

reSource

£7.50 (UK) No 6
Autumn 2005

magazine



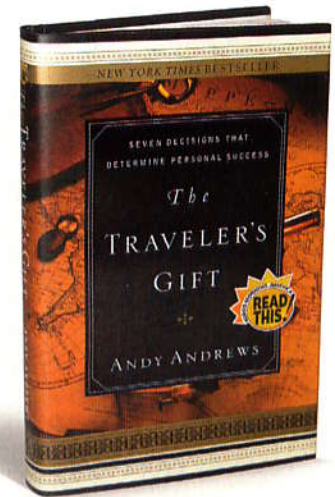
Seven Decisions to Personal Success

Andy Andrews talks to Christine Miller

Andy Andrews was one of the keynote speakers at the 2005 National Speakers Association convention I attended this summer in Atlanta, Georgia, and I have to admit I had never heard of him before. His entertaining, engaging style certainly amused the 1600-strong audience, but contained within his stories and jokes were powerful messages concerning the growth and development of ourselves and our planet. Homeless as a young adult, Andy made the discovery that there are seven decisions that work without exception to transform lives. Now, as someone who has been invited to speak by four different US presidents, has performed for the US Military, and delivered speeches for many Fortune 500 companies, Andy has been described as one of the most influential people in America today.

After I contacted his office to arrange this interview, Andy's Chief Solutions Officer, Nick Francis, sent me two books - "The Traveller's Gift" and "Island of Saints" - so I could be fully conversant with his work. I wasn't sure what to expect, although the reviews were excellent, and Andy definitely seemed to have a knack for storytelling. In fact, I found both books powerful, yet easy to read, and those skilful storytelling skills were prominently displayed throughout, making them a joy to read.

I was curious about what had prompted Andy to turn his life round at the age of nineteen, and here's what he told me.



Christine: Was there a certain something, a defining moment that prompted you to ask yourself the key question "is life just a lottery ticket or are there choices one can make to direct his future?" at a critical point in your life when you were 19 years old and sleeping rough on the streets, that helped you get your life back on track?

Andy: The defining moment that really got me to the point of asking that question was the realisation that I was at the point where I had no money, no family, nobody to help, no car, no place to live, no job. So I really was at my wits' end, and that was the moment when I asked: "Is that all there is in my life?" "Can I control this?" "Is this life just a lottery ticket, and this is my ticket?" So that was when I really started to examine whether life was just chance, or if I had any control at all over my future.

It was those questions that started directing my search, and at that time I started reading. I read between 200 - 300 biographies of these happy, successful, financially secure, influential people and in my search I asked myself what is this about? Were they born this way, or was this something that they did, something that they became. If it was something they did, then how long did it take them to do it, and what exactly did they do. That was how I discovered the seven principles, which I then used for to pull my life out of those circumstances. These later became the Seven Decisions around which I

built the story of the Travellers Gift.

Christine: How did you determine which were the seven main principles when you were sifting through the 200-plus biographies you read?

Andy: Those were the seven things that cross-referenced in every one of those people's lives. I could see all seven things in each one of those people's lives, and that's how I narrowed it down to seven. There were other characteristics that people had, but they may have not necessarily cross-referenced with everyone else, so these were the principles that were enduring in people's lives. That is why the Seven Decisions are so powerful, why they work every time, because they are principles. I later put them in a story in *The Traveller's Gift*, because stories are the easiest way for me to learn.

*Christine: Apart from your material for your comedy act, which was obviously very highly effective, had you been writing at all prior to *The Traveller's Gift*?*

Andy: I wrote magazine articles, or short stories, but *The Traveller's Gift* was the first novel I wrote.

*Christine: Was there an event or a significant happening in your life that prompted you to start writing *The Traveller's Gift*?*

Andy: For years, I had been studying those Seven Decisions from the time I had identified them, and even through to this morning, I continue to study them, to think about them, and try to figure out more effective ways to relate them to people. Through the years, I had talked about them with certain people at certain times, and I would search for a really effective means to put those seven things across. Essentially, it evolved over a period of time until about six years ago, when I thought "I learn best with stories" - and so I came up with the story.

The Seven Decisions

1. HARRY S. TRUMAN

The Responsible Decision:

The buck stops here.

I will not let my history control my destiny.

2. KING SOLOMON

The Guided Decision:

I will seek wisdom.

God moves mountains to create the opportunity of His choosing. It is up to you to be ready to move yourself.

3. JOSHUA CHAMBERLAIN

The Active Decision:

I am a person of action.

Many people move out of the way for a person on the run; others are caught up in his wake.

4. CHRISTOPHER COLUMBUS

The Certain Decision:

I have a decided heart.

Criticism, condemnation, and complaint are creatures of the wind. They come and go on the wasted breath of lesser beings and have no power over me.

