



## **Ghostwriting Isn't for Sissies: Six Lessons Learned the Hard Way** by Bobbi Linkemer

**W**hen I decided to become a ghostwriter, I was quite naïve. I had been writing professionally for close to four decades and freelancing for most of that time. I had written 12 non-fiction books on a range of topics. I had developed a workbook and taught many people how to write nonfiction books. I had even written an e-book called *So, You Want To Be A Ghostwriter?* I thought I knew the score. Boy, was I wrong.

Here are some of the things I have learned so far:

**1** Ghostwriting is not a euphemism for freelancing, only bigger. Nothing I have done in my freelance career has come close to planning, researching, and writing a book for another person. It is so unique, it deserves its own label; and I think ghostwriting is perfect. You are very much like a ghost: your presence is palpable; your influence is real; but you are largely invisible.

**2** Helping someone write a book is like becoming a nanny to her only child; it's personal. In the beginning, a book is merely an idea, a distant goal. But, as that idea begins to take shape — first, in an outline; then, in chapters; and, finally, in a cohesive manuscript — the author feels an increasing sense of ownership. This is her baby, not yours.

**3** Contracts are crucial, but no matter how clear and carefully constructed they are, don't be surprised if their provisions become a little fuzzy over time. You set up a timetable with strict deadlines and milestones. You and the client agree that they are achievable. Perhaps, at first, you both stay on schedule. But, then, things slow down. The client's life or business interferes; the project suddenly seems overwhelming to him; his interest or commitment wanes. For whatever reason, the contract is all but forgotten.

**4** Clients are unpredictable and sometimes do what you least expect them to do. You have done everything in your power to assess the situation, the person you will be working with or for, and the problems that may arise as you progress. But people defy being put in neat little boxes. Just when you think you know how your client will behave or react, you may wish you'd majored in psychology instead of journalism.

**5** Thinking you have found a good friend or a soul mate is a mistake; you have found a client. No matter how it feels, you are not a member of the team or part of the family. You are a supplier of services. That is not to say that a friendship can't develop; of course, it can and sometimes does. But, more often, it remains a strictly professional relationship. So, don't be disappointed if that relationship ends with a "thank you" and a handshake.

6 Believing you are indispensable is an illusion. No one is indispensable. There is always another writer who can take over where you left off. Sure, you know the subject like the back of your hand. Sure, you have invested your heart and soul in this project. Sure, you have adopted it as your own. But despite all of that, and hard as it is to accept, you can be replaced.

If your latest experience was more positive than negative, you learned something valuable from it, and you were paid for your work, put this one in the plus column. If, as I am, you are still walking a relatively new path on your career journey, my advice is to keep going. Nobody starts out as an expert. I think that is especially true of writers. Every project is a brand new challenge; every client expects you to prove yourself as if for the first time. If you chose this line of work, that's just what you do ... time after time, book after book. For a ghostwriter, life is always an audition.

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