

# AUTHOR STRAIGHT TALK



The possibilities, pit-falls, how-to's and tribal  
knowledge from someone who knows

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## DEDICATION

For all aspiring or current authors who have questions no one will answer. You may not follow all the advice, wisdom or lessons-learned I share, but you will be informed in a way that I certainly wasn't when I started in publishing twenty years ago. May you skip the pain, collapse the years to market for your work and make more money than me.



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# AUTHOR STRAIGHT TALK









## INTRODUCTION

You don't have time to read, you want to write, I get it. I've been there. I know the anxious, I-can't-wait-to-get-started-and-get-my-book-out feeling. Along with this zeal come the questions that every aspiring author has: How do I get an agent or is an agent even required? What's the best route to market for my book? Where do I find a good editor? What if readers hate my book? When will I start making money?

**This book came about because I have often wondered what would have happened if I'd had the advice, the insider information and tribal knowledge from agents, publishers, editors and other authors years ago, or even more recently. Would I have chosen a different publishing method? Hired editors earlier in the cycle? Used social media more effectively?**

I hope my younger self would have read, listened and learned from all this insight, and I certainly hope you will too. **What you learn could save you years of frustration and money.**

Perhaps you are worried that this book will depress you with statistics, one more mental obstacle that stands between you and your future bestselling novel. I'll be clear: I do include real facts and figures that you need to know. The first one is that I was told by a publishing executive it's easier to become a professional athlete in the United States than a published author.

If this statistic bothers, you, I have one thing to say:

Read it, digest it, ignore it, and keep going, just as you did when you listened to your inner self who whispered that the idea in your head had merit and that you could do it. Jackie Collins wrote every one of her thirty-two bestselling novels on a yellow legal pad by hand. She was expelled in high-school yet sold over 500 million books in dozens of countries, proving that authoring is the great equalizer. One must not be a certain height, weight, color or even have a computer literacy level of a merit scholar to put an idea down on paper and turn it into a novel.

**The only difference between the present you and that bestselling author you are looking up to is the commitment to write, and persistence to keep going when people tell you otherwise.**

Today, most authors will tell you they spend forty-percent of their time actually writing. The other sixty percent of their day is spent on the business of authoring. I'll write that again. *Authoring is a business.* Any agent, publisher, movie producer or Broadway director is going to say the same thing. The sooner you get this into your head, the better off you will be down the road. The good news is that by reading this book, you have already mentally committed to pursuing your dream. Stop for a moment and reflect on that reality. You have taken action. You are making it happen. It may not always be easy or fun, but by placing one foot in front of the other, you are going towards your ultimate destination, not away from it.

Perhaps you won't agree with every point or principle, but know

this: you are getting it straight from an author, hence the name. *Author Straight Talk* is the unfiltered truth from a person who has been through the cycles with mainstream and self-publishing, experienced multiple agents and editors, and had manuscripts optioned for movies and Broadway.

My only goal is to share my experience concisely so you know now what took me years to acquire. I'd also like you to:

- Avoid the mistakes and pitfalls common to authors
- Improve your chances of success in your genre
- Feel confident and assured as you pursue your dreams in the face of opposition

### **The Straight Talk Mindset**

What you are writing is a product, not a book. It sounds harsh, but it's the truth, and every good agent, editor or producer refers to what comes out of your head and on to the written page as just that: a product to promote, sell and monetize. The sooner you start thinking of your finished manuscript as a product to sell to readers who can read it, the easier it will be to detach yourself emotionally so you can focus on the business of authoring.

The questions are posed exactly as I once asked, or as I've received them from others through Instagram, Facebook, unsolicited email and conversations. I've provided the answers, along with perspectives and alternative viewpoints from myself or others in the publishing, entertainment, or associated industry who have given me

direct information. Most of the industry insiders who I quote (publishers, acquisition editors, agents) have asked for anonymity, as they are not authorized to go on the record for their organization. However, all supported my decision to share this information in order to help others. Why? By being better informed, you are actually helping them do their job.

### **What I won't give you**

Tips on how to be a better writer, create storylines, improve your plot or deepen and strengthen your characters. Many other authors, agents and editors have produced amazing books and even YouTube videos on these aspects of writing. While I do share a few of my tried and proven favorite resources that have dramatically improved my writing, *Author Straight Talk* focuses on the business of authoring, where I pick out and share the most important feedback I've received, what helped and what didn't. At the request of aspiring authors, I include the emotional and philosophical aspects that have been necessary for me to endure the challenges unique to this profession.

It's my hope that you learn from my mistakes and perhaps will improve upon my successes. That would be awesome and I'd love to hear about it.



## **Book Organization**

## **Chapter One: The Motivation, Money and Opportunity for your Book**

- 1: Why write a book when so many are already out there?
- 2: How do I know if mine will be good enough?
- 3: What makes the best book?
- 4: Is it true the average self-published book makes less than \$10,000 in its lifetime?
- 5: What's the tipping point then for sales?
- 6: My (self-published) book has sold less than fifty copies. I'm so demoralized, and even though I'm not doing it for the money, how do I handle this?
- 7: Do authors make money?
- 8: How long is the payout cycle?
- 9: You're telling me that even if I land on the New York Time's Bestseller list, it's still going to take two years for me to get paid?
- 10: What is considered a bestselling book?
- 11: What will agents take for commission?

