

*If you've ever said, "I could write a book," you should read this one! Everything you need to know about writing, publishing and marketing a book.*

# **REALIZE YOUR WRITING DREAMS**

## **Actionable Tips on Writing, Publishing and Marketing**

by Doreen McGettigan

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Actionable tips on writing, publishing  
and marketing



Doreen McGettigan

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ISBN: 978-1-64718-175-8

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Published by BookLocker.com, Inc., St. Petersburg, Florida.

Printed on acid-free paper.

BookLocker.com, Inc.  
2020

First Edition

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data

McGettigan, Doreen

REALIZE YOUR WRITING DREAMS: Actionable Tips on Writing,

Publishing and Marketing by Doreen McGettigan

Library of Congress Control Number: 2019921017

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## Chapter 4 - Platforms and Tribes



Building a **Writers Platform** means to create a connection between you the writer and your potential readers. How do you find that connection? Every book has some sort of message, something the author wants the reader to take away with them.

Authors used to be able to sell books based on the idea of the story. Today no matter which route you choose traditional, independent or self-publishing for your book having a platform in place is a necessity. Yes, there are exceptions to that rule, and you may be one of them, but my advice would be to start building that platform while you are writing the book.

You don't build an author platform to sell your book. You build a platform to build credibility as an author and to introduce you and your work to the industry and to readers. It will help you garner media attention and reviews when needed. Your platform is the foundation of your writing business. Building an author platform is not something you can do in a hurry.

You won't need a hammer and nails but think of the platform as a firm foundation and a sturdy bridge. It is the method that takes your book to your readers.

Like I said, every book whether it's fiction or nonfiction has a theme or a message for its readers. What is your book's message? Take some time to think about that and make a list. If you don't think your book has a message, the time to add one is while you are writing. Here are a few examples:

- If writing a fiction zombie book perhaps your platform could be based on self-defense or survival.
- My first book was a non-fiction based on the road rage murder of my younger brother. My platform is 'How not to become the perpetrator of a road rage attack' and 'How to protect your-self against a road rage attack.'
- My second book, *The Stranger in My Recliner* is a memoir based on an 83-year-old homeless woman my husband brought home one night. She lived with us for 2 ½ years. Because of what I experienced with her first-hand and the extensive research I did on homelessness, mental health and the elderly I've become an expert on all three topics. This presents me with an extensive platform to bring the book to interested readers.
- If you write fiction romance your platform could be based on finding and maintaining healthy relationships OR ways to spice up your relationship.



- Perhaps you write YA. Your platform could be teen romance, bullying, education, or body image.

The possibilities are endless. Find your message and stick with it. Read about, talk about and research, research and more research on your topic. Your goal is to become an expert, the most qualified person to tell your story.

Once you have narrowed down your books message you will need to find the audience for that message. Are there online groups that fit your subject? Find them and join them. Don't discuss too much about your book in these groups. At this point you are not trying to sell books you are trying to build an audience. Instead interact with them and learn from them. When the time comes they may be the first people to purchase and review your book. Look for actual meet-up groups on your topic and attend them. Set up a Google alert on your topic.

Remember you are not building this platform to sell your book. You are going to use it to introduce you and your work to the industry and to your community. The buzz about your book should never come from you. All the buzz needs to come from your readers and the media. I could tell you I wrote the best book that has ever been written. My statement will mean nothing to you. If you told someone else that I wrote the best book ever written people are more likely to believe you.

You will need a professional website and should consider including a blog. When choosing a name for your website and blog my advice would be to go with your own name, especially if you are planning to write more than one book. If you are using a fictitious or pen name, use that but be sure that is the name you are going to stick

with and make it legal. Write articles and blog posts on your topic. My advice would be not to include more than a two-sentence excerpt from your book in articles or blog posts prior to the book being published.

Pay attention to breaking news and what is trending. Is there a way to tie that news to your topic? If there is write about it and submit away! Write guest posts for other blogs and request them for your own blog. Write letters to the editor of your local paper and local magazines on topics that you are passionate about. Print publications are short staffed these days and may appreciate your freelance work. Once a blog post is posted or an article you wrote is printed in a newspaper or magazine you are considered published. This will help your writing resume when looking for an agent or a publisher and will also build your credibility as an expert on your topic.

