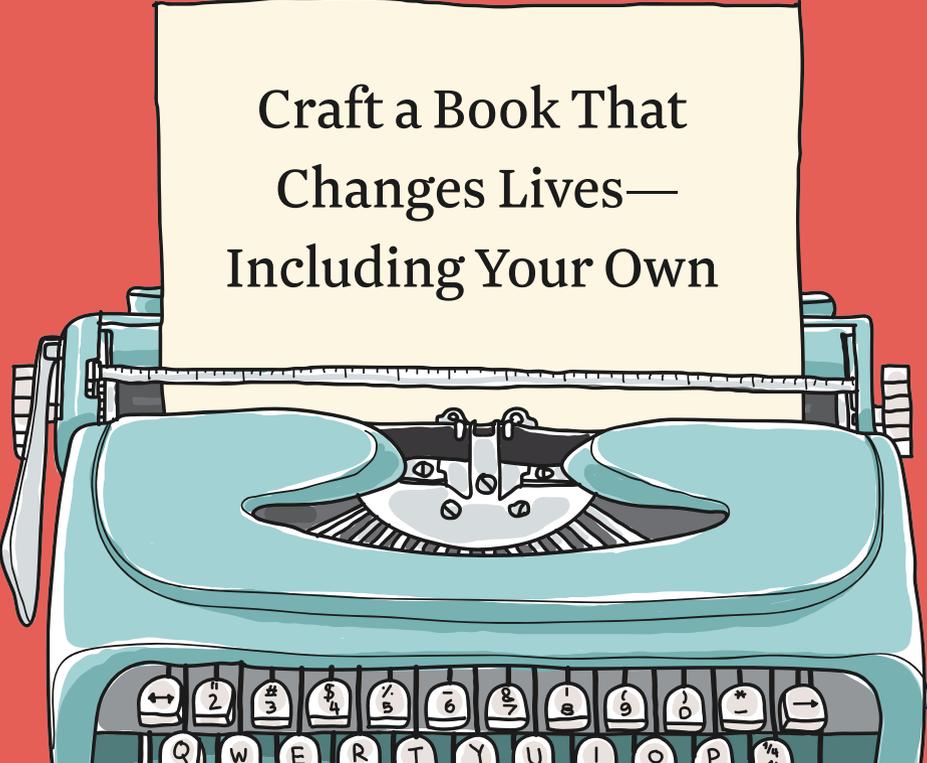


“An essential resource to help you produce the works  
you were put on Earth to bring forth.”

STEVEN PRESSFIELD, bestselling author of *The War of Art*

A J HARPER

# Write a Must-Read



Craft a Book That  
Changes Lives—  
Including Your Own

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# Introduction

## A Book Is Forever

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**W**HEN I WAS a ghostwriter, my motto was, “A book is forever. Write a good one.” So many clients came to me because they wanted to “just get something out.” Knowing how much effort, time, and money is involved in writing, publishing, and marketing a book, even a mediocre one, I wondered why anyone would start the process with that attitude.

I wrote exclusively for personal and professional development authors: books that promise to help readers improve some aspect of their life or work. The “better business card” racket that dominated my industry at the time—and still does—created a “drive-thru” mentality about books. I imagined wannabe authors driving up to the menu at Books-to-Go and ordering their debut: “I’ll take a two-hundred-and-fifty-page business book, Tony Robbins style, with a side of Brené Brown. Hold the action steps. And can you super-speed that? I need it in seven minutes, not ten.”

I once had a client hire me to write her second book. When I asked about her first one, she said, “Oh, please don’t read it. It’s just a little thing I wanted to get out.” Please don’t read it? She had a book out there that she didn’t want people to read. Can you imagine? She counted on the fact that no one would crack it open, because she wrote

it in a hurry so she could say she was a published author. She wasn't proud of her book; she knew it could have been better—much better. And yet, it was still available for anyone to purchase.

Click on the listings for many Amazon category bestsellers and you'll see a lot of “abandoned” books—books that people wrote and published quickly and then left up for proof that they wrote it. How can you tell? Look at the reviews. Has it been a year or more since someone left one? That means the author likely isn't promoting it, or not much. Look at the sales rank. Is the book ranked at one million or higher? That means it sells a handful of copies a year.

