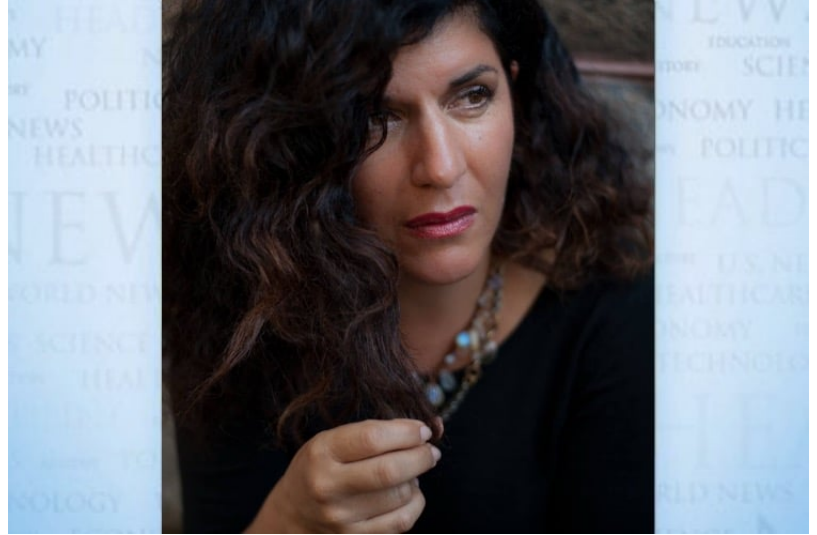




Mike Rowe's Intentionally Unintentional Intentional Purpose-driven Life

Mike Rowe has had one heck of a year, and it isn't even over yet.

Rowe, best known for hosting the Discovery Channel's long-running "Dirty Jobs," is also involved in shows called "The Story Behind The Story," "The Way I Heard It," "Somebody's Got to Do It," "How America Works" and "Six Degrees: A History Show For People Who Don't Love History." He also launched the Knobel Tennessee Whiskey company, and he is known for giving away \$8 million in work ethic scholarships through his foundation.



Salena Zito

"Oh, I should add, I'm writing jingles," he says and points to the piano right beside him. It turns out that he writes them unsolicited for advertisers on his "Off the Wall" podcast.

He is particularly fond of the wonderfully inappropriate, bawdy one he wrote for MANSCAPED, which is pretty darn hysterical and which he says raised lots of money for his foundation after listeners egged him on.

"This jingle for MANSCAPED just sold \$30,000 worth of whiskey and raised over \$30,000 for mikeroweWORKS Foundation because a woman pledged to donate a thousand dollars if I manscaped myself on the internet. So I did. And yes, it is as ridiculous as it sounds," Rowe explains.

The best way to describe Rowe's life journey is as an intentionally unintentional intentional life filled with purpose, even though he says he sometimes fails to grasp that purpose in the moment.

The best way to describe the impact Rowe has had on people because of how deftly he embraces the ethos of American exceptionalism is hard to capture with eloquence.

Rowe's foray into our living rooms began when his mother called him one day and said only what a mother can say to a grown son when they know there is more purpose to him other than freelancing his way through life. She said, "Gee, wouldn't it be great if before your grandfather died, he turned on the TV and saw you doing something that looked like work?"

Within 24 hours, he was trying to fix a sewer in San Francisco, covered in human feces, and after a lot of hard selling, found few people at the time were looking for a show that was a love letter to hard work. Nonetheless, it soon became the basis of his hit show "Dirty Jobs," which spent nine years filling a void no one knew was missing in American culture: a love and respect for honest, hard work.

It was a project Discovery wasn't really married to — sort of a one-off. They had only ordered three episodes, and Rowe had no expectation they would take it any further, and then something remarkable happened: The pilot episode attracted thousands of letters from viewers who loved it.

Rowe has a way of touching the common man that is ingrained in his sensibility but also his life experiences. His grandfather never got past middle school yet went on to become a master electrician



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and a guiding influence to his young grandson. In return, Rowe honored him when naming the Knobel whiskey he founded a year ago.

Someone from Hollywood might hire 34 people to focus group a name for a whiskey that would take nine months and cost millions, but Rowe just reached back and saw his grandfather. It is a sensibility and reverence almost anyone else outside of Hollywood would have come up with as well, and that is at the root of why it connects with people.

That sensibility and reverence are at the heart of why Rowe is so successful: the unintentional gift of being intentional, of honoring purpose and recognizing it at the most base level, as he did in Oklahoma recently.

“I’ve been working on this project that allowed me to have unscripted conversations with people in the energy and medical industries as well as teachers, and I found myself wanting to talk to farmers and their relationship with local restaurants,” he said.

Rowe said he wanted to do that because he doesn’t think people really understand the relationship between energy and their food. “So I went to this little diner and I met a farmer who had about 30 acres, literally just down the road, and was the sole supplier of meat into this diner.”

The man was the classic farmer who had inherited some land and started raising beef and was determined to pay homage to his father, who had died shortly before.

“His dream was to get quality beef onto the menus of local establishments; the place we were in made an onion burger, and the chef let me go back and make the most ugliest, beautiful piece of food I’ve ever seen. It was just misshapen, and it smelled so good, and we slathered it with cheese,” he said.

So Rowe breaks bread with the farmer, and they discuss the farmer’s concern that people have become wildly disconnected from their food and his attempts to help remedy that situation by simply raising the best beef he possibly could and making sure that everybody in the community knew it.

“As we were talking, I glanced up, and I saw the craziest thing on the wall: the head of an Angus cow with the clip still in its ear beautifully mounted right over the table where we were sitting,” Rowe said.

“The farmer explained that was the first cow that he sold to this establishment, and he wanted the people who came here to enjoy the onion burger to understand in no uncertain terms precisely from whence came here,” he said.

Rowe said that is his very long way of saying why he does what he does no matter where it leads him: “There’s such a hunger as it were to get reconnected to the basics, and somewhere near the top of that list is each of us trying to connect each other every way we can.”

His job, as the unofficial working man’s evangelist, is to tell those stories.

Salena Zito is a CNN political analyst, and a staff reporter and columnist for the Washington Examiner. She reaches the Everyman and Everywoman through shoe-leather journalism, traveling from Main Street to the beltway and all places in between. To find out more about Salena and read her past columns, please visit the Creators Syndicate webpage at www.creators.com.

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