

Burn the Boats

Finding Personal Greatness Through A New Level Of Commitment

By: Andy Andrews; Photo By: Peter Nash



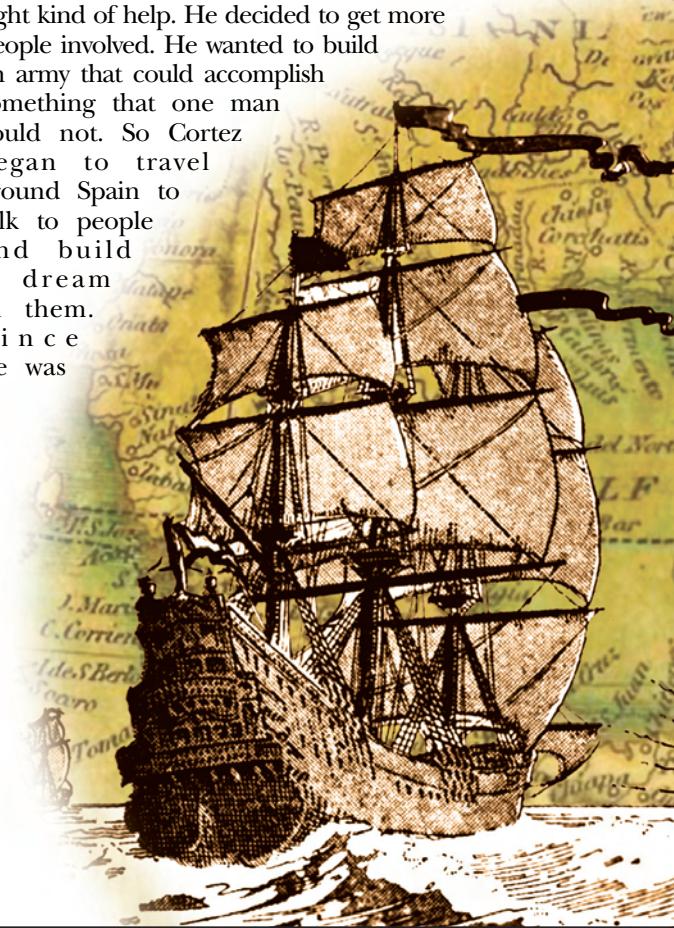
Commitment is the foundation of success. Not a single football game has ever been won without it. Commitment has been involved in every skyscraper that has ever grown beyond the first floor. Businesses, marriages, and schoolwork all depend on the quality of commitment for their success. By focusing on that one important component, commitment, we can plan our future.

Deciding just how much we really want to achieve our goals is obviously the first critical step. It has been proven time and time again by our own experiences that we get out of something only what we put into it. We can accomplish extraordinary things only when we have planned to accomplish extraordinary things. And we alone can determine how hard we will work, how much we will invest, how late we will stay up, how many miles we will drive, and how much we are willing to endure to realize those extraordinary things. Our goals, our dreams, are a reality already awaiting our arrival. It is only

when we claim a successful future that it begins to move toward us. But first let's examine the past, because by studying yesterday's challenges, we can more ably ensure tomorrow's success.

In February 1519, Hernando Cortez set sail on the final leg of a voyage that was to take him from Cuba, a stopover, to the shores of the Yucatán. He commanded 11 ships, with more than 500 soldiers, 100 sailors, and 16 horses, bound for Mexico to take the world's richest treasure. The precious jewels, gold, silver, and sculptures sheltered on this limestone peninsula had been hoarded by the same army for 600 years.

The quest for these riches began several years before in Spain. Cortez, already a wealthy man, had heard about the treasure. For centuries people had tried to take it, to no avail. But ambitious Cortez knew that he could take it — if he had the right kind of help. He decided to get more people involved. He wanted to build an army that could accomplish something that one man could not. So Cortez began to travel around Spain to talk to people and build a dream in them. Since he was



already rich and successful in their eyes, as he told them of the bountiful treasure that was theirs for the taking, they believed him.

Oh, other people had tried, he told them. Columbus, Vasquez, DeSoto, Vespucci — all had gone to Mexico seeking the fortune. And all were ordinary people, just like those Cortez was trying to persuade.

"They are just like us," he said to his listeners. "If they can do it, we can! And we will succeed!" This got them excited.

"Let's do it!" they agreed after Cortez's persuasive speech.

Of course, a few said, "I don't really believe there's treasure there," or "I don't think it'll work." But the majority of the people enthusiastically embraced the idea, and before long, Cortez's ships were in place. The soldiers were in position, the sailors were prepared, and the horses were aboard. And together they set sail for Mexico and the richest treasure in the world.