How did this happen? How did we get to this place where the main goal is speed, not quality? Where the focus is on the perks of being an author, not authorship?

In 2005, when I shifted from writing plays to ghostwriting books, most of the people I met just wanted to add a book to their platform. Sure, they wanted it to be good. Yes, they hoped it would help some people. But their primary goal was to get their book done and use it to catapult their careers and businesses. They wanted higher speaking fees—or they wanted to become a speaker. They wanted to drive clients to their business. They wanted to become an influencer, a brand, a big f-ing deal. And they believed a “better business card” book would help them do all that. They didn't expect their published work to be on par with the books they loved. Heck, many of them didn't expect people would read their books. That strategy worked somewhat for some of them. But it would have worked better if they'd written a better book.

I later learned that the “better business card” concept was born after self-publishing became more accessible, affordable, and accepted, and with it came a legion of people who profited off aspiring authors. These people and companies touted the speed and ease of self-publishing and, in doing so, dropped the editorial standards and necessary milestones followed by traditional and high-end hybrid publishing. Authors churned out books in months, even weeks. And when they didn't have time to write their own books, or didn't know how to write, they hired ghosts like me to do it for them.

Over the next ten years, I worked with more than five hundred authors—some for just one chapter, others for one or multiple books. I had the privilege of writing for and with some of the most successful authors of that time. And I noticed a pattern. Those who focused on their reader—their desires, their questions, their concerns—had legions of followers. Those who focused on themselves—their message, their ideas, their stories—did not.

You can game the system to become a bestselling author. You can even legitimately pull it off at launch. But what happens to your book after it's published? You won't gain a massive readership if people don't read, love, and recommend your book.

Here's the thing many aspiring authors don't understand (yet). Any book *will* help you expand your career and grow your business. If you want the catapult, though, you need a must-read. A great book, a truly transformational book, a book that really does change lives, *that* is the book that will get you the highest and best results. You know why? Because people will talk about it. It really is that simple. Why do successful thought leaders have legions of fans? Because they wrote a book that made such an impression on readers, their readers told a friend. Or a colleague. Or a family member. They said to one or more people, "You've got to read this book." And they said that because the book helped them in some way.

Your book is not a better business card. Why would you want that? People throw business cards away. Don't write a book to promote yourself. Write a book because you have something to say that could really help people. Period. If you go into writing a book with the intention of "just getting it out there," you are not going to write the book you were meant to write or help as many people as you could.

A book is forever. Once it's out there, you can't get it back. Every book printed has a life of its own. It's on bookshelves, in boxes, on garage sale tables. It's given as a gift. Your kids will read it. Your grandkids will find it and read it. Strangers will read it. Future clients or employers will read it. Writing a book is a major endeavor, so why short-change yourself and your readers by trying to rush through it? Why not make it great? Why not write a book that really makes a difference?

I hope that's why you're reading this right now—because you *do* want to make a difference. That's the first requirement to write a must-read.

IN 2016, burned out after writing too many books and feeling disillusioned by the self-help industry, I hung up my ghost costume. Some of my clients encouraged me to teach or coach aspiring authors so they could write their own transformational books. At first, I was reluctant. I thought, *No one else can do what I do. It's intuitive.*

When I shared this belief with Mike Michalowicz,<sup>1</sup> with whom I've written nine books, including *The Pumpkin Plan*, *Profit First*, *Clockwork*, *Fix This Next*, and *Get Different*, he called me out. "That's bullshit. It's your ego talking. You have a system, and you can teach that system to other people. You just need to break it down."

*Impossible. Most people don't want to put in the work it takes to write a must-read.*

Then Mike asked me to attend an author retreat in Maryland and provide support for the attendees. He'd teamed up with Michael Port, author of the bestseller *Book Yourself Solid* and other books. Again, I was reluctant. I had worked one-on-one with my ghostwriting clients over months, sometimes years. How could I help these people over the course of four days?

