



Commitment Is The Foundation Of Perseverance

By:
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It hardly seemed like a year had passed since Paul's crisis with the bank, his meeting Rafe, and setting off on a whole new direction with the school. Perhaps Rafe had been right about the relativity of time—the train was certainly moving faster these days.

Paul's Chevy crunched across the gravel parking lot, then sputtered into silence after he turned off the ignition. It was one year ago to the day that he had last walked up the hill before him, one year ago that he had met Rafe. Looking at the Chevy's odometer, which he had pushed well into six figures with his travels over the past year, Paul wondered if the old hulk would be up for another backward race through time.

The door creaked open against Paul's shove and he climbed out. His own creaking joints reminded him that he was holding up hardly any better than the car. The park was deserted, just as it had been a year ago. As he trudged up the hill, Paul could see that the impending sunset would, if anything, be more spectacular than the one into which he had jumped one year earlier.

ESPECIALLY OVER THE LONG TERM, YOU CAN DO MORE THAN YOU THINK YOU CAN DO. DON'T CHEAT YOURSELF BY SETTling FOR ANEMIC GOALS.

It had not been just a dream, of that Paul was sure. At the crest of the hill he hesitated. He had long pondered where he would go first—straight ahead to the edge of the cliff, or off to the right toward the spot where he and Rafe had first spoken. Standing quietly with his hands clasped in front of him, Paul waited to see if he felt pulled in either direction. As the sun touched the western horizon, he walked to the edge of the cliff.

So much had happened since he last stood on this spot. They had gone ahead with the merger of his school and New Trails, and Paul had given up routine administrative responsibilities. Phyllis had helped to secure a large donation to be used for developing the philosophies and practices Paul had pioneered at Shay's Point into a package that

could be implemented in other communities. For the past six months he had been traveling almost nonstop selling the concept and helping people start it up.

The Miracle of the Leap, as Paul and Joan now called his experience with Rafe, had not eliminated stress and anxiety from his life. Far from it—the demands of creating a national program were heavier than any he had ever known. He most regretted that his travel schedule kept him from spending as much time as he wanted with his family.

But he had learned to overcome the doubt that before the Miracle of the Leap made his life so miserable. Now when he did have time with his family, he never felt guilty for not being at work. Having more clearly defined his personal mission helped him avoid spending time on things that weren't really important. And his new vision, in which someday troubled kids everywhere would have a place to go and someone who would be on their side in a world where everyone else seemed to be against them, crowded out the nagging voices that reminded him of everything else he wasn't doing.

He had given himself permission to dream a big dream and then to work hard to make it come true. Along the way he had been helped by many new and unexpected friends. Although his frequent travel took him from his family more than he wished, the quest in which they all believed had also brought them closer together.

Paul took a step closer to the edge and looked down. The sea was more turbulent than it had been a year ago, and the waves crashed over the rock upon which he had been broken. A part of him was still down there—the part that had once thought he could make it on his own. The part, he smiled to think, that had once looked down its long, arrogant nose at people who, he believed, had money but no meaning.

The sun was halfway set, sending a perfectly symmetrical spray of silver needles into a crimson sky. Paul wanted to step back away from the edge, but was rooted in place, mesmerized by an inner voice daring him to fall forward, to put Rafe to the test. *It's a beautiful evening for flying*, it mocked, and a part of Paul longed for the exhilaration of free fall into a web of faith.

Defying the voice, Paul made an uneventful trip to Rafe's meeting place. From there he watched the sun take its final bow, knowing that he would never again see it rise from that spot. Above, in just the place it had been a year ago, the prick of light that he called RafeStar began to emerge, and Paul's thoughts went out to Jack O'Mara.

One of the first things he did after the Miracle of the Leap was to hire Jack as a custodian for the school. But with Paul's consent, six months later Phyllis fired him for coming to school drunk for the third time. Jack was not yet ready for his miracle.

Paul pulled a battered index card from his shirt pocket. It held the notes he made right after his day with Rafe:

Commitment Is The Foundation Of Perseverance

Caring is the root of courage.

Courage is the fuel of commitment.

Commitment is the foundation of perseverance. Perseverance is the agent of change.

Tonight Paul would be giving a speech at the first national meeting of New Trails School Systems. Phyllis, he thought with a smile, had even come up with a better name than he had, which they agreed to use for the new corporation. Paul was going to talk about Rafe, and about the Miracle of the Leap.

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The podium stood under a huge banner that read:

NEVER FEAR, NEVER QUIT

As Paul heard himself being introduced and looked out at the expectant audience, he momentarily wished that Rafe would appear and rescue him from having to go on stage. Public speaking petrified him; the largest audience he had heretofore addressed fit comfortably in the Shay's Point auditorium. Joan gave him an encouraging squeeze; Rafe would not save him now.

Conquering fear was getting easier all the time. Paul looked this particular fear in the face, named it "the universal worry that your pants will fall down right up there in front of all those people," and stepped up to the podium.

"Those of you who know me well know that since I was a young man—which right now feels like it was a very long time ago—there has been a spot that holds a special place in my heart. From Shay's Point you can see a sunset like you'll never see anywhere else. But not many people go there, because the road is long and rocky, and out on the point it's usually cold and windy. When Joan and I started the school, though, there was no question we would call it Shay's Point.

"A little over a year ago I went up to Shay's Point planning to jump off the edge. I had been so blinded by my own worries and insecurities that it seemed there was no way out except down. I hope, my friends, that you will not think less of me for it, but jumping off the cliff onto the rocks below Shay's Point that evening saved me."

There was an awful stillness in the room, as if Paul had just announced that he had a dread disease and everyone was wondering whether they had gotten close enough to catch it.

Never Fear, Never Quit. Paul gathered up his courage to continue.

He told the whole story. Unedited and unadulterated. How he had been defeated by his own fear and yet, from the wreckage of failure, was rescued by a power far beyond his understanding, much less his control. Why he no longer felt so certain about the nature of “reality,” and how in any event reality did not really seem so real anymore, now that he knew how malleable it was in the hands of a master like Rafe. And that being broken on the rocks below Shay’s Point allowed him to be rebuilt in a stronger and more functional shape, although with fewer fragile adornments.

As he spoke, the appalled silence softened. Understanding nods here and there throughout the audience told him that he was not the only one who had experienced Rafe’s intervention.

How big my family has become now that I do not judge people through the distorting lens of my own fears.

As the audience rose in applause, Paul waved Joan up to the stage to join him. In the back of the room he saw the fi sherman he had not seen in a year smile and nod, then turn and walk through the closed door.