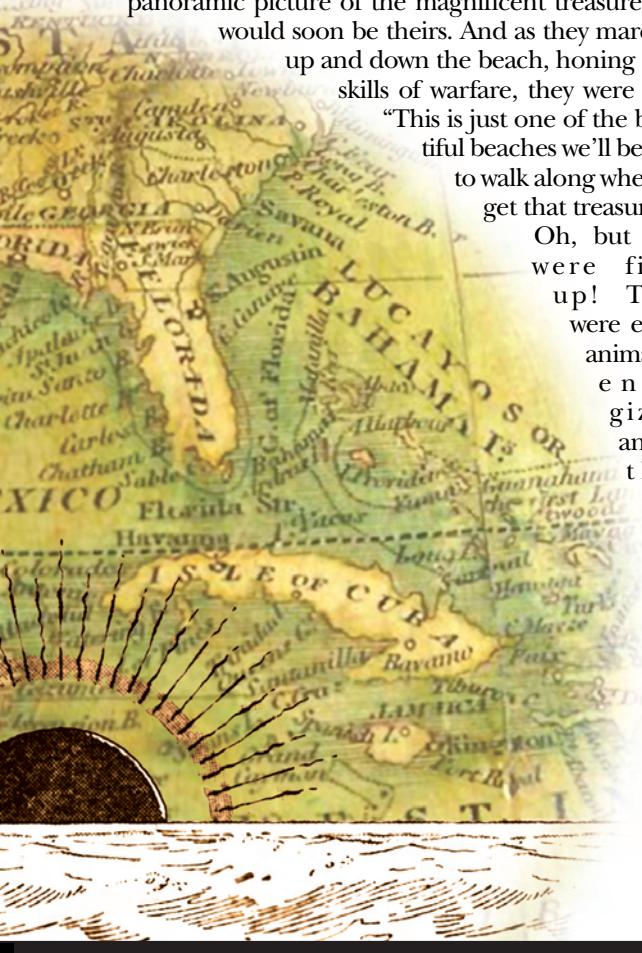
But once out on the ocean, it didn't take long for Cortez to realize he had a problem. Some who were excited before the journey, had now turned into whiners. There are always whiners.

Cries of "I shouldn't have come," "This isn't what I thought it was," and "I didn't know we were going to have to work this hard," began to circulate among the people. Yet Cortez persisted, in spite of them, and made it to Cuba, where he obtained water, food, and supplies. After resting his men and letting the quitters get off the ship, he began the final leg of the journey, formulating an idea that had never been used before. He created a system to motivate and train his soldiers and sailors that was unheard of in the history of the military. When they landed on the shores of the Yucatán, Cortez began training, coaching, stoking them, even. He would hold "seminars" in the afternoon and "pep-rallies" at night. They were reminded constantly of all that they were about to accomplish. Cortez painted a panoramic picture of the magnificent treasure that would soon be theirs. And as they marched

up and down the beach, honing their skills of warfare, they were told,

"This is just one of the beautiful beaches we'll be able to walk along when we get that treasure!"

Oh, but they were fired up! They were eager, animated, energized, and as they



waited, trained, and prepared for victory, their conviction grew.

But there was one more level of commitment that Cortez wanted to take them to, and they arrived at that place on that last, historic day, as they lined up to march inland. Before they would be allowed to seize the treasure that no army had taken for 600 years, Cortez would speak to them.

They were probably expecting something like, "OK, guys, we're gonna get out there and win today, and when we do, we are going to par-TAAAY! . . . Oh, and if it gets too tough, we'll just meet at the oak tree and come back to the ship." But that's not what they heard.

As they listened, Cortez leaned in and said three simple words that changed everything: "Burn the boats."

"Excuse me?" they must have said.

"Burn the boats," he repeated, "because if we are going home, we are going home in their boats." And he torched them. He burned his own boats, and by doing so, he raised their commitment level to new and astounding heights! And an amazing thing took place: they fought well! For the first time in six centuries, the wealth changed hands. Cortez's band took that treasure. And why did they win? The answer is very simple. They had no choice! It was "take it or die" — no options. Their boats were burned.

Theirs is the attitude you must embrace in your heart and mind: you must burn your boats. What are the boats in your life that are keeping you from accomplishing what you really want? What vessels in your mind are keeping afloat the fear and doubt and frustration that hold you captive? Whatever prevents you from achieving your goals and dreams is a boat that must be burned.

Unfortunately, when the bullets start flying, we make for the boats. It's just human nature. Doing anything else really requires a decision on our part. It's attitude more than anything. A willingness to work without the net, to burn the bridge — or boat. What boat do you need to burn? It can only happen one way: by embracing a level of commitment that sees sacrifice as a positive thing.

So many people think of sacrifice as something that is taken away, and it's gone forever. Nothing could be further from the truth. Sacrifices of time, money, and effort are what we give to the game. How badly do you want that final result? Are you willing to sacrifice more than anyone else? If so, then your triumphs will be consistently greater than anyone else's. Greatness — your greatness — will always be measured by the sacrifices that you are willing to make!

So strike a match to the anchors of your past and introduce yourself to the victories of your future.

Burn the boats!

Andy Andrews will be hosting this year's ICM Awards, live from Nashville's Acuff Theatre on November 9. His audio books can be found at www.AndyAndrews.com and at most major book retail outlets.



Hernando Cortez