I don't remember how it happened, but I ended up doing back-to-back laser coaching to help the aspiring authors with their core concepts and their outlines. To say I was winging it would be an understatement, but I approached it the same way I wrote game-changing books. I figured out how to help each author in their own language. I drew on the clarifying questions I had asked my clients over the years, the same questions that helped me craft their books. I demonstrated how to draft an outline that would make sense to

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1 Mike is one of only a handful of authors for whom I've written who is open about our collaboration and allows me to talk about it. I love that about him, and that's one of the reasons I still write with him. If you're wondering about my other ghostwriting clients and the books I wrote for them, I'm afraid you'll have to keep wondering, because nondisclosure agreements prevent me from sharing that information publicly.

readers. I explained the concept of delivering on a promise, not just making one.

One by one, the authors' ideas took shape. One by one, they gained confidence in their message as they refined it. One by one, they sat taller in their seats, the way forward visible and their aims affirmed.

I started to see that these people really did want to write a book that changes lives. They weren't interested in a "better business card." I should have expected this, since Mike and Michael subscribe to a much higher standard. Still, it was a welcome surprise. I started to have hope that maybe, just maybe, aspiring authors wanted to give more to their readers, to do better. I knew some of my clients wanted that, but up until then, I thought most people just wanted a quick turn-around, a template, a fill-in-the-blank book that would make all their dreams come true.

Turns out, I underestimated "most people."

That's when I started to think, *Huh. Maybe I can teach this.*

Then I had a bigger thought, a bolder thought: *Maybe I can help change the way people think about writing personal and professional development books. Maybe I can inspire authors to want more, to adopt higher standards. Maybe we can get better books published, books that could change the world.*

On the drive back from Maryland to New York, Mike at the wheel, I sat in the backseat and started breaking down the reader-focused framework and methods I'd developed over the years.

To make sure my process worked, I took on new clients: entrepreneurs and speakers who wanted to write the kind of books I once wrote. Instead of ghostwriting their books, I showed them how they could do it and to a higher standard than they believed possible for themselves. From soup to nuts, I guided them through the process from idea to publication, taking notes about my process along the way. With those notes I created a curriculum for an online workshop.

And I declared a new mission: To empower authors with the knowledge, strategies, tools, and support they need to write and publish game-changing books that are in service of the reader.

Then, in 2018, I launched Top Three Book Workshop, a fourteen-week live online class I now hold twice a year for fifteen authors. I call it Top Three to attract aspiring and established authors who want their book to be on someone's top three list of favorite books. Authors who hope to write something that truly changes lives. Authors who are willing to put in the work to create something remarkable. Over the years, this class has grown into a powerful author collective that is among the greatest joys of my life. By providing them with the framework and the feedback they need to craft a book, and by expecting excellence, I found my people at last. They had been looking for a resource to help them write a better book, the book they needed once upon a time, the book they know so many people need now.

Maybe that's why you're here. Maybe you, too, have been turned off by the "better business card" mentality and the book-in-a-weekend programs. Maybe you need a home for your big, bold mission. Maybe you want to write a must-read, and you simply need guidance. I hope so, because that's what you'll find in these pages. This book is not a page-turner; it's a workshop. Writing is my calling, editing is my superpower, and, as it turns out, teaching is my jam. I love it.

I wrote this book because I want you to have access to the frameworks and guidance I once gave my clients and now give my authors in Top Three Book Workshop. Whether you bought it, borrowed it, or checked it out from your local library (yay!), I want you to learn how to write the book that's been on your heart; the book you've been meaning to start, or finish; the book you've been called to write. I don't want you to have to settle for a template or rush to publish. Your ideas, your message, your story deserve more than that. Your readers deserve more than that. They deserve not just your words, but your *craft*. To craft is to produce with care, skill, or ingenuity. In these pages, I can help you develop the skills, and I've got ingenuity on lock. The care, well, that's up to you.

Your book is forever. Let's craft a good one together.



## Reader First, Last, and Always

---

IT WAS THE fastest I ever spent \$1,500. It was also the only time I booked a trip without first consulting my calendar—and checking with my wife.

The subject line caught my eye: “Spend the Day with Steven Pressfield.”

I opened the message immediately. Now, you should know that I hate email, and because I am usually writing or editing, I have a bad habit of letting emails pile up, unanswered. Promo emails? Forget about it. I am an email marketer’s worst nightmare—I almost never open them.

So, why did I click on the email about spending the day with Steven Pressfield?

Because his book *The War of Art* changed my life.

