

Keep On Rising By Investing In Your Career

By Lynn Crandall

Good Morning! Is anyone wearing pajamas? I'm glad to see you all inside your safe places and yet you're here with me. Don't worry if the dog barks, or your husband walks by half naked, or if one of your children wants to join in. It's all good.

I'm going to play a little bit of the song Keep on Rising to wake up your bones.

How do you feel? Inspired, focused, determined? Good, 'cause that is the opposite of defeated, depressed, and discouraged. With the virus and other troubling things happening around us, this time in the world presents emotional challenges. Today I want you to be able to relax and soak in all the information available during the conference that promises to help you with your writing career. I'm excited to be here with you today and I'm hoping you get useful information from this presentation.

Now, we'll get down to business.

This presentation is going to show you how you can **build** and **sustain** a healthy writing life and find **satisfaction** in it no matter what happens. I'm going to share some things that happened to me and suggest ways to avoid pitfalls common to authors, in particular, me. These pitfalls are what I have been through. I'm not a physician or life coach. I'm simply someone who has made mistakes and suffered, but with the help of other people's input, I have learned to do things differently and enjoy my career. I want to share what I learned through experiences so hopefully you don't go through what I've gone through.

Writers are different but the same. We're all different, but fundamentally we share commonalities. Authors are good at taking disappointments and defeats, but are able to Keep on Rising. If we get a one-star review, we take some time to recover, then get back to writing. It's

what we do. It's what **I** do. We have resiliency and passion to fuel our work. These are things authors have in common. In fact, spend much time with writers and you'll find we all have moments of feeling like a fraud, not knowing what comes next in a story, dismay at reviews and sales number, and on and on.

But commonalities are not limited to the less than lovely experiences. Regardless of the method each of uses to write a book or the genre or genres we write, we all enjoy the process of creating a story. Many of us use Save the Cat, Three Part Story Structure, Chunky Method, or, my favorite, Clustering to plot or pants out the story, but universally authors get a story idea, populate it with characters, and develop the plot. We dive in to building a world and developing a story that meets readers' needs. We all love writing.

Prolific Harlequin and indie author Liz Flaherty put her sentiments succinctly.

"... (W)riting is my happy place. Writing calms the storms for me."

Marie Force, best-selling author and author advocate, expressed similar sentiment about writing.

"I enjoy the unique challenge of putting together a story one page at a time and making it up as I write. There is nothing (about writing) that I don't enjoy," she said.

Prolific and award-winning author Donya Lynne said she was born to write and can't imagine a career in anything else.

"I've been writing my whole life," Lynne said. "I can't remember a time I wasn't writing. Even as a little girl, I could always be found with a pencil and a sheet of paper, writing poems and short stories."

For a variety of reasons, we love writing and want to get our books published and into readers hands. You belong to a group of fellow authors who share your **love** of writing. We all know

what we're talking about when it comes to challenges **and** delights. We can learn from each other what works and what doesn't. We do it all the time. Want to know the secret to writing a good book? Someone in the industry will tell you write what you know, and another will suggest write from your heart. Another person will tell you to write to the trends, and another person will say don't follow the trends. So this weekend is your chance to benefit from other authors' varied experiences and determine what would work for you.

Today, listen to what you hear in the presentations and stay tuned to what is going on with publishing, but know one thing: How you build your career depends on information about yourself. You need to learn to trust your instincts and not let self-doubt or outdated dreams rob you of a successful and satisfying career.

Maybe you always wanted to get a contract with a traditional publisher. That's fine. But be aware what your odds are of fulfilling that dream and know how to go about accomplishing it. Do you want an agent? How will you find one who cares about your writing? These questions and more have personal answers. You want to write a certain type of romance? If the market says what's popular is contemporary romance, you have to decide if that genre is right for you. Information and self-awareness are invaluable to building the career you want.

So let's talk about Building your career.

Building



The first step to building a career you can sustain is, **defining** yourself based on knowing what **your** values are. You need this foundational understanding in order to weather criticism, manage all aspects of your writing career effectively, and find a balance that nurtures you.

