

3 Author Mistakes That Can Take You Off The Playing Field

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Aug 7, 2024, 09:03pm EDT

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Avoid these 3 mistakes. DEPOSITOHOTOS

“Do you have a minute for a quick question,” a colleague asked me this morning over the phone.

“Sure,” I said, knowing that the questions from my book-coaching clients are rarely quick—or even a question. Most often, they’re asking for direction in

taking their next step in building a career around their book.

“Good. I just want to reconfirm which book idea I should do first: I could do the nonfiction book on keeping kids safe in today’s environment of violence. But I’m thinking that the second book idea—the motivational one about perseverance—would have the widest appeal. Which do you think I should start with?”

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It took me less than a nano-second to answer: “The first idea on keeping kids safe—physically and emotionally—in today’s dangerous world. That definitely matches your expertise. You’ve been educating parents and kids for years on the topic. Plus, you’ve suffered childhood trauma as a victim and can speak from experience.”

“Are you *sure*?” came the push-back that I’ve come to expect on such questions. “But I thought a lot more people need perseverance. . . . After all, not everybody has kids.”

I spent the next 20 minutes explaining for the millionth time in my coaching career why specificity wins over generalities.

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And the same reasons apply to marketing, speaking, or building almost any product or service.

Mistake #1: The Failure to Identify a Target Audience



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As one CEO of a publishing company put it recently: "There's no such thing as a general market anymore." So writing a book that "everyone" might read is writing a book that no one will likely read.

Novelists are known to write from the heart, not the head. They finish their manuscript and hope readers will appreciate either the entertainment, the perspective, or the emotional catharsis.

But for those who move in the workplace (as authors, speakers, innovator-entrepreneurs), they must either find a need and fill it, identify a problem and solve it, or create a desire and fulfill it.

That's why it's critical to have your target audience in mind before you begin.

Mistake #2: Developing the Book or Product Before You Create a Marketing Plan

Take it from me, the author of more than 50 books (novels and nonfiction) with major publishing houses: *Writing* a book is much easier than *marketing* a book.

You'll rarely hear of an entrepreneur developing a product without knowing his or her ideal buyer. They can tick off demographics with great specificity: Senior citizens who've never had golfing lessons, but want to start mastering this sport in their retirement. Mothers of toddlers who get tired easily of

taking toddlers to the grocery store with them. Professionals who “eat on the run” and need quick-and-easy snacks and breakfasts.

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Think marketing from the “get-go.” How will you reach these specific readers? That thinking will lead you to shape the actual book as early as the first draft.

Mistake #3: Failure to Build a Platform or Brand

About two months after we finished building and moving into our new house, boards in the hardwood floor started popping up here and there. The builder didn’t seem too concerned about the problem, but promised to send over his installers to re-nail the wood. But the planks continued to pop, move, and crackle—and the builder got tired of sending over the installers to do the repairs.

Instead, he cavalierly told us, “So sue me!”

His wish became our command. But we didn’t go out and hire just any ole’ lawyer. We called up the general contractor for our office building, told him the problem, and asked him for an attorney referral.

He responded immediately, “There’s a guy in Dallas. I’ll have my assistant send over his contact info. There’s no one who strikes more fear in the heart of builders—commercial or residential—than this attorney. He doesn’t lose a case.”

We didn’t call the attorney down the street. We wanted the best. (And the referred attorney won the case and got us a great settlement—the builder was required to pull up the entire downstairs flooring, buy new wood, and start over.)

Book readers are of the same mindset. They want to learn from the best. They want to hear hard lessons and success strategies from those who have

excelled in their field. So if you're having trouble gaining the attention of an agent or editor, your book manuscript may not be the problem.

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They're more likely investigating your following on social media, your speaking invitations, and your reputation in the industry. Start there to lay the groundwork. Build your brand (or "platform" as publishers call it).

Avoid these three mistakes and you'll find the road to successful publication much easier, faster, and smoother.

Dianna Booher is the bestselling author of 50 books, including ***Communicate Like a Leader***. She helps organizations communicate clearly. Follow her at BooherResearch.com and @DiannaBooher.
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