to capturing the living knowledge of others — looked at me with a certain discomfort before responding with an evasive kind of intelligence.

That question never left me.

Tal listened to the story with full attention and told me, with the same calm he had been sitting in before I arrived: James was my professor. We smiled. That serendipitous icebreaker opened the door to a deeper conversation.

I had spent seven years in full dedication — reflecting, practicing, and verifying an inner perspective of sustainable happiness through coherent leadership of our own physiology — starting from perfect, coherent, and conscious breathing within the framework of neurocardiology — as a contribution toward a society of consciousness. But I had an unfinished debt to Gerardito. It seemed only right that Harvard should know about him through Tal Ben-Shahar. After all, Gerardito had been fundamental in my own path toward sustainable happiness.

I had Tal's morning conference fresh in mind, and the relevance he had given to acceptance in its first part. Then, like an arrow, it reached my heart-brain: Aceptología — the science of acceptance developed by a self-taught mystic from the small town of Tabio, Colombia — Gerardo Schmedling — little known in his own country but with a quiet reach that extends far beyond what any algorithm could track.

Before revealing the name, I walked Tal through that possibility of accepting one's own autobiography through understanding — that is, love — and trust — that is, faith or spirituality, as each person sees fit. I told him that in the midst of my bankruptcy as co-founder of an award-winning international company, after nine years as CEO, the science of acceptance had helped me recover my vital energy and resilience — and that path eventually led me, fortunately, to a herd of horses: my true therapists and initiatory teachers in coherence and consciousness.

I could sense I had touched his researcher's enthusiasm. Then I told him the name of the author who seemed to know the laws of the universe the way one knows a tree that grew beside them their whole life: Gerardo Schmedling. But first I clarified that he was a self-taught man who as a child had suffered Guillain-Barré syndrome and couldn't attend school, and who had learned to read with the help of his cousin. I also told him about Gonzalo Rodríguez Freyle — a lawyer with the highest national bar exam score in Spain, with a prodigious memory, Harvard MBA graduate, and pioneer of the first family offices for wealthy Spanish families in the United States — who had left a million-dollar career, sold his companies, spent a decade searching for spiritual teachers to fill an inner void, and eventually found Gerardito's work. And about his Foundation for the Development of Consciousness in Spain, and the Master's program in Consciousness and Being — with outstanding faculty — in which I was awarded a scholarship by its director, all of it centered around Gerardito's School of the Magic of Love.

Tal asked: an academic master's degree? I shook my head.

Then he took out his phone and asked if there was anything about Gerardito in English. I told him not that I knew of, but that I would gladly find out. He had already found something on Google: "Aceptology is a philosophical and psychological framework created by Colombian humanist Gerardo Schmedling..."

At that moment Tomás Smith joined us — an engineer, entrepreneur, and partner in a shared vision we had discussed before: a replicable model cell of 100 hectares for 20 autonomous

families on my farm La Lucía in the Eastern Plains of Colombia — near Puerto López, Meta — as a "Full Life Insurance" designed for an era that can no longer remain the same. And suddenly, with Tal and Tomás, the conversation jumped to humanity's current inflection point with artificial intelligence — and the only path back to nature and simplicity.

It was then that Tal said quietly something that will stay with me forever: "I am at peace. I could die at peace. But not for my children. For them, I don't have an answer. Neither does Harvard."

We were called to lunch.

My neighbor at the table was Chilean Ronald Sistek — a conference speaker who applies complex systems thinking, drawing from patterns and models in nature, to the reality and possibilities of organizations. As our conversation unfolded, I began to sense something unexpected: the presence, the energy, and the vocabulary of someone very dear to me — the Chilean biologist Humberto Maturana, nominated for the Nobel Prize for his concept of Autopoiesis alongside Francisco Varela, considered "my teacher" by the Dalai Lama, and foundational to my own models of fair and sustainable trade. I had come to know his work primarily through rural leader Mario Bonilla of Agrosolidaria, who studied him deeply and translated his ideas into the language of Colombian farmers with extraordinary fidelity. When I mentioned this intuition to Ronald — that something about him reminded me of Maturana — he revealed that Maturana had been his teacher and mentor. And that Humberto Maturana's last podcast, recorded at age 92, days before he died, was with him. I sat in silence for a moment, grateful for the magic of that instant.

