

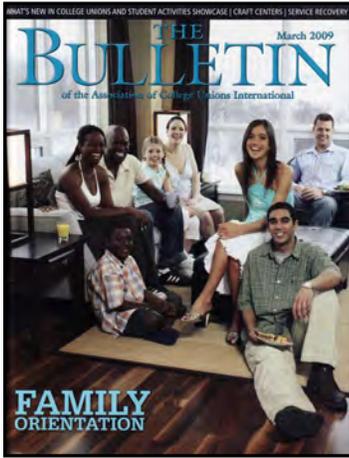
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FAMILY ORIENTATION



Q&A with Paul Vitale:

Inspiration, motivation, and teamwork in today's economy

INTERVIEW BY RICK GARDNER

Paul Vitale is a professional speaker and trainer who recently presented “Energize the Enthusiasm that Exists Within” at the Region 5 conference at Vanderbilt University. Vitale speaks regularly about enthusiasm, motivation, and teamwork while working with everyone from high school students to the corporate boardroom and from the University of Kentucky to the U.S. Chamber of Commerce to the Minnesota Vikings.

Gardner:

How do you inspire, motivate, and encourage teamwork in today's college union setting?

Vitale:

With the current economy, I believe we must find ways to return to the basics of service to others. It's a common theme we all need to consider. To help reverse the current cycle we are in, it behooves us to once again understand we're in a position not only to take care of ourselves, but also others who are reaching out for help.

There are many people hurting right now, individuals who are simply lacking hope. If we are continuously focused on our own struggles and challenges, it can not only bring us down, but also break our spirits. More often than not, we should consider taking the focus off ourselves and placing it on others. Having an attitude of service provides hope for the many that are confused and exhausted. When they see

someone reaching out with a helping hand, it renews their spirit and inspires them; and in turn, we become greatly encouraged.

This cycle of give and take reminds us how fortunate we are and helps put things into perspective through these difficult times. Even though we have our own problems paying bills, tuition, rent, etc., there are still others who are dealing with worse situations. Recognizing this makes us much more thankful for what we do have. Remember, each day we are given on this planet is one more day provided to serve others in either a large or small way.

Gardner:

How do you create excitement for change?

Vitale:

Creating excitement for change really begins with how well each of us put things into perspective. Suppose there are layoffs or your union is restructured because of the economy. Change such as this is not only uncomfortable, but also unfortunate. Hopefully, the individual placed in a situation such as this can find a way to accept the change and move forward in a new or different direction. It will take no small amount of resolve and persistence, but it can be done. Even though adjustments are being made, we all still have the opportunity to enjoy what we do, leave an everlasting legacy, and influence people along the way. Many people don't realize how much influence they have on others—in times of change as well as when maintaining

the status quo.

Keep in mind, though, as difficult as change can be, positive results can occur. An organization may be looking for ways to streamline, increase productivity, expand, or develop new approaches to its standard way of doing things. Sometimes people get in ruts; they become deflated and lose enthusiasm for what they do. Change can create a new burst of energy, especially when you choose to recognize the good and the potential surrounding it. Change will always play a leading role in our lives.

Gardner:

Can you tell me more about strengthening leadership through risk?

Vitale:

There are times when a choice has to be made about whether to take a risk. When we talk about this in regard to leadership, each of us must be willing to step outside our comfort zone, sacrifice, and do things we normally wouldn't do in order to better ourselves and the people around us.

A great example occurred at the Region 5 conference when I asked one of the attendees to join me on stage. I encouraged him to step out of his comfort zone and speak in front of all the participants. He introduced himself, shared with the group why he was there, and in the end, walked away feeling more empowered. For those few minutes, he was leading by example. In the future, if that same gentleman is called to speak in front of others, he now knows he can. Many will look at the risk he took and say to themselves, “If he can do it, so can I!”

How do we strengthen leadership through risk? When each of us steps out of our comfort zone, we show others that they have the ability to do the same; we lead by our example. Our example eliminates the fear of failure and ignites the eagerness in others, setting the tone for success. What is the reward? Knowing that something was accomplished today that yesterday you thought was not possible.

Gardner:

How do we encourage teamwork in today's economy?

Vitale:

When we talk about teamwork, we must realize we are all in this together. We win as a team or lose as a team. Being a team is critically important. We must remember the influence we have on each member of the team and vice versa. We are influenced by others to have a positive attitude, to not give up, to go out and help other people. By uniting people for a common cause, understanding and respecting diversity, and encouraging individuals through our positive actions, we can keep from living in the past, look beyond the negatives of the present, and focus on the future. Very few people ever achieve their greatest potential without the support of key players surrounding them. Our economy is no different. If we want to encourage positive growth, we must begin within our own team.

Gardner:

How do you overcome the anxiety that today's economy and media present us with?

Vitale:

I try to balance how much time I listen to the news networks and read the newspaper. As I said before, the key is perspective. I do my best not to allow the negative statistics and facts to overwhelm me. At the end of the day, whatever is going to happen with the economy is going to happen. I have no control over Wall Street or the stock market. Knowing this, I simply just do the best job I can each day and try not to worry about it.

I am optimistic that things will eventually change course and improve. At times, it is very frustrating though—you have to take a deep breath, count your blessings, and move ahead.

Gardner:

Who do you look to for inspiration?

