

Motivationally unchallenged

With abundant enthusiasm and determination, Paul Vitale understands and supports his and others successes

By Suzanne Tebo

RUSSELLVILLE—Paul Vitale never planned on writing a book. Yet, at the age of 27, this Russellville native is the author of a self-improvement book entitled, *Are You Puzzled by the Puzzle of Life?* The book centers around the question of what it takes to be successful. Though he was considered to be too young and inexperienced to truly know the answer, Vitale's inborn determination and discipline have already propelled him through numerous personal and professional accomplishments.

"What he's accomplished at 27 is probably what some people won't get accomplished by the time they're 40, 50 years old" observed family friend, Greg Holiman.

From childhood, Vitale possessed the skills needed to realize his dreams and ambitions. His mother, Carole, Vitale, 55, recalled, "He's very disciplined. And I don't know where he gets it from. He always had a plan, even when he was little."

One of the first accomplishments Vitale achieved was overcoming a learning disability in grade school. Despite being a hard-working and bright student, he scored poorly on an achievement test. Soon after, he was diagnosed and received therapy. A few years later, he no longer required extra help. His drive and inner motivation started extending to other areas of his life as well.

"He was an over-achiever in sports," his father, Lou Vitale, 63, explained. "Even though he was a step behind when it came to sports, he'd always over achieve to the point where he'd be a step ahead."

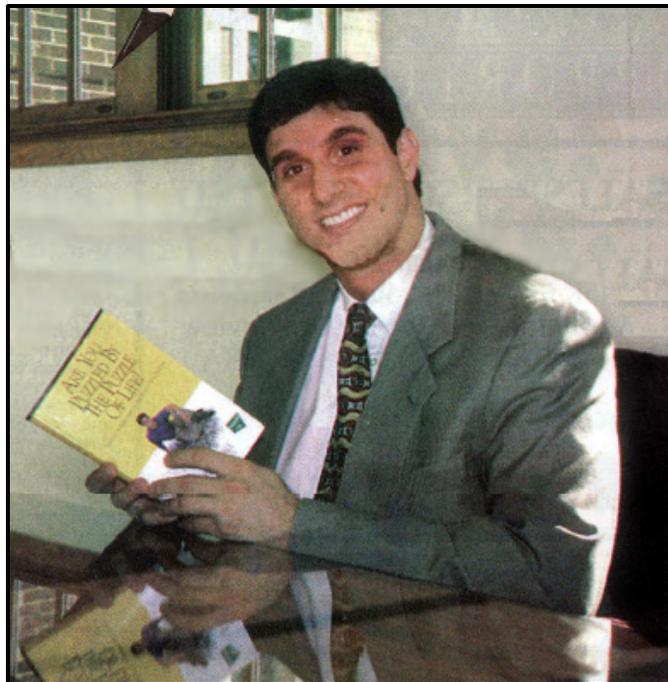
Vitale credits a simple philosophy with his success. "'If you can dream it, you can do it.' That helped me find my path at an early age. It kept me on the track up to this point."

In high school and college, Vitale sought and won offices in student government and became president of his fraternity at the University of Central Arkansas (UCA). Unlike his older brother, Matt, Vitale did not receive a baseball scholarship to UCA; however, he made his way onto the team as a walk-on.

"You just kind of always knew Paul was going to succeed. Whatever he did there was always that dedication—be it baseball, to collecting, to his parents. Anything he did, he was focused on it. Always," Holiman said.

After graduating from UCA in 1995 with a degree in mass communications and journalism, Vitale went to work for Cranford Johnson Robinson Woods Advertising Agency in the travel and tourism department. While maintaining his full-time position there, he also started his own company, Vital Communications, in 1996 to launch his true passion, motivational speaking.

"I've always said I want to be the Garth Brooks of motivation. I want to be an individual who has a very good and a very positive message, but can come in and present it in a fun way," he said.



Twenty-seven-year-old Paul Vitale of Russellville (above) with his book, *Are You Puzzled by the Puzzle of Life?* Vitale, who has dedicated his life to motivating others is currently guest lecturing at the University of Central Arkansas, while touring with his book.

Since beginning Vital Communications, Vitale has spoken to a variety of audiences, from big businesses such as ALLTEL Communications and Parke-Davis Pharmaceutical Company, to universities and high schools, "I love the opportunity to get up and deliver a message," he stated plainly.

He also thrives on the diversity of people he encounters while speaking. "The beautiful part about speaking is that every day is different, it's a different type of group, and you just never know what's going to happen."

Despite his enthusiasm and passion, sometime a speaking engagement falters. And because his career focuses on his personality and character, criticisms and defeats affect him directly. Yet even after a bad or difficult session, Vitale turns the experience into an educational one. His mother, Carole explained, "Where most people just back away or just be devastated, he looks at everything as a learning experience."

Commenting on his career choice, he said, "You challenge people. You're not going to win them all, I know that. But the few you do win, is worth it."

In an effort to continually improve himself, Vitale videotapes his sessions to critique his performance. Though there are many who give him assistance in a variety of ways, the majority of work is done by him, including learning the business of motivational speaking.

"He's had no mentor. He's done this on his own," his mother remarked with a sense of awe.

The book evolved from a twist of fate. Shortly after he graduated from college, his brother Matt posed the fateful question. "What do you think it takes to be successful?" The deceptively innocent inquiry turned into a big challenge for Vitale.