5. ANNE FRANK

The Joyful Decision:

Today I will choose to be happy.

Our very lives are fashioned by choice. First we make choices. Then our choices make us.

6. ABRAHAM LINCOLN

The Compassionate Decision:

I will greet this day with a forgiving spirit.

You will find that God rarely uses a person whose main concern is what others are thinking.

7. GABRIEL

The Persistent Decision:

I will persist without exception.

Reason can only be stretched so far, but faith has no limits. The only limit to your realization of tomorrow is the doubt you hold fast today.

am able to see things in a clearer manner if somebody presents ideas to me in a story rather than in a text book. With a text book, I can remember the facts until it's time to take the test; but with a story I'll remember the facts forever. I wanted to present an effective way for somebody to be shown in the worst position in their lives, and so David Ponder, the hero of the *Traveller's Gift*, his life is in a shambles. His job and his financial means have been taken away, his daughter is sick, his life is in trouble. I put him in a situation where he is able to travel through time, and meet seven historical figures who are each going through tough times in their own lives.

He has conversations with each of these seven people, and then has the opportunity to receive from them a written decision. If he understands and follows that decision, and puts it in his heart and makes it part of his life, then each of these Seven Decisions will change his future.

There are troubled times when we would all like to be able to go back and get some advice from great people, whether it is our family or great leaders - and it was an interesting device to be able to put into this situation and create a story.

Christine: Do you tell stories to your children?

Andy: Yes, every night and several times during the day. I think that's the best way to teach my boys, because that way they do listen. Nobody wants to listen to a lecture, but if somebody says "Let me tell you a story about a time...", then that perks you up and grabs your interest. So with my children, I tell them stories about when I was a little boy, when I did such a thing, and what my daddy did.

Christine: How has your life changed since you added being a highly successful author to your accomplishments?

Andy: Writing is definitely more my focus now than the other parts of my career. However, I'm able to blend them together; I speak all over the world now, and most of what I'm speaking about is these principles. And even in my previous existence as a comedian, I could take the principles and lay them out in a palatable way for people, not too seriously, but in a way that people are able to laugh at certain situations they recognise from their own lives, and doing it in a fun and conversational way.

Christine: *How do you personally define and measure success?*

Andy: I define it as living my life in harmony with the direction in which I believe I'm supposed to be headed. My personal measure of success is that it is not a destination - it is an ongoing process - the process of becoming a better father, of becoming a better husband, of becoming a wiser and more valuable friend, and becoming a better communicator for the people who might look forward to, or even depend on the work that I do. So it is a process of becoming rather than a destination for me.

Christine: *What are the most important things to you in your life?*

Andy: My family is most important to me - my family is my connection to where I come from, it's my connection to where I'm going, it's my connection to the legacy that I'll leave - how I raise my children, how they turn out and what they will produce - that's part of the legacy I'm working for now. That's the most important thing for me - I gauge my work, my books, and my speeches by what kind of impact they will have on my family's lives 100 years from now. Will things that I produce still be working 100 years from now, will they still be changing lives and influencing others and pulling people out of despair - and will they still be providing guidance for my own family.

Christine: *What can you tell me about meeting influential people, such as presidents and military leaders?*

Andy: One of the things that I always try to do is ask questions, because it seems to me that as adults, parents, supervisors and suchlike we spend a lot of time answering questions, and if I'm around people who have accomplished something, I try to remember that the quality of my answers will be determined by the quality of my questions. So I try to ask things that will allow me to learn something that's beyond them, something that's inside them. So I ask them questions like "What's the first thing you do when you wake up in the morning?" "What do you do when you're depressed?" "How do you put your children to bed at night, what do you say to them, what's the last thing you want them to hear?" "If you could go back to age 18 and change one thing in your life what would you change?" "What's the smartest thing your father ever did?" I aim to try to bring wisdom that is in there out into a form where I can understand and use it.

Christine: *So what is the first thing you do when you wake up in the morning?*

Andy: The first thing I do when I get up in the morning is to say a prayer and ask God for his guidance for today. I look in on my little boys, and make sure everyone is okay. If I'm out of town, I pick up the phone and call, and then go about scheduling what I'm doing. But I spend some quiet time in between, where I settle myself and figure where I'm going and what I'm doing for the day and what I need to accomplish.

Christine: *What do you think makes a leader effective?*

Andy: Empathy. Leaders with empathy are particularly effective. The type of leader who, when you

look into their eyes, show that they understand you, and demonstrate that whether or not they have been where you are, they can certainly feel what it is like. They have empathy with the people they lead.

Another characteristic I have observed which is very attractive in a leader is people who can accept responsibility for things that go wrong, and give credit for the things that go right. We see a lot of leadership that does the exact opposite - they give all the blame for the things that go wrong, and take all the credit for the things that go right.

