

My name is Mike Rowe, and I'm the creator and executive producer of a TV show on The Discovery Channel called *Dirty Jobs*. *Dirty Jobs* is a show about hard work. It has no plot, no script, and no actors. Its central figure is an untrained apprentice, (me) who travels the country, looking for people who aren't afraid to get dirty. Turns out, the list is longer than I thought.



Recently, I've poured steel in St. Louis, cut timber in Tennessee, and hauled garbage in Chinatown. I've mined for coal in Pennsylvania, and drilled for oil in Louisiana. I've fished for crab on The Bering Sea, and raised maggots in Idaho. I've painted the tops of our highest bridges, and plumbed the depths of our lowest sewers. I've paved highways, resurfaced runways, and helped rebuild a railroad. Now, after five years and 200 apprenticeships, I've come to the undeniable conclusion that people with dirty jobs are holding this country together, and in the process, are having a lot more fun than the rest of us.

As lessons go, it's not the only one I've learned from *Dirty Jobs*, but it's definitely the most relevant, especially today. The traditional notions of Hard Work are under siege. Hollywood gives us one-dimensional stereotypes and American Idols. Madison Avenue tells us every few minutes that happiness and leisure go hand in hand. And Silicon Valley has provided a shiny new toolbox that has no need for shovels or hammers. As manufacturing jobs vanish into thin air, we tell our kids that the toll on the road to prosperity is nothing short of a four-year degree, and now, we've become so accustomed to seeing manual labor portrayed as drudgery, that the sight of people working their butts off while actually enjoying themselves is almost confusing. Unfortunately, in redefining the meaning of a "good job," we've simultaneously marginalized the very occupations that make polite society possible, and the fallout from this nonsense is serious.

Trade school enrollments are chronically down. Our infrastructure is crumbling around us. Welders, carpenters, pipe fitters, plumbers, steamfitters, and concrete workers are all in short supply, in spite of the fact that these occupations are no less critical today than they were fifty years ago. In fact, if rebuilding our infrastructure becomes a true priority, skilled labor will become more important than ever, and our society's collective attitude toward dirty work will simply have to change.

On Labor Day, September 1, 2008, [www.mikeroweWORKS.com](http://www.mikeroweWORKS.com) was launched along with a video introduction where I described what I had in mind. Like *Dirty Jobs*, its purpose is to make a fun, but deliberate, case for skilled labor, and challenge the notion that a four-year degree is the only path to a worthwhile career. The site is taking shape quickly, transparently, and with great promise. At the end of October, we put up a public forum and a call for help. Thanks mostly to the hard work of dedicated *Dirty Jobs* fans and others who've otherwise heard about the site, the forum has taken shape with literally thousands of links to trade resources, scholarships, apprenticeships, fellowships, and vocational schools (and more) that will benefit anyone wanting to explore a career in the construction or technical trades. We are now in the process of launching a revised site that will contain a real, functioning, informative and interactive resource center for people in, or looking to explore, the trades.

In a modest way, *Dirty Jobs* has reminded people of a time when Hard Work was not seen as a thing to avoid - when craftsmanship was lauded, and Master Tradesmen were seen a role models. In a bigger way, mikeroweWORKS will function as a PR Campaign for Hard Work and Skilled Labor - a deliberate attempt to make sure the jobs we *need*, are jobs that people actually *desire*.

Like the infrastructure, mikeroweWORKS is under construction, and always will be. Come by and check us out. And if you have something to contribute or suggest, please let us know either by posting in the forum or emailing us at [info@mikeroweworks.com](mailto:info@mikeroweworks.com). I hope to see you around and help us get America back to work. You have my thanks.

Mike Rowe  
[www.mikeroweWORKS.com](http://www.mikeroweWORKS.com)