That's easy to say. Knowing your values and how to create a career that expresses them is a big deal. I'm pretty sure you all know the definition of personal values, but just for the record, **Personal values** are the beliefs and behaviors that are important to us. When we live from our values, we feel good about ourselves. For instance, if you value forthrightness, you think it's important to be honest, with others and with yourself, even when it's hard. If you value physical health, you consistently eat healthful foods and work out. If you appreciate commitment, you meet deadlines and spend quality time with friends and loved ones. The graphic lists a variety of my personal values, just to give you an idea what yours may be.

To help clarify your values and get in touch with a genuine definition of **you**, let's do an exercise.

Make a list of qualities you believe you possess, your assets and weaknesses you believe you have.



(pause) Did you learn anything new about yourself? Share?

My version of the personal values list includes - impatient, quick tempered, kind, thoughtful, forthright, insightful, creative, fascinated by people, introverted, driven, and ambitious. My **values** include kindness, commitment, being a good listener, being direct, engaging in meaningful conversation, and being gracious and generous. Knowing I'm an introvert, I know I enjoy talking to people, but it is a challenge for me to do book signings. I know if I'm going to do one, I can't let anxiety control me. I have to ground myself and focus on the readers who show up. That's just one example of what knowing yourself can do to improve life and build a career.

Knowing your values and paying attention to them when you make writing-related decisions will form a foundation from which personal responses, choices, and decisions flow.

Now, the process of learning who you are and what your values are is an evolving one. We're so influenced by outer input and past experiences. It's like we're wearing tight, full-body coats that bind and we don't have freedom to move and express, said counselor Lynne McLewin.

“I don’t think people realize what physical strictures emotional needs present to us,” she said.

“As people do inner explorations there is loosening that occurs. For writers, the more you know about your beliefs and the tiny life that is underneath what you express, the greater range of characters you’ll create, and the greater range of activities you’ll have them do. The more ideas you’ll have for getting them into situations.”

McLewin helps individuals learn more about their beliefs and why they’re there.

“Most people don’t know what it means to get to know yourself,” she said. “It’s working on things that need attention and all you have to do is acknowledge.”

So let’s get to know more about ourselves with a simple but revealing exercise from McLewin.

We’re each going to think of a question we want answered. The question could be, why am I afraid of being in the dark? Then you say to yourself the first thing that pops into your mind. Ask the question again and state the answer with the first thing that pops into your mind, then repeat

Okay let’s jump in. You can get a lot of useful information about yourself. We all have beliefs that block us from being who we really are. In this exercise we’re simply noticing and acknowledging. That’s all you have to do to deepen your understanding of yourself.

So to yourself, think of a question or statement and pay attention to what pops up next in your mind. (pause) Afterward we can share.

Make a statement:

1. I believe I'm not a good writer – because someone was mean to me.
2. I believe I don't know things -- because other people are smarter.
3. I believe I'm too sensitive because people told me so.

Repeat the exercise for 5 to 10 minutes and see what stuff inside you is telling you who you are.

It's good to reevaluate your list from time to time. You'll have a solid foundation for forging a quality career that suits you when you define yourself without letting your peers or your family or any other outer would-be authorities tell you who you are. Knowing your values and respecting them will give you guidance to create a career that aligns with your true self, and you'll have more zest for writing and peace inside you.

The next step in building a career is to define success on your terms. But let's first discuss what is **-failure**. What do you consider failing in writing? Anyone can share.

A three-starred review, an Amazon rank of anything less than top 100, not getting an agent are all are things that may prompt us to reassess again whether we're a legitimate writer or not.

Failure is hard, and all the things you just mentioned hurt. But failing at goals you have no control over doesn't tell you who you are or what you should do with your life. Failure is an opportunity to ask yourself if failure defines you. The answer is no every time but the reason you believe it does is worth exploring and acknowledging. Failure shows possibilities for improvement in your writing. Failing isn't a statement about you personally. It's not a sign you should quit writing. It's an opportunity to take a look at what you're doing that maybe you could do differently, then move on. Don't let any form of outer authority define failure for you.

Anyone have anything to add?

-Success

Let's move on to define success. What defines success for you?

Just shout out your thoughts.

Okay, let's personalize your definition of success. (graphic)

Ponder your version of career success, then list what it includes.



Share?

This is as important as defining your values because what success is to you may be similar to other authors' definitions, but it should be personal.

