

The Author's Life: 14 Hints on Developing a Career Plan

Dara Girard

1. Remember publication is a business; writing is an art. Get those confused at your peril. Treat publication as you would any enterprise--as a professional. Meet deadlines, learn about the industry, and grow in your craft.
2. Know your market. You wouldn't sell meat to vegetarians, would you? Yet so many new writers don't know where to send their work. If you write mysteries, find a market that buys mysteries. It takes time but saves you the aggravation in the end. Check the recent Writers Market or similar books. Or look at your bookshelves. Which companies published authors you like or have similar stories to yours?
3. Know what you want. Do you want to be published in hardcover or paperback? Do you want an agent or literary lawyer? Do you want to work full-time or part-time? Knowing this will help you develop a roadmap to your chosen destination. You have to know what you want to get it. Remember to write it down. This will prevent you from going off track.
4. Set concrete goals. That means goals that are measurable. "I want to make the best-sellers list" is not a concrete goal. "I will write five pages a day/ one new query letter week/ an article a month" is.
5. Be realistic. Lower your expectation of making \$800,000 on your first book. Build up to that. So what if some fifteen year old got a million-dollar deal? In all likelihood that won't happen to you, so don't be disappointed. Keep writing.
6. Learn the rules then make them work for you. Follow or fudge them. You can pitch a novel you haven't finished, just be prepared to write like a lunatic when they want to see the book right away.
7. Keep submitting. Every salesperson hears the word 'no'. You're selling your work so you will hear it too. Every no gets you closer to yes.
8. Think about quality control. Use a trusted reader, agent, critique partner, friend or spouse to go over your work. They'll help you keep your work in top form.
9. Forget the market sometimes. Between moneymaking projects write what excites you. It may eventually come into fashion. Aside from that it keeps your brain active.
10. Recognize frustration. You'll get frustrated and that's okay, it's part of the industry. A story that was rejected for being "too hard to sell" makes the bestseller's list for a new author. Your agent has stopped returning your calls, your editor leaves, your book sells poorly, or gets a nasty review or letter. Your writing friends are getting better deals than you. It is a competitive market fraught with obstacles, and there will be times you'll want to give up. Don't. Frustration will be a part of your career but it won't last forever.
11. Believe that you will succeed. Half asserted efforts will show. You don't need to be super confidence. You don't even have to think positive, but you do have to believe that you're worthy of success. You do have to write the best books you can. You do have to believe in your stories. Success is your birthright. Stay away from those who think otherwise.

12. Remember that you're enough. You don't need to change. If you can write coherently in your chosen language, you can write whatever you want to. So begin. You improve only by writing. That's it. There's no short cut. You can secure the biggest New York agent in the business, you can get a Ph.D. in literature, you can become best buddies with a best-selling author, or know all the booksellers in your neighborhood. That will not sell your book or make you a writer. Writing does.

13. Forget about luck. Those people we consider lucky did something to receive their so-called luck. They went on the job interview (didn't know they would be hired on the spot) played the Lotto (didn't know that they would win) went on the blind date (didn't know they would meet their match) or wrote the book (didn't know that it would be a best-seller). I'm not saying luck doesn't exist; just that luck follows action. The more you do the luckier you'll be.

14. Have fun! Write without caring about what anyone will say. Remember the joy of creating.

©2005 Dara Girard