About Mike Rowe:

Mike Rowe is known as something that maybe isn't the most attractive thing—The dirtiest man on TV. Why? He's the host of the hit series Dirty Jobs. He's also a best selling author, the host of the Facebook series Returning the Favor, the country's leading advocate for skilled labor, and the CEO of the Micro Works Foundation.

On authenticity and taking a stand:

I really love the authenticity and your willingness to have an opinion at a time when it seems to put you at risk. If you don't have an opinion right now then you've got an opinion. And your opinion is not to have an opinion that you can get away with for a while. **But what's going on in our country right now. It's a time to be weighed and measured in a lot of different ways.**

I run a foundation it doesn't do me any good to get needlessly political. And so I don't but to argue from the middle, **to be persuasive, to try and be authentic…whatever business you're in… TV, radio or real estate…it's all kind of the same. People can smell a fake.** You know, I think Mark Twain said if you can fake authenticity, tell me how far you can go.

On his beginnings:

I came from Baltimore. I grew up on a little farm. My grandfather lived next to me. I was 100% positive I was gonna follow in his footsteps. He actually dropped out of school in the seventh grade, but by the time he was 30, he was a steam fitter, and a pipe fitter, and a mechanic and a welder. He was [also] an electrician. He built the house I was born in without a blueprint.

He had that chip in the back of his head like he could take this watch apart blindfolded, put it back together. He just knew what to do and I was positive I would I would follow in his footsteps until I learned that the "handy" gene is recessive. And so all the things he could do naturally, I couldn't.

On getting a different toolbox:

Years ago, I screwed up a foundation. I was probably 17 and he said **"you know, you can be a tradesman if you want… just get a different toolbox.** And that was kind of the moment where I thought, **'Well, I'm not going to do the thing I thought I was going to do but that's where I came from**. I came from a little farm in Baltimore, grew up next to a guy that gave me some good advice and then I went about the business of doing weird and uncomfortable.'"

[So he] told me to get a different toolbox. When you're 17 or 18 years old, [you're] not quite sure what that means. But for me...I can always carry a tune, but I never studied or anything. So I went to the Rosedale library. And I said to the librarian that I need to memorize an aria in Italian because I'm going to crash an audition for the Baltimore Opera. It was kind of a racket back in those days that if you wanted to be in TV, and I thought maybe I did, [then you needed] a Screen Actors Guild card. The work around was with another union called the American Guild of Musical Artists. Now if you get into that guild, then you can [get into the] Screen Actors Guild. Now to get into the American Guild of Musical Artists, you got to get into the opera, which means you have to go to the library and learn the shortest araa you can find and then show up on the last Thursday of the month in 1983 and sing your lungs out. So I get in the opera. Amazingly. I mean, they needed young guys with low voices. I didn't understand any of the Italian I was singing by the way. But they let me in and my plan was to get my SAG card and then go about the business of being a TV star. The weird thing was the music was better than I thought and being in the opera in those days...well, the women I mean...but there were 80 people in the company—45 women and 35 Guys—and 30 of the 35 guys had zero interest in 100% of the women. Of the remaining five straight guys, three of them were married and the only other single straight dude had a mole in his eyelid, like the size of my thumb, with thick black hair growing out of it. So I'm 22 years old, dressed as a pirate and a Viking singing in the Baltimore Opera I stayed in there for eight years.

I mean, it's it's such a crooked road. I was seven years in the opera. And while I was in the opera, I have three or four sales jobs [to pay the bills]. I knew that I wanted to be on stage. I knew that I wanted to figure out a way to make money doing this.

From the Baltimore Opera to QVC:

One day, I heard about a very strange company called QVC. We were in the middle of a production of a really horrible opera. It's like 12 hours long, and during the intermission, dressed as a Viking. I walked across the street to drink a beer and watch the Colts get beat. And while I was sitting there at the bar, the bartender wasn't watching the game, which is very strange. Incidentally, if you ever have a chance to watch a football game while dressed as a Viking and drinking a beer during the

intermission of an opera, you ought to do that. This is great. Except that on the TV, the football game wasn't on. There was a big guy and a shiny suit selling pots and pans. And the bartender was auditioning for that guy's job the next day. QVC was in town and they were having a giant National Talent Search. In the midst of [th]ir conversation[, I challenged him. I bet him 100 bucks that I could get a call back if I went to the audition. And the next morning, I auditioned for QVC and they offered me a job on the spot and that was my first job in television.

Well look everything...everything is sales. But the one thing that comes before sales is story, which means everything is story. You know, everybody is on their own hero's journey.

