
EDITOR'S PAGE

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GET UP, DRESS UP, SHOW UP

Sage Advice from the Saxophone Colossus

In the spring of 2024, *New York Review of Books* published *The Notebooks of Sonny Rollins*. Edited by Sam V.H. Reese, this short volume — fewer than 200 pages in total — pulls together some of the great saxophonist's thoughts on music theory, philosophy, physical wellness, spirituality, and a thirst for betterment. Anyone looking for the life story about this revered jazz figure won't find it in there; they'd be served in that pursuit by Aidan Levy's incredibly thorough biography, *Saxophone Colossus: The Life and Music of Sonny Rollins*. But those wondering about his wonderings would do well to check out the notebook entries.

As a serious Rollins admirer, I picked up a copy, took my time with each line and page that Reese assembled, and was treated to many pearls of wisdom. "The motive for doing a thing is inevitably and ultimately ABOVE that thing" is one gem that I quickly came to appreciate. The Will Rogers-borrowed "Never miss a good chance to shut up" is another. And, "What other people think of you is none of your business" is a third. But the one that *really* hit me is the very last statement in the book: "No matter how you feel, get up, dress up, and show up." The profundity packed into those 12 words can't be overstated.

Another wise man — Leonardo Da Vinci — once noted that "Success lies in the relentless execution of the basics." And it doesn't get any more basic than getting up, dressing up and showing up. But as we know, surface expectations run deceptively deep.

Get up

Is there really much to discuss here? You set an objective — a target, the alarm to hit it — and it's based on the perceived needs for the following day. Nothing could be easier. But psychology, emotion, exhaustion, apathy, anxiety, and any number of other factors tend to get in the way for some people. An individual's ability to open their eyes becomes an eye-opening window into their motivation or its absence.

Having directed zero period middle

school ensembles for more than a quarter of a century now, there's little I haven't seen or heard with regard to getting up. There are those who, as a matter of routine, dedication and steadiness, are always prompt and present; another group can be relied on to be late or absent; and a third, just as inconsistent though somewhat more invested, vacillates between those two camps.

Adults, likewise, run the gamut. And, if I might offer a piece of advice to those who struggle with the day's first task, pupil or professional, it's to wake with purpose and reason, and just address the first step. The hardest part of getting up is throwing off the covers, planting your feet on the floor and starting to move. Once you accomplish those micro goals, the entrance to your day takes care of itself.

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Dress up

I'm probably not the best person in the world to speak on sartorial splendor. I've never been a dedicated follower of fashion and I prefer pragmatism and comfort over dressing to the nines. However, I plainly recognize the value in dressing up, how it influences my own actions, and what it says about me to other people. You should, too.

Do you have a big interview on the horizon? Dress for that job you want. When you have that first marching band performance of the season on your schedule, make sure the uniforms have been cleaned. If the school concerts are coming up, be certain to convey to your students the importance of presenting themselves not only in sound, but also in image.

Beyond addressing specific situational dress codes and norms, it's important to

realize that dressing up of any sort, right after getting up, alters the flow of your actions. It puts you in a more productive mental state that you just won't encounter while living in pajama purgatory.

Show up

This is the key to *everything* in life. Both literal and figurative meanings are embedded in this idea(l), and each carries extreme importance. When a student skips a band rehearsal without legitimate reason, I often remind them that you can't be *in* band if you're not *at* band. Students need to show up. And so do we, regardless of emotion.

If you had an amazing day and you know the next one will feel like a letdown by comparison, come back anyway. When you've had a rough experience and you crawl away from the job bruised and defeated, brush it off as best you can and return on the road to healing. Yes, take care of your mental health and protect your peace. But also, try not to throw in the towel. Show up, continue and take care of business.

This concept of showing up, of course, isn't limited to physical presence and attendance. When somebody needs you — a student, colleague, friend, spouse, parent, etc. — help them from wherever you may be. Showing up isn't just about being somewhere. It's about being *something*. It's your character and your calling card and your very being all wrapped into one. I believe we all want to be reliable, responsible, upright and caring. And so much of making that a reality is built into those two words: show up.

Closing up

Rollins — the Saxophone Colossus, who passed away at the age of 95 in May of this year — certainly knew a thing or two about the importance of those three pillars. And as a longtime fan who shares his birthday and (astro)logical traits, I deeply feel his point. I'm guessing you do, too, so please feel free to join me. Get up, dress up, and show up. ||