



## ACTIVITY 53

# MICHAEL'S SPEECH

The audience was angry. The man speaking to them had just spent ten minutes telling them how fortunate they were. He had criticized them for self-pity and told them they had no reason to feel sorry for themselves. Who was he to talk to them like that? Every person in the room had recently lost an arm or a leg from exploding land mines and enemy mortar. Some had other serious injuries as well. Most had only recently returned from the front lines where two armies were desperately locked in a life and death struggle. What did this man know of their suffering? What right did he have to stand in front of them and criticize them for feeling as they did?

Sensing their anger, the speaker moved toward the audience, increasing the severity of his criticism. There were boos and hisses from the audience. As he moved down the aisle, continuing his speech, the audience became furious and some started jeering.

Unexpectedly, the speaker stopped talking. He pulled a chair into the aisle, and sat down. Without saying a word, he carefully removed one

of his legs. A sudden hush came over the audience. Next, the man slowly and deliberately removed his other leg. There was a large gasp from the crowd. Then, to their utter amazement, the speaker removed one of his arms. By this time, there was dead silence in the hall. Finally, he removed several parts from his other hand and sat before the audience, just the stump of a man remaining. The speaker, Michael J. Dowling, had just demonstrated that even a person who has suffered serious injuries has choices. Choices about how to look at things. Choices about how to approach life.

At the age of 14, Michael was caught in a blizzard and suffered extreme frostbite. To save his life, doctors amputated both legs, one arm, and much of his remaining hand. But Michael was a determined young man. He went on to pursue successful careers in education, business, and politics and to raise a family of three children. Much of his later life was spent giving motivational speeches to disabled war veterans during World War I.

### Hindsight Questions

- How did the soldiers feel about their injuries?
- Why were they angry with Michael?

### Insight Questions

- Why did the soldier's attitudes change when Michael took off his legs?
- How might a person's attitude prove to be a greater disability than an injury to the body?

### Foresight Questions

- What choices did Michael have to make after he lost his legs, arm, and some of his other hand?
- Why is it important to take ownership of your thoughts and feelings in making choices?

**Discussion Opportunity:** Michael recognized that to have any quality of life, he had to take ownership of his thoughts, feelings, and choices. He had wanted to feel sorry for himself, but he used Concentration, Control, and Correction and chose instead to make something of his life. In doing so, he became a far happier person and helped others as well. Character Traits: PR own; SR self-understanding

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