



## Interview with author Pamela Slim on writing her second book: a kitchen-sink first draft, yellow pads and how the book relates to her business

**Debbie:** Hello, everyone. This is Debbie Weil with Voxie Media and *Beta Author Boost*. Our guest today is award-winning and best-selling author Pam Slim. Pam is the author of a wonderful book called *Escape from Cubical Nation: From Corporate Prisoner to Thriving Entrepreneur* – I love that title – published by Penguin Portfolio.

It is a marvelous book. It's both solid and also highly engaging. It's fun to read, and it tells you how to go from crazy dreams to viable business ideas, ideas that align with your passion. Pam is also a business coach and a professional speaker who helps people navigate the new world of work, and I want to say she's so much more because she does a lot of stuff.

She's also a long-time blogger. The book is actually named after her blog, *Escape from Cubical Nation*. It's one of the top career and marketing blogs. Full disclosure: She's also a mentor and a friend. Pam is currently writing her second book. I don't know if this is a final title, but it's called *Body of Work*, and it will be published in the fall of 2013, also by Penguin Portfolio.

Welcome, Pam.

**Pam:** Thanks for having me, Debbie. I am totally delighted to be here.

**Debbie:** This is so fun and I think so interesting to get a glimpse into your writing process as you are, as I understand it, writing your second book now for the next couple of months. Is that right?



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**Pam:** I am. You're right. You're right in that it's a working title right now. The working title we used for the proposal stage is *Body of Work*, but I think we're going to come up with something a bit more zingy and descriptive. Certainly the core idea from the book is *Body of Work*, but choosing a title is one of those fun, occasionally excruciating things, which I'm sure you also talk about with your Beta Authors. The right title makes a big difference to a book.

**Debbie:** Absolutely we do. It's hard to explain how it takes time in a way to keep thinking of ideas, and then have one finally say, "Ooh, that's the right one." Talk for a minute about – I'm going to call it *Body of Work*. I actually like that title, *Body of Work* – and how it relates to everything you're doing in your business. When did you realize that *Body of Work* was the topic of your next book?

**Pam:** It's a good question. I find that I have an integrated approach to how it is that I view my life and my work, the work that I do with clients, the writing that I do in some cases to be attracting new clients. For me, it's personally because I have always had a deep passion about the work that I was doing.

You know this, Debbie, but for those who I haven't met before, I've been self-employed for 16 years. The last real job that I had was at Barclay's Global Investors in San Francisco as the director of training and development.

I quit that job and started consulting and working inside companies for about 10 years on the human side of business, so doing executive development, change management, teaching people how to manage employees, doing employee communication, and anything that related to the human side of business.

I worked in all kinds of different companies. I started in high-tech because I was based in the Bay area, worked a lot in Silicon Valley and places like Hewlett-Packard and Cisco, and then expanded into a lot of different kinds of companies. It was really an adventure. It was a process of research – even though, at that time, I didn't realize that it was research – of getting exposure to so many different work environments and seeing on the inside.

Because I was working on the human side of business, I often got the behind-the-scenes story of sometimes places that were written up in the press as being the best places to work, or that maybe everybody thought everything was great



if you worked at a certain company, but then when I got inside, I realized that it was a much more complex situation that was happening there. Sometimes things were better than was being projected, and sometimes things were a lot worse.

That experience of doing consulting is what led me to want to begin to work with people who were interested in leaving to start a business. Because I did work for myself, when I would be doing meetings or engagements, often there were a small percentage of people who would pull me aside and ask me about how it is that I did it, how I went from a corporate job into entrepreneurship.

That seed planted the idea of at first starting my blog, *Escape from Cubical Nation*, in which I could be sharing ideas and information and perspective based on the work that I had done working in corporations. One of the things that I think help me to do the work that I do and help the articles on the blog is because I did understand so deeply what the real situation was for people that were employees.

I love to have a huge variety of different perspectives on writing for many different people. Sometimes I found personally that somebody who had been a serial entrepreneur, who had never had a corporate job, maybe whose parents came from an entrepreneurial background, couldn't understand deeply what kind of shift it was for people that were looking to leave the corporate environment.

That whole piece of my *Body of Work* that has been related to *Escape from Cubical Nation* was addressing the needs and the interests while I was working. It leads to the next book and where I am now.

Now, after having worked with entrepreneurs for the last seven years in a very hands-on way of working with individuals, teaching classes, and writing about this whole entrepreneurial environment, I notice that there was a split in the way that we viewed the world and, in some ways, that which we would criticize in corporate life for things being so black and white or for feeling like what I described as mafia culture, where you either work for the company or you're totally ejected.



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That same kind of mentality can seep into entrepreneurial life, where people would think the only way to work was working for yourself and the only way to be free was working for yourself. Well, work with a few thousand people who are doing the real journey of entrepreneurship. You know this, Debbie. It is not always a trip to the ballet. It is hard. It is really challenging, personally, emotionally, intellectually, in all ways.

