

‘Are you puzzled by the puzzle of life?’

Searcy teachers prepare for another year of educational excellence

By Warren Watkins

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With a speech impediment that took 12 years of therapy to overcome, Paul Vitale of Little Rock could have had an excuse to not excel in life. Instead, he stood before 275 teachers from the Searcy School District Monday and motivated them to begin another year of the local tradition of excellence in education.

Beginning with the title question, “Are you puzzled by the puzzle of life?” Vitale challenged the teachers to be proactive and positive. “I want to once again reinforce the fact that educators have a great influence on people,” Vitale said before beginning his high-energy presentation. “They encourage people to dream dreams, and to stretch outside their boundaries.”

Vitale’s philosophy of teaching is illustrated with four lines: “To read means to learn; To learn means to share; To share means to encourage; To encourage means to influence.”

Three practices allow teachers and other leaders to achieve their goals, Vitale said. They should dare to dream courageously, establish a course of action and empower others to imagine.

“To dream means to envision what may become,” Vitale said.



“Throughout history, every organization and social movement grew from the seed of a dream. The dream or vision is the strength that creates the future. Leaders dare to dream often. However, some are unable to implement their vision because of the lack of courage.”

A leader must believe in himself, Vitale said, but also in the wisdom of others’ thoughts, ideas and critiques. The “what ifs” of life must be challenged, a process that allows new opportunities to surface. Lessons of success and failure are valuable learning experiences. Celebrating team success produces positive attitudes, and discussing failures in the proper way helps lessons to be learned.

“To set a dream or idea into motion, a leader must first be clear about the course of action,” Vitale said. “Create a

plan and work the plan. Effective leaders do this through being precise and decisive in the plans they set into motion. This is an active, not passive process.”

Inviting the support and assistance of team members is an effective strategy, Vitale said, and

establishing the course of action takes good management, enthusiasm and the willingness to listen.

“The imagination is an incredible and powerful tool,” Vitale said. “Leaders are learners who welcome collaboration, teamwork and ideas from others. When individuals have the chance to share their imagination with the team, they develop a keen sense of ownership in the process.”

Leaders who are truly effective “talk up” the ideas of others, versus tearing them down, Vitale told the teachers.

Beth Mauer, a teacher at Southwest Middle School, was excited about another school year. “I came today to enrich the learning experience and to motivate myself to do the best I can in the upcoming school year,” Mauer said.