

The Waiting Game

Dara Girard

It's always helpful to start off a new year with good habits. As an author, learning to wait is a habit one must master. I haven't mastered it yet—too impatient for that—but I'm no longer climbing the walls. Presently, I have a proposal and manuscript making the rounds. (I flatter myself; they're likely sitting unnoticed on someone's desk. I am trying my best not to think about them. What if my editor hates it? What if someone uses my proposal as a coaster and returns with a coffee ring stain?) It's difficult to wait, but I've been down this road before so I know how to cope.

Unfortunately, not everyone knows how to wait proactively. I know an aspiring author who is slowly going insane while she waits for a reply. Here are the suggestions I told her that may be helpful to you:

Don't check the phone, your email or mailbox thirty times a day. There's a saying that a watched phone never rings. (Remember waiting for that call from a prospective boss or suitor that never came? Pure torture.) Willing the phone to ring or a message to arrive is agony. I know. I've tried. Forget it.

Don't imagine all the ways your package or email got lost. No, the postal carrier wasn't involved in a hijacking where the mail was stolen then dumped in a New Jersey alley where your manuscript is being used as nesting material for a growing family of rats. Be confident that your manuscript made it. The editor or agent just hasn't gotten to it yet.

Don't imagine that the agent or editor is reading over your work and laughing hysterically about how badly written it is. Really, if you think it was bad, you shouldn't have sent it in the first place. Remember: Only send your best work. Once you've sent it out, release it. Let go!

Don't call or email the editor/agent after three days to inquire about the status of your submission. This may be difficult to realize, but your manuscript doesn't have a status because it's not important to the recipient. Your manuscript is one of many and will get read when it gets read--on their schedule not yours. Even if they like the work, after receiving numerous pesky calls or emails they may decide that they don't like you and not offer you a contract. **Caveat:** However, if many months have passed (i.e. 6-10) you are entitled to call or send an email to remind them of your manuscript and jog their memory. Also consider sending your proposal or manuscript to the editorial assistant. They are more eager for material than senior editors.

Don't analyze the silence. Silence doesn't mean yes or no. It means no response yet. It means either they haven't read it yet or they haven't made a decision. But don't worry about the silence because you can't translate it anyway.

As an author who has been in the publishing world for several years, I know it's hard to wait. It's difficult to put your hopes and dreams on the shoulders of one individual and her opinion. My advice? Don't. Don't wait. There's a great chapter in Julia Cameron's book *The Right to Write* called "Making It". In it she advises a young writer who is afraid to submit that "*Everybody's scared to submit things. The trick is to keep writing and submit while you're writing. Don't stop and wait for a response. Keep up your momentum.*"

Even though I occasionally think about my proposals and manuscript sitting neglected on someone's desk (or worse yet in a pile on the floor) I keep myself busy with other projects. I have other books to write, articles, newsletters etc...I also enjoy traveling and dining with friends. Being a writer is just a job, not my entire life. Get busy. Work on your next project. The best way to wait is to not wait at all.

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