I don't think, in this new world of work, that everybody working for themselves is the solution to everything. What I think what we need is a framework and an understanding about first, what is this new world of work? What opportunities do we have today that we didn't have before?

A lot, I think, with the rise of the Internet and flexibility in working options, people doing things on the side, people teaching virtually and working virtually. But also the reality that we know, which is that things are simply, I think, always going to be less stable than they have been in the past. No job is guaranteed in any kind of work configuration.

Given that, I'm exploring in my book what are the specific skills and competencies that people need to have in order to thrive in this new world of work. What I'm seeing a lot with clients is that some people might choose to be in an entrepreneurial situation for a while and run their own business. Then they might want to go back and join a company, or they might want to start a nonprofit, or go back to school and end up working for a university.

People will be moving between different environments. My intention for the book is to provide the kind of tools and motivation so that they can do that really successfully, and maybe to bridge some of this gap that we have between the extreme thinking of "corporate is bad" and "entrepreneurship is good." The light and the dark side of the force.

I think our world of work is a lot more complex than that, and that kind of thinking is going to jeopardize more people than it helps.

**Debbie:** I love how you explained that. Now I understand much more what the core of your new book is. Let me ask you this, because I know that those listening may be wondering. It seems like you already have a very, very full plate. You're



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coaching, speaking, and teaching courses. How does writing another book fit into your overall business strategy?

Writing a book is hugely time-consuming. It's very challenging. What do you expect the ROI to be for your book? Do you try to quantify it in advance, or is it that you have this burning desire to write another book? I'm figuring you've thought about this in a methodical way.

**Pam:** I have thought about it in a methodical way. I look at my work within the context of the definition of "body of work," which is the other central idea of the book. I think the purpose of our life is to create a body of work that we're proud of throughout the course of our life.

As you're thinking about your last day, hopefully many years from now, when you're looking back over what it is that you've done, what are the very specific things that you have created throughout the course of your life? They can be concrete things like books or products or software code or maybe you built an organization.

It's also about the quality of relationships that you've developed. Maybe you've been a very engaged community member. You've been an engaged parent or grandparent. Everything about the way that you interact with the world, everything that you create, everything that you impact with your life is related to your body of work. It's not just work-related. It also has to do with what people do on the volunteer side or on the personal side.

From that perspective, through the work that I do, I'm fascinated by working with people. When I see repeated questions and concerns that people have about an area, or I watch the news and I read what people are saying about the new economic environment and hear that a lot of people are stressed out, I sometimes find myself yelling at the television.

"You don't get it. It's not all bad. Let's not keep telling the new graduates that everything is horrible and it's a terrible time to graduate. It's not a terrible time to graduate. It's a great time." As I'm shaking my fist and wanting to get these ideas out there, part of what I like to do is to encapsulate the ideas in something like a book.



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The neat thing about a book is that it is a very concrete piece of history and piece of legacy. I may be old-school about this, but as much as I love everything about the new ways of publishing and think that in certain cases self-publishing can be a fantastic way of getting your work out there, there's something about, for me personally, being connected to a traditional New York publisher that still makes me happy and has some meaning.

Knowing that my book is going to be sitting with other really amazing books that have been created. That makes me feel good thinking about that. My publisher portfolio is headed up by Adrian Zackheim, who is the one who edited Jim Collins' book *Good to Great*.

I remember when I was first researching publishers, I got so excited about that, because that book had an impact in my life in so many ways, both hearing Jim speak personally – which I will never forget. That happened here in Phoenix right before that book came out. – and also exploring the ideas in the book, which had an impact on me in terms of how I do my work.

There have been other books like that. Martha Beck's book *Finding Your Own North Star* was another one that impacted my desire to become a coach and to have a framework in which I could work with people. There's something for me personally that's a very personal connection with wanting to create something that does have a legacy that can help a lot of people out there.

I am miserable without a deadline. Forget about it. I won't get it done unless there's somebody breathing down my neck and saying, "This needs to happen." Maybe besides watching episodes of *Law and Order* or hanging out on Facebook. I tend to do that really well, but anything else, I need to have a concrete deadline.

What it does in the context of my bigger business perspective is that *when I write a book, the book is the framework and the anchor for all this next piece of the body of work that I will be doing*. I'm writing about very concrete things, like some of these skills that people need for the new world of work.



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One example: I just wrote a blog post today, which is related to a theme in the book, which is about the two stories that you tell. What stories you tell yourself about your capability to move forward and achieve your goals, and what story do you specifically tell people who you're trying to influence, customers who you're trying to get, jobs you're trying to get, et cetera.

