

So you want to write a book

There is nothing like a successful book to impart wisdom, make you a more recognizable name in the business field, and open doors to speaking, teaching and other opportunities. But if your intentions are serious, you first must answer these questions. **BY BARBARA MONTEIRO**

FOR MANY OF YOU, writing a book may be just a passing thought. The pressing nature of business for most executives means that you've hardly had time to seriously consider whether (1) you should put your efforts into such a venture, and (2) what to expect to achieve, besides having fun recounting business events from your perspective or hoping to give useful advice to future leaders and managers.

For most of my career I've worked with nonfiction authors specializing in business, economics or finance. Many combined teaching with consulting and writing, such as C.K. Prahalad who wrote the now classic, *The Fortune At the Bottom of the Pyramid* that we launched as the leading book of the Wharton Business Book series. Others like Bill George, former chairman and CEO of Medtronic and now Harvard professor, began writing his books after leaving his corporate position. He created the concept and bestselling book *True North*, and has used it as a platform for other writing, classroom teaching, speaking and consulting. His fourth book, *True North Groups: A Powerful Path to Personal and Leadership Development*, was published in fall 2011. There are those who are working full-time in their field while writing, such as Jane Stevenson, vice chair of KornFerry's CEO and Board Practice, and Bilal Kaafarani, whose book *Breaking Away* was launched in spring 2011.

Here is the thought process

Whether you are in the middle of your career or at the top, whether you already write a blog or speak before conferences, here's the thinking process you might use to decide whether writing a book is the right step for you. Before you begin the formulation of a book project or think

about hiring a ghostwriter, here are some questions you should ask yourself if you are serious about writing a book.

1. What is the purpose of my book? You'll need to define what you want the book to accomplish. As a business executive, you already set goals for yourself and then plot the process to achieve them. You'll need to think about your book in a similar way. With a larger purpose than simply yourself, you are more likely to find the energy to act as an advocate for the book once it is published. Please note: This is a different question than the one often asked in radio or television interviews — "Why did you write the book?" From my perspective, everyone has a unique story to tell, but that doesn't mean it should be in book form.

2. Who is the target market for your book? This is an important question because you should be envisioning a real person in your target market and writing with that person in mind. For example, if you're writing about leadership, then you'll need to be thinking about the middle manager who is looking for inspiration and advice for leading his team. If you're writing about how to turn around

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a business, then you'll be thinking about the C-suite people under pressure to find a way out of a difficult situation. And, if you're writing about innovation, then you'll need to have many examples, both successes and failures, to show the reader how to think about the concept and how to pitch it so that it can get funded.

3. Why should people in your target market buy your book? You'll need to do some research to answer this question. One of the first things you'll be asked by a publisher or a book agent is how does your book stack up against the competition. There are a few ways for you to evaluate what you're up against. I advise that you visit your local bookstore and look at the books on the shelves, what is facing out and most likely selling well and what is on the "new nonfiction" tables near the front door. You can also visit your local library and ask the librarian about books that are regularly checked out in the business section. It is important to physically see the competition, look at the endorsements on the back of the book jackets, read the copy on the inside flap as well as the author biographies. Then try to envision who will endorse your book, which means they'll get an advance reading copy and be interested in you and your book in order to get you a quote under a tight deadline.

You should also use Amazon as a tool for sizing up the competition. Read the top 10

books in your subject or topic area and decide what your book would add. Read the Amazon reviewers comments on the top books as a way to understand why these books are selling well.

4. How is your message different from the books already published in your theme area? Scan Amazon with key words to see how books in your area are presented and what sales rankings they have. For casting a wider net, I would track some Google conversations with key words to see what conversations are taking place on your topics, such as "management" or "business strategy." These are conversations you'll be advised to join in on once the book is out.

An editor once told me that he wouldn't sign up an author if that author hadn't read at least five books that year in their specialty. Doing your homework on the competition will also help you when you submit your book proposal to an agent

or a publisher. Every book that is presented has this information available so that the publishing house knows how to represent the book to the bookstores and online retailers.

5. How can you increase your expertise and visibility in your area before you write your book? Your expertise will become part of the "platform" for your book. Here are some avenues that authors can pursue to increase their expertise. Do you lead professional conferences and debate opposite views from your own? Have you served in an executive position in trade associations? Have you received any awards for your work? Does the media already seek you out for comments? And, have you done pro bono work in your field? The more of these activities that you can already have on your resume, the better for making a name for yourself in your field and getting your book signed by a publisher.

6. How do I write my book? Do I need a ghostwriter? Once you've done your homework, you'll need to make a commitment to writing. I would advise that you make an outline of the chapter headings and then put your effort into completing the first three chapters. I would seek out a close business associate who will tell you the truth and have them read the chapters. If you need help with writing, there are many book agents who can suggest "book doctors" who can take what you've written and make it smoother and easier to read.

7. Do I need a literary agent or can I submit the manuscript myself? An agent will be interested in your book only if there is money in an advance that the publisher would offer, as well as royalties based upon sales. If a book agent takes your project on, then you should go through the process of finding a publisher, even though you might be in a hurry to see your work published. If a major publishing house takes the manuscript then you'll have distribution of the title in Barnes & Noble and independent bookstores as well as Amazon. For a business book, there is more credibility with a traditional publisher. If you are writing fiction, self-publishing is a more accepted route.

8. How long will it take to get my book published once the manuscript is accepted? What do I do while I'm waiting? It can take from six months to a year to see your manuscript transformed into a real book. Publishers vary due to their pipeline of books and the printing season. Fall is the heaviest season for new books. In the meantime, you'll be reading copyedited pages and be thinking about how to market the book once it is available. You

One of the first things you'll be asked by a publisher or a book agent is how does your book stack up against the competition.

should be signed up on LinkedIn and be creating a website for yourself and the book. You don't have to pay a fortune to have this done; there are easy online programs that can take you through the process

You should be creating your author page on Amazon before the book comes out. You can blog through the author page, list your speaking engagements, and interact with your readers. You should also be giving advance copies of the manuscript to influential people who will read it and give you an advance quote to use on the jacket of the book.

9. Will I need a book publicist to help me get attention for my book? If you are not already a household name such as Bob Lutz or Jack Welch, then I would highly suggest that you hire a specialized book PR firm to help you get attention for your book in print, radio, on the Web and blogs and, depending upon the subject of the book, television. But then, that is what I do for living. Most publishers put the resources they have available to help your book become a success — working behind the scenes with Amazon and Barnes & Noble. Their in-house publicist may be able to work closely with you. But to get the maximum out of your book launch, you should consult with your agent and editor and seriously consider hiring a book publicist.

The power of a book

There is nothing like a successful book to impart wisdom, make you a more recognizable name in the business field, and open doors to speaking, teaching and other opportunities. Not only will your opinions be sought after, but you'll feel a sense of satisfaction that all your hard work is paying off. When I see my authors speaking before groups and the audience cannot wait to get an autographed copy of their book, then I know a unique contribution is being made to the field of business intelligence.

One of my authors told me that he got a handwritten note from a CEO of a top American car company saying that he enjoyed the book and found it helpful in leading his organization. You cannot replicate the joy and sense of accomplishment that my author felt because his book was read by and helped a top executive. Never underestimate the power of a book, and, therefore, the power of an author to change how people think. ■

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*Your expertise
will become part of
the 'platform' for
your book.*

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extraordinary coverage of
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