

I've heard all the clichés many times before from the run-of-the-mill motivational speakers who wax on about “chasing your dreams” and how “you should never give up.” But such clichés didn't seem so tired coming from the speaker I was hearing say them now.

In fact, those clichés seemed downright powerful and inspiring coming from the person standing at the podium with a cane by his side. The people in the packed audience were hanging on his every word.

When D.J. Gregory said, “With hard work, anything is possible” and “Never take ‘no’ for an answer,” you *really* believed him because you knew he was living what he was saying.

I heard Gregory speak late last year at the Carolinas Golf Course Superintendents Association's annual conference, where he delivered the keynote address. Gregory received a standing ovation as he stepped off the stage after his speech.

Gregory's words resonated with the superintendents and others in attendance. They resonated because audience members knew what Gregory, who was born 31 years ago with cerebral palsy, had been through, such as the five surgeries on his legs he underwent by the time he was in the first grade.

Those people knew that with his hard work, something deemed impossible for Gregory — walking — was not only possible for him, but also real.

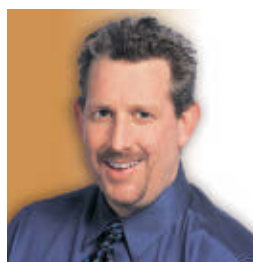
They also knew that Gregory's parents didn't take “no” for an answer when doctors told them their son, who was also born with entangled legs, would never walk and would be in a wheelchair for the rest of his life. Let me repeat what I said earlier: Gregory walked off the stage after his speech.

Let's get back to the cliché “chasing your dreams” for a moment. A lot of us chase our dreams, but never attain them. Gregory chased his and achieved it.

It's the reason he was asked to speak at the Carolinas show and at other events across the country. In 2007, Gregory, a huge golf fan, issued himself a personal challenge to walk every hole of every PGA Tournament in

Words That Mean So Much More

BY LARRY AYLWARD



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2008. If you're counting, that's 3,256 holes or slightly less than 1,000 miles in 44 weeks.

Gregory wore out five pairs of FootJoys and endured more blisters than most of us do in our lifetimes in fulfilling the challenge.

“It was the greatest experience I could ever have,” he says.

The experience also came with much fanfare, which Gregory really didn't expect. While he set out to accomplish a personal feat, he quickly realized, by about the third tournament, he was being hailed as a hero by golf fans and PGA players. People came up to him and told him how awesome it was what he was doing. Two years later, people recognize Gregory in public after seeing his story on TV and the Internet and approach him to pay homage.

Gregory realized he was an inspiration to others and that others were using his story as a vehicle to chase their own dreams.

When all of this hit him, he felt a calling to do what he's doing — to make his rounds to share his story to motivate others.

And Gregory, who has endured more physical hardship than most of us will ever know, not to mention the mental anguish that goes with it, says he's fortunate to be able to do what's he doing.

Amazing.

“I'm a big believer that everything happens for a reason,” says Gregory, who also wrote a book about his journey. “If these are the cards I've been dealt, then these are the cards I'll play to the best of my ability.”

We've heard these clichés before. But in Gregory's case, they're words that mean so much more.

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