As I think about some of those elements in the book, those most likely are going to turn into keynote talks. They're going to turn into workshops. It's really easy and effective and a great business decision to make to have a book to be anchoring these activities. Whether we like it or not, people think you're a little bit more credible and smarter when you write a book.

It's actually not true. There are really, really smart people who have never written a book, but it's one of those things that, for whatever reason, we all collectively tend to believe. Because that's the case, why not ride with that? When I have done the analysis about why I would write a book, I am much less concerned about getting a huge advance.

It was fine, reasonable and good, a good advance that I got from my publisher. I wasn't looking to squeeze every last cent of it. I'm not concerned. Some people would say, "But you don't make as much money for a book as if you were to do it from a self-publishing perspective."

I look at it more from the keynote speaking perspective, where having a top New York business publisher means a lot to people who might be hiring me to speak, much more than the amount of money that I might make from getting a higher percentage per book on book sales.

I see it very personally as wanting to contribute something to the world that's going to be useful and helpful, I'm hoping, to many people for many years to come. A book can reach many, many people that I can't through the phone or through my website. I have proof of that from having written the first book, where I still to this day, even though it came out in 2009, get messages from people all over the world describing how helpful it was.

That makes me feel good, but from a very pragmatic business perspective, it will be something that I can easily use to leverage to create workshops, to create



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keynote talks, and to be using the tools with new clients that I may be working with.

**Debbie:** I couldn't agree with you more about the boost you get from a New York publisher. Interestingly, I had the same publisher, Penguin Portfolio, for my book, *The Corporate Blogging Book*. There is something very special about that. My intention with Voxie Media is to present this *not* as an *either-or*, but as a both-and when it comes to traditional vs. self-publishing.

For people who are lesser known, it's very difficult to get the book contract, so doing something short, getting it out there – short but terrific – is a crucial first step. Like you say, there are many steps, and they all relate to each other. I appreciate you saying that, because I think it's in the back of everyone's head. It's not that self-publishing means you should never ever go with a New York publisher. I would never be the one to say that.

Let me ask you. This is something we spent some time on in the *Beta Author* program. How long does what I call the idea stage for a book take? That is the coming up with the unique idea and the angle versus the actual writing. We're trying to compress a whole big thing into eight weeks here.

I stress that figuring out what the idea is is important. Even though you feel like you want to get right to the writing, maybe stop and let's dig deeper to figure out what's unique and compelling about your idea. *Can you talk a little bit about the idea versus the writing?*

**Pam:** Definitely. I wanted to address one quick thing about the last comment that you made. I could not agree more about a huge, important step being creating something from start to finish. That can be a smaller piece of work. It's one of the very best ways that you can become familiar with the process and that you can begin to build more of a platform and fans and everything else that you're going to need if you choose to go the traditional published route.

It's definitely not the only way to go. There are so many reasons why having something that is a clear, well produced book is going to help you. I want to underline that. It is an *and*. It's not an *either-or*. One of the things that's typical for traditional publishing today is the expectation on the author that you will



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probably do 99% of the marketing yourself. That is the reality, even in the big publishers. That's why you need to have that marketing engine behind you. This is going to be a big step to do a smaller book.

**Debbie:** I didn't say that specifically, but the marketing piece – the ability to market your book through an author platform – that's what gets you the contract with New York, or not.

**Pam:** Exactly. It's getting your work out there and seeing how it happens. I will give the typical consulting answer, which is it depends. It really depends on what the idea for your book is. There are some people who have been doing work for a long time. Maybe they have a core process that they want to get out there, or they've been ruminating on the story for a long time. It's just a matter of getting it down on paper and making it clear, and then they can be off to the races to do it.

For other people: I was on Twitter today, and I sent a message to Nancy Duarte, who is one of my heroes. I love her. She's written a number of books, including *Slide:ology* and *Resonate*. She's an amazing author and designs a lot of presentations per her agency in Silicon Valley.

We were having dinner. She's working on her book. She said that she had basically downloaded the entire Internet and was reviewing it for patterns for her new book, because she was doing this intense analysis about business today, archetypes of leaders, and all of these amazing things. In the case where you're doing a book like Nancy, which is based on huge resource and you don't even know the ideas that you're going for until you start to dig into it, that process can take years. Some people do spend years looking at that.

A lot of it depends on the objective for why you're writing something and maybe a book that you do feel like you have in you, which might be more relevant for your Beta Authors. This is a great place to start. It makes sense. You can leverage the knowledge that you currently have in order to get something of great quality out the door.

From that perspective, length does make a big difference. I've had two experiences for the two books. The first book, I had initially put together a general outline with an initial agent that I worked with, and floated it by a couple



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publishers. It fell flat. I wasn't feeling it. I knew that I wanted to write a book, but I had halfheartedly written the ideas, and it didn't work.