Pressfield had never done an event like that before, and the prospect of spending a day with him, learning from him in person, was so exciting, I didn’t hesitate to open the email. I also didn’t hesitate to hit the “buy” button and plunk down a bunch of money for the one-day experience. I didn’t care what it cost. Okay, I cared. I just didn’t care enough to hesitate.

Within two minutes of receiving the email, I registered as one of the lucky thirty-five. Within ten minutes, I booked my flight to Nashville where the event would be held. I didn't check first to see if it would take me away from something important. I simply had to see him.

I ended up squeezing the trip in between two other trips and only spent about twenty-six hours in Tennessee. I arrived late the night before with a belly full of butterflies. From the time I left New York, I tried to think of something appropriate to say to Mr. Pressfield. However much I enjoy someone's work, I'm not the type of person who waits at stage doors or stands in line to get autographs. I cringe from second-hand embarrassment whenever people try to talk to celebrities. Still, this was my chance. I'd have to come up with something.

Because we were a small group, I expected to be among strangers. Which is why I was so surprised to spot my friend Susan Michal sitting in the front row. If not for her beckoning me over to sit next to her, I probably would have found my "usual" seat in the back row, chair closest to the door.

When Mr. Pressfield arrived, the butterflies in my belly multiplied by ten. Is this how people feel about meeting boy bands? Or sports heroes? Because, wow.

A tall, soft-spoken man with a kind face, he shared his thoughts on the artist's journey and stories from his early life as a writer. Every so often he referred to his loose, typewritten pages, which he left on the table just inches from my own notebook. As he spoke, I took copious notes. One of his comments about Joseph Campbell's breakdown of the Hero's Journey had me buzzing in my seat, looking around the room to see if anyone else noticed the story structure glitter bomb he had just dropped. (More on that later.)

At the break, Mr. Pressfield remained in the room, scanning his papers just a foot away from me. While I tried to muster the courage to get his attention, the woman at the table next to mine motioned him over and said, "Your book changed my life."

She clutched her copy of *The War of Art* to her chest and then slowly slid it across the table toward him. I was close enough to see the deep creases along the spine from years of reading and rereading.

She opened the book and proudly displayed marked-up pages. She had underlined, circled, and highlighted passage after passage. So many corners had been turned down, the book had expanded in size, as if someone had dipped it in water and left it in the sun to dry.

“You probably hear that all the time,” she said.

Mr. Pressfield offered an unassuming smile and nodded. “A fair amount, yes.”

I kicked myself for forgetting my own copy of *The War of Art*. Not because I wanted an autograph; I, too, wanted to show him my well-loved book, evidence that it had made a difference in my life. A visual representation of how much it meant to me, how much it *still* means to me. I’d lost count of how many times I’d read it.

*Tell him your story*, I thought. *Tell him why you’re here*. I tried to find the words to say it succinctly, not to take up too much of his time.

After he autographed the woman’s copy of his book, I seized the moment.

“I quit my job because of that book,” I blurted. Not exactly eloquent, but okay.

His eyes narrowed. “How did that turn out for you?”

“Very well. It was one of the best decisions I’ve ever made.”

His shoulders relaxed and he smiled again. “Good. People tell me that often, and I’m always afraid they went broke.”

Yes, *The War of Art* inspired me to quit my job. Steven Pressfield didn’t tell me to do it; I finally summoned the will to do it, because of his words. After reading his book, I won my decades-long battle with writer’s block and devised a system, which I share later in this book, to ensure that it would never happen again. I also vowed that I would never take a “straight” job again—the day jobs many artists take to support themselves while they write, paint, make music. And I didn’t. I read his book in 2004 and by March 2005, I was done with straight jobs forever.

Through his book, Pressfield introduced me to the concept of Resistance and, through practice, I was able to develop a system that worked for me. It worked so well, in fact, I stopped believing that writer’s block was a thing—because it isn’t. That was the missing piece I needed to follow my heart, to follow my dreams. If it weren’t for his

book, I'm quite certain I would not be living the life I live today, the life I love. And you would not be reading *this* book, because it would not exist.

I did get in trouble with my wife for booking the trip, by the way, because I had forgotten that she had purchased tickets for us to see Brandi Carlile at Madison Square Garden for a special date night. That did not go over well. At all. She forgave me, but I'm pretty sure she's still mad about it. Was seeing Steven Pressfield worth the expense and the argument with my wife? Yes, it was. To have the chance to meet and learn from someone who changed the course of my life was worth that and more.