When I started out writing years ago, I wanted to sell books. That was my goal. There is nothing wrong with wanting to sell books, but I had very little control over that. So when promotions didn't garner many sales, I got anxious. I wallowed in self-pity and confusion. Eventually, as I kept writing while trying to find more joy than disappointment and fear in it, I had to learn to focus on the process more than sales. I loved the process of writing, so I kept doing it, even as I questioned my skill. Much later, I realized that I valued inner peace as much as writing, and

started working on what I needed to do to have peace. Not surprisingly, with more peace came more confidence, more room for “failing.”

After these first insights appeared, years of reflection followed in facing needless guilt and shame, along with more productive changes in my view of myself and my career. Writing is a business, and authors have to accept that. But for me, writing has been a path of self-development, which has expanded my sense of self, given me confidence, and made me more alive.

Donya Lynne suggests learning who you are is worth the time it takes to fully understand.

“The trick is in aligning your goals with your passion and style,” she said. “And that can take time.... You have to find what works for you and do it, knowing that what works for you won’t work for someone else, and that’s totally okay.”

A solid understanding of what you believe success looks and feels like will be something you’ll return to over and over as you go through ups and downs, decide whether to go indie or seek a publisher, even on deciding which publisher or agent, or if going indie would make a good fit. On days when you throw your hands in the air and holler, “Why am I writing?” you’ll have substantial answers. I mean something you can create in your life that is lasting because it fits you.

Here’s a quote from Stephen King about what success is not and what it is.

“Writing isn’t about making money, getting famous, getting dates, getting laid, or making friends. In the end it’s about enriching the lives of those who will read your work, and enriching your own life as well.”

I feel the same way as Stephen King. Granted, we all want those things at some level, but creating a writing career that respects your right for self-expression, your need for meaning, and allows you to enjoy writing **is better**. The so-called fame, fortune, and excitement aren't in our control and can be elusive. But inner peace and self-confidence is something you can do something about and along the way find joy in your writing career.

For me, writing has been a path of self-development, which has expanded my sense of myself, giving me confidence, and made me more alive. Those things translated into improving my writing, being excited about trying new things, and loving life more than thinking it sucked.



Sustaining

Now let's look at keeping your career going.

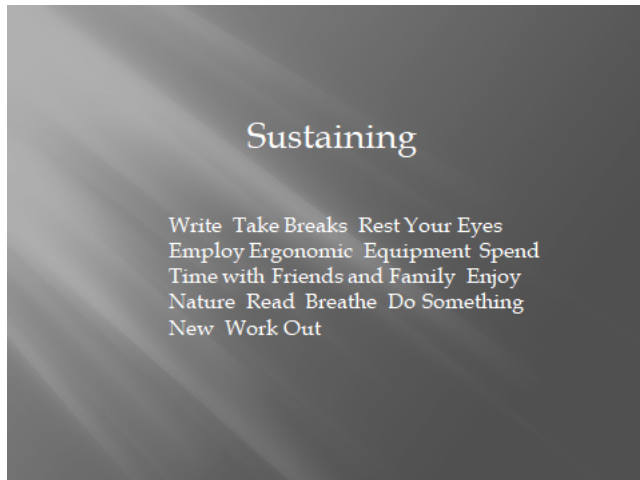
If you're a newbie, you're told to sustain your career you need to write more books. For all of us, sustaining a writing career is often framed in terms of how many books you have in your body of work. *Production is going to pave the way to glories*. I don't disagree. But we should not forget that first of all, in order to sustain a life-time career, you need to take care of your body. You can become immersed in writing your first, second, or third book and find pure joy in the process.

However, so many of us suffer from the things I've already mentioned: self-doubt, burn out, and poor health. That's why we need to talk about not **just** building your career but also sustaining it.

After years of dismay with reviews, even when I got five stars, and working way past when everyone in the family had gone to bed, I was forced to reevaluate my process. I had carpal tunnel syndrome and dry eyes disease. I tried to make do with special gloves for my hands and wrist until I also got a trigger finger. I sought advice from a hand and wrist specialist. It was too late for physical therapy for my wrist and finger. I had to either have an injection or surgery. As for my eyes, I tried a ton of different eye drops but still had headaches and painful eyes. It's very hard to write when your vision is blurry, your eyes burn, and you have daily headaches. Intervening care helped out and my wrist and finger, and my eyes are better. I put into practice ways of working without harming myself, such as, using an actually good and supportive chair and an ergonomically correct mouse and keyboard. I learned you can't overwork your body without consequences, but I now have chronic problems that exert an impact on my writing.

