



## Think Like a Winner by Bobbi Linkemer

**W**riters put words on paper for public consumption, and it isn't always easy. Why? Isn't that what we are supposed to do? What kind of courage does it take to write something — a piece of news, a brochure, a PR release, or an article — and let someone else read it? How scary could that be? The answers to those questions are: Yes, that is what writers do. In reality, it takes a great deal of courage to do it time after time; day after day; sometimes, year after year. In fact, there are few aspects of freelance writing that don't require just plain chutzpah. Think about what it takes to make a living this way.

- **Finding work:** To get an assignment in the first place writers have to make cold calls, send out query letters, show our work, and prove again and again that we have the experience, ability, and wherewithal to do the job. In short, we are constantly trying out for the part.
- **Proving ourselves:** Once we've gotten over that hurdle, no matter how many years we may have been doing this type of thing, we have to convince the client, or editor, that we are capable of learning their particular business, product, audience, or unique perspective. And then we have to prove it.
- **Pricing our work:** Clients usually want to know what the project is going to cost before we have any idea how much of the information is supplied, how much will have to be researched, how many interviews are required, how long it will take to write a first draft, and how many revisions there are likely to be, for starters. Sometimes, we aren't exactly sure of what the client wants because he or she can't quite articulate it. ("I'll know it when I see it," should be a bright red flag!) Yet, even without this basic information, we are expected to come up with an estimate — and live with it — even if it turns out to be ridiculous.
- **Standing our ground:** When we finally arrive at an hourly or project fee that reflects our experience and expertise, we not only have to say it out loud, we have to mean it and insist on it, even when the client or editor says, "What makes you worth that much? I could hire someone for half that amount!" If we submit a contract or letter of agreement with such terms as, "I will begin this project upon receipt of this agreement and 50 percent of the agreed-upon fee," it takes inordinate self-confidence to sit tight until the agreement is signed and the check is in hand.
- **Learning to leave:** And, finally, when the client or editor turns out to be impossible to work with, satisfy, or respect (but you need the money), think of how gutsy it is to say, "This relationship doesn't seem to be working out to our mutual satisfaction. I believe that you should seek another writer."

These are not unusual scenarios; they come with the territory. To face such challenges to one's self-esteem requires a special brand of confidence — one that is solid and assured, but never arrogant or defensive. If you're good, you're good. If you've proved it 10,000 times in every conceivable circumstance, you know it. In fact, you radiate it — or, at least, you should.

An experienced writer I once knew was asked by an editor for a sample of his work. He haughtily replied, "My dear young woman, I do not audition." Not so. As freelance writers, we are constantly auditioning. The trick is to do so with confidence and class. The question then becomes, how does one achieve that attitude?

Obviously, no single article can provide all the answers. But since this is an issue that particularly plagues writers, here are some techniques I have found helpful over the years.

- Give every project your all. Then, you'll always know you did the best job you could possibly do. That is one of the most powerful confidence builders you can employ.
- Maintain your professionalism in every situation. Expect to be treated as a professional. Among other things, that means that you do not have to accept inappropriate or abusive behavior. It takes a strong feeling of self-worth to put a stop to such treatment, even if it means leaving the room or leaving the client; but it's very important to your self-respect to do it.
- If you're not getting feedback, ask for it. Writers often feel as if we are throwing our work into a bottomless, black hole. A lack of criticism is not the same as a compliment or positive reinforcement. It's just a lack of feedback.
- Take criticism graciously. Learn from it. Get your ego out of the way, and concentrate on finding the best solution to a communication problem, not on being a star. Consider constructive criticism a way to improve your work.
- Accept praise. If you receive a well-deserved pat on the back for a job well done, accept it with appreciation. Often, the best response is a simple, "Thank you."
- Keep a portfolio of your best work. That has two purposes: first, it is a powerful marketing tool; and, second, it reminds you of how good you are.
- Keep a file of any "fan letters" you receive. Reread them on bad days. They provide spontaneous, sincere positive reinforcement, which is worth its weight in gold.

Remember that self-confidence in a creative field does not always come naturally. Even if you were born with it, it is subject to rough treatment in this business. That's why it's important to keep it from eroding by reinforcing it after each perceived assault. If you consistently do your best work, you will know it and so will those who hire you. Excellence has a way of shining its own light.