When you write a book that helps a reader transform some aspect of their life, they become your ardent follower, your raving fan, your ambassador. They don't hesitate to take you up on your offers. They sign up for your classes. They buy your next book, and your next book, and your next—often without thinking about it. They move heaven and earth to gain access to you. And they help you sell your book. I have recommended *The War of Art* to hundreds of students, clients, colleagues, and friends. I have purchased dozens of copies to give to people. Heck, I'm telling you how awesome it is right now, which will probably lead to more book sales for Steven Pressfield.

All that is possible when you set out to write a must-read.

Think about the books that changed your life. The books you will never part with, that survive through various moves and stages of your life. The books you underline, dog-ear, and highlight. The books you keep on your nightstand, because you want to read them over and over. The books you may not read again but keep as a souvenir for the experience you had reading them, or to remember all that you accomplished because you read them. These are the books you give as gifts and recommend to people. These are the books you buy in paperback, ebook, and audiobook because you want access to all the versions on all your devices. These are the must-read books that make it onto your top three list of faves.

Imagine writing a book that inspires change in readers, that motivates them to fix something, change their mind about something,

or change their behavior, to grow, to make bold decisions and take important action. Imagine writing a book that readers underline, dog-ear, and highlight; a book people reread again and again and again. Imagine writing a book that people love so much, they fly across the country just to meet you and say, “Thank you. Your book changed my life.”

This is the book you are about to learn how to write.

## The Reader Transformation Sequence

You have big dreams. You want to make an impact—on your industry, your community, your country, the world. You want to change things for the better. Show people the way, a better way. You want to become an industry leader, or start a movement, or grow your brand exponentially. To do this, you’re going to have to sell a lot of books. A whole lot. And to sell a lot of books, you’re going to have to get a lot of people to tell other people your book is a “must-read.” A lot, a lot.

To sell books, many authors shift their focus from writing to book marketing and the launch. This is a very important part of authorship and I hope you give your book the push it deserves. The problem is, when we focus solely on the launch, we start to think primarily about getting people to buy our book, and not much beyond that. This is one reason so many people end up with short-lived “bestsellers” that no one can remember a few months later.

Your book becoming a bestseller is not a fixed state. Most—and I do mean most—of the Amazon “bestsellers” made it to the top of an obscure category for a day or so, and then nothing. Even some *New York Times* bestsellers don’t sell well past the first week. Why not? Why doesn’t bestseller status lead to more book sales for some authors?

The answer is simple. Few buyers actually read the books they purchase, and fewer still finish them, and almost no one is actually better because they read them.

If you buy a book but don’t read it, what’s the likelihood that you’ll tell someone else to buy it? Or if you buy it and read part of it? Or if you buy it and read most of it, but don’t actually follow the author’s advice?

When a book languishes in your “to be read” or “to be finished” pile, it’s not top of mind when someone asks you, “Read any good books lately?” So a book that sells well right out of the gate can easily fizzle out because no one is recommending it.

What you want is a perennial bestseller, a book that sells well year in and year out. That’s a book that will change *your* life. And to get that book, you need to first be mindful of what I call the Reader Transformation Sequence: buy, read, finish, act on, tell. You want readers to buy your book, read it, finish it, act on your advice, and then, because some aspect of their life has been transformed, tell someone about it. Or tell a lot of people about it. A lot, a lot.

How do you do that? Here’s a quick reference I hope you’ll jot down and keep close as you read this book:

**Buy.** Readers will buy your book because you have a solution for their problem.

**Read.** Readers will read your book because you see them and you get them.

**Finish.** Readers will finish your book because they trust you.

**Act on.** Readers will follow the advice in your book because you believe in them.

**Tell.** Readers will tell people about your book because *they* believe in *you*.

You’ve probably heard that you need to write a book that is a solution to your reader’s problem. That’s usually where most people stop thinking about the reader. And this is why so many books fail to catch on. You’ve got to think about your reader beyond getting them to buy the book. If they don’t see themselves on the first page, it’s not likely they will actually read your book. Maybe they’ll finish the first chapter, but if you don’t connect with them, they will set your book aside. If they do feel seen by you, you can still lose them at any time if they think you’re full of it, if you don’t have the solution to their problem

or don't understand their perspective, or if you ask too much of them. This is when you lose their trust, and it's nearly impossible to get back.