We spent the next year stepping away from it. I kept writing on the blog. It was after that period of time that Portfolio approached me about doing the book. That's where the ideas were more crystallized, and I think it's because I had been consciously tracking what was that process that I was using with clients, so that I could be including those in the book. If you take that total process, it was probably over a year that I was working on the ideas, but some of that was just percolating and doing the experiential work.

In the case of the latest book, when I began to feel that I wanted to work on it and I got excited about this idea, *Body of Work*, it was a little bit longer for the process of getting the proposal together. For the first one, I met my agent, and I took about three weeks to put the proposal together. It just worked. We turned it in on a Friday, and we signed the deal on Tuesday, which is very unusual. In this case, the publisher had approached me because they had already been following my blog and were more confident in my writing.

With this latest book, my agent and I went through, I think, six different iterations where I sent her the first draft, she gave me feedback and sent it back, I sent it back to her. There was a lot more back-and-forth, because a lot of this idea set is a new one. I haven't been writing about these things everyday. I haven't been coaching thousands of people for seven years on these topics. She helped me to clarify and hone it.

We also sent it to the editor of my first book, who is involved with me in the process, and she gave some feedback. I had a meeting with the team from Portfolio where we reviewed. They gave some feedback. The process took a little bit longer, maybe three months of going back and forth.

**Debbie:** You said something about a draft, but are you talking about your book proposal? That's what I was going to ask you.

**Pam:** The book proposal, yeah. This is the proposal. That's how I choose to do it. I know some people like to write the whole book before they approach the publisher. I don't. It's much easier for me to be sharing the idea for the book,



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because when the publisher sometimes has a specific view about what would be a useful angle to take, or maybe there is another book that I'm not even aware of that's coming out in the market that would be a direct competitor where there's no new ideas.

For anybody down the road thinking about the traditional publishing route, I think that can be a really effective thing. Usually for a first book, they might require that you write a couple of the first chapters as sample chapters. In this case, because it was a second book, I didn't need to do that.

It did take a while to do it, and we've had about six months or so to have a little bit of flexibility in the timing. Most likely, it's going to take seven months as I'm getting into it. I think it may take a little bit more time, but what we're aiming is to be able to have it ready for release in the fall of next year.

My writing process, I know you asked that before, about how it is that I might fit it into everything else that's going on. I wish I could change this about myself. I'm 46 years old, and I would think by now that I would have this perfectly stretched out process where I did a little writing every day, but it never seems to happen that way.

What I notice is that I work in batches. When I have a lot of things going on on the business side, which I have this fall, then it's easier sometimes –

**Debbie:** Pam, are you there?

**Pam:** Yeah, I'm here. Sorry. My headset died.

**Debbie:** I thought it was me. You're still there?

**Pam:** Yeah, I'm still here. It's more having a dedicated process where I know that, as I get toward the book deadline, I'm more or less going to be writing full-time. That's where I'm making sure that my other business activities are going to be okay with that, so that I don't have so much stuff going on during the times where I'm doing intensive writing.



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I love to write. The process of writing a full-length book is very grueling. There's parts of it that are not fun that I'm not looking forward to, but the joy of having written a book is so great that I know it's worth it.

**Debbie:** I would agree with you there. It's funny. I've been thinking about having a mini book proposal process be part of the writing program that I do with up and coming business authors. Even if they're expected to self-publish, you cover a lot of ground in a book proposal, from the why of the book to who the audience is, how you're going to market it, possibly how you're going to organize it.

It's really useful. I know, and this time I remember, that it seems like you worked a lot on the book proposal. You worked for quite a long time on that.

**Pam:** I think the book proposal process is a fantastic one for the reasons that you discussed. Sometimes, as authors, we get wed to our ideas, and sometimes a bit blind to other components. Is anybody else going to like our idea? How is it positioned competitively in the market? How are we going to get the word out?

It's similar to taking the time to do a business plan where, when you do that thinking, even though it can take a little bit of extra time upfront, it can make the entire process moving forward so much easier. I do believe in having a clear idea and basing a great book on the merit of the ideas themselves. That's important. You want to make sure that you have a very high quality book.

However, when you are a business owner and you're using a book as part of what you do in your business, you also do want to think about what are the components in there that are related to things that you might be doing on the business sense.

I think about **Dan Pink**, who is another person who I admire so much, who's so bright. I notice when he's doing his decision-making about books. He's such a fantastic writer. He always has such an interesting perspective. He also chooses topics that are going to have a very broad appeal. Looking at something like *Drive*, which is all about motivation, that's a core element that affects everybody within every kind of company.



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It's a really smart kind of idea to be sharing about. His latest book that's coming out right at the end of this year is about selling and a whole new way to look at selling. It is important to be thinking about how the book is going to be used, and part of that is what it is that you're analyzing in your book proposal.

