

BETA AUTHOR BOOST

Nov. 15, 2012

Homework: 7 Action Steps to Jumpstart Your Book

Writing a book is a BHAG (Big Hairy Audacious Goal), to borrow from Jim Collins. But it can be broken down into doable action steps. **Make it doable** is one of my favorite phrases. I will say it a number of times. Here are seven steps you can start with:

- ▶ **List your goals for writing a book [exercise]**
- ▶ **Explain your book idea in 2 sentences [exercise]**
- ▶ **Explore organizing principles for your book [exercise]**
- ▶ **Procrastinate productively [exercise]**
- ▶ **Take stock of your existing content [exercise]**
- ▶ **Block off chunks of time on your calendar [exercise]**
- ▶ **Sit the hell down and write [exercise]**

I. List your goals for writing a short book

While writing a book in and of itself is a wonderful thing (and may be on your bucket list), a business book is a *tool* - a means to an end. A book is part of a *bigger toolkit* that will help you take your business in a new direction, or expand your expertise (your personal brand) if you're working in a corporate setting.

Ask yourself: *What will be the measure of my success?* It's *your* measure, not someone else's. What are your goals? What ROI are you looking for?

- ▶ Do you want to attract X number of new clients?
- ▶ Do you want to start a consulting practice?
- ▶ Do you want to double your speaking fee?
- ▶ Do you want to give workshops or training based on your book?



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- ▶ Do you want to cross writing and publishing a book off *your bucket list*?
- ▶ Do you want to make the world a better place?
- ▶ Do you want to make boatloads of money? (Hint: probably not the right answer)

EXERCISE My goals for writing a short book are:

2. Explain your book idea in two sentences

EXERCISE Jot down a very rough outline of your book idea. This can be a scribbled list of ideas on a piece of paper or a formal outline in a Word doc.

Note: you will use this as the starting point for Mark Levy's List-Making exercise.

Now step back. If you had to describe your book idea in one or two sentences, what would you say? *What value are you offering your reader?* How can you be of service to your reader? Why is it important for you to get your message out into the world?



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3. What organizing principle could you use for your book?

EXERCISE Seth Godin <http://www.sethgodin.com> is fond of saying that it doesn't matter what format your content is in: it could be a book, a speech, a powerpoint presentation, a video. *The point is to spread your ideas and to help people think differently about work and life.* That said, you have to give readers a way to take in and easily digest what you want to tell them.

That's where the *organizing principle* comes in. Gretchen Rubin uses a month by month calendar in her best-selling *The Happiness Project* <http://www.happiness-project.com>. A number of business authors lay out a principle or concept and then explain the *10 Steps* it takes to master this new way of thinking or doing. Another format is the business novella, where the message is revealed through a narrative with characters. *Built to Sell* by John Warrillow <http://www.builttosell.com> is my favorite example. Jot down one or two organizing principles that you are considering for your book.



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4. Procrastinate productively

EXERCISE Stack up all the business books you have in your office or at home. Flip through them. Pay special attention to the TOC (table of contents) to see if you can figure out what the *organizing principle* is.

How does the author structure the book? How does she/he deliver the "promise" that is suggested in the title of the book? Is there a logical progression, a series of 10 steps that build to a culmination? Or are there many equally-weighted sub-topics that address the "promise" of the book?

Go to the bookstore and do the same thing in the business book section. And of course, go on Amazon or another online retailer and browse through business and nonfiction titles. If you have a Kindle, you can download lots of free samples. Often the TOC is included in the sample.

✓ *Yes, I procrastinated by looking at the TOC of other business & nonfiction books*



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5. Take stock of your existing content

EXERCISE What do you have on hand that you could draw from? A Powerpoint presentation? Blog posts? A speech? Notes for a speech? A white paper? Scribbled notes? A journal?

These materials are valuable. Make a quick list below. Then dump them into one file on your hard drive. Better yet, put them in a folder in Dropbox <http://www.dropbox.com>

Best option: use Evernote <http://evernote.com/> to scoop up and keep track of everything you have in hand - or run across - that relates to your book idea. Evernote can be used - and synced across - your computer, mobile device and iPad.

Evernote Essentials: the Definitive Getting Started Guide <http://nerdgap.com/landing/evernote-essentials/> (\$29 download)

How to use Evernote for collecting, brainstorming and organizing: <http://blog.evernote.com/2012/10/31/how-to-use-evernote-for-nanowrimo-an-evernote-employee-shares-his-tips/>



6. Block off specific blocks of time on your calendar for your book

EXERCISE Author, publisher, speaker and prolific blogger Michael Hyatt <http://michaelhyatt.com/> calls it practicing Calendar Triage. The only way you will get your book organized and written is to schedule it into your calendar in blocks of one to three hours.

Be ruthless. Make it non-negotiable.

I recommend blocking off a minimum of 6 - 8 hours a week to start. That means one to two hours a day during the workweek. Are you a morning person? Make it 6:30 - 8:00 AM or earlier. Can you find a chunk of time during the day? Can you work on your book in the evening?

Consider using Internet blocking software to turn off your online access during your book time. I recommend Freedom (works on both Mac and PC): <http://macfreedom.com/>

Have a brutally honest conversation with yourself. We'll revisit it during your first I-to-I session.

✓ *Yes, I had a brutally honest convo with myself and blocked off time in my calendar*

7. Sit the hell down and write

Yes, you knew that. But there is a way to make this part of your daily routine, no matter how busy or stressed you are.

EXERCISE Freewrite for 15 - 20 minutes every day



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If sitting down to write is paralyzing or scary and you have trouble getting your *inner editor* (what Seth Godin calls your Lizard Brain) to shut up, then start by freewriting for 15 to 20 minutes. Get a kitchen timer and set it. I do this a lot. My inner editor is very loud and bossy.

Mark Levy's book, *Accidental Genius* [link below] devotes Part I to *The Six Secrets to Freewriting*. Read it, savor it, do it. I recommend buying the paperback so you can make notes in it.

The best part of freewriting is that you can't fail. No matter what you write, it counts. You don't have to be officially writing your book. Just put your fingers to the keyboard (or pen to paper) and type / write for 15-20 minutes straight.

Start by using freewriting as a way to generate your thoughts on what your book is about (Exercise 2 above).

Freewriting resources

Accidental Genius: Using Writing to Generate Your Best Ideas, Insight and Content by Mark Levy (specifically written for business people):

<http://www.amazon.com/Accidental-Genius-Writing-Generate-Insight/dp/1605095257/>

The Artist's Way by Julia Cameron (a little more touchy-feely but a great book):

<http://www.amazon.com/The-Artists-Way-Creativity-Anniversary/dp/1585421464/>

✓ *Yes, I am adding 20 minutes of freewriting to my daily schedule*

