

Interview including Transcript from an ABCnews.com LIVE Chat with Andy Andrews

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In *The Traveler's Gift: Seven Decisions That Determine Personal Success*, author Andy Andrews weaves a fictional tale about a man who loses his job and money but finds his way after he's magically transported to seven key points in history.

Moderator

Hello everyone. I am your Moderator. Author and speaker Andy Andrews is on the telephone with me. I will relay your questions and transcribe both your questions and Mr. Andrews' answers. Andy, welcome! Thanks for joining us today.

Andy Andrews

Thanks for the opportunity to be here. I'm anxious to hear the comments and field some questions.

Moderator

What prompted you to write *The Traveler's Gift*? How do you think this book can change people's lives?

Andy Andrews

When I was 19 years old, both of my parents died in the same year; my mom of cancer and my dad in a car accident. Through the next two or three years and a series of bad decisions – all my own, I might add – I ended up literally homeless, before that was even a word. I even slept occasionally under a pier on the Gulf Coast.

So my question at that time was: Is life a lottery ticket, or is there something we can do to direct our progress and our growth and our success?

Here's what I did. I read hundreds of biographies at that time, trying to find a common denominator between all of these successful, influential, happy people.

Is it something that they all were? Is it something they all did? Is it something they all became? What I found were seven common denominators between all of these successful people.

These seven principles became the seven decisions that are in *The Traveler's Gift*. Not coincidentally, they are also the seven decisions that I made to bring myself out of the circumstances that I was in years ago.

The reason that these seven decisions are so critical and the reason that people recognize their power to change lives is that they are principles, not ideas, not theories. A principle is something that works every single time.

Curiously, a principle affects your life whether you are aware of it or not. For instance, the principle of gravity was working long before the apple ever fell on Newton's head. But once it

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did, and he understood it, then we as a society were free to harness this principle to create, among other things, airline flight.

The principles of personal success are exactly the same. They are affecting our lives, whether we know them or not. Therefore, shouldn't we harness them and place them in our lives, under our control, to create the future of our choosing?

One more point: The reason that these principles are called decisions in *The Traveler's Gift*, is that when you harness a principle and place it in your life, it has become a decision.

Moderator

Would you say this is self-help book?

Andy Andrews

I can see why people would term it that way, because one can certainly use the information to help oneself. But I really believe it's more of a life manual. These principles are things that you might have heard before, but maybe didn't understand how they fit into the context of your life, your happiness and your success.

I believe that any type of education can be great, but an education about ourselves can create a different life.

Actually, I really dislike being termed "a motivational speaker". I'm not even sure I like them myself! (he laughs) I speak for corporations and associations and often tell them that "if you want a motivational speaker, I am not your guy." Does anyone really need to bring a speaker in to tell an audience to "have a good attitude"? I mean, my gosh...your mother should have told you that! How many times do we have to hear about "the Harvard study of the 3% who wrote down their goals" or the "starfish on the beach" story?

Encouragement...motivation...these things feel good for a time, but ultimately are a band-aid or a drug. As soon as it stops—for whatever reason—most people find themselves back to square one...with their feelings and indeed their life not have really changed at all.

Moderator

So what *do* you consider yourself?

Andy Andrews

I am a teacher. Now granted, I am probably like your 8th grade science teacher in his first year of teaching...I am scrambling to stay a paragraph ahead of the class! But I'm not any different from anybody else except for the fact that I am diligently searching for and having some success finding answers.

The reason people think that I might be a motivation speaker is because they get excited about the material. We laugh a lot as I deliver it. But in essence, all I'm doing is teaching some common truths within a story. When people understand that they do have choices and understand which choices to make, they are excited about their future. (But if you're motivated when you get through with me, it's not my fault! (he laughs)

Janice from Philadelphia

I know you speak for companies like General Motors and Microsoft and even for the military. My boss told me you have a reputation for increasing an organization's profitability. How do you account for that? How is that really possible?

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Andy Andrews

Well, that's certainly flattering... (he pauses) If that is true, here is how it happens: For years—the past two decades for sure—corporations have utilized what most are recognizing has been a flawed strategy of “specific training” in order to increase productivity and profits, never understanding why absenteeism, apathy, even outright disloyalty continued to flourish in the rank and file of average employees. I believe many of the companies with whom I work would admit that they have been going about this process in a way that had no chance of lasting success from the beginning.