When you think about it, there's certain advantages that you can use when you're doing the book marketing, like if you know that you have certain kinds of business engagements. Remember, Debbie, you were telling me that one of your authors had written a book that had to do with insurance. Is that right? That particular approach that he had to insurance?

**Debbie:** Yes, that's right.

**Pam:** When you think about that and you think, wow, what if he's going and he's speaking at a whole number of conferences that are related to insurance? Maybe there's partners that could work with him that would buy a huge volume of books in order to give to their clients. Gifting: Having companies buy books that they give to their clients or customers or their employees is often a really good way to move a big quantity of books.

All of these things end up being part of what you think about when you're doing your marketing plan. If it can influence in a positive way without corrupting the beauty and purity of your ideas, but influence making good choices about what's in your book, so that you can have a better chance of selling it down the road. I think that's a really good thing to have.

**Debbie:** Also, I think you said that both selling the book and also, in a sense, extracting from the book the business activities you want to engage in going forward, whether it's workshops or speeches. Of course, Dan Pink's books lend themselves perfectly to speaking to all different kinds of organizations. Thank you for saying that. It's so important.

**Pam:** It's not by accident.

**Debbie:** Oh, no.



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**Pam:** I think that's the other thing. He consciously thinks about that, which is one of the many reasons why I like him.

**Debbie:** I know Dan. He lives here in DC. I was talking with him on the phone very briefly probably a year ago. I said, "What are you up to?" He said, "I'm working on my next book," which was this book. He said, "It's hell. This one is so hard for me." For everyone listening, that's that these big-time business authors will admit. It's true, organizing and figuring out what you want to say.

Pam, tell us a little bit about what I'm going to call your methodology. For example, some of what you want to write about in *Body of Work* is probably in your head. I'm going to call those visionary ideas. I know that you love to weave in stories and case studies based on interviewing people. As you go about working on the book in your batches of time, how do you allocate that? Knowing that "I'm going to write about this topic, but I need five stories to go with it."

**Pam:** One thing I learned from the first book seems like the simplest thing in the world, but it actually was pivotal. In the early stages of writing, I had a document going where I was writing sequentially. I'd start with the introduction, and then I was going through to fill in the information in the chapters.

One of the things that I've now learned about myself is I do not have a sequential brain at all. I might get an idea in the shower for one chapter, and then I'm listening to the radio and a song comes on and it reminds me of something else for another chapter.

At one point, when I was very overwhelmed with the book, I felt like there was no way I was ever going to finish it, it's totally impossible, and I was looking at a bunch of blank pages. I went through my Word document, I took the table of contents, which I had because I had done that for the book proposal, and for each of the chapters, I created section headers so that there would be a link and there was a style.

Those of you who use Microsoft Word know what I'm talking about, where you could create a style for each of the headers for the chapters. I had all of the chapters in at first, and many of them had nothing in them, but at least I had the document divided into different sections.



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Then I went through and went to my blog, and I went to eLance.com, which is a site where you can have different freelance projects, and I hired somebody. It was amazing. He did it in 24 hours for \$50.00. He indexed every single blog post that I had on my blog, and copied it into a Word document, and organized it by title so that I could click on the table of contents and be brought to that particular post.

That's one source that I began to use to pull in certain content from my blog into my book. It's a very appropriate and okay thing to do to be leveraging writing that you've already shared in your blog. It's a common practice now, whereas in the past, I think a lot of folks thought that you had to have everything be totally new content when you're creating a book.

Because I had that index in my Word document where I could create the table of contents, which then also has hyperlinks, as I would be going through my blog posts and saying, "Ooh, here's a great thing," I could pull this paragraph from that one post and put it in the chapter that has to do with XYZ. I could quickly click on that chapter and paste it right in there.

That process began to match more how it is that my brain worked. What ended up also feeling good is I began to have a document that actually had some meat on it. It's much easier for me to be editing stuff that's already there rather than just looking at a blank page and writing things.

That is an important process that I've done. If I have a note or a thought, I keep that document in Dropbox so that in any kind of laptop that I'm using, no matter where I am, I have access to it and I can update it. It's also backed up, which is very important. As I have a random thought for a certain chapter, I usually put at the top of the chapter, "Add an interview here," or I might put a link to a blog post that I wrote that I want to reference.

That's the basic way that I operate. I've been trying to use Evernote more, because a lot of my friends talk a lot about how Evernote's such a great tool. I think I just need to learn the tool a little bit more. I can see how it would be effective when you can bookmark things from your phone and all of that, but I haven't figured out the technical side enough to use it as a good tool.



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**Debbie:** I am so glad you said that about Evernote, because I'm having the same problem. Everyone recommends it, and I'm still finding it confusing to use. I do talk to my authors about using Word, but I didn't know enough about this style thing, so I've been saying set up different Word documents for each section and then dump stuff into each of the sections.

