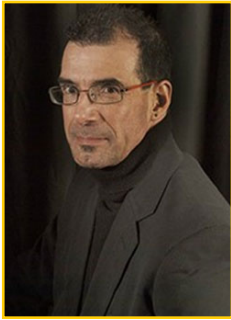


SALES STAR


Tom Ingrassia: Proof That It's Never Too Late to Succeed

[By Akbar Ali]

Tom Ingrassia is a man of many talents; he's a motivational speaker, a journalist, a life coach, an academic, a biographer, and, above all, a big-time dreamer. As he proudly proclaims, "I guess you could say that I am living, breathing proof that dreams *do* come true!"

Ingrassia began his career as a motivational speaker at a time of national crisis. Just days before 9/11 and at the age of 48, he walked away from a highly successful and notable career in higher education administration that he had been building for 25 years. He had decided to pursue his lifelong dream of working in the entertainment industry, a dream he had held onto since he was 11 years old. He first fell in love with show business while watching The Supremes on *The Ed Sullivan Show* and has never looked back since.

Presently he runs a successful artist management agency, serving as a representative for a wide variety of artists, among them classical musicians, jazz groups, a percussionist, an actress, and members of the popular 1960s band Girl Groups. He has also recently completed work on an autobiography of The Crystals' Barbara Alston, *There's No Other*, which is set to be released later this year. In addition, he served as editor for the autobiography of The Coasters' Carl Gardner, which is available now.

As an in-demand motivational speaker, Ingrassia is able to travel across the country and motivate listeners, as he does with a workshop called "Making a Difference Begins with You...So Live into Your Dreams." He

also makes the rounds with a pop-culture lecture program focusing on the relationship

between music and the Civil Rights Movement of the 60s.

Ingrassia's path to his present career has been a long and unconventional one, starting as it did with a degree in history. He had always wanted to pursue a career in entertainment, but it never seemed practical.

"'Normal' people don't leave the safety and stability of a 'normal' life for show business, do they?" he asked.

After graduating from the State University of New York at Geneseo, Ingrassia moved on to the University of Connecticut, where he earned a master's degree in history. At that point, he did what most would do: got married, bought a house, and worked for 25 years in a secure job in higher education administration. Over the years he was promoted until he finally landed the position of assistant dean at the Graduate School of Management at Clark University in Worcester, Massachusetts. Still, he longed for a career in entertainment.

Opportunity came knocking in 1972 when he interviewed The Supremes' Mary Wilson for a magazine article. Over the next 30 years they maintained a friendship, with Wilson frequently asking for Ingrassia's assistance with various projects, including helping her

Q. What do you do for fun?

A. I *love* to travel. I just returned from three weeks in Sweden and Denmark. I also love to garden—digging your hands into the warm soil and eating fresh, warm tomatoes right off the vine is so therapeutic!

Q. What CD is in your CD player right now?

A. 60s Motown, of course! It's got a great beat, and you can dance to it!

Q. What is the last magazine you read?

A. *Billboard*—I devoured it cover to cover while I ate lunch today.

Q. What is your favorite TV show?

A. *Ugly Betty*—so funny but also so real in many ways. Oh, okay, I guess I'll admit it—*American Idol*, too!

Q. Who is your role model?

A. Oh, I have so many. But I think my one true hero is Nelson Mandela, who has taught an indelible lesson in how *not* to hate.

Q. What makes you laugh?

A. The fact that I am living my dream. Even in my wildest dreams, I never imagined I'd have what I do today.

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secure speaking engagements on college campuses. In 2001, he became her full-time assistant and took over managing her merchandising business, assuming the title of Creative Director of Mary Wilson's Supreme Legacy®.

Over time Ingrassia came into contact with more celebrities, expanding his client roster and ultimately leaving Supreme Legacy in 2004 to start two of his own companies: Ingrassia Artist Management and Tom Ingrassia Productions. It wasn't long before he realized that his past experiences had equipped him with the necessary skills to survive in the competitive entertainment business: management, organization, marketing, communication, and negotiation.

During his career as an administrator, Ingrassia had worked for a large number of colleges in New England and the Midwest, including West Virginia Northern Community College, Urbana College (Ohio), Assumption College and Clark University (Worcester, MA), and Regis College (Weston, MA). Additionally, he worked for a while for the training department of the State Mutual Companies (Worcester, MA).

In spite of the very varied professional experiences Ingrassia has had over the years, he said his greatest achievement so far has been finding the courage to create the life he always wanted for himself: "I am

immensely proud of the fact that at the age of 48 I *finally* found the courage to take the risk and pursue my passion. I didn't want to look back 20 years from now and say, 'What if?'"

Ingrassia has also developed a traveling museum exhibition of 60s music memorabilia which accompanies his pop-culture lecture program. In March of this year, it debuted at the Lockhart Gallery of his alma mater, the State University of New York at Geneseo.

In 2002, Ingrassia worked with Mary Wilson and the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame and Museum on the ceremony commemorating the debut of a set of postage stamps featuring 12 of the legendary girl groups of the 1960s. He was also involved in the "jam session" that followed, handling all travel, hotel accommodations, food, and local transportation for 33 of the original members of the musical groups.

"It was the first time all 33 of these women had been on the same stage at the same time-and for many, it was the first time they had seen each other in decades! I truly felt like I had a hand in creating music history," he recalled.

In terms of those who have influenced his career, he singled out Mary Wilson as having had the greatest impact.

"She is the one who had faith in me and who gave me my start," he said.

Of course, he also credits his wife, Barbara, for her support ("I couldn't do what I am doing now without her total support-plus, she maintains the health insurance!") as well as one of his classical artists, Scott Lamlein, who has opened up a new world of music to Ingrassia.

To those impressed by Ingrassia's success and hoping to experience some of their own, he revealed his personal motto: "Learn from the turtle-it only makes progress when it sticks its neck out." He also emphasized, "To achieve what you truly want in life, you have to be willing to take risks. Take the opportunities that are presented to you-even if they don't seem perfect at the time-and make them your own! You can only regret the chances you *don't* take!"

ON THE NET

Tom Ingrassia Productions
www.ingrassiaproductions.com

Mary Wilson
www.marywilson.com/v1

State University of New York at Geneseo
www.geneseo.edu

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