Become a friend to your local library. Spend time writing and researching there. Offer to run a workshop, start a writer's group or a book club with them. Once you have a published book to sell they will be more likely to support you if they know you.

Also become a friend to your local bookstore. Attend book signings, author events and panels held at the store. Follow them on social media, share their news and events and leave meaningful comments. Buy books there.

A **Tribe** is like a family. It is a group of people that supports you and your writing. They are also constructive and honest with their criticism of your work. These are the people that will celebrate you and your choice to write. They will celebrate your victories and offer a shoulder to cry on when your work is rejected

The process of writing a book, finding representation and a publisher is a long one. Your friends and family may be tired of hearing about it and start believing you're wasting your time. They don't understand the process therefore you absolutely need a community of your own peers or a tribe.

Finding a good writer's group is a good place to start. A good writer's group is one where you feel comfortable sharing your work and receiving encouragement as well as constructive criticism. You should also feel comfortable giving others in the group feedback and encouragement. Again, the buzz about your book should never come from you the author. The buzz should always come from readers. This is where your tribe is invaluable. Your tribe members are those that share your social media posts, talk about how much they enjoyed your book, write reviews and show up at your book signings not alone but with friends.

Think tribe for everything you do as a writer/author. Be sure to support other writers by encouraging and inspiring them. Support other authors by sharing their releases, events and successes on social media. Write reviews for them and encourage others to read their books. Talk about their books with your friends and family. Offer inspiration when they've received rejections. Being there for your tribe members will increase the chances that they will be there for you too.

### **What if Family and Friends Don't Support Your Writing?**

Because we writers and artists must open ourselves and our work up to criticism and rejection it can sometimes be tough for us to believe in ourselves. When someone close to us questions our choice and doesn't support our decision to write it stings.

Before letting it hurt your feelings at least consider the possibility that they may be genuinely concerned for you. They may also lack understanding of what all is ‘involved’ in writing when we choose it as a career.

Once you have done your best to explain to them what you do, what your plan is and what they can do to support you and they still don’t want to support you, agree to disagree. You must realize that no matter how hard we try; everyone will not love our choice or our work.

When I asked a friend to come to one of my book signings and she asked me when I was going to come see her at work that got me thinking. I didn’t know exactly what she did at work. It had also been ages since I stopped by the dealership where my husband works, just to say hi. I never stopped by to see my daughter at the nursing home where she works to bring her chocolate or wine, nor have I ever gone to the lumber yard where my other daughter works to buy lumber and have her sign it for me.

Well that revelation hit like lightening. Writing is my job. It is emotional, and I am passionate but at the end of the day I cannot expect a daughter that lives for romance novels to gush over my nonfiction.

Paying more attention to the careers of my loved ones, my friends and being more supportive of their passions is what I needed to do if I expected the same of them.

I am blessed because my immediate family does support me and my choice to write. My girls are happy to help me choose an outfit for

a book event, but they don't always enjoy going to work with me. For that I need my tribe and my tribe needs me.

When in need of support for my writing, feedback or when I have exciting news to share the best place for me is with a group of my peers. My writing and critique groups, in person and online are full of other writers that get what I do and feel what I feel. There is always someone there with a hug, creative advice or a hand- up.

A good place to find your tribe is in Writing Groups, Critique Groups, Conferences, Writing Classes and /or Workshops.

A good writing and or critique group can be such a good resource for writers no matter where they are in their writing process. These groups are the best place to receive constructive, honest criticism from people who expect the same in return.

Writing classes and workshops are also good resources. The business of publishing is evolving rapidly so no matter where you are in your writing, classes and or workshops are a good place to keep up to date with those changes. They are also a safe place to receive honest feedback and advice from likeminded people.

Where do you find these classes and groups? Most community colleges offer a variety of writing, publishing and marketing classes. In local newspapers you might be able to find a workshop.

You may have to attend several groups before you find the perfect fit. Look for Meet Up writing and critique groups in your area. You can also check with local librarians to see if any groups meet in your local library. On- line writing groups and workshops are good for

education and inspiration but in -real -life groups are the best place to socialize and are invaluable when it comes to promotion. Writing groups can be found by doing a Google search of your town and writing group. You may have to visit a few groups before you find one that fits. I suggest giving the group a chance by visiting two or three times before making your decision.