I'm going to have to research this. It is brilliant to have one Word document divided into the sections that you could click to. You could look down at the bottom of that Word document and see word count, 10,000, 20,000. It would make you feel so good. I'm glad you told me that.

Let's see. This is one of my favorite questions. You've talked a little bit about this, but writers use all sorts of techniques, from meditating to turning off the Internet, blocking the Internet, getting out of the office and going to a coffee shop to write. Tell me about any discoveries you've made that work for you in terms of sitting down and doing the actual writing? What are your tips and tricks that appeal to you?

**Pam:** One thing I learned: I recently spoke on a cruise, which is a great work gig where they paid me to go to the Caribbean for five days, and all I had to do is do a talk for three hours during that time. It was a wonderful way to disconnect from everything, and I ended up diving into the book then and doing a lot of writing during that time.

It is hard for me once I'm in the office. I have my assistant right in the office next door, and often I get sucked into stuff that's going on at work and distracted by what I'm working on, and don't really get into the book. I do like the idea, and it's been effective for me in the past, to go to a different physical environment, like a café or if possible a cruise to the Caribbean, which of course can't happen once a month, unfortunately.

Part of what I think I'm going to work into my process this time is maybe going up to Sedona, and I'm in Arizona, so it's just a couple hours away. In the month of January, where I know I'll be doing some intensive writing, use that as a way to get away. That is one thing that personally works well.



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The other thing I noticed when I was on the cruise is I didn't always want to bring my laptop out when we would do the day visits to the beaches, so I brought a yellow line notepad and a pen. I found that it was so much easier to be capturing thoughts when I was doing that.

What I would do is I would go out and let all the ideas out, sometimes draw pictures and have different ideas for side bars and stuff like that. I would write and write and write in my yellow notepad, and then I would get back on the ship and go to my laptop and then type in those notes and transfer them.

That became much more of an easier writing process rather than sitting down at the laptop and trying to type. That's something now that I'm carrying into the writing process. It's more expeditious if I directly go and write in the book, but if I get stuck for any reason, then I'll pull out my yellow pad and start to write notes. That tends to turn it around right away.

**Debbie:** We definitely need to have a cruise during which one can write a short book.

**Pam:** I think that should be your next offering.

**Debbie:** Oh, God. That sounds wonderful. It also makes sense. We'll even figure out how many ports it needs to go to. Maybe each port will be one subheading of the book or something. *[Note: this is a bit of dry humor, but a cruise would be fun, right?!]*

You've hinted at this a little bit, but let me ask you outright, because I think everyone struggles with this. What do you do – and I have a list of things here – about procrastination, fear, anxiety, writer's block? You seem so sane. Do you have these problems?

**Pam:** Oh, my goodness. If you could only inhabit my brain, I absolutely have the problems. I always have. It's something that is inherent to my process and the way that I do my writing. It's concerning. Sometimes it's part of the writer's journey. Not everybody has it. I think everybody can have a certain amount of fear and doubt that comes in.



# BETA AUTHOR BOOST

**Voxie  
MEDIA**

A couple things that I found help. One of them is the book *Bird by Bird* by Anne Lamott, which you might hopefully have already recommended. I recommend it to everybody who is writing a book, because it's hilarious, it's accurate, and it immediately will name sometimes the crazy fears and thoughts that we have in our head when we're writing.

Because she names it so much and makes you laugh in the descriptions that she gives of her own writing, which is amazing and brilliant, I find it immediately calms my own fear and lets me get started. One of the things, I'll give the PG-13 version of what she says, but her whole chapter is about the S-word first drafts, how you can write drafts that are absolutely garbage.

That's what you need to do when you first start writing, you can let your mind wander. She described in that chapter having seven pages of total drivel, and then on page number 7, you have this one paragraph where, all of a sudden, some jewel jumps out. That's what the writing process is more like.

Educating yourself about the writing process is really helpful. I find the humor in that is helpful. I kept that book by my side the entire time that I was writing. At that point, I didn't have an outside office, so I worked from home, and I would take that book with me wherever I was going. If I got stuck, I would open it to a page and feel better.

The other book that I reference a lot is *The War of Art* by Steven Pressfield [[link provided at end of transcript](#)]. That's more when I want to kick up my inner warrior and stop whining and start moving and writing. Steven Pressfield comes from more of that strong perspective, which I relate to based on my martial art background. He says writing is a craft, and it's a profession, and you have to sit your butt down, and you have to do it.

Avoiding it, putting it off day after day, tends to let the anxiety increase. Any way that you can, break things down into much smaller pieces. I remember when I was writing my first book, my daughter was really little. She was three months old when I got my book deal. She was a tiny baby, and all kinds of things were happening in the economy and my husband's business. It was a wild time.



