Top 10 Tips for Fruitful Writers & Speakers

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A mentor once advised me, “Getting your book published isn’t the ultimate goal. The ultimate goal is *getting your book into people’s hands* where it can change lives!” Indeed, cardboard boxes of published books collecting dust in a garage simply do not change lives. Books *in reader’s hands* change lives!

We serve a BIG GOD who may have BIG PLANS for your writing and speaking ministry. Therefore it’s vital to position yourself for maximum potential. After all, we don’t write or speak for our own benefit, but for the benefit of others. So why not make your goal to reach as many “others” as possible in your lifetime?

Here are a few nuggets of wisdom I’ve picked up along the way toward that goal:

1. **Speak before you write.** Some ask, “Don’t I need to write a book before I can develop a speaking platform?” Expecting to write a book on a topic you’ve never spoken on is like getting the cart before the horse. I spoke publicly to a wide range of audiences for four years before I ever put my message in writing. I tested different kinds of material, watched for responses, got feedback, collected personal testimonies supporting my message, etc. Then writing a book didn’t seem so overwhelming.
2. **Create a following**. As you travel and speak, don’t be shy about collecting personal information from your audience. You want to keep in touch with them, and for them to keep in touch with you. Then when you publish your book someday you’ll have a ready-made readership. Ask for email addresses. Offer to send them free tidbits of encouragement. Publish a monthly e-newsletter with interesting articles. Invite them to interact with you through a blog. Develop your own web community where they can interact with one another. Host regular conference calls or webinars. The possibilities are endless!
3. **Read, Read, Read.** Discover every book you can find on your topic, and spend as much time as necessary discerning how you want your message to be different. Consider what *hasn’t* been said about your topic. Most writers feel justified in saying, “I don’t want to read anyone else’s book on my topic because it will skew my thinking.” No, it will sharpen your thinking. Publishers have no interest in putting a “Me Too!” book out there – one where the author has simply repeated what everyone else has already said. KNOW what’s already been said, and develop your own UNIQUE message. That’s what publishers are looking for.

4. **Carve out time.** People frequently ask, "How have you found time to write 22 books?" A serious writer doesn't *find* time to write. They *make* time to write. Carve out blocks of time in your schedule and tune out all distractions. Figure out when you're at your mental best, whether that's morning, afternoon, or evening, and work the rest of your day around that sacred time.
5. **Be real.** Keep in mind that the point of your greatest misery is also the point of your greatest ministry. Take off your mask and be real with your audience. Get vulnerable with your writings rather than tiptoeing around issues for fear of what others will think about you if you disclose your innermost self. Your message will then resonate with readers on an incredibly deep level, and they'll *gain* respect for you, not lose it. Shout your message from the mountaintops without inhibition, and you'll inspire others to courageously overcome their own struggles.
6. **Pace yourself.** Once you've done your research, carved out time to write, and gotten in touch with what you really want to say on the topic that no one else has said yet, develop a big-picture first draft outline (use hundreds of sticky notes on a wall to organize your thoughts if necessary). Then divide that outline into bite-size pieces, developing each individual idea (a paragraph, a section, or an entire chapter) over a period of several weeks or months. Rome wasn't built in a day. Pace yourself, and the task of writing a book won't seem so overwhelming.
7. **Embrace editing.** Some authors say that you should gallop through your first draft without taking time to edit sentences along the way. I've tried that, and it doesn't work for me. If this idea doesn't work for you either, feel free to carefully craft your words along the way, but don't get too emotionally attached to how you've written anything. Your editor may come along, slice it and dice it, and want you to say several things differently. This isn't a bad thing, as ultimately it will make your writings much sharper in the end. Keep repeating, "My editor is my friend! My editor is my friend!"
8. **Market yourself.** The biggest mistake a writer can make is assuming that their publisher will do all the marketing for them once the book is published. *Bzzzzt.* Wrong. Any author who puts all of that responsibility on their publisher's shoulders is doomed to a short writing career. Take initiative. Call your local newspapers, radio stations, and television shows, telling them about your book's message and offering to do an interview if they are ever interested. Send e-mail blasts to every friend, family member, and business colleague announcing your book's release, awards received, reviews written, testimonies of lives changed, etc. It's not about promoting *yourself*, it's about promoting *your message*, and you'd hate to invest all this time and effort into a message that the world never gets to hear because you were too shy or intimidated to effectively market it.
9. **Be a relevant expert.** Look at today's current trends and hottest topics, and consider how your book is relevant to those issues. Write up a couple of paragraphs to that effect and send it (along with a one-page bio) to

major magazines, national radio programs, and even international television outlets, offering to be a guest "expert" on their show. It doesn't matter that there are more popular experts out there. Is Dave Ramsey the *only* one who can speak on money? Is Dr. Ruth the *only* one who can speak on sex? Absolutely not! Such experts are far too busy to appear on anything but *Good Morning America* or *Dr Phil*, so don't be afraid to step up to the plate and shamelessly tell the world what you have to offer. Coordinate these pitches with your publisher so that you're not duplicating one another's efforts. Your publisher will *love, love, love* the fact that you're eager to fully partner with them in marketing your book!

10. **Push through the pain.** Developing your personal passion… crafting an oral presentation… putting it all in manuscript form… selling your idea to a publishing house… marketing your book… being available to write magazine articles and do interviews -- these are all high and holy callings, and success requires great personal sacrifice. I liken the entire process to giving birth. You feel pregnant with your own destiny, and just like a pregnant woman can't sleep through her labor, you can't miss your opportunity to give birth to your message. So I encourage you, when the labor pains come, don't abort the process! PUSH! And KEEP PUSHING until you deliver *everything* that's inside you!

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