Vitale:

My parents have always inspired me. That is where my core comes from. I go to my parents for inspiration. My family is where it really starts for me.

As a schoolteacher, my mother inspired me to educate others and encourage them to reach their potential. She's always helped me see how my attitude is important. My father was a[n AmeriCorps] VISTA volunteer from Pennsylvania during the 1960s. His vocation has always been helping others deal with poverty and working with community action groups. For me, he provided the example of serving others, and especially people who are less fortunate. Additionally, he has taught me to get along with people from all walks of life, to embrace diversity, to bridge gaps, and to listen and learn about different cultures and backgrounds.

Gardner:

What does choose the "Wow" over the "Towel" mean?

Vitale:

We have two ways of looking at life; either the glass is half full or half empty. Enthusiasm begins with making a conscious choice. I believe we all have the privilege to get up each morning and do something positive. We are all original and unique. This is very powerful when you stop and think about it.

One of enthusiasm's greatest enemies is anxiety. Some people just want to give up and throw in the towel if things aren't going their way. They dwell on the negatives: "I didn't get this break, or the outcome didn't turn out the way I hoped." It breaks their spirit and leaves them with less confidence. If we concentrate on the positive, realize how special we are, choose the "wow" in life over throwing in the "towel," we can each have a much more fulfilling life. That builds our confidence and, in turn, gives us a reason to share our gifts.

Gardner:

In your presentation on leadership,

what do you mean by the remarkable traits of leadership?

Vitale:

Be authentic in who you are and what you have to offer, express a genuine interest in mankind, be a good listener, be patient, and appreciate those who encourage questions and steady streams of dialogue.

Remember, people are not only inspired by those who can speak, but also by those who can listen. Share ideas with others while listening with purpose. This encourages others, and helps to form mutual respect.



Gardner:

What does "recognize influential surroundings" mean?

Vitale:

With each vested relationship comes a level of influence. As I alluded to earlier, any setting we are in, any team we are a part of, we will always influence others. But it's important to recognize that those around us influence us as well. If you are in an environment that is consistently positive, it becomes habit-forming and the better you will become.

However, it's also habit-forming to be in a negative environment. That has the opposite effect on your performance. We must recognize how our surroundings influence us to be optimistic or pessimistic and remember—it's a matter of consistency.

Recognize the influence of your environment and make a choice to be positive and be consistent with it. We are where we are today because of many others.

Gardner:

How do you balance community vs. your own interests?

Vitale:

As we move ahead, each of us have the chance to insert positive energy into our communities. The term “community” can be defined many different ways. There is the campus community, the town you grew up in, your home state, the region of the United States (or another country) where you are from; it’s all in how you characterize community. Nonetheless, have you ever stopped and asked

do we remember what went right? On a weekly basis, I keep a running list of the small things that went right. I write them down and review them regularly. My list helps me to realize all the things I should be thankful for while keeping me focused on the positive.

Gardner:

Can you give me an example of leaving an “unforgettable mark” when it comes to leadership?

Vitale:

If you look at our political system today, especially if you reflect on the recent presidential race between

words and how you present them, and do your best to deliver a message that’s memorable. People will remember not only what you say, but also how you say it. It’s your passion and enthusiasm that sets the tone of the message. For example, if you are asked to stand up in front of a group and inspire them to exercise good teamwork, your energy and passion will create a memorable message.

Remember, though, it works both ways. You can set either a positive tone or a negative tone in a matter of moments.

Gardner:

As a motivational speaker, do you have a favorite quote?

Vitale:

I’m not sure if you would consider this a quote or just a simple lesson. Either way my father taught me this many years ago, and it’s an idea that is true and timeless: It’s never so bad that it couldn’t be worse. ♦

As human beings, we have a tendency to think of what went wrong.
How often do we remember what went right? On a weekly basis, I keep a running list of the small things that went right.

yourself where does your community fit into your list of priorities? Is one of your goals to become more involved and reach out to the larger community in need? Naturally, we all have special interests—our own interests—but are we willing to put others before ourselves? It’s a good question to consider!

Gardner:

What motivates you?

Vitale:

People motivate me. The participants who attend my events and share their thoughts and ideas encourage me. People who are willing to listen, learn, and get involved energize me. I’m extremely fortunate to get to do what I do every day. This is a huge motivating factor as well.

Gardner:

Do you have any tips or techniques to help?

Vitale:

As human beings, we have a tendency to think of what went wrong. How often

Senators Barack Obama and John McCain, you see each had a different style of leadership. Regardless of their political differences, at the end of the race, they each left an “unforgettable mark” on all those interested in the process.

As leaders, we have the capacity to create memorable messages that leave everlasting marks in the minds of people. There were 1.8 million people on the National Mall to hear President Obama’s inauguration speech. His comments and challenges left an everlasting mark in the minds of each person who took the time to stop and listen.

There are many types of leadership styles and ways of motivating people. It’s up to each leader to find what embodies their true spirit.

Gardner:

What do you mean when you say we should create a memorable message?

Vitale:

We communicate messages every day, both verbal and nonverbal. When you communicate, realize the power of your

The Bulletin is a publication of the Association of College Unions International. Professional speaker and author Paul Vitale delivers keynote presentations and seminars around the globe on topics such as leadership, enthusiasm, customer service and sales. For more information call 501.868.8195 or visit paulvitale.com!