# BETA AUTHOR BOOST

Voxie  
MEDIA

I felt very, very overwhelmed. I honestly thought there was no way that I could do this, so I called Martha Beck, who I've trained with as a coach and as a friend. I said I can't do this. It feels like I'm somewhere in a war and I'm dodging bullets, and then I have to sit down under a palm tree and write a poem. I'm not feeling it. I feel like there's tragedy all around me. I can't calm myself down.

She recommended that I do what she calls the four-day win, which is breaking the writing down into tiny, little bits, so setting a goal for something like writing for 15 minutes each day. I would say I'm going to make myself write for 15 minutes. It can be total drivel. At the end of that, when you do complete it, you give yourself some tiny, little reward, a little piece of chocolate or something else.

You do this for four days. On the fourth day, when you've completed that entire sequence, then you can give yourself a little bit of a bigger reward. What happens, not surprisingly, is once I was able to get in and start doing writing for 15 minutes, that very quickly turned into an hour, and then two and three, and then I was on a roll, and I ended up finishing the book.

It's important to not do things like set eight hours blocked off in your schedule in order to write. That can be overwhelming, and you can start to put it off. Rather, put a little, tiny piece in there. You might block off three hours of time in order to be focusing on the writing, but set a personal goal, if you're feeling overwhelmed, to just write for a very short period of time.

Once you get rolling, then you can start to build and spend more time doing it. It's part of my journey. I learned to embrace that. In many ways, when I am feeling totally overwhelmed and scared and out of control and like this will never happen, I realize I'm on the right path, because I felt like this before and I survived and I wrote it and it worked well, so I'm going to do it again and get back on the horse the next day and move forward.

**Debbie:** That's great. I have told everyone about *Bird by Bird*. I have to tell more folks about *The War of Art*. It brings me to a perfect final question, which is easy, and then maybe we could take a few minutes and have the listeners ask some questions. So far, would you say, now that you're an experienced author, is it easier or harder writing your second book?



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**Pam:** It actually feels the same. I think there's a balance. Knowing that I've done it before does help a little bit, but that sometimes is balanced in a negative way by being concerned that the second one won't be as good as the first one. It happened to work out so well. I was so excited that the first book did well. It won best small business book of 2009, and that was a huge, huge success for me as a first-time author.

It's like somebody having their first movie do really well or having their first hit come out. It would be a number 1 hit, all of a sudden, and then the second one becomes harder. I would only love to have had the success that Elizabeth Gilbert had with *Eat. Pray. Love*. We know that was a massive gazillion seller.

Her **Ted Talk** about creativity was so hysterical, because she mentions that after that raging success of the book, whenever she was telling people she was working on her second one – it actually wasn't the second book she ever wrote, but it was the book following *Eat. Pray. Love*. – everybody would look at her with pity, like "That must be so hard. How awful to have to write a book that follows that one." She said, "What do you mean?" It's like almost setting herself up for doom.

There's a little bit of that that happens, but in general, what always keeps me going is thinking about the purpose of the book, which is to be of service, to help people, to help people get jobs and build a business and have a high quality of life. Whenever I start to get stuck in my own process is where I step back and slap myself like Cher did to Nicolas Cage in the movie *Moonstruck*, and be like, "Snap out of it."

It's not about me. It's about helping people in the world who I care about. I know that I have things that will help them, so stop whining and get out there and do it. That usually is enough to shake me into writing again.

**Debbie:** I am entirely confident that this next book will be just as good and intriguing and provocative and what you've said so far about the topic. It's the next step. It's so interesting, and it's something we all are waiting to hear. I'm confident of that.

**Pam:** I am so glad you're confident. I will depend on your confidence. I need it.



# BETA AUTHOR BOOST



**Debbie:** Let me switch to interactive mode. There's not that many people on the line. Does anyone want to jump in and ask Pam a question? I know she has another commitment at the top of the hour at 3:00 pm, so we do have just a few minutes here. Introduce yourself if you do want to ask a question.

**Jeff:** I have a question.

**Pam:** Yes?

**Debbie:** Who is that?

**Jeff:** It's Jeff.

**Debbie:** Good. Hi, Jeff.

**Jeff:** Do you start off with the overall structure and have the book pretty well figured out and outlined, or do you start and see where it goes?

**Pam:** I use the structured approach, because within any particular chapter, sometimes I don't know exactly where it's going to go. It personally can feel overwhelming to me if I don't know what's the overall objective of the book, what are the main messages, and what are the ways that the chapters are organized and how do they fit together.

The book proposal acts in that way for me. I start my actual book with pulling the outline that comes from the proposal, and get going that way. Often the process of discovery is where I start writing and come up with analogies or ideas that I hadn't thought about at first.

