

Sue Thompson's BeExceptional

[Your Character is Showing](#) | [About Sue](#)

Laying My Burdens Down

I have had the great blessing of having sat under the instruction of, or been acquainted with, a number of successful, impressive entrepreneurs. I admire these people greatly, sometimes bordering on a crush. They are examples of what people can do when they are filled with determination and drive and energy. To a person, they are highly goal-oriented and extremely focused, and they seek to instill in me the belief that if I really want to, I can go places in life I visualize if I put my mind, heart, blood, sweat, and tears to it.

Hear my confession, good friends: I have followed. I have listened. I have responded and begun. I have not followed through. I have not been successful. I may never be—not in the way my respected gurus believe I can and should be.

They would say *everyone* has what it takes, *anyone* can put their principles to work and be a success, *every single person* has the same ability to go as far as they have gone, and if I would just decide I want it and set my goals and start walking, I would find the energy and the drive, and determination would rise up to greet me.

There is a difference between us, however, and it is distinctive. I and the entrepreneurs I admire have a lot of the same qualities, and I understand why some look at me and say, “She’s got it.” But while I know I’ve got something that makes me interesting to people, and I am aware of my gifts and what I bring to life that is unique, I also know what I don’t have:

I don’t have the energy to accomplish what my heroes do. The reality is they have a fire inside that doesn’t burn in my guts like it does in theirs. I can work like a crazed person for long hours at my job because I like doing things excellently, but when I come home, there is often little left with which to push and work on that book, contribute to those blogs, create those videos and prepare those promotional materials so

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necessary to get things going. When dream, I think I desperately want certain things, but I don't have the inner propellant to light and get shot into space with enthusiasm. I can find the igniter and I can hold a match to it, but the honest truth is there is not enough fuel in this tank to get me very far unless it's meant to be.

I don't have the motivation for money. These motivational captains have a driving desire to make money that was either instilled into them at an early age, was modeled throughout their lives, or was born out of a situational need that required they figure out how to put food on the table. Yes, I'd love to make a whole lot of money, but I would often rather just give away what I have inside because that gives me joy. Of course, that leaves money on the table—but it feels really good to be generous, even to my own hurt.

I'm not ambitious. Like the motivation for money, ambition is important to getting to the kind of success we're told is available to anyone if only they will give it their all. I wanted very much to go into the theater when I was young, but the crippling fear of the kind of rejection one has to face in auditions was bigger than I could handle, so I moved aside to do other things. I knew I could be successful—I'm talented—but I was aware of what it was going to take. It just wasn't worth it to me to be bent over with emotional pain nearly every day just to reach a goal. But to some people, it is. God bless them.

I'm not competitive. Some folks are inspired to compete with those who are doing great things, and truly great competitors compete against themselves. This is not something that can be manufactured, planted, grown, or worked up. It is often part of a successful entrepreneur's makeup, probably more than is admitted.

On top of all this, I believe in destiny. I contend that some people are simply meant to do and be what they set out to accomplish and become. They knew they possessed a unique and indefinable quality they kept to themselves because, frankly, a person can make a lot more money telling people Here's-How-to-Get-What-I've-Got-in-10-Easy-Steps-for-only-\$129 than by telling audiences there's a big dose of serendipity in all of this and it's hoped they encounter some.

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Is everybody really capable of being an Oprah Winfrey? A Steve Jobs? A Taylor Swift? A Vera Wang? How many people who are ridiculously, phenomenally successful will admit they didn't plan to be where they are, they had no ambition to do what they're doing; they just stumbled into opportunities and took them and they pinch themselves every day and ask, "How in the world did this happen?" I wrote about this in the second newsletter I published in 2008, "[Stumbling Into the Place](#)," about Mike Rowe, who made no plans to be where he ended up. What about people like him? There are more than we hear about, in every field, who never planned to reach the heights upon which they now sit.