Consider this: Why would we expect employees to perform at the highest levels at work, when their personal lives are unsatisfactory? You know...a person whose marriage is not what they want it to be, whose communication with their children is on shaky ground, who has no great hope for a brighter future, and is not certain that they are making a difference anyway...this person cannot possibly be as effective or productive a member of the team as otherwise might be the case! And frankly, no amount of specific training about “how to sell” or “how to lead” is going to change that.

There is a huge difference between “encouragement” and “proof”. I *prove* to an audience the absolute power of a harnessed principle. I mean, we laugh a lot, but from there, I suppose, the increase in an organization's financial bottom line is a matter of simple logic: If people leave our time together and their lives are changed...if their marriages are working, communication is better with their kids, there is realistic hope for a better personal future, and they are convinced, without a doubt, that every action they take (or don't take) makes a difference in this world...these people are quite simply better spouses, better parents, better friends...and better, more productive, employees. And profitability increases.

Cathy asks:

How are your books different from all the other motivational and “how to” books I've read?

Andy Andrews

There's that motivational thing again! I think my books are different because they are placed in the context of a story about people with whom we can all relate.

I'm not the smartest guy in the world, so I don't mind telling you that text books and “how-to” manuals are boring to me. I have a hard time getting through some of them. But stories connect with me. Since I have a hard time reading text books, I sure couldn't write one. So I wrote a story.

In a period of time in our country when so many people are having a tough time financially, I have greater hope that these books will connect with them.

I get messages every day on my Web site, www.andyandrews.com, with people saying that they never liked motivational books per se, but these are books that they're giving to their children and parents and friends. I'm very grateful for that because I feel like the first one, *The Traveler's Gift*, was a gift to me too.

As an author, I believe *The Traveler's Gift* is the most important thing I have done. That was the book that really started it all. But one thing you might find curious is that I had begun to wonder if it would ever be published.

After I completed a manuscript, I went through three literary agents and 51 different publishers rejected it. It was obviously very different from anything that had been done in a while, and I'm not sure if people knew how to categorize it. In fact, if you look at some of those book lists, it's on a fiction list in one place, a nonfiction list in another, an advice list in another, religion in another. So I can see why they had a hard time categorizing it.

But it is an amazing confirmation of the 7th Decision that Gabriel gives David Ponder in the warehouse: I will persist without exception.

Jamo asks:

How did you get to be an author, from being a comedian?

Andy Andrews

I always wanted to be a comedian when I was growing up because I knew that laughter was the outward expression of enthusiasm, and enthusiasm is the fuel that runs the world. People want to be around happy people. And I enjoy making people happy.

But even when I was working as a comedian, I had an underlying message...a combination of comedy with a couple of serious topics thrown in. Obviously, I haven't worked as a true comedian in some time, but laughter is still important and that is a part of everything I do.

The Traveler's Gift was really an extension of my life – an extension of my own continuing search for answers. Remember, I'm still learning too, so if you come up with some answers that can help me, send me an e-mail!

Bob L writes:

Andy, I read your book when it was first published and loved it! The section on Lincoln and forgiveness really validated a process I undertook years ago. I now believe that without forgiveness, one simply cannot grow.

My question is, where in heck do you come up with this stuff?

It's great! Keep up the good work!

Andy Andrews

You can really understand things like forgiveness when you live without it. And you can really understand how powerful it is to forgive when you have lived without forgiving.

How many times have I laid awake at night thinking about that specific person who did something to me or said something to me – I laid awake thinking what I should have said to them or done to them – and it occurs to me that they are fast asleep, not even aware that I am spending energy on this.

When I understood that principle of forgiveness and how liberating it is to forgive others even though they haven't asked for it, and even though they don't deserve it, it changed my life.

The principle of forgiveness is especially necessary to use with yourself. So many of us are caught up today in the guilt of what we said we were gonna do, or what we said we were gonna be. It's time to realize that nobody else is mad at you, so you don't need to be mad at you. Put down the whip you've been beating yourself with, and let's get on with our life.

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Kevin asks:

Do you feel that the message(s) contained in this book impact a larger (and younger) audience due to the "story" format in which it is written?

Andy Andrews

Without a doubt. Parents are giving this book to their children and children are actually enjoying it because of the story. But I also think that's why adults enjoy it too. Stories are just more fun. While a text book will connect with your head, a story has the power to connect with your heart.

Always remember that no matter how tough things get, whether you're 20 or 30 – or 80 or 90 – if you are still breathing, your purpose on this Earth has not yet been fulfilled. There is more fun to have, more people to help, more life to live. You are not through.

It may be tough now, but you are only at halftime and nothing is LESS important in this game we call life than the score at half-time.

Moderator

Thanks to Andy Andrews – and all those who joined this chat session.