

Stumbling into the Place

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 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.

continued ▶



Sue Thompson

Sue Thompson is a personality trainer, an etiquette expert, and an instructor in life lessons. Her seminars 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 listeners at companies and business organizations throughout the country to rate her presentations as "the best seminar of the conference!" 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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Stumbling into the Place (con't)

"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.


"You may need to get dirty crawling into a few smelly tunnels to see if your road is buried there."


My point, however, is a follow-up to my comments last month regarding following a leading as opposed to creating goals. Keep this in mind: ideas can take on a 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



My friend and colleague, Colleen McCafferty of [Hixson](#), an architectural/engineering/interior design firm in Cincinnati, has turned me on to what I am finding the most compelling, wondrous blog *ever*: [The Daily Coyote](#). Shreve Stockton writes from her one-room cabin in Wyoming, which she shares with her cat, Eli, and a coyote, Charlie, whom she has raised from birth. She took Charlie in after his parents were killed and is documenting his extraordinary existence as a wild thing living with a loving and respectful human. You must scroll to the bottom of the page, click on "Older Posts" until you can start right at the beginning, and read it from the bottom up on all the pages in order to absorb the full story of Charlie's journey (make sure you visit the "About Us" page.)

From the time Colleen first sent me to The Daily Coyote, I have been transfixed. Frequently there are tears in my eyes as I contemplate Shreve's unique and sacred opportunity to be a friend to a creature understandably hated by ranchers. She makes no judgments; her focus is on this one life, growing and developing in her world but clearly belonging to another. Self-described as "non-techy," Shreve's writing is exquisite and her breathtaking photographs (with clever and sometimes hilarious titles) document the wondrous relationship she and Eli have crafted with Charlie. Her photos are for sale. 

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. 

*There are three things which are majestic in pace, yes, four which are stately in walk:
A lion, which is mighty among beasts and does not turn away from any;
A greyhound, a male goat also, and a king whose troops are with him.*

Proverbs 30: 29-31, NKJV

The elegant, well-mannered, highly intelligent, and uniquely expressive Teddy Bear the Greyhound left this world on February 13th. She was 15 years old—a great stretch of life for her breed—and had lived with Larry and me for nearly 13 years.

Teddy was an exceptional dog, and while I know every dog owner feels his or her pet is matchless, she truly was an original. She'd been brought from the track with a bunch of other Greyhounds to an ex-racer adoption kennel when she was 2 years old. Her group had been named after wines—Madeira, Merlot, Chianti—but the volunteers gave her the name “Cork,” thinking of the effervescence of a Champagne bottle, because she was so energetic. Greyhounds are known by those who love them to be gentle, docile, laid-back creatures, not at all the stereotype of some high-strung athlete who can barely sit still. Teddy, however, really was highly active, loving to chase tennis balls as far as they could be thrown. I would have preferred to call her “Victoria” or “Colette,” thinking of something majestic or elite, but Larry said she was as soft as a teddy bear, and it just seemed right.

She was such an unusual sight for most people that we were frequently stopped and asked about her. She would sidle up to lean on her questioner, inviting a stroking, and Larry and I always enjoyed seeing the sincere astonishment that would come over a person's face as he or she would exclaim, “She's so soft!” She was almost weirdly soft, so silky it didn't seem possible. Children adored her, and countless times when we were out for an afternoon constitutional, we'd hear, “Teddy Bear! Teddy Bear!” and some child in a nearby house would come bounding out of a front door to hug and kiss the velvety head. Cars would zip past us, voices calling out from inside, “Hi, Teddy Bear!” She reveled in it. Wherever we've lived, the entire neighborhood knew her.

She would become exasperated when we did not read her thoughts. Standing in the middle of the living room she would snap her lengthy jaws (I called her my little velociraptor) and vocalize as though supremely frustrated with how obtuse we were. She was uncommonly smart. If she had run in a field two years ago and slipped on a turn, she'd slow down at the exact location, the memory of her mishap fresh at hand. When playing with her Greyhound companion, Killian, whom we lost more than a year ago, she would theatrically fake him out. Killian was faster than she and as he'd pass, Teddy

would feign injury, crying out and holding up her paw. Killian would circle back in concern and approach her gingerly as she seemed to nurse her leg. Just as he got close, Teddy would shoot off in that 45 mile-per-hour trajectory and sometimes we could almost hear her laughing in Greyhound glee.

