

Sue Thompson's

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BeExceptional

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RESTUMBLE

This month, I'm reaching back to my second newsletter—February of 2008—to remind you that everyone doesn't have specific, measurable, attainable, realistic, and timely goals. There's still hope for us.

Mike Rowe of the Discovery Channel television show [Dirty Jobs](#) is on the cover of [Fast Company](#) this month ("The Dirtiest Mind in Business," Ellen McGirt, February 2008). For the uninitiated, *Dirty Jobs* features exactly what its title implies: Rowe heads into sewers, works particularly icky farming jobs, rescues wildlife, crawls into unimaginable holes, all to document the jobs we think no one in his or her right mind would enjoy doing. In fact, in his five steady years on this rewardingly dirty job, Rowe has discovered he has a passion for showcasing these way-behind-and-sometimes-underneath-the-scenes men and women and the often intense pride they take in their accomplishments. Author Ellen McGirt writes that Rowe's "real curiosity about and respect for his subjects telegraphs a powerful message: There's dignity in hard work, expertise in unexpected places, and deep satisfaction in tackling and finishing a tough job."

What thrilled me about this article was Rowe's journey to his current status as a bona fide, straight-up media sensation. He did not plan to end up where he is. He studied acting and voice in college and managed to stay afloat with theater and opera work. Bumping into a three-year job at QVC as an on-air personality where he received a gargantuan \$50,000 per year salary, Mike felt as though he'd died and gone to heaven even though he worked the wee hours of the morning. After that he spent some years on a number of television jobs, some fun, some forgettable, but during that period he formed the idea for what became *Dirty Jobs*.

He talked with some contacts he'd made throughout the years and ended up making pilot episodes for Discovery. If ever the phrase "and the rest is history" applies, it's

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here: Mike Rowe's idea almost singlehandedly propelled Discovery into cable-ratings respectability and made Mike a star.

All this from a guy who had not planned his work or worked his plan. Mike stumbled into his place, which seemed to be waiting for him. Following what appealed to him and, in the process, most likely appearing aimless and unfocused to those close to him, he was brewing a concept based on something that lived deep inside. Read how the author expands:

As the realization set in that, somehow, he had stumbled onto a new sense of purpose, Rowe slowly began to understand where it had taken root. Growing up in a rural Baltimore exurb ("real Huck Finn stuff"), he'd watched his grandfather, whom he adored, live the perfect dirty life. "Every day of my childhood," he says, "my grandfather was building a barn, putting on an addition, putting in a sewer line, pouring concrete." He even designed the local church, without a blueprint. And while Rowe wasn't a particularly handy kid ("Nope, no manual skills, really," says his mom, Peggy), that memory has come to fill him with a rare—and forgivable—earnestness. "All of my earliest memories involve my grandfather fixing something, usually starting very clean and ending up very dirty, with the problem solved and a lot of yelling and laughing in between." Rowe pauses. "This is really about him."

I highlight Mike's story not to dissuade anyone from developing plans for the future or from setting clear, measurable goals on which to concentrate. I simply urge my readers to resist the prevailing insinuations that we will be relegated to some dull, worthless *nowhere* if we don't know exactly where we're going. If anyone disproves this notion, it's Mike Rowe!

To be fair, now that Mike is a celebrity he has had to become much more strategic and thoughtful in the direction he wants to take his career and his brand. These days, opportunities seek him out as opposed to his needing to hunt down the avenues he might pursue. Lots of folks want a piece of him, and Rowe has to gather what has become his purpose and give it a structure with some identifiable markers. There does come a time when we *must* assess our hopes and dreams with a view to making them tangible.

My point, however, is a follow-up to my comments last month [ed. note: The reference is to the January 2008 newsletter] regarding following a leading as opposed to creating goals. Keep this in mind: ideas can take on a

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life of their own. People pick up on them, pounding their messages as though they are doctrinal truth. Books will be written, talks will be given, and true believers will parrot these not necessarily false but not necessarily absolutely accurate concepts while all around us are examples of how, well . . . sometimes they're true and sometimes they're not. Don't feel guilty if you're not in step!

No matter how successful others have been following the current big idea, you may be on a different path entirely. Your job is to make sure you're not just wasting time making excuses or twiddling your thumbs hoping the Destiny Express will derail and chug into your house, zip up your stairs, and run over you as you nap. Your job is to keep your eyes open and your feelers sensitive and follow—physically, intentionally get off your behind and *follow your leadings*. You may need to get dirty crawling into a few smelly tunnels to see if your road is buried there. That's okay. There's dignity and deep satisfaction in tackling a dirty job. *

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To be doing every day what you enjoy doing is rare. Rarer still is to be doing what you were meant to do, particularly if you got there by sheer serendipity. Until near 30, I'd fully expected to spend my life as a doctor. My present life was never planned or even imagined. An intern at *The New Republic* once asked me how to become a nationally syndicated columnist. "Well," I replied, "first you go to medical school . . ."

Charles Krauthammer

"When I talk to students—and I still think of myself more than anything as a kind of professor on leave—they say, 'Well, how do I get to do what you do?' . . . And I say, 'Well, you have to start out by being a failed piano major.' And my point to them is don't try to have a 10-year plan. Find the next thing that interests you and follow that."

Condoleezza Rice

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YOUR CHARACTER IS SHOWING

Join me for my monthly teleseminar in which I interview interesting people about their character

One of the ways to start pinpointing your leanings or purpose is to identify your character strengths. When someone makes clear to us the intangible qualities that have always mattered most, it can illuminate a direction we hadn't considered. I invite you to listen in on interviews I do with professionals from all walks of life on the strengths that have been their drivers. There's always a take-away that inspires me!

Past interviews have included powerhouse entrepreneur Traci Lynn and sales expert Jim Dedrick; you can listen to the recordings of their sessions on the site. Upcoming interviews will feature consultant Stormy Friday, a presence in the facility management world, and Carla Mathis, one of the founders of the Association of Image Consultants International (AICI) and author of *The Psychology of Personal Style*. It's rather invigorating to hear how the same character strength can be expressed so uniquely in different people—and it can help you discover your unique **modus operandi**!

Click [here](#) to sign-up. It's free.

About Sue

Sue Thompson is a personality expert, etiquette trainer, and an instructor in life lessons. Her work on recognizing and developing talent, identifying personalities and working effectively with the people who possess them, responding appropriately to difficult experiences, treating others with respect, and behaving like a professional have caused companies and business organizations throughout the country to value her consulting skills. She trains those entering the workforce how to present themselves with style and authority; new employees in the importance of respecting one's work and the workplace; managers in the value of understanding employees' talent and temperament; and everyone in the timeless rules of behavior that will always bespeak excellence.

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