

Journey to become a 'man of your word'

After becoming an accidental, viral phenomenon overnight, Alex Sheen turned his instant success into a national movement to change the world one promise at a time.

Sheen shared the story of his journey at the University of Toledo's Doermann Theater on Feb. 16 to nearly 400 audience members.

As CEO and founder of "because I said I would," Sheen said he makes and keeps promises to strengthen humanity's will because he simply doesn't believe in superheroes.

"It doesn't matter how much money you make, the color of your skin or what language you speak; we all understand the importance of a promise," Sheen said.

On Sept. 4, 2012, Sheen was asked to eulogize his father at his funeral. There was one thing that kept coming to his mind.

"My father was a man of his word," Sheen said. "When he said he was going to be there he showed up. He always kept his promises."

The day after his father's funeral, Sheen wrote his first post about the concept of promises and how that connected to his father.

Later that night, he made the Facebook page "because I said I would."

Sheen said he wasn't satisfied with the concept of everyone being sad over his father being gone and not doing anything different. He thought if he could get a few people to make and keep a promise, his father's legacy would continue on.

“My first goal was to have my father’s memory live on a little bit, be more meaningful, but also to say goodbye in a manner I thought was respectful to him,” Sheen said.

Sheen made a Reddit post that said he would send out five promise cards to anyone in the world. A promise card is the size of a business card but is completely blank except for the words “because I said I would” written near the bottom.

Sheen said the concept of a promise card is to make that promise tangible; it becomes more real on paper.

“Once you write the promise on a card, you give it to the person you’re making the commitment to and you get it back after you do it,” Sheen said. “You say ‘this card is a symbol of my honor and I’m coming back for it.’”

Today, “because I said I would” has distributed 4.47 billion cards to 153 countries upon request. Sheen said sometimes we make promises so small we tend to forget, but, to another person, that promise could mean the world.

“I’ve had to go a long journey to get better at my promises, and I’m still flawed in many ways, but I would put my batting average up against anybody,” he said.

While at work in February 2013, Sheen received a letter from an anonymous person explaining that Sheen’s blog and organization is the reason this person is still alive and made a promise to Sheen to never give up.

Sheen said he remembers sitting at his desk crying because of how this letter affected him. That was the day he quit his job to start his non-profit organization, “because I said I would.”

For Sheen, it all comes down to accountability.

“Sometimes we don’t need a miracle; we need people to do what they said they would,” Sheen said. “There’s no such thing as

superheroes in this life; it's up to you to offset the bad."

Sheen's current goal is to further develop the organization's chapters.

It starts with an adult chapter to provide funding and connections. From there, he wants the chapters to spread to high schools, middle schools and elementary schools.

"I want to give someone a way to come up being a good person," Sheen said. "That's our goal."

Heidi Appel, Dean of the Jesup Scott Honors College, said Sheen's success shows us how effective social entrepreneurship can be.

"'Because I said I would' compels us to follow through on promises we make to ourselves and to each other," Appel said. "This is critical to our leading successful and satisfying lives as social beings and is really the finest expression of our humanity."

Taylor Burchfield, an honors college communication intern, said Sheen's speech was very impactful, especially to college students.

"As college students, we don't always understand the impact of everything we do or the promises we make," Burchfield said. "What Alex said really put things in perspective to be more mindful of the commitments we make to others and ourselves."

Sheen said he wants to change the world, and he doesn't care if that sounds ridiculous.

"'Because I said I would' is not about me; I would go so far as to say it isn't even about my father," Sheen said. "It has always been, and forever will be, about you."