



Meeting a Legend

by Steven L. Anderson, Ph.D., MBA

Recently I had the opportunity to meet a legend in the speaking industry. Denis Waitley, author of *The Psychology of Success*, is an internationally known speaker. I have long admired Denis for his inspirational message, his integrity, and his focus on family values.

Allow me to share with you how I was able to make Denis' acquaintance. Several years ago I wrote a book, entitled *Embracing Rebellion*. In that book I put a great poem by Denis called "Roots and Wings". It's a beautiful piece that gives some good advice about how to raise children effectively. It is written from the perspective of a child. It follows here:

If I had two wishes, I know what they would be
I'd wish for Roots to cling to, and Wings to set me free;
Roots of inner values, like rings within a tree,
and Wings of independence to seek my destiny.
Roots to hold forever to keep me safe and strong,
To let me know you love me, when I've done something wrong;
To show me by example, and helps me learn to choose,
To take those actions every day to win instead of lose.
Just be there when I need you, to tell me it's all right,
To face my fear of falling when I test my wings in flight;
Don't make my life too easy, it's better if I try,
And fail and get back up myself, so I can learn to fly.
If I had two wishes, and two were all I had,
And they could just be granted, by my Mom and Dad;
I wouldn't ask for money or any store-bought things.
The greatest gifts I'd ask for are simply Roots and Wings.

Recently, a friend of Denis', DiAnne Karas, read my book, saw the poem and called Denis. She asked him if he would like to meet me and he said he would. So, DiAnne invited both Denis and I to give motivational speeches to her Altrusa meeting in Sidney, Ohio. (Altrusa is an International women's organization that focuses on teaching children how to read. To learn more go to www.altrusa.com.) I could not believe my luck! Denis has long been a hero of mine.

I became acquainted with Denis a few years ago when I heard a CD of him speaking at a convention. I was mesmerized by his authenticity, his principles, his belief in children, and his ability to tell great stories. Denis has been making a living as a keynote speaker for four decades. There is none better than him. He flies all over the world giving talks on leadership. Yet, he was interested in meeting me

and helping me on my journey to become a great speaker. That speaks volumes about what a wonderful man he is.

As I sat in the audience that day I learned two things about becoming a great speaker. One is to bring the emotion of the story to the audience. As Denis told the story of helping Mary Lou Retton win a gold medal in the 1984 Olympics I was overcome with emotion. I felt as if I were there. I think that is true for all of us. If we want to really be good at something we have to put our heart into it. Up until now I feel I have been a good speaker, but too often I have played it safe so that I was not rejected by my audience. No more. With Denis' example I am committed to giving my audience all I've got. They deserve it.

The other thing I learned from Denis is to always make the speech about the audience. After telling a story Denis would always segue into what that story meant for the audience and how it could benefit them. This seems obvious, but I have never been careful to make this distinction with my audiences. Once again, I think we can all learn from Denis. When we go to work we should think about how everything we do there should benefit our customers. After all, they are the reason we have a job in the first place. When we lose sight of those we are serving I believe we lessen our positive impact in the workplace.

I hope that we all can learn from Denis' example. Denis is at an age where most people would be deep into retirement. But his strong desire to lead his fellow man won't allow him to do that. I know I am a richer human being because I was able to spend time with him. Thank you, Denis, for being such an inspiration to all of us!