Everybody understands the basic narrative, a beginning a middle, and end. [There's only] five six stories in the whole world. All opera touches on those five, six stories, and so do the most of the classics.

I was starting to develop my blocks, and I could say I could write. I had been at enough plays. And I've been in front of enough people often enough to know that there was something there. **But one of the tools you pick up if you tell stories and sell things, is the ability to talk for great periods of time without really saying anything at all. To create the illusion of importance, credibility and confidence where it doesn't really exist,** or as Grant might say, "to bullshit with a straight face." To be able to keep yourself on your feet and begin a sentence with no clear idea of how it's going to end is, in fact, a critical part of any successful salesperson who I've ever met.

So the audition for QVC: I walked into the conference [room] and there was a man in there with a camera setup. I sat down and he was busy writing and he didn't even really even look up. When he was ready, he rolled a pencil across the table top. And he said, "Mr. Rowe I want you to pick up that pencil. And I want you to look at the camera. And I want you to talk to me about that pencil. I want you to make me want that pencil. And I don't want you to stop making me want that pencil till I tell you to stop." QVC's auditioning process was that if you could talk about a pencil for eight minutes, then you were hired and put on a three month probationary period. And two nights later, I was

sitting on the air on live TV at three o'clock in the morning trying to make sense of an endless parade of items that were brought to me every eight minutes. And so for three months, I sat there in the middle of the night trying to make things interesting that really were not very interesting.

That job, kinda like the opera, lasted longer than I thought. I was fired three times over three years and rehired each time. I stayed at QVC for three years. I make fun of those days a lot now because it's crazy to sit there for three hours on live television in the middle of the night talking to an audience of narcoleptic lonely hearts. It's utterly like the best entertainment that nobody knows about. **But looking back, that's where I got my toolbox. That's where I understood how live TV worked. That's where I learned who the audience was. That's how I learned the value of a submissive posture.** Well in nature, when a small wolf meets a larger wolf he has a choice: he can engage the larger wolf and they can fight to the death and it's going to end badly for the small wolf OR the small wolf can lean back and expose his belly and basically say, "Look, I get it, you win. We don't even have to go through the part where you prove it right." **When you're big on small, there's a humility in that. And for me, advice is tricky because you never know what people need to hear at a certain point in their lives. People need to hear the truth.**

The value of the submissive posture:

The first thing they brought me was called the Healthteam infrared pain reliever and it looked like a flashlight with a little red bulb on the end and it emitted infrared light. And if you rub it on your arthritis, it'll feel better. This is what it says on my blue card. I'm like you got to be shitting me man. So I sat there my first night on QVC director said 3, 2, 1, and the red light came on. I said, "Hi everybody, I'm Mike. I'm the new guy. And it's a thrill to be here with you in the middle of the night. This is the Healthteam infrared pain reliever. And there's a phone number on the screen right now. And some of you I'm told have been watching this channel for many years and if those of you watching might own the Healthteam infrared pain reliever or maybe even used it yourself, it would be awesome if you can call this number and tell me what the hell this thing is." The switchboard explodes. Hundreds of people, many of them very drunk are calling in to tell the new guy not only what

it is, but how it works. In other words, these are testimonials. These were people doing my job for me. And so when they brought me the Amcor negative ion generator shortly after the Healthteam infrared pain reliever which is a shoe box shaped device with a little antenna that charges all the ions in the air with a negative charge thereby improving your life in ways I can't entirely explain...what I said was, "This is the Amcor negative ion generator and if any of you folks watching have any idea what the hell this does, I'd love to hear from you." True story, I sat there for the better part of three hours on my first shift to QVC simply taking phone calls from people who told me what the hell the things were. It was the submissive posture.

Ask for help. Decent people always step up:

And for me, when I look back, that was the moment and again there are no new ideas. Everything. Every new idea that feels new just comes at a time when you when you need to hear it. I didn't realize I was doing it [the submissive posture]. I just had narrated enough nature documentaries to know what the submissive posture was. And thought it might work with homo sapiens. And it does. **You can't fake it. But when you're honest about it, how many how many people have you helped as a result of them saying, "Can you help me? I could use I could use some help?" You know, decent people when they're honestly asked for assistance, always, always step up.** I was there because I talked about a pencil for eight minutes and now I'm on live television. And the only people I could ask for help were my customers...drunk though they were.