**Debbie:** Great question. That is a both-and answer, I think. Pam, thank you for explaining that.

**Pam:** Thanks, Jeff.

**Debbie:** Anybody else? I know that Joanne is there and Rob.



# BETA AUTHOR BOOST



**Rob:** I'm glad to ask a question. It's Rob.

**Debbie:** Okay.

**Rob:** Pam, I'm also a leadership coach, so I live in that same world. Here's one of the things I've been interested in and would love your thoughts on. I'm going to write a book about governance, because I think governance is challenged right now in our society, especially nonprofit boards. One of the things I wanted to ask for your advice on is I'm inclined, as I write it, to be not coy, but to be very reluctant to give solutions.

I'm more interested in being generative and provocative in terms of getting people to those solutions based on the outcomes that they're seeking. I wanted to get your thoughts on that. There is also that tendency to say, "Well, let me just tell you how you do this." I don't think that's a winner.

**Pam:** I would say it depends on what it is that you're trying to do with the book and how it is that you're using it. One of my former clients worked with Seth Godin at the Domino Project, if you guys know Seth. My client Willie Jackson was the chief technology officer, and he would tell stories about every day where Seth was riffing about publishing and talking about different kinds of books.

One day, he called me and said, "Hey, we kind of ripped apart your book and looked at it." One of the things that Seth was saying is that a big idea book – which is, I think, more what you may be talking about, Rob, where you introduce provocative ideas, you get people thinking – often those kinds of big idea books do sell more than those that are very prescriptive and how-to.

Sometimes it can seem a little bit less interesting or less than a big idea if you have a book that's getting people talking as opposed to how-to. However, it also depends on who your audience is and what is the intention of the book. For example, who would the audience be for this book?

**Rob:** I think the audience would be people who are serving on boards. I'm particularly interested in CEOs who work in close collaboration with what I would call chief voluntary officers like board presidents.



# BETA AUTHOR BOOST



**Pam:** Sometimes for that audience, CEOs by nature tend to not have a lot of time, want quick information, do get inspired by ideas, and then will pass it on to their staff and be like, "Hey, figure this out." If that's the audience, it could be a good fit.

Sometimes, I think, it is useful where you have done things that have worked well, then that's where the way in which you're doing it wouldn't necessarily have to be prescriptive, but you could give certain examples where you have a case study or an example. Here's a situation, here's this big idea, here's how it's applied, here are some examples of how you can take this particular concept and do something with it, so that people can understand what the application is. Otherwise, some people can feel frustrated by it.

That goes to the purpose of the book. What are you trying to do? If you're using it as a way to stimulation a conversation, which then you're going to pick up as you have speaking engagements or maybe as a way to open the door for you to do more consulting, then maybe you don't want to give all of the specific how-tos. But if you want to reach an audience that has some of the application parts, then that's where you might want to include a little bit of the how-to.

That's the approach I've always taken with my books, a combination of both. That's what my publisher and I talked about for this one. That's because, for many people, they may never work with me. They just want to be able to get those tools.

That's one way to look at it. The other thing would be where you could have a companion book, where you might have the big idea book that's provocative and opening people's minds, but then you have some kind of a companion book that you can sell in a package or as a follow-up that might have some more specific recommendations or recipes.

Knowing how strapped for time people are in organizations and how they want to take an idea and apply it, if you can help then do it, that could be a value to them as well. That may end up being a separate thing.

**Rob:** Super. Thank you very much.



# BETA AUTHOR BOOST



**Pam:** Sure.

**Debbie:** We have time, I think, for one more question. Okay, I think there's a couple people on the line who are feeling a little shy, Pam. They're probably just overwhelmed.

**Pam:** That's okay. No, I think it's great. Sometimes I have to step back and think about it too before I formulate a question, so I encourage folks to follow up and post a question on my Facebook page or something like that.

**Debbie:** I will be sure to give everyone all your links. I want to say that was wonderful, absolutely wonderful, provocative, informative. Pam, thank you so very much from all of us.

**Pam:** Thank you. Anything for you, Debbie. I'm happy to support your work, and I'm excited to see all the great books that will come out of this course.

**Debbie:** Wonderful.

**Pam:** Thanks. Bye-bye.

## Useful Links

*Escape from Cubicle Nation* by Pamela Slim:

<http://www.amazon.com/Escape-Cubicle-Nation-Corporate-Entrepreneur/dp/0425232840>

Pam Slim's site and blog: <http://www.escapefromcubiclenation.com>

Ask Pam questions on Facebook page: <http://www.facebook.com/pamslim>

Follow Pam on Twitter: <http://www.twitter.com/pamslim>

*The War of Art* by Steven Pressfield:

<http://www.amazon.com/War-Art-Through-Creative-Battles/dp/1936891026>

*The Corporate Blogging Book* (updated Kindle edition) by Debbie Weil:

<http://www.amazon.com/Corporate-Blogging-Updated-Preface-ebook/dp/B003B654MO/>