If they do trust you, they'll finish your book. Still, it's tough to get them to act on your advice. People are busy. Most won't do the thing you ask them to do, which could mean they won't experience the transformation you promise. But when they know you believe in them, when you've made it easy for them to take action and inspired them to try, most of your readers will do the thing. And when all of that happens—when they buy, read, and finish your book, when they act on your advice—a magical thing happens. Now they believe in you. And when they believe in you, they tell the world.

So, how do you pull off this Reader Transformation Sequence? How do you do this when you aren't even sure your idea is book-worthy? When you aren't sure anyone will want to read what you have to say? When you're concerned you don't have what it takes to write something readable, much less remarkable?

Focus on your reader.

To get them to read, finish, act on, and finally tell someone about your book, start with your reader and stay with them all the way through.

## **The Key Understanding That Will Make Any Book Better**

Have you ever read a book that felt like listening to a college lecture? Or your blowhard cousin who tells everyone what to do? Or a guru who thinks the circumstances of your life don't matter? A long pitch from a smarmy salesperson? A conversation with a party guest who goes on and on about themselves and never asks you anything about yourself? Or a frustrating exchange with a tech support person who thinks you're clueless? All those books have the same problem: somewhere along the way, the author forgot about their reader.

To write a transformational book, the key point you need to understand is that a book is not about something. A book is *for* someone. It's not about your topic; it's for the people you serve and the people you hope to serve.

When authors write books about something, they may have a reader in mind and they may want to be of service, but their focus is on their collection of knowledge and stories: What is my reader demographic? What is my message? How much of my knowledge should I share? What stories do I want to include? How long (or short) should my book be? Should I include action steps? How should I organize my book? How can I get on the bestseller list? It's not that they don't want to write a great book; it's just that they are focused on themselves. My book. My knowledge. My stories. My success.

When authors write a book *for* someone, they are focused solely on that person—their Ideal Reader. Now the questions change. Who is my reader (and what do they want, fear, struggle with, wonder about)? Which message will help my reader change (get what they want)? What can I promise my reader? What do they have to understand and what actions do they need to take for me to deliver on that Promise? How can I help them better understand my teaching points? How can I help them feel better about themselves? Where do I need to simplify my process so they can take action? How do I want them to feel at the end of my book? How can I engage with and continue to serve my readership after the book comes out?

When the focus changes, the book changes. Instead of a decent collection of your thoughts, ideas, and stories, you now have a book that is designed to provide the reader with a life-changing experience. We can give the reader our best stuff and hope they take it and run with it, or we can intentionally craft a book that is transformational in and of itself, so that the reader changes by the time they turn the last page. Which book do you think people would treasure? Which book do you think people would tell their friends about? Which book do you want to write?

A must-read book . . .

- 1 Connects with the reader where they are.
- 2 Respects the Reader Journey.
- 3 Delivers the promised transformation to the reader.

Notice that your reader factors in all three of these fundamentals.

A book is not about something. A book is *for* someone. This is the foundation of everything I write, everything I edit, and everything I teach. Making this simple shift will automatically help you write a better book. Even if you stop reading this book right now, you can up your game by keeping that philosophy firmly in mind.

To help my student authors remember this, I coined the phrase, “Reader first, last, and always!” We’ve shortened it to “Reader First.” Write it down. Post it on your computer. Type it at the top of your blank document before you sit down to write.

You may have come across the phrase “serve your reader.” You may also have been given the advice to write a book that changes lives. This is not a new concept. The challenge is that these ideas are almost always limited to the ideation stage of book development. So, for example, you might consider these points when you’re trying to figure out which of your book ideas would best serve your Ideal Reader and which message would help them most. That’s usually where “serve your reader” and “change readers’ lives” ends—in the beginning.

To truly serve your reader and have any hope of actually changing their life with your book, you have to do more than ask yourself that question. You must hold them the whole way through. You have to put the reader first, last, and always. This means from idea through execution. From writing the super-rough draft of your book all the way through engaging with readers after it’s published. Reader First is not just an idea; it’s a craft.