It's important to know your audience. It's important to take the temperature of the room, obviously all that stuff is it matters. But what really matters is can you put yourself in their place. And then ask yourself honestly, what would I like to see myself doing? What would I like to hear? The thing people forget about is your audience...they're rooting for you. They didn't pay money. To sit there and hope you bomb. It's the same thing as a sales presentation. It feels adversarial sometimes for all kinds of reasons but primarily what always helped me to answer your question to remember that if there are people in a room, they're probably not hoping I crapped the bed, right? They want me to be good at whatever it was that we are able to do that like back then when you were doing that. And it's like, okay, these people are actually pulling for me. I mean, how do you connect? Like

there's no feels, there's no passion in that position. Well, here's the thing. It is inherently passionless, but life is not inherent, and your situation is always going to be relative. So at QVC it wasn't like Mike Rose showed up at midnight to do a three hour shift. That thing was on 24/7. So there was somebody on before me from 9 to midnight, and there was somebody on after me from three to 6am all day every day. And what I noticed was all those people, and there were talented people, they were good salesmen, they all did every single thing the same way. You could set your watch by it. So I did it differently. And at a glance, I looked subversive, irreverent. And radical. But only by comparison. I was still doing a family friendly G-rated show. It's just that I was sandwiched between two impossibly squeaky, clean, boring people that all I had to do was put one toe over the line and it looked like, "Wow, that guy!" **So, you know, I think it's important. If you're going to try and read a room…not just to read the audience, but to understand who you're following and who's following you.**

Dirty Jobs happened, in part, because my my granddad, who I mentioned was 91. And I was working for CBS at the time in San Francisco impersonating a host for a show called Evening Magazine. Talk about creating the illusion of credibility and competence. That that's what I kind of perfected. [It was] a terrible show. Nobody, nobody watched it. **But my mom called me one day and I was sitting in my cubicle, and she said, "Michael, you know your grandfather is not going to be around forever. Wouldn't it be great if, before he died, he turned on the TV one day and saw you doing something that looked like work. And so on and so on." This is the same grandfather who could build a house without a blueprint, the same Pop, who I learned the "handy" gene was recessive…the guy that told me to get a better toolbox and now imagine his horror. His grandson goes from the opera to home shopping to like all these other jobs he could not possibly relate to.** And so when he was old and dying, I took my crew, my camera man into the sewers of San Francisco to host an episode of Evening Magazine from inside the sewer. Mostly I just couldn't do the job because we were completely subsumed by a river of crap, giant roaches and enormous rats and we were we were baptized in filth…me and my cameraman…I couldn't do my job. But my camera man filmed.

"Welcome to another edition of Evening Magazine. Tonight we take you to a different place. A special place. A place I dare say many of you have never been to before. Right?"

I host the show from a different place every night. On that night I was in the sewer. And on that night, every time I opened my mouth something unspeakable flew into it. And so after spending an hour and a half in the sewer, trying to host the show, I turned to the guy that was our tour guide and he was a sewer inspector. And he was down there doing actual work. He was replacing the rotten bricks, hammering them out, putting them in unspeakable circumstances. Hot, sweaty, miserable. His name is Jean Cruz. I remember. **And I said to my camera man at the time, Branson I said "Look, man, I can't do my job. We might as well help this guy do his." So Branson filmed me replacing bricks in the sewers of San Francisco in 2003 with a sewer inspector named Jean Cruz. And that footage, when I looked at it later, looked like nothing I'd ever seen on TV before. An honest interview with a host who's supposed to know what he's doing. Working with an expert, who was completely anonymous, right? Talk about out of sight out of mind.** The guy worked in a sewer, right? I put that footage on the air two nights later. And the night after it aired, this little show that nobody watched in San Francisco got 1000s of letters. Now some people were upset. They sat down to enjoy their meatloaf just in time to see a smart alec crawling through a river of crap making poop jokes. I'm funny. I like me. Know what I got? What I got to change everything. We're hundreds of letters from people who said, Amen. You should meet my dad, my grandmother, my brother, my uncle, my cousin, my sister, my mom. Wait until you see what they do? And in that moment, **I realized I didn't have to be a host. I could be a guest. I didn't have to have all the credit. I didn't have to be the expert on camera. I just had to be curious. I had to be submissive. I had to be honest. And I had to let the regular people we met on that show be the stars of that segment. And that's what I've been doing since 2003.** That's good. I was good. I was good.

