

Alvin Powell talks the talk at BPS Career Day



Some people have a special talent for public speaking. It might stem from their childhood, while listening to adults, or from a natural talent that doesn't have to be developed, or simply because a turn of events forced these people to dip into their reserve of mental resources.

Last week, high school students on the Gaspé Coast had the opportunity to meet with a speaker of great talent, Alvin Powell, who came to the Bonaventure Polyvalent as the motivational speaker for their annual Career Day.

Some students preferred not to attend school, as Career Day isn't a compulsory activity. It is the season of Christmas wreath manufacturing and some students probably need the money. In certain cases, this money is welcome since parents have problems making ends meet.

I'm not living in one of these families and I will not judge the people who preferred to work or to stay at home for Career Day, but I can certainly say that the students who weren't there to listen to Alvin Powell missed the speech of the year.

I came close to missing it, because of adverse weather conditions. I only listened to the last half of his speech, first in the wings of the scene, upon my arrival at Bonaventure Polyvalent, and then in the audience, as the friendly giant was explaining how drugs almost killed him about 12 years ago.

Alvin Powell is a six foot, five inch tall, 320 pound former offensive lineman who played in the National Football League and in the World Football League as an offensive guard. He might have lost a few pounds since but he is still a tremendous sight.

The "ox", able to hold his own against the most fearsome defensive linemen of the NFL, was probably very fragile inside, as he almost destroyed his life because of drug addiction. But the American met someone in Montréal in 1992 and the man helped him get rid of substance abuse.

Since then, Alvin Powell has decided, with the help of an organization called the Saving Station Foundation, to help children the way he was supported more than a decade ago. And he does it with enthusiasm, dedication and a passion that is palpable.

The man walks from one end of the stage to the other. He has a powerful voice, so powerful that he doesn't need a microphone. With a handkerchief, he wipes the sweat from his forehead. He doesn't slow down. He makes speeches the way he used to defend his quarterback - full out. No half-measures.

For close to an hour, he tells the truth. Drugs can be fun. It sounds scary to admit it, but, he promptly adds that they are fun just for a while.

After that, they can kill you.

And how do you get rid of these substances? If drugs can be fun, you have to find something else that can be fun. It sounds simple, but when it is said by Alvin Powell, you tend to believe it. You find yourself able to look for a better passion in life.

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Alvin Powell's speech went uninterrupted, a rare phenomenon when you talk to a high school audience. He probably achieves that by telling the truth without hiding scary details.

Students, parents and teachers rushed to him when he finished his speech. Everyone wanted to talk to him, get his autograph, thank him, shake hands with him. He took the time to talk to all of them, to hand out pamphlets about the Saving Station Foundation, while looking at his watch to make sure

that he wouldn't be late for his workshop.

Passion and respect. The man demonstrated that with these two values, human beings can solve the most acute and severe problems. Of course, he has the talent to make a presentation, although we all forgot to ask him if it stems from his childhood, from the fact that he is a natural or because he developed it through life experience. It probably came from all three sources.

Let's make sure that Mr. Powell comes back to the Gaspé on a regular basis.

