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Motivator's mantra all about attitude



Chris Dorst

Motivational speaker and children's book author Chuck Stump enjoys a playful moment with Monty Python, the pet snake that inspired a book on diversity called "Why Do You Hate Me?" Covers from two of the Sad Mad Glad books he wrote with Jim Strawn decorate the wall behind him.

By [Sandy Wells](#)

CHARLESTON, W.Va. -- He specializes in attitude adjustment.

He's dynamic and laid back all at once, a casual Dale Carnegie. The breezy manner and a gift for gab sparked his success in sales and marketing.

Today, he puts that positive disposition to work as a motivational speaker. President of The Performance Group Inc., he leads seminars for businesses seeking to infuse employees with a passion for their work.

With co-author Jim Strawn, he wrote "The Sad Mad Glad Book: The Anatomy of Your Attitude," an award-winning children's book based on uplifting body idioms. Other prize-worthy children's books followed, all aimed at building character and self-esteem.

At 51, Chuck Stump personifies the mantra that guides his life: Attitude is everything.

"I grew up on Quarrier Street, a block from the Capitol. My father was in the funeral business. He was in grave registration in Korea, a licensed embalmer and funeral director. He lived over Barlow-Bonsall for about 10 years.

"Most of my time growing up, he was a traveling salesman. He sold caskets. He left at 7 Monday

morning, and we didn't see him until Friday evening. That had a big impact on me as a parent. He was a great father, but he just wasn't around. I'm on the opposite end because I work out of my house.

"I've been in sales most of my life. In junior high, I always had the lead in plays. I loved being on stage. It's a lead or get out of the way thing. I like to lead fast and be out front. I think you are just born with it.

"My first job at 13 was at Spence Paint over on Washington Street. I sold paint and wallpaper. I always enjoyed taking care of the customers.

"I graduated from Charleston High in 1978 and went straight to WVU. I was an accounting major until I was a junior. Cost and intermediate accounting drove me back into marketing.

"I was supposed to go to work for McJunkin right out of school. McJunkin was a booming company. But the recession of '82 crushed them.

"I finally got a letter close to Christmas saying they didn't know when they were going hire. I got a job at SportMart and sold skis and was a ski bum for a winter.

"Then McJunkin sent a letter saying they were going to live with what they had. I got a job with Rental Uniform out of Morganton, an industrial laundry business, the people who deliver and pick up laundry from people who get really You call on car dealerships, garages and coal miners.

"It was a hard thing to sell. It was a contract business. If I called on you and you had a contract with another supplier for five years, I had to continue to cultivate the relationship until the contract ran out. I went seven weeks without selling anything.

"The guy who hired me always told me to make 30 calls a day. I was out there pounding the street to make 30 calls a day. At the end of every day, we would sit and talk about every call.

"He said if things didn't change, he would have to do something else. I told him I was making those 30 calls a day. He said if I wanted to make less than 30 calls and sell something, it would be OK. I started spending more time working with customers than focusing on 30 calls. And then I started selling stuff.

"That led to a job in sales management and opening the plant here. It was a business where you had to get out and work, and you had to hear 'no' a lot.

"With this younger generation, I don't know where the commission sales people are going to come from. They're not used to hearing no and not having things go their way.

"We were bought out by a French guy, one of the financiers for Euro Disney. We expanded and I was part of all that. It was in hyper-growth mode in the late '80s when the economy was booming. I moved up and built a plant there and managed that project.

"I ended up back at corporate in Culpeper, Va., for a couple of years as a kind of sales trainer. I was able to sell the idea that we needed to do all our own training.

"I was with them 16 years. Then we were asked to do some things we didn't believe in. I decided to open my own training company and move back home.

"We started Performance Group in 1995. These people who came in for sales training knew how to sell. They just didn't want to sell. Successful people love what they are doing. Attitude is more important than skills. People have to find a reason to love what they do.

"When I'm out in the morning, I look in car windows and people driving to work look like they're

on death row. They are not excited about what they are going to do that day.

"Most days, I'm excited about what I have to do, whether I'm going to the farm to cut wood or going to work with a client or to the elementary school to read to kids.

"My wife was working full time as an X-ray tech to give me a chance to start my company. I speak 8 or 9 days a month, and she works a couple days a week. There's a lot of balance. We can spend a lot of time with our kids.

"I work with small to midsize businesses, anybody who wants to spend some time and money on their people. We change the oil in our cars and trucks and do maintenance on our equipment. But what about the people? When is last time you invested some money in them?

"Seminars are my bread and butter -- behavior training, communication training, attitude leadership. And I do workshops on generational diversity. This is the first time we've had four generations in the work force. The way they look at work and authority is different.

"In the old days, you went to work and worked 35 years and got your gold watch and rode into the sunset. The younger generation is expected to have seven different jobs. Everything is a steppingstone. They don't want to earn those stripes. They want to start in the middle or above the middle.

"The older ones, all they did was work. They raised chickens, split wood, hauled coal, what they had to do to stay warm and survive. I always ask them if they would go back to that simple lifestyle. Every one of them would go back.

"The book thing started in 2002. Jim Strawn and I were playing scramble golf in a tournament. He hit a bad shot. I said, 'Keep your chin up.' I hit a bad shot, and he said, 'That's OK. I've got your back.'

"I thought, these body idioms we hear all the time, these young kids don't hear them. My kids were 4 and 2. I was reading lot to them, but none of it had any meat. We thought it was a great idea for a motivational book for kids.

"The 'Sad Mad Glad Book' won the Moonbean Childrens Book Award for 2008. Our second Mad Glad book was named by Independent Publisher as Outstanding Book of 2009.

"We have a new baby book. 'The Sad Mad Glad Baby.' It won the Moonbeam Children's Book Award as Best Baby Book for 2011. What prompted it was, so many people who bought the first book have autistic kids. Autistic kids have a hard time recognizing facial expressions and what they mean.

"A lot of parents have kids who may be delayed developmentally but they don't notice it. If you are reading this book with a baby between 9 months and a year and they are not giggling and pointing and saying 'baby,' it's time to call pediatrics. Babies love looking at babies, and they are going to respond.

"We also did a snake book, 'Why Don't You Like Me?' It's about diversity, about how judgmental people are. You meet a big tall guy or someone who is overweight and you make judgments about them.

"I have a pet snake, a ball python. I've had her four years. Monty Python has a hard time making new friends.

"We ask kids about going to a new school. People don't know them, so they feel like outsiders. We ask them how they would like it if those people wanted them dead before they even met them.

12/27/11

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That's the world my snake lives in. A lot of people think the only good snake is a dead snake.

"The books are the hobby now. The goal would be for the hobby to trade places with the speaking business. Writing the books and reading to children keeps you young.

"I don't see retiring. What I'm doing is too much fun. I've got a lot more to do. Number one is to be a good father and get my children self-sufficient. And I want to keep helping people grow their business. Our motto is, 'We build your people so your people can build your business.'

"I feel so blessed. I have a lot of balance and a lot of fun, and there is not a lot of stress in my life. If I have a client and we don't get along, we just quit working together. Lot people have put up with customers they don't like."

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