The beauty of putting your reader first is, you will always have an answer. When you wonder, “Should I tell this story?” you simply have to ask yourself, “Does this story serve my reader?” When you aren’t sure what content you’ll need for your book, you simply ask yourself, “What do I need to include that will help me deliver on my Promise to my reader?” When you wonder how long your book should be, or if it should have action steps, or if you need illustrations, or a companion workbook, or, or, or . . . the answer is always, “Would this serve my reader?”

And, because you will always have an answer, you are less likely to give up on your book and stick it in the proverbial drawer. Reader

First can save you from that fate. When you get stuck, when you don't think you can go on, when you are convinced that no one will want to read your book, when you believe the nasty critics in your mind—or in your life—who tell that you're not good enough, talented enough, smart enough, or strong enough to pull this off, Reader First will pull you out of that hole and get you back on track. Because, you see, when we are in service to our reader, helping them is our only goal. We can set aside our desire to be the best, to be perfect, to sell the most books. That ego stuff gets you in trouble. It kills the dream.

We don't need more books that no one reads, that few finish, and still fewer actually follow. We need books that connect with readers, respect their journey, and deliver the promised transformation. You can pull this off. I'm sure of it. And to do that, there's one more shift you'll need to make, one more truth you'll have to accept: writing a must-read book will take much longer than you imagine.

### **Take the Time to Write a Good Book**

I like to declare myself queen of random things. “Queen of Interviews,” “Queen of Hallmark Christmas Movies,” and the one I say most often, “Queen of Managing Expectations.” I keep my expectations low. Like, sub-basement low. Magical underworld low. Scientists believe this is the key to happiness, and it certainly has been the key to mine. The reason I take managing author expectations so seriously, though, is because I've seen too many good ideas die before they became books—and too many great books go unread once they're published.

The dream of authorship is both powerful and precious, and yet in their search for guidance on to how to go about it, many aspiring authors end up settling for easy and fast. Certainly, many people do actually want easy and fast. They want to “get a book done” for a specific event or season, to give away to clients, or just to say they have one. They aren't really interested in people actually reading it. No judgment on those people; they're just not my people.

Sometimes I wonder why so many book coaches and programs tout speed as a benefit of working with them. I don't have the answer, but

I suspect it is in part due to a belief that you can't teach people how to be great writers, so why not make the process easy and fast? From a business standpoint, I guess that makes sense. The problem—the really big problem—is that that approach also breaks hearts.

Yes, you can write the first draft of a book in a few weeks or months. You may even be able to write the first draft of a short book in a weekend—and by short, I mean you can write a pamphlet in a weekend. What you *can't* do is write a great book in a weekend, or in six weeks, or even in three months. This is where the heartbreak happens. Many book coaches and programs lead you to believe that, once you finish your first draft, you can move right into production and publish in weeks, if not days. In production, a copy editor dots your i's and crosses your t's. They fix the grammar, punctuation, and if you're lucky enough to get a *real* copy editor, they'll also fix passive voice and other pesky writing habits newbie authors often have. What they won't fix, however—what they can't fix—are the big issues:

- Does your book speak to your Ideal Reader? Can they see themselves on its pages?
- Does your book meet the reader where they are and take them where they want to go?
- Does your book help them on their journey through your content?
- Does your book deliver on its Promise?

Beyond serving the reader, there are other concerns:

- Are you writing the book that will help you realize *your* dreams? Is this the right book for your short- and long-term goals?
- Does your book represent all that you are and all that you stand for? Does it sound like you?
- Does your book plant seeds for revenue and reader engagement?

It's damn near impossible to answer these questions without guidance, especially if you didn't even know to ask them in the first place.

Not everyone has the talent of a great writer, but that doesn't mean you can't write a must-read. Still, writing a book is hard. Period. It takes time. A lot of time. The process will challenge you and change you. And that's a good thing.

You may not be able to write a must-read book in ninety days, but I'm 100 percent confident you can write a must-read book—eventually. This book will give you the guidance you need to answer the big questions, a framework to help you outline and draft your book, and an editing system to make sure it all works. You'll also need patience. A lot of it. Will you need help along the way? Absolutely. Publishing is a collaboration, and you need good people. That said, with the help of this book, you can do a lot of the heavy lifting on your own.