A year ago an adrenal tumor was discovered and we thought we'd lose her then, but the vets tried a medication regulating her blood pressure and she rebounded. Arthritis was a bit of problem, but it didn't stop her from sprinting on her walks and she handled her changes with grace. An episode last month had us back at the vet's office and her excellent doctor warned me that Teddy's condition was not going to improve. Over the next several weeks, our girl became quite frail and before too long was refusing food. We fed her soup (butternut squash was her favorite for a few days) and then the morning came when she turned away from water, and I knew she was conveying her desire to go on. We heeded it. We treasured her. We gave her whatever she wanted.



Larry and I know we will finish our grieving after a while, but we're experiencing a form of empty nest that's hard to describe to those who don't understand pet love. We're dogless for the first time in more than a decade. Our duties to our precious beasts are dispensed with and we find ourselves lonely for the routine of their needs. More than anything, we miss Teddy's one-of-a-kind presence, the miraculous intelligence behind her eyes that spoke volumes of devotion and contentment. We know we gave her a wonderful life and we also know we let her go at just the right moment. We are deeply grateful we had the opportunity to love and care for the magnificent, the delightful, the incomparable Teddy Bear. *AMM*

In memoriam, I'll continue the “Teddy Bear Says” column with the etiquette tips represented by her refined and aristocratic style.



Teddy Bear Says . . .

No matter what form or fashion you follow for introductions, the number one rule about them is: introduce! Don't let people go un-introduced. It's very awkward and can convey the impression that you don't *want* one person to know the other, or that having the pleasure of meeting your acquaintances is a double top-secret proposition.

Americans are very informal compared to the rest of the world. Even in business, folks tend to use first names and act like they're old friends who haven't seen each other in years. No precedence is established in the introduction and it might be as simple as, "Hey, Jerry, have you ever met Nicole? Nicole, Jerry."

This is far better than not introducing Jerry and Nicole at all! But if you want to show yourself capable of a proper introduction, there are a few rules to keep in mind. They require practice. There's nothing wrong with practice. I had to practice going up stairs when I first came off the racing track and moved into a regular house. I had never seen stairs and didn't quite know what to do with them, but after a few attempts, I got the movements I needed down pat and before too long I was zooming up the stairway without a moment's hesitation to jump on the bed and nap with Sue. Practice every chance you get and you will be a pro, just like me!

Here is the first rule of business introductions: it's all about rank. When introducing two people in business, the simple way to remember who should be introduced to whom is to whisper to yourself, "Greater Authority, may I present Lesser Authority." Think of it in different contexts:

"President of the Company, may I present to you New Employee."

"Long-time Manager, I'd like you to meet New Manager."

"General Counsel, let me introduce Director of Operations."

Always use appropriate titles, such as doctor, reverend, professor, rabbi, dean, etc. It's up to the people you're introducing to offer their first names if they wish ("Please, call me Harry"). You can't go wrong if you use Mr., Mrs., Miss, or Ms. and, if you practice, it will become second nature for you to introduce in this respectful way. If you're introducing two peers and there's no obvious rank, you don't have to make one up. If you're introducing more than one person, introduce them to the highest ranking. If there's no clear precedence, just introduce! Don't make them introduce themselves.

Remember that you are presenting Lesser Authority *to* Greater Authority, so you will not say, "Vice President, may I introduce *you* to Manager." Manager is being introduced to Vice President: "Vice President, may I introduce (or present) *to you* Director." It's often easiest to simply leave it at "may I introduce" and go straight to the name.

As part of your introduction, you'll want to provide a little morsel of information to each about the other: "Julie Jones, may I present Ralph Mahoney, our new sales manager. Ralph, Julie is our director of public relations."

Here is the exception to the rule: your company's client always outranks any employee of your company, no matter how high up. For instance, you will present the president of your company *to* the client: "Mr. Gene Grant, I'd like to introduce Mr. Bob Smith, the president of our company. Mr. Smith, Mr. Grant is our client from New York." All of this is said with a smile, of course, and warmth and sincerity, even if you don't feel warm and sincere. That's what etiquette is all about: making others feel comfortable even when you don't have warm and fuzzy ears . . . whoops! I mean feelings. It doesn't matter what you feel; polite behavior is extended to those around you because it's the human thing to do. Even we dogs know that!