Christine: *What was it like performing for the troops?*

Andy: It has been great - and part of the reason for that is the realisation that the troops are doing a job for our world, and that they are not politicised. They are out there, and they are not Liberals or Conservatives - they are people doing a job that has been demanded of them. Whether we agree that they should be there or not, in a very drastic sense, the troops are *us* - they are our neighbours, our sons and daughters, our fathers and mothers, and that is a major part of the reason why they deserve our support, and our love and prayers, because they are *us*. They represent our nations - and they are not only us, they are among the best of us. Most of them could make more money in private service, but these young men and women are choosing to give themselves to us, to our nations.

Christine: *In terms of your new book, "The Island of Saints", which focuses on the power of forgiveness, have you personally found that forgiveness is what makes the most difference in your own life?*

Andy: Yes, I believe so, because I believe it is a beginning point. So many of us see forgiveness as an end, but it is truly a beginning. Once you understand forgiveness, and understand that it is something that

we can *give*, and that it means more to us than it does to the person being forgiven, then it's a breathing point. It's a new start for where we want to go, because most of us do not realise how stunted and stopped we have been by a lack of forgiveness in our lives.

Christine: *The world is definitely in need of forgiveness, how can we encourage more people to adopt the principle of forgiveness to foster peace and community?*

Andy: A lot has to do with people understanding forgiveness, and that's what I tried to do in "Island of Saints". I laid it out in a story, in a form that people would enjoy reading and also understand the different viewpoint that forgiveness allows. I really believe that "Island of Saints" is the best thing I've ever done in my life - I think it's the best story and the most effective and powerful principle for changing our lives.

Christine: *Is there a message you'd like to offer to the people of the UK, and particularly London, after the recent bombings?*

Andy: The people of the UK and the people of London have always seemed to be incredibly courageous and discerning to me. I remember I had a friend who said 'isn't it amazing that the people of London are going about their business much more quickly than the people in America did after 9/11?' I said to him that the people of the UK have a history of going about their business. People don't realise that during the Blitz there were 59 nights in a row when London was bombed, and 59 mornings when the people of London got up and went to work. This an extremely courageous country, an extremely courageous people, and I believe that the people of the UK are our best friends - they are where many of us come from, and what a wonderful legacy you guys have for us, a wonderful example for us.

I think it's important to remember that if you are still breathing, there is more ahead in your life. Things may be bleak and bad personally, but we're all either in a crisis, coming out of a crisis, or heading for a crisis. That's just part of life, part of being on this planet - so if you understand that whilst you're still breathing, you're still here, which means that you have not accomplished the purpose you were sent here for.

If you were through, if your purpose was fulfilled, you wouldn't be here. So, you're still here, that means there's more to do - there's more laughter to enjoy, more success to experience, more children to influence, more friends to help - there's more to your life. And it will get better and better and better, and to the people of the UK, and of London in particular - we appreciate your example, we appreciate your courage, we appreciate your friendship. And we appreciate the legacy you've laid out for us.

Christine: *In terms of forgiveness, do you have any suggestions as to how people who have been deeply affected by the bombings and by the situation could practice forgiveness?*

Andy: There is one thing to remember - and that is that forgiveness is a decision - it is not an emotion. If we try to ask for forgiveness with our emotions, our emotions drag us the other way. Forgiveness is something that we can give - and the person we are forgiving doesn't have to ask for it, they don't have to deserve it; they don't even have to know that they are being forgiven. Forgiveness is a decision that we are able to wield, and if we forgive, and understand that it is a decision, then our emotions follow the decision. People sometimes say what they are just going to get way with it? No, that's not it at all. Do you forgive somebody who steals from you? Yes, you do. Do you continue to

work with them? No, you don't. Forgiveness and trust are two different things. Forgiveness is about the past, and trust is about the future. Trust and respect are earned, and they are not permanent.

"A man of fear lives always on the edge of insanity. A man of faith lives in perpetual reward. Do battle with the challenges of your present, and you will unlock the prizes of your future."

- Andy Andrews, *The Traveller's Gift*.

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Bio:

Andy Andrews is the author of the New York Times bestseller *The Traveller's Gift: Seven Decisions That Determine Personal Success* (Hodder Mobius,



Paperback - June 6, 2005, £12.99). His most recent book is "Island of Saints" (Nelson Books Hardcover - June 2005, £10.99) He is a seasoned performer, a prolific writer, and a successful entrepreneur who is internationally known for his unique combination of entertainment and inspiration. Andrews has performed at the White House at the request of four different United States Presidents, and has entertained thousands of audiences worldwide. Andy Andrews has achieved success and happiness by bringing forth his own brand of dogged persistence to quietly become one of the most sought after speakers in America today.

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