## **Why Not You?**

At the Steven Pressfield event in Nashville, I forced myself to line up to get a picture with him. I wouldn't have done it, except my writing partner, Mike Michalowicz, had texted me earlier: "Have an AMAZE-BALLS time with Steven Pressfield. Get pictures!"

Mike knew I would probably skip that part, and he also knew how special this moment was for me.

I did get the picture with Mr. Pressfield, and, in my Minnesota-raised self-effacing way, said thank you for a lovely day. It was a pretty good pic, actually. I really do look like I'm glowing with happiness.

Later that day, while waiting for my flight back to New York, I texted the pic to Mike. I thought about how many times I've seen him take pictures with readers, and my mind wandered to some of my own experiences with them. It's rare for a ghostwriter to be on the receiving end of a reader's adoration. When I was a full-time ghost, I operated my business like Fort Knox. I never told anyone who I wrote for, even if that author had not asked me to sign a nondisclosure agreement (NDA). At times, I had to bite my tongue because someone was talking about a book they read, which I wrote. Mike, though, had decided to be open about our writing partnership. He's a bit of a rock star, and

sometimes, despite my best efforts to hug that wall at the back of the room, his fans find me.

Once I was at a networking event, meeting my obligatory five new people, when someone I introduced myself to read my name tag, put two and two together, and then did the “We’re not worthy” bow from *Wayne’s World*. I’m always a little uncomfortable in those situations because really, Mike’s books are Mike’s books, not mine.

At another event, a speaker called me up on stage in front of hundreds of people and told everyone that I write with Mike. I did not expect that! You’ve never seen me move to the back of the room so fast, I assure you. I managed to slip out before anyone could stop me, made it all the way to the elevators, and pressed the button for my floor. Then, like in the movies, someone slid their hand in between the doors just as they were about to close.

Suddenly I was alone in an elevator with a young woman with big eyes. She wore her hair in a high ponytail and pulled a rolling suitcase behind her.

“I’m sorry to bother you,” she said. “Is it true you wrote *Profit First* with Mike?”

I nodded and glanced at the control panel. Nine floors to go.

“Could you tell him something for me? I know it’s a lot to ask, and you don’t know me, but I may never get a chance to tell him myself.”

I softened and offered a smile. “Of course. I’m happy to do that.”

“Could you . . .” She adjusted the strap on her backpack, glanced at the ads on the wall, and then looked me straight in the eyes. “Could you tell him his book saved my business? We were . . . we weren’t going to make it. We almost lost everything. Then I found his book and we turned it around.”

This woman wasn’t a “fan.” She didn’t want a piece of Mike. It wasn’t about an autograph or a picture or a claim to fame. She was a reader who wanted to thank him, because his book changed her life. And if she couldn’t do it directly, she would do it through me. As simple as that.

*Oh, man. So this is what it feels like.*

“Yes. I will tell him,” I said.

The doors opened for my floor, she thanked me, and we said our goodbyes. Before I even made it to my room, I’d passed the woman’s message along to Mike and added, “It means a lot to me to see first-hand how we’ve changed readers’ lives.”

Now, sitting at the Nashville airport, having just met my literary hero, I thought about my authors—the students and clients who trusted me with their book babies. *This is what I want for them*, I thought. I want their readers to seek them out. To write them about their progress. To wait in line to meet them. To stop them in elevators and say, “Thank you so much.”

This is what I want for *you*, lovely reader.

And before you think, “Who am I to think so big?” or some version of that nonsense, let me tell you that “AMAZE-BALLS” Mike, rock star Mike, well, he had just as much experience as you, once upon a time. When I met him, he was unknown and super green. He didn’t even call himself an author. He didn’t know how to put his reader first, how to tell a great story, or how to deliver real change on the page. He hadn’t developed his voice or his vision. He simply wanted to make a difference for entrepreneurs and to write an excellent book that would be a game-changer for them.

He learned. He got better. He focused on craft.

He devoted himself to authorship. And he became an author.

You can, too.

If you have big dreams for your book, don’t ask yourself, “Who am I?”

Ask a different question.

“Why *not* me?”

*Write a Must-Read* is available now  
on Amazon. [Click here to pre-order!](#)