Vitale reflected, "I thought I was just going to pop out an answer; no problem. Well, I couldn't answer because I didn't know what success was. I had just graduated from college. I had no idea. How do you define success?"

Initially, his parents were skeptical about the idea of him writing the book. "He had the title before he had the book. He said, 'Wouldn't this be a great title for a book?' Now, at the time, he was like maybe 22 years, 23, and I said, 'What in the world, you are still wet behind the ears. What would you have, what do you know that you would write a book to tell people about life?'" his mother recalled.

In his usual determined fashion, Vitale set out over the next few years to find the answer. He solicited the opinion of people he considered to be successful. He sent out 953 letters to a variety of people across the country, from CEOs to actors, asking only three questions: *What does it take to be successful? What motivates you? and What do you look for in young people?*

The 187 responses he received became the book *Are You Puzzled by the Puzzle of Life?*

After reading the varied responses, he began to see similar themes and ideas throughout, and compiled them into nine different lessons. Combined with personal examples and quotes from those who responded, the book serves as more of a guide than a step by step program. "This book is not written to tell you how to become successful. This book is written as reminders of things to remember as you're pursuing what you want to become," Vitale said.

Often criticized as being too young to have the answers to success, Vitale explained that the book is not solely his opinion. "This book is not so much about Paul Vitale. This book is about those individuals who contributed...it's not so much about what I think it's what other people think. And all I tried to do was reinforce that."

One of the messages in the book is the importance of support systems, a conviction Vitale takes to heart. He cites his parents as a constant source of inspiration and encouragement, and credits them for instilling in him the ambition and faith to follow his dreams. "I honestly feel that I had an upper hand because of two wonderful parents," he said.

He also attributes his desire to help others to his parents and upbringing. "My mom and Dad, they raised me with basic concepts of life of trying to basically help people. Help your fellow man through whatever means."

Holiman has observed this serviceable attitude. "The impressive thing about Paul is his mannerism and his caring. He, in general, cares about people, and about just speaking with somebody. He's very polite, and he's concerned with what somebody's telling him, even if he doesn't know who they are. He wants to talk to you. He's concerned about what you've got going on or what you've got to say."

When he is not working, Vitale donates his time to various organizations, such as Big Brothers/Big Sisters, the Make-A-Wish Foundation, the Cystic Fibrosis Foundation and the Arkansas Children's Hospital. He also spends his limited free time visiting homeless shelters in various cities. It is here that the professional motivator finds inspiration.

"I don't speak a whole lot. I listen. I ask these individuals who and what motivates them, and what's their dream," he said. "I don't think that these individuals are asked often enough what their dreams are, and what their ambitions are. It's amazing to watch their faces light up when you say, 'so what's your dream?'"

Describing a man he met in Tennessee who plays an instrumental bucket on a street corner, Vitale's passion and admiration is apparent. He illustrated why he was drawn to this man. "He feels that he can make it. He feels that he will get a break one day. And, he's a homeless man, and I don't know, to be quite honest with you, if he'll ever get his break, but he believes it. That inspires me."

Since July 16 of this year, Vitale took a leave from his full-time job to devote himself to promoting his book and furthering his career as a motivational speaker. On his own, he has traveled to more than a dozen states and has spoken to numerous people about his message of purpose and success. In his book he speaks of balancing different aspects of life through organization and priorities. It is a lesson he is still working on himself. "I don't do a great job of balancing myself very well right now because I'm in too many directions," he said.

Currently, his work takes center stage, which leaves little time for a personal life. "When you decide to pack up your car and drive across the country and knock on doors of people you don't know, you're sacrificing a normal way of life," he said.

His mother added, "He has totally dedicated this part of his life to his career."

Though career oriented now, Vitale does plan to give more attention to his personal life in the future. "I'd like to slow down at some point...have a family one day."

He believes the ultimate challenge is raising a family. "I think if you can raise a wonderful family and go through the trials and tribulations of life, I think that's a huge success," he commented.

Adding a family to an already hectic schedule will be challenging, and Vitale turns to his parents as an example of balancing careers with family. "My mom and dad always took time for my brother and me. They were balanced with their family and with their jobs. They didn't have to. It was their choice."

Another career opportunity he would like to explore is obtaining a position to speak on behalf of sports organizations to motivate young people. He explains the benefits of such an alliance. "Kids are so infatuated with athletes today that if you go on behalf of a sporting organization and present a message that's positive, I think these young people will listen."

After achieving much at an early age and choosing to make a career of helping others to pursue their goals and ambitions, Vitale finds personal success in his influence upon others. "I wrote a book. Does that make me successful? I don't think so. I think what makes you successful is hopefully being a role model for someone over here that wants to write a book, and if they write a book, then maybe you were successful because they were inspired by you."

Those around him understand that Vitale's true motivation is his natural passion for helping others, not the personal gain or ambitious goals. Holiman expresses this simply: "He doesn't care about the money. He doesn't care about the amount of time that it takes away from his personal life. It's something that he wants to do inside."

His parents are amazed that their son has achieved a great deal at an early age, yet they have identified the main factor of his success. His father, Lou sums it up, "The key to Paul Vitale—enthusiasm."



Paul Vitale relaxes with his parents Carole and Lou Vitale.