

Speaker Bortolotto motivates and inspires

By Mark MacDonald *Publisher*

NANAIMO - Those that think they can, and those that think they can't are both right.

Michael Bortolotto believes he can. And he does.

Born in Campbell River with Cerebral Palsy, Bortolotto has overcome incredible odds to become a very successful motivational speaker, businessman, husband and a father.

The president of **Bortolotto & Associates** had 30 speaking engagements in a very busy fall schedule, and his goal for 2011 is over 50 bookings. He already has 25 committed.

Now 48, he's been speaking for 19 years. There have been many, many highlights.

As he looked out over a crowd of 1,900 gathered at the **American Medical Association** convention in Washington, DC several years ago, he couldn't help but feel a sense of immense satisfaction. Addressing some of the top physicians in the United States was a mountaintop experience, especially for someone who was told repeatedly he simply "can't".

He'll be the keynote speaker at an **Alberta Fire Chiefs Association** convention this year. He talked to a corporation in Port Alberni about limitations, and recalls that "three people quit their jobs the following day and went out to do what they really wanted to do with their lives."

Bortolotto has spoken to countless groups of students, about anti-bullying and peer pressure. He's in the midst of writing two books - one for children, another on his life.

His is an amazing story, one his parents must pinch themselves about, seeing first hand how Bortolotto has overcome the physical limitations of CP to become a successful inspirational speaker, sharing his message across North America.

"What really inspires people, and what drives any business, are examples of facing a struggle and succeeding," he says.

"When I pick up the phone and talk to someone, my voice doesn't sound very good," he allows. "Sometimes I have to say: 'I'm not drunk, I'm not stoned - I have Cerebral Palsy.

Please correct me if you can't understand me.'

"It's in moments of honesty like that, where the heart connects with the brain and creates a special moment," he says. "That's very important."

In 1993, Bortolotto was homeless.

"I slept on a covered sun-deck that fall," he recalls. "I never told my Mom and Dad, though. I've had lots of opportunities to quit. I used to sit in front of the Cenotaph (in downtown Nanaimo), wondering how I was ever going to make a buck and get a job.

"I'm tired of people saying 'I can't'. That's taking the easy way out. And the easy way out is actually the long and hard way out, because you pay for it somewhere down the road.

"If you can afford a \$195 computer at **Staples**, you can start a business."

Bortolotto has had plenty of defining moments in his life.

He was told countless times there were many things he'd never be able to do. He would never be able to catch a football. Eat a sandwich on his own. Do up the buttons on his shirt. Drive a car.

He does them all now. Often when he speaks, he tosses foam footballs to the crowd, telling about the first time he caught one all by himself.

While attending high school, he watched as a group of teenagers played football. To his surprise, one of the players called him over and asked him if he wanted to play.

He was thrilled. Surprised. Frightened. They could see his limitations, but they needed one more player, and worked with him.

Michael told them he couldn't catch, so they made an imaginary target on his chest. If they threw the football and it hit the 'target', it counted as a catch.

"I was the perfect wide receiver," he laughs. "I could run pretty well, but never in a straight line. And because I didn't know where I was going, neither did the other team."

That was fun, initially. He was playing football, something that he longed to do. However,



Michael Bortolotto at the Port Theatre in Nanaimo

it soon became evident that it hurt a bit, too, as the football bounced off his chest.

So after a few games and a few more bruises, he dared to try to reach up and grab the football with his hands. To his amazement, he did. It was exhilarating. His teammates were ecstatic.

After the game, he went to his locker, waited for students to go to their classes, and pulled out a sandwich. Alone in the hallway, grasping it with both hands, he ate it - something else he was told he could never do.

He did. And he hasn't looked back. The rest, they say, is history.

"Society has come a long way," Bortolotto notes. "People in this country who have challenges can be fabulous like no one else can. If they try."

Bortolotto's arsenal of topics includes a career planning message titled 'A Formula For Success'.

"It teaches people how they can succeed beyond their own mindsets, and the limitations

set by other people," he says.

Bortolotto is billed as "the positive rebel", which is also the title of his website. He makes people think because of who he is, what he's done, and how he says it. He challenges people, like when he says he believes many people should not receive disability payments. He doesn't.

But that's a topic for another time. . .

According to **Stats Canada**, 17 per cent of Canadians have some type of disability. That is an untapped employee resource for business, and an audience Bortolotto would like to reach.

His "I Dare You" seminar is targeted towards 13 year old physically challenged students and their parents, encouraging them to come up with a business idea and develop skills so they can support themselves once they leave high school.

"If they can learn how to run a business while in school, they can get something started and be able to earn money and support themselves after they

graduate," he notes.

He spoke to a group of nurses - about "being a rebel. That was a wild experience," he laughs.

He spoke to the **Qualicum Beach Chamber of Commerce** last year. He's speaking to students at **Heritage Christian School** in Kelowna in February.

Then there are the books he's working on.

"The Truth About Apples and Pineapples" is for children in the 4-8 year old age group, and features 35 pictures Michael has drawn himself. His message is simple: "I want to teach people to look beyond their size, their height, past their physical limitations, and see what's inside."

He's been writing his life story for the past two years. He's up to 19 chapters, and hopes to have a draft completed early in the new year.

"Do I love what I do?," he asks. "More than anything."

Not surprisingly, he believes anything is possible: For those who try.

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