A turning point:

You don't always know your big moment until you look back on it:

So part of what happened as a result of Dirty Jobs was a whole new philosophy began to emerge. You know what's the Dirty Jobs take on teamwork, or innovation or efficiency? I started to good naturedly challenge, the platitudes and the bromides

Should you follow your passion?

and the tropes that we so often see hanging on the walls and conference rooms, right. And, you know, the one like the big one is follow your passion. And there's usually a picture of some guy climbing a glacier or out in a kayak doing something. So I said, "Well, what's the Dirty Jobs take on that?" **And the answer is, passion is important. Nobody in the room wants to live without it. But do you really follow it? Is it too important to follow? For instance, what if you never follow your passion but always bring it with you? That would suggest that something might be more important than passion? Well, what is that? Well, you get to decide but the big lesson from Dirty Jobs was opportunity.** The fans of the show, they look at that show and they form a real simple opinion, a tribute to blue collar workers. But the truth is, we featured 45 multimillionaires on 30 jobs. And nobody ever knew it because they were covered in crap or something worse. They didn't look like the versions of success. **The things I learned primarily from that group of entrepreneurs was, don't follow your passion. Always bring it with you. Start with the opportunity, then figure out a way to be really, really good at it. Then figure out a way to love it. So it's, you know, we might come at it from different sides, but in the end, every successful person I know, is passionate about what they do, and they're good at what they do.** The question is, how do you take them along? This goes to education, too. We tell our kids today, by and large, we say look, you want to be happy? What do you want to do? Alright, I want to be a doctor. Okay, Action Plan. Here's how you're going to be a doctor and you go through all these boxes, you have to check. And one of those boxes is, well, you're going to sign on the dotted line and you're going to borrow vast sums of money and you're going to go to school and you're going to do all these things in one day. If you do everything right. And if the stars line up, you're going to be a doctor and then you can be happy. Right? And so that's kind of the narrative we default to. That's the story of success that most of us tell when we go back and we write our own stories.

Dirty jobbers didn't do that. I remember a guy named Les Swanson. Met him at a septic tank in Wisconsin. He was a former psychologist. We were outside of Madison, Wisconsin. Les was 58 years old when I met him and we were in a pumping station, standing up to our nipples in human filth. Knocking chunks

of cholesterol off the wall. It was about 120 degrees. And at the worst of it, I looked at Les and I said hey man, what? What happened to you? How'd you wind up here? And he said, Well, I was say, I was a high school guidance counselor for about nine years and then I was a psychiatrist for about 10 years. And I said," Well, what happened?" and without missing a beat. This is why I love TV. Without missing a beat, he said, "I got tired of dealing with other people's shit." And I said, "Wait a minute, man. Walk me through it." And he said, "It's not complicated. I have seven employees. I have three trucks. I have a summer home. And later today, we'll continue our conversation by my pool where I've just installed a margarita machine." Les Swanson from Wisconsin. Figured it out he took a reverse commute. He had embraced his own submissive posture. **He had a hell of a toolbox he built now all he had to do was figure out a way to enjoy doing what he's doing. He didn't follow his passion into the septic tank. He followed the opportunity. This guy looked around to see where everybody else was going and went the other way. And then he figured out how to be good at it. And then he figured out how to love it. And I could tell you 50 other stories from guys like that.**

Follow opportunity not passion:

What are the common denominators I think when I watch a show? I made them believe that you got shoes you get when you shipped and how important is that in life and then to take advantage of whatever? **Well it just depends on where authenticity ranks on your hierarchy of needs. And again, I don't want to assume that it's important as it is for me as it as it is for you. I don't know anybody who says it's not really important to be authentic. But look at the barriers in your own life that keep you from being the most authentic person you can be in my business**. Jesus, they're everywhere. Turn on the news, right, everybody who reports the news wants to be seen as credible, trustworthy and authentic. So why do they pretend to read? Why do they pretend that they're not reading a teleprompter? When they so clearly are? Why don't they just have the script in front of them and why? Don't they just look down and just tell you what they know. Why do they pretend to know more than they do? Why do they wear makeup? Why do they insist on an HD camera? Why are all the graphics 14 inches tall and why does all the music try to scare the hell out of you? All of that stuff goes to production. The question

Production is the enemy of authenticity:

is, if you care about authenticity, is it making the experience more authentic? Or is it making it more produced? **So on Dirty Jobs, one of the big lessons early on was production. [It] is the enemy of authenticity. Now you can't have a show without production. But if you have more production than you need, well then, you're just building little monuments to yourself. And you're congratulating yourself for making something that's pretty instead of pretty good.** So the thing we did is to check ourselves on that show, and I'll be doing it again in two days. The show is going back in production, by the way, two days from now. I'm going to be on a jellyfish boat off the coast of Georgia. They catch jellyfish and they sell it to the Asian market. I'm going out for a couple of days to catch jellyfish. But what we'll do to make sure we do an honest show is the same thing we do on every episode and that is we'll have what I call the truth cam. Some people just call it the behind the scenes camera. In my industry, they call it "breaking the fourth wall." That's something that was never done. Dirty Jobs was the first show to show you what it looked like to make that show. And so I could be in the middle of my job. And a battery might die on somebody's audio or a plane might fly over. You know there are 1000 reasons all of a sudden, production stops but on Dirty Jobs when that happened, I always turned and found the truth cam. So I'm here and I'm working and blah blah blah and all of a sudden we stop and then I go "Alright, well here's what happened folks. The battery just ran out the plane ran over now the audio guys all pissed off because nobody can hear anything and what a pain in the ass that is because it's already five o'clock and if I don't get the crew out of here right now they're going to starve to death. So I Yeah, yeah, yeah, right? **A little moment like that where you turn to your audience and tell them the truth. Doesn't have to be glamorous, right? It doesn't have to be earth-shaking. It just has to be the truth. You do that three, four or five times during the course of a shoot, they will trust you. You know, they will trust you. And so on that note, that's what I see happening on social media.** I'm able to see behind the scenes like I did this thing with Discovery. I'm like, that's why don't you just keep that. Like why don't you keep that phone ring. I got a phone call. Why do they stay in this other idea and then have a social media with so much authenticity and so much transparency and no production? What is the effect on TV? Well, look, there's great truth in that old bromide. The biggest,

greatest enemy of the good was perfect. And in TV. It's not a good plan. Every producer fancies themselves a great architect, a storyteller. They have a vision. They get storyboards and then they focus group. What tends to happen when people say "no, stop, let's do it again," it's not because it was bad, it's because it wasn't the way they imagined it. And so they fall in love with the way they think the shoots gonna go and they'll make themselves crazy trying to execute as opposed to just bearing witness.

Social media vs TV:

TV, as we understand it, can't keep up with social. The best thing Dirty Jobs did and the closest I came in working on a TV show, to mirror it is to simply eliminate take two. There is no take two, you get one chance to make the first impression. Well, you also get one chance to do take one. **So the second part of its power is that, and this is tied also to Dirty Jobs, but you know how you're doing on social media in real time. Instant feedback. So many people have no reliable feedback. So they don't really know how they're doing or they look totally at numbers.** They look only at a certain metric and they get caught in this rubric. So they they know how they feel, but how are they really doing? **But what what's happened socially, has been, I think, maybe the greatest wake up call in the history of modern media. Because it forces people to tell stories. It forces you to consider your own relationship with the truth cam. And with take two and you'll all have to navigate that.**

What does 10X mean to you?

It's a good start. 10X is just a good stuff. I would take it back to: is it a goal? Or is it a symptom? I mean, do you sit down and say okay, I'm going to take my business and this is how I'm going to do it. Or do you sit down and say, Alright, I don't know anything about opera. But I'm going to learn the shortest aria I can. And I'm going to walk in. I'm going to make as much noise as I can. And I'm going to play the cards I got. Or maybe it's not binary. Maybe it's both. But I'll tell you, for me, **what 10X means is when you are either willing, or have no choice, but to re-identify yourself on the most basic level.**

And for me, that happened in the sewers of San Francisco. It happened when I realized I can't do my job as a host. Remember, from QVC or 20 years 300 different jobs before Dirty Jobs. I became fairly fast as a host I was good at it. But what a fast sale means is I can create the illusion of credibility and believability

in short bursts on TV. That's what I could do. I could stand next to a candidate and say "On bloody lane 4000 Confederate troops confronted blah, blah, blah, blah, blah." And you wouldn't believe it's not [true]. It's not that I'm lying. It's just that I learned all that by reading a plaque about 30 seconds earlier. And then I turned to the camera to explain it. Right. That's what I was good at.

In the sewers of San Francisco. I realized how full of shit I actually was. Again, I realized for the first time, this thing I did on the air, put me in a submissive posture another hour to do something I'd never done really before. Which was truly humbling. When the sewer inspector became the star of the show, and I became this guy who could come and go and try and keep up. When I became a guest, instead of a host. When I became an apprentice instead of an expert. When I became an avatar, a cipher, right instead of a personality.

Because Discovery saw something that didn't look like the show that was on before it, or the show that was after it. They saw a different paradigm. And they ordered hundreds of Dirty Jobs. And that show went on to launch 35 other shows and gave me a chance to start the foundation that I run today that I'm pleased and unlucky to have. And so, like I said, you don't often know the big moment until you look back but for me, it was in the sewers of San Francisco.