If you can't find the group you want to be part of, start your own.

Writing is such a solitary process. For most of us it can be extremely difficult to step out of our safe writing caves and share our work with others, but it is a necessary process and so worth it if we want to be the best writer's we can be.

Members of a good group or class will keep you educated and motivated.

I belong to two-writing groups. One group meets every Wednesday at a Panera Bread. It's an- hour drive for me but I love the group, so the drive is well worth it. I am so grateful to, Kelly the facilitator of the group. She is a talented writer, editor blogger and a friend. The members of this group are so positive and supportive and that is because of Kelly's leadership.

Writing conferences are held in many different cities. Investing in a good conference is an invaluable investment in your writing career. They are also a source for learning to improve your craft. Most offer workshops on all things writing. They also connect you with professionals in the publishing business, agents, editors and you will have the opportunity to meet many other aspiring authors. Many writing conferences offer opportunities to meet with and pitch your

book to an agent. To increase your chance at a successful pitch, be sure to research the agents prior to the conference and choose to pitch one that represents your genre and is looking for what you have. There is more on pitching in a later chapter.

Most of us creative types are naturally shy and find it difficult to come out of our shells and be more extraverted. I promise you if you if you give it a shot the rewards will be great. It does get easier. We are so lucky in this day, and age because we can virtually meet people before we meet them in real life. Most writing conferences will have a Facebook page and that gives you the opportunity to follow others that will be attending. Follow them and comment on their posts. It is possible to develop friendships before you meet in person.

I attend the Philadelphia Writers Conference every year and try to get to the New York one and others as often as I can. I also attend blogging and marketing conferences.

There are also many writing retreats. Some are in the mountains, by the ocean and there is even one in Transylvania. Retreats can also offer unique learning experiences and critique opportunities. They are usually weekend getaways to a beautiful place that allows for plenty of time for writing. Be brave and attend one or start one of your own!

To get the most out of a writing conference, prepare before you attend. Have you followed all the presenters on social media? Have you followed and introduced yourself to some of the other attendees? Bring plenty of business cards, pens and notebooks. When someone hands you a business card jot something on the back of the card to help you remember them, such as “Met at the Philadelphia Writers Conference.” I always jot whether they would be a great addition to

either my tribe or platform. It's a good idea to send an email a week or so after meeting saying it was nice to meet them and possibly invite them to meet for coffee.

One thing you never want to do at a conference is to hand out written pitches. You want to be prepared by being able to recite (without sounding like its being recited) your pitch, as naturally as possible in two to three sentences. Practice, practice and practice some more. Example: "I'm the best-selling author of two memoirs, and I also work as an author coach and a book consultant. What do you write?"

You also want to make sure you dress appropriately. Agents and editors are looking for professional writers, so you want to dress like a professional. A suit and tie or a dress isn't necessary but not a bad idea.

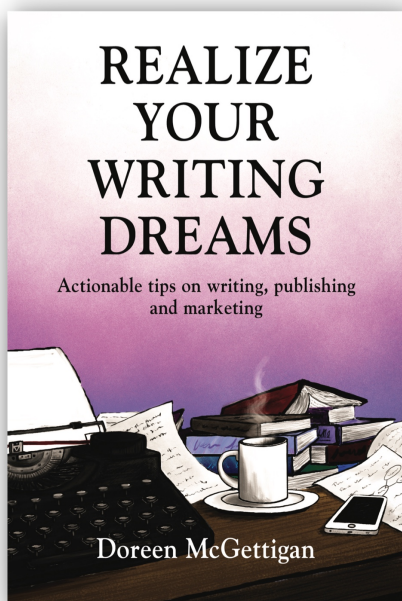
At the conference do not monopolize the agent's time. Everyone is there to meet them, and they want to meet everyone. Keep in mind and practice the ninety-second rule. You don't want to be remembered as a conversation hog. Use your ninety-seconds to ask them what their dream manuscript and who their dream client would be.

No matter where you are in your writing process there is always something to learn. Take the time to listen to learn not listening to speak.

Relax, smile, make new writer friends to add to your tribe and have fun!



No matter where you are in your writing career, beginning or a best-selling author the chance of being rejected is always there. Our tribe helps us survive and write past those rejections. Writing is such a solo activity but for the business of publishing we must have a platform and a tribe.



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