## **Chapter Two: Inspiration, Insecurity and Writer's Block**

- 12: I have a family and a crazy life. How can I possibly write?
- 13: I have physical disabilities. Can I still write a book?
- 14: I'm afraid my friends, family or members of my church will judge me. Is this normal?
- 15: I'm not confident enough to write a novel. Should I start with a short story and get it published before starting a novel?
- 16: I'm making money writing articles here and there. Can't I continue as I write my novel?
- 17: Where can I find inspiration?
- 18: Should I write about people, concepts and things I know?
- 19: How do I branch out from my own world without looking like a fraud?
- 20: What if nobody likes my novel?
- 21: I'm stuck, unable to write, and don't know how to start up again. Is Writer's Block real, and what can I do to get writing again?
- 22: Can I change genres if I get writer's block?
- 23: Should I use a pen name?

### **Chapter Three: Bringing Your Book to Market**

24: Do readers today still buy print copies or is it all digital?

25: Do readers have a preference for what format you choose in which to publish your book?

26: What's the best way to bring my book to market?

27: I've listened to a lot of audible books, but for self-published authors, this seems cost prohibitive. Do I have alternatives?

28: What about selling my chapters of the book on the way to a completed manuscript?

29: I don't understand why the routes to market take so long. What's involved and what are reasonable expectations?

30: What's the best strategy to get my book out to the majority of readers?

31: What's the most profitable way to get my book out there if I'm self-publishing? In other words, where will I make the most money?

32: How much money can I make self-publishing?

33: Is my finished manuscript suited for a made-for-tv movie, Netflix or HBO?

34: Do covers really sell a book?

35: If I write Women's Romance, do I need to have a nearly naked man on the cover?

36: How do I compare agents?

37: How do I find and get in touch with an agent?

### **Chapter Four: Editing, the Difference Between Success and Failure**

38: Do I really need an editor?

39: As the author, how much work am I expected to do when it comes to editing?

40: What are the circumstances where I'd hire a contract writer?

41: If I have hired an independent publisher, and need to hire a contractor, who pays, me or the publisher?

42: I have an agent but not a publishing deal. Am I expected to get my manuscript professionally edited before submitting it to the agent?

43: Where do you find a good editor?

44: What do I look for in an editor/what questions do I ask?

45: What should I expect to receive from an editor?

46: Is there more than one editing round?

- 47: How long does this editing round take and how much does it cost?
- 48: How are the bills typically paid?
- 49: So, in theory, I'm going to actually improve my writing by hiring an editor?
- 50: After the top-line, strategic editing, then what?
- 51: What's the difference between a line editor and a copy editor?
- 52: Will I have a different experience with an independent publisher, whom I'm paying to do all this work for me?
- 53: What can I realistically expect from an external editorial process?
- 54: How often should I expect to speak to my editor?
- 55: Do I wait until the entire manuscript is done or send in chapters?
- 56: If the proofreaders are so good, why do I still see errors in printed books I purchase?
- 57: I don't know anyone in the industry. Where do I start?
- 58: What's the total cost of getting my book to market, pre-marketing and sales?

## **Chapter Five: Process, Tools and Time Management**

- 59: What is the best writing process to follow? It seems like every author, teacher, workshop and book I buy tells me to do something different.
- 60: What's after the outline?
- 61: What other processes exist to create a visual story flow?
- 62: Can't I just let it flow? I've read so much about writing this way and it's always talked about at conferences and writer's workshops.
- 63: What do I do with all the scenes that I've created (in my mind or on paper)?
- 64: How much does formatting play into the purchase of a book by a publisher?
- 65: Where does word count come into play?
- 66: Do I need a degree in creative writing?
- 67: Do I need a computer?
- 68: Should I take special classes to help improve my writing skills?
- 69: Do I backup my computer? What's a foolproof method?
- 70: Are there forums or events where I can connect with other authors in my genre?
- 71: What about attending a conference to meet a prospective agent or publisher?
- 72: I feel like my story is strong but my writing hasn't caught up. Any advice?
- 73: What if I'm halfway through my book and I hate it?
- 74: What does a writing schedule look like?
- 75: How to I start building a writing schedule?



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76: What advice to you have to stick to a schedule?

77: I've read so much about being in "the zone" with the perfect environment. Is it a physical state or mental?

78: Can you give me ideas for my own writing life so I can replicate it?

### **Chapter Six: Conducting Interviews and Fact Checking**

79: How do I prevent getting sued by a subject I'm writing about?

80: When I take inspiration from a real person or experience, how do I ensure they won't come after me?

81: What if I'm writing about someone and it's flattering?

82: When writing about celebrities, people or brands, do I have to get permission?

83: An individual is accusing me of writing about him/her, and I've totally invented the character. What do I do?

84: How do I approach and convince the reluctant interviewee to speak with me?

85: Do I cold-call an interview subject or provide a document for the potential interviewee to review?

86: What is my role in fact checking?

87: How do the "Pros" fact check?

### **Chapter Seven: Genres and Marketing your Book**

88: Why separate out marketing and sales? Aren't they connected?

89: Is marketing a book different from marketing other products?

90: Do traditional marketing programs have a value, and what does the effort look like?

91: I hate the idea of talking to the press and speaking. Do I have any alternatives at all?

92: What is the best philosophy to have when it comes to spending money on marketing my book?

93: What is your number one form of marketing then?

94: If it's not increasing my book sales, what's the best way to use Facebook?

95: Can I leverage my personal page to my author page?

96: Does the number of followers on FB count then?

97: What are book ratings? Do I need them and do they have an impact on sales?

98: What about paying for reviews?

99: Does the number of reviews make a difference in book sales?

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