If we listen, lots of people say they stumbled into their destiny. I'm not saying they didn't work hard, but a lot of them didn't work the kind of hard that's implied by those who tell me it's why I'm not a success. In so many life trajectories, a person goes along doing what they do, following an instinct or a simple desire, and finds doors opening to them and opportunities presented without their having to do a thing. Not every star in whatever field you name had a plan, set goals, worked like a dog to reach them and created a 10-year timeline of expectations. Actress Sofia Vergara was planning on dentistry school when she was spotted by a modeling agent. "I don't think I've ever planned a thing I've done," she told a magazine recently. Condoleeza Rice, a highly motivated woman for sure, said sometimes she's asked, "How can I get where you are?" Her answer: "First, you become a failed concert pianist."

I'm done with beating myself up every time I read of someone who's working on their third book (I've had [one published](#) and I'm still pretty proud of it), landed a lucrative client, achieved a goal it seems I should have been able to reach myself . . . if it were what I was supposed to be doing. The truth is I don't have it all together. I'm average in so many ways, and what's wrong with that? I'm still figuring things out. I'm still on a search for what I'm meant to be. I am content with my life, my relationships, my job. I have a rich and remarkable circle of friends, many of whom I've known for greater than four decades. I absolutely adore my husband. I'm blessed beyond measure, and I believe there are many blessings yet to come. I have a confident expectation of good things, and I believe in a good God who provides extravagantly. Isn't that success? Isn't being part of a family or a community and giving what one has to give "success"?

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Isn't waking up every day and participating in the goodness around us "success"? Isn't being happy for others' good fortune "success"? Of course it is.

I'm closing my ears to how I didn't pull the weight, put in the effort, work the program, stay on top of things, manage my time, focus on what's important, decide I wanted to win, make room for more, envision the end goal, push past the pain, knuckle down, buckle down . . . I didn't do it. It's true, and I'm the first to admit it, and I don't care anymore. I like my life, and I do my Exceptionality work for fun. It may become something more later, but right now I can just love, believe, forgive, enjoy, breathe, laugh, and live, and know there will be grace. *

YOUR

Click here listen to interesting people talk about their character strengths!

CHARACTER Is SHOWING

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The next tele-interview on character is a bit of a departure—my subject is not someone in business, but a student. Kate Carroll is a second year student at the University of Hawaii at Hilo, studying for a BS in marine science with a minor in chemistry. While on a family vacation in St. Croix when she was 12, she was introduced to diving and never looked back, having been fascinated with the ocean for as long as she could remember. With unfailing singlemindedness, Kate is creating a life committed to the sea: she's a certified divemaster who makes money training others; she's a part of the Hilo Marine Mammal Response Network (HMMRN), which responds to monk seal haulouts around the big island of Hawaii when the seals beach themselves to rest, raising awareness for their protection; she's far exceeded the normal amount of credits she should have under her belt at this point, and has already been the co-author of a scholarly, peer-reviewed paper.

In addition to this, she loses herself in photography, particularly macro shots under water. Here's how she describes herself: "You could put me on a shallow reef for hours and I would still be finding new stuff and taking pictures until my memory card was full. In the future I want to get a Master's

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from Scripps Oceanographic Institute in California, and then maybe a PhD—maybe not—maybe teach at a university—maybe not. I would like to be a researcher in the field and discover something or do something important that leaves its mark.” Her dedication to pursuing what excites her impressed me deeply, and I wanted to know what motivated her. In contrast to the images we are presented of young men and women who seem to have no other interests than fashion and celebrity, it’s a thrill to hear of such passion. I will speak with Kate about the character strengths that drive her. Join in on the call by signing up at www.YourCharacterIsShowing.com and let her pursuit of her purpose in life inspire and educate you! *

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“I am done with great things and big things, great institutions and big success, and I am for those tiny, invisible molecular moral forces that work from individual to individual, creeping through the crannies of the world like so many rootlets, or like the capillary oozing of water, yet which if you give them time, will rend the hardest monuments of man's pride.”

~ William James

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 presentation 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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