

# Sue Thompson's BeExceptional

November 2011

Building a Character-based Workforce | About Sue

## *Even Though it Didn't Feel Good at the Time*

*This is a re-do of last November's main article, partly because I have so many new subscribers who can benefit from what I shared last year, but also because I feel it's so important. This month is all about thanksgiving, and I hope to inspire you to look upon the toughest situations you've faced this past year—and may be facing now—and see the deeper implications.*

Almost every family/friend gathering at Thanksgiving tables across the country has its own “giving thanks” ritual: some offer a prayer or prayers, some go around the table and speak gratitude for a particular blessing. I'd like you to consider a twist: express thanks for something that did not seem a blessing at all when it occurred. Give praise for what you thought would kill you. Lift up your hands before all who matter and proclaim that something meant to destroy you has been the portal to a new way of thinking, living, or approaching life.

It's nearly impossible to do this if you're still limping from an unexpected blow, so your gratefulness may not apply to an incident or season still fresh with the sting of trauma. If you lost your job last week when you didn't know you were being targeted for layoff, or your kid totaled the car three months ago and you're still negotiating the often frustrating use of public transportation, this may not be the exercise for you.

Some of you reading, however, know what I'm talking about. You caught the spirit of my second paragraph immediately and you know *exactly* where to go with this. Your thanks rise spontaneously from the passage of enough time to have you fully cognizant of how important, how significant, how only-now-viewed-from-a-distance *precious* and *valuable* is the result of your rotten experience.

It doesn't have to be something that happened this year, or last, or the one before; often it takes a good long passage of

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[www.BeExceptional.biz](http://www.BeExceptional.biz)

[Sue@BeExceptional.biz](mailto:Sue@BeExceptional.biz)



healing time to hit upon the truth that what caused us seemingly insurmountable pain became an Everest to scale, showing us what we were made of. We found out we had something of which we were completely unaware—be it a talent, friends, a hidden resolve, a path that had been waiting for discovery.

My husband left his work many years ago to come to Delaware (I had gone ahead for a new job) and found he hated it. He was unable to find employment in his field and was convinced he had ruined his career. He felt unproductive and angry. During a year-long plunge into a dark abyss, he found some comfort in staying up half the night, teaching himself graphics programs that challenged him and took his mind off his frustration. Fast forward x-number of years: he now works as a freelance designer and creator of websites, newsletters, and promotional materials (including this newsletter and my website). He had an eye for color, structure, and excellence he might never have nurtured. He says today, “I’d have to be paid a million dollars to go back to the corporate world.” His time is his own and he’s doing something he enjoys with a talent he might never have uncovered had it not been for a situation that hurt like hell when he was going through it.

I grew up in a family buffeted unendingly by the destructive behavior of my brother and his various addictions. I watched two very generous, kindhearted parents with limited understanding and even more limited resources wage a battle of futility in dealing with him. I hated the whole sinking mess of it and left home the moment I could rent an apartment on my own. It took decades to face the onion-like layers of truth about myself and about them, and the necessity for forgiveness, but I am a person set free today by the accomplishment of survival. I’m continually astonished with the ability I’ve been given to look back with gratitude and see how that experience made me what I am today. I went for a Master’s degree in psychology because of it. I wrote a book about it (*The Prodigal Brother: Making Peace with Your Parents, Your Past, and the Wayward One in Your Family*). My business theme is centered on setting people free because I am firmly convinced of the prize of seeing the potential and ultimate results of our heartaches, whether they are business or personal (and we know they are usually always both) and how they often make us better in both arenas.

So this year—consider making it an annual ritual—give thanks for *all* things that have enriched your life, not just the obviously good. Develop an expectation of dark tunnels that

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will have you wondering as you enter how you'll end up explaining the benefits at the next Thanksgiving feast. It will remind you that while you were going through, the tunnel was dim, but the train stayed on the tracks after all, and here you are. \*

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*If things start happening, don't worry, don't stew, just go right along and you'll start happening too.”*

— Dr. Seuss

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### 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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