Unfortunately, that afternoon, right after my own conference, I was invited to give an interview at the CCB radio station and missed the chance to hear Ronald speak on stage. But life is curious — and the conversations that matter always find their moment.

After my conference, Juliette was waiting in the front row — a luminous friend with a career in international consulting at global firms, who had made a courageous leap: she left that trajectory to lead herself from within, inspired by Gerardo Schmedling's work. Her presence, with that smile that belongs to someone who has already found their path, was a quiet gift.

The following day, at the speakers' lunch on day two, my neighbor was Jorge Rosas — a brilliant Mexican communicator who had achieved something few manage on a stage: making us laugh and cry three times in alternating waves during his conference on Happiness Unlocked. A man whose emotional intelligence was felt before he ever opened his mouth. We exchanged visions on artificial intelligence and its impact on society and found immediate chemistry. The conversation turned toward what we both felt was the only real path forward: an inner migration — from outside to inside, from city to nature, from a consumer society toward a society of consciousness. "I'm going to bring you to Mexico," he told me. At that same table I met Mario Plata — former director of the Colombian association of human resources directors — and Carolina Astaiza, its new director. Conversations that opened doors toward organizations already searching for exactly what ENTRÉNATE has to offer. Jorge and I kept talking for half an hour past the end of lunch. There are people with whom time simply behaves differently.

At the close of the event, the Chamber had offered me a book stand — and there I stood, sharing with wonderful visitors: open souls who came for books, dedications, and photos. Those moments that appear in no agenda and are, perhaps, the most genuine of any event. Juliette became my guardian angel that day: she drove me home with the boxes of books, and the conversation we wove along the way — about Ronald Sistek, about La Lucía and its autonomous cell model as a Full Life Insurance — kept naturally blooming. She also told me that the coming weekend she had designed a course that framed Gerardo Schmedling's prosperity framework combined with her years of international consulting — the GA Method — to which she invited me. I went. I learned enormously. And I confirmed with greater clarity than ever the architecture of the path I was building to bring physiological coherence to everyone who needs to train it.

Thanks to the living and tacit conversations of that event — with Tal Ben-Shahar, Ronald Sistek, Jorge Rosas, Tomás Smith, Juliette, all the others, and the permanent echoes of Gerardo Schmedling and Humberto Maturana — I confirm the fundamental relevance of anchoring, as the one indispensable atomic habit, the nuclear power of physiological coherence that lives in our conscious breathing as a present-moment meditation. There, in that breathing, emerges intuition — the intelligence of the heart — which does not require the filter of artificial intelligence, though we can use AI well as a catalyst for our consciousness, advancing with heart and brain toward a better possible world.

In 2007, I asked James Austin — master of the case method at Harvard, a man who devoted his life to systematizing the knowledge that others generated by living — what lay behind the protagonists of his cases. What was it inside them that allowed them to produce natural knowledge without ever needing to read it in any book or Harvard case study. Nineteen years later, this article is my answer.

It is a personalized case study in heart intelligence and coherence. And the only way to learn it is not by reading it — it is by training it.

If you have read this far and something in you resonated, this is the natural path forward. For leaders whose decisions impact the lives of more than 1,000 people — in the private, public, social, sports, or arts sectors — this event confirmed for me the moment to launch the Exclusive Training in Coherent Leadership: a personalized 12-hour process, in three moments supported by a herd of horses, at your own pace, so that you make the most important decisions of your life from your best version of yourself. And for everyone who wants to train physiological coherence as a daily practice — because the transformation that begins in the leader must be able to reach everyone they lead — in August arrives the Course ENTRÉNATE PARA SIEMPRE on Hotmart.

When the leader transforms from within, thousands feel it. When those thousands train, the world changes.

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