

MAY 2010

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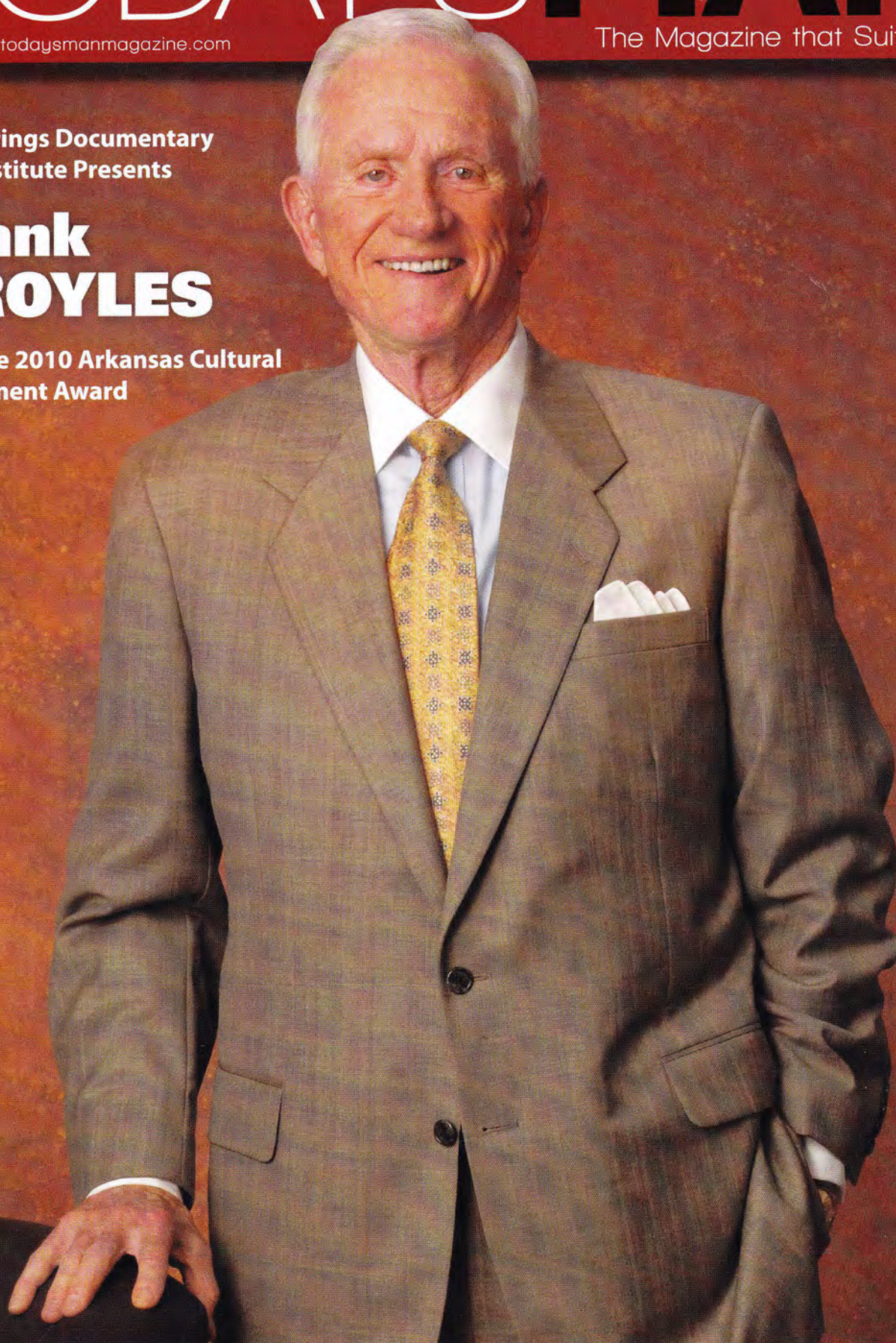
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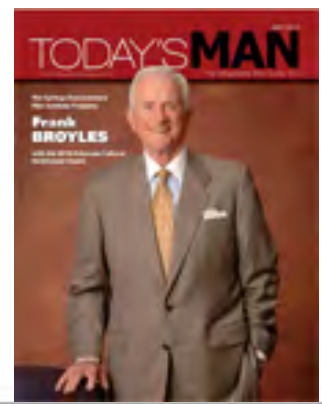
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# Paul Vitale

*Paul Vitale is a professional motivational speaker. Ask him whether he wanted to grow up to be a motivational speaker when he was a boy, and Vitale can answer, "Yes."*

Text By: Rebecca Haden

He was influenced strongly by an assembly speaker when he was in junior high school, and he thought at the time that he'd like to do that. "When I first went to my parents and told them I wanted to be a professional speaker," Vitale laughs, "they didn't know what to say."

