

# Man with a message

## Russellville native conquers learning disability to become author, speaker

By Sara Greene  
STAFF WRITER

LITTLE ROCK — Russellville native Paul Vitale, 35, overcame a childhood learning disability to write two books and launch a career as a professional speaker, fulfilling a goal he had since junior high school.

“Being around people and encouraging them is success to me. It’s not so much what I say but reminding people what kind of mark they can leave on others,” Vitale said.

In elementary school, Vitale struggled with phonemic awareness - difficulty recognizing vowel sounds. Having to sit outside his regular classroom each day to go over vocabulary flash cards with a tutor, he recognized the importance both the written and spoken word have on people.

In the eighth grade, Vitale had the opportunity to participate in a student leadership program during which he attended a lecture by Stanley Schofield, a 1976 Olympic track coach. Vitale liked Schofield’s energy and mannerisms so much he decided at age 14 to become a professional speaker.

After graduating from the University of Central Arkansas in 1995 with a degree in mass communication and a minor in journalism, Vitale embarked on a career with a Little Rock advertising agency while writing his first book, **Are You Puzzled by the Puzzle of Life?** He self-published the book four years later and spent a year traveling throughout America selling it to bookstores.

He then started working as the sales and marketing director for the Hot Springs Convention Center, promoting the Spa City while accepting as many speaking invitations as possible.

Through a combination of the popularity of his books, word of mouth and good marketing, he was able to start professionally speaking full time in 2003.

Vitale also offers one-on-one personal-growth counseling and acts as a facilitator of town hall meetings and discussions. He’s written a second book, **Pass It On**, a collection of 365 inspirational quotes.

Now Vitale spends most of the year traveling to speaking engagements around the country and world on topics such as teamwork, leadership, the importance of customer service and presentation coaching. He uses both his own experiences and lessons from others to motivate and encourage.

“Some speakers only have one good message, but I have at least 11,” Vitale said.

Titles of some of his keynote speeches include “You Chose Your Change,” “Keep It Simple,” “Enthusiasm: Your Secret Weapon” and “It’s Your Business, It’s Your Name.”

His audiences have run the gamut from high school students in rural Arkansas to city leaders, professional associations, colleges, substance-abuse prevention programs and major corporations like Tyson, Dole in Hong Kong and the Washington Redskins football team.

Being a professional speaker is both humbling and invigorating, he said. “I hope I’m a good steward of their time whether it is 45 minutes or an hour, because I don’t want to waste their time,” Vitale said. He has a straightforward approach for talking to students.

“If you level with them and get past the fluff and the bull, if you speak to



them not as students, but as people, they can relate,” Vitale said.

As clichéd as it sounds, Vitale said if he can reach one person in a positive way during any of his presentations, he feels he’s on the right track. His parents, Lou and Carole Vitale of Russellville, taught Vitale about caring about others. Carole is a retired teacher and Lou works with organizations fighting poverty in the River Valley area.

“My parents taught me a lot about sitting amongst other people. One of my mottos is ‘It’s never so bad, it couldn’t be worse,’” Vitale said. One of Vitale’s most important messages is don’t procrastinate.

“I think 9/11 made everyone realize all you’re guaranteed is right now. Whatever mark we want to leave on the world, the time to do it is now,” Vitale said.

He is writing a third book titled **Dream Chasers** and developing more curriculum, including the recently completed **A Hero Within** for students in grades eight through 12.

“As long as I can continue to motivate and communicate sincerely, I’ll stay the course. If the day comes when I have to fake it, well, I’ll find something else to invest my time into,” Vitale said.

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