The Russellville native began researching the industry in high school, learning about the career paths of leaders in the field. In college, he had the chance to talk with professional speakers, and to learn, as he puts it, from their wisdom. Vitale took his degree in Mass Communications and Journalism from the University of Central Arkansas. He worked in marketing, beginning with an internship and then employment at Little Rock's Cranford Johnson Robinson Woods, and going on to direct the Hot Springs Convention and Visitors Bureau. Along the way, he was chosen as one of Arkansas Business "40 Under 40." He is a graduate of the Leadership Greater Little Rock Program and currently serves on the Board of Directors of the Arkansas Travel Council. With this experience under his belt, he felt ready, seven years ago, to take on his dream of becoming a full time professional speaker.

Since then, Vitale has spoken in corporate boardrooms and homeless shelters, schools and sports camps. His speaking engagements—an average of one hundred a year – have taken him to countries ranging from Hong Kong to Italy and most of the states in the union. His list of clients is studded with household names: Dole, ALLTEL, Tyson, the Minnesota Vikings, the Heifer Project, and the United States Postal Service are just a few. He has written several books and a curriculum for youth leadership training.

He exemplifies his own definition of success: "Finding something you honestly enjoy doing, something you honestly enjoy being, and then going out and living it."

Vitale speaks about success, about leadership, about personal growth – and also about sales. His book *Sell With Confidence* covers everything from dress and grooming to customer service after the sale. Salesmanship may seem like a less lofty topic than the others on his list, but Vitale says, "It speaks to the skills needed for promoting something you believe in. It could be a belief, a cause, a thought process. We all promote something."

And the book doesn't talk about sharks,

about knowing your enemy, or about trouncing the competition. The usual war and predator metaphors are missing, even though the drive and ambition are evident. "We can do it in a respectful way," says Vitale. For Vitale, sales and promotion are about sharing a passion. His work for Big Brothers/Big Sisters, the Make-A-Wish Foundation, Arkansas Children's Hospital and the Cystic Fibrosis Foundation bring out this passion. So does his work with schools.

His mother was a teacher for 33 years, and his father was a social worker, so he started out with a great respect for education. His own experience with that inspirational speaker in his Junior High auditorium showed him how much difference his message could potentially make in a young life. So Vitale developed a leadership training curriculum for 8th to 12th grades, and has presented for most Arkansas school districts, plus schools and educational organizations from California to Florida and from Georgia to Iowa. An upcoming engagement will have Vitale speaking to 1300 young people at an NFL sports camp.

When he talks to young people at schools and sports camps, Vitale emphasizes 21st century skills, along





with some foundational concepts that have stood the test of time: strong work ethic, positive attitude, presentation skills, customer care, follow through, social networking.

Social networking includes online networking. Vitale is concerned about cyberbullying. A group of sixth graders told him just this week that bullying is their greatest challenge outside of school. His experience with young people has convinced him that new communication media have brought new communication challenges in their wake. "Even though we have all these opportunities to stay connected," he says, "in some ways we're more disconnected than ever." So Vitale talks with young audiences about the decisions they make when they choose to use Facebook or YouTube: decisions

that involve timeless life skills as well as up to date technical skills.

Vitale makes these decisions himself, too. This year he has been working on his own online presence, from his website at [www.PaulVitale.com](http://www.PaulVitale.com) to his social media networking – the wave, he's convinced, of the future. "If I'm going to suggest that other people do this stuff," he says simply, "then I have to do it, too." He feels that having that online presence increases accountability.

"The greatest challenge is not only to speak about it, but to live it." Being connected through modern media gives an audience a greater, more real-time sense of connection. For Vitale's company, Vital Communications, this has led to greater transparency

with clients and potential clients. It's almost a return to the days when the owner of the corner store knew all his customers: people can tell whether you follow through on what you say you believe.

Vitale sees this challenge not only for himself, but for his audiences as well. "One of the common themes I hear from people who've heard me speak or who've read my books," he says, "is the difficulty of follow through. 'I'm all fired up now, Paul, but how do I keep that momentum six weeks from now?' How can you always be optimistic or always have a good attitude? We all have days when we don't feel like getting up."

Vitale has learned that managing energy is the key to the momentum that leads to success. First, become connected with the passion, the calling, the belief system that is the basis for your choices. Then take that energy and manage it so it's consistent. The result is a set of habits that allow consistent, positive action.

Vitale believes in carrying this idea through in all aspects of his life, from physical health to spirituality to gathering wisdom from others. "We all are in a position to contribute to mankind at some level," he points out. "If you're a writer, be the best writer you can be. If you're a speaker, be the best speaker you can be. If you manage lawn care, do that the best you can. We've all signed on to a mission, to a calling. We all face challenges. We all have a choice of how to deal with those challenges."

Vitale may deal in big ideas and travel to big cities, but Little Rock is big enough for him. "I am a very, very proud Arkansan," he says. "I believe in this state. We have some of the nicest people and one of the most beautiful states. Add the quality of life, and I'm always glad to come home."