You don't have to pay for your success with your health. Believe it or not, you can achieve the success that meets your goals and still get writer's block, have fearful thoughts, and burnout. But a full understanding of what you're working for and why, can inform your definition of success in a way that doesn't require painful eyes, carpal tunnel syndrome, or burnout. It's about having respect for your values, your instincts, your preferences, your choices, and your health.

To sustain a long career, it's important to pay attention to what you're doing physically that may go sour at some point. I know this from personal experience but to get expert input, I interviewed Abby Kurtz, a Certified Personal Trainer and owner of Pea in a Pod Fitness (<https://www.peainthepodfitness.com/>). She shared a lot of important information, but I'm going to boil it down to some basic highlights I think you'll appreciate.



The demands of writing include sitting at a computer screen. We all know that as our deadlines close in on us we may sit for hours without moving. That's not good. Abby said studies reported by the American Exercise Council found that sitting without moving for large chunks of a day is as unhealthy as smoking or obesity.

“For overall cardiovascular health, sitting does a lot of damage, but there are a lot of things writers can do to prevent damage,” Kurtz said. “For instance, resting your eyes and focusing your eyes on varying distances helps prevent problems from not blinking enough.”

One thing that happens while we sit at our computers for long hours is our metabolism tanks because we're not burning many calories. Don't we all know what that means? Feeling sluggish and gaining unwanted weight. But we don't have to settle for compromised fitness.

“One thing I would suggest for writers is set an alarm on your watch or phone and get up on the hour,” Kurtz said. “Just take a brisk walk for three to five minutes. It's going to get your blood flowing, and blood flow is going to improve your metabolism.”

More than faster metabolism, exercise improves cognition, according to Kurtz.

“It’s well documented exercise promotes improved cognition,” she said. “With better cognition you expand your creative ability and lessen your chances of getting Alzheimer’s disease.”

So moving is good, and so is periodically changing your position while you work on a project. Kurtz said making regular changes in where you write helps keep your muscles balanced and will help prevent repetitive motion stress on your body.

“Sitting the same way all the time is going to cause problems, because you’re going to have muscles that are going to tighten over time and muscles that are going to lengthen. This can cause a sore neck, tight shoulders, and weak gluteals, which can cause back pain. Just having variety helps alleviate all that and more,” she said.

Kurtz said it’s okay if you sit at your desk, then move to your bed or the couch, just keep in mind variety of position is important and so is using good posture.

“If your laptop is on your lap you’re going to be looking down, causing neck strain. Your wrist may be in an awkward position and you’re on your way to having carpal tunnel syndrome,” she said. “Just be mindful of how your body is in the space. It’s important. Poor posture can take a toll.”

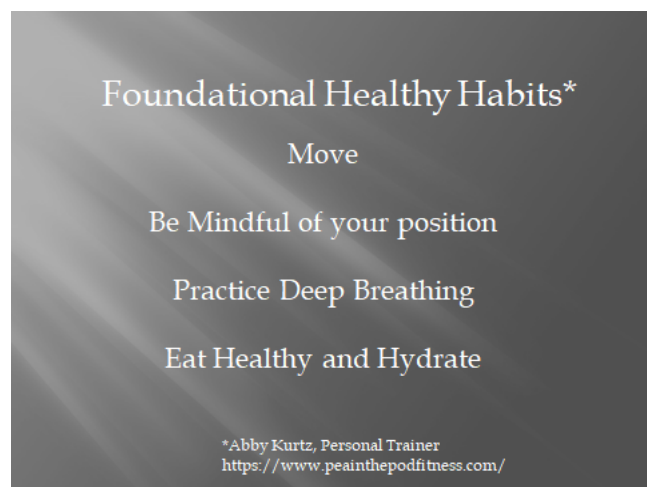
Kurtz recommends that you keep your screen at eye level to protect your neck and shoulders, and stretch your arm out to place your wrist in a less damaging position. To prevent shoulder pain, make sure your elbow is under your shoulder and your back and neck are aligned.

Additionally, Kurtz recommends writers drink eight, eight-ounce glasses of water a day and take time to be intentional with your diet. Hydration and nutrition have as much effect on your cognition as exercise. And she reminded us to breathe. Don’t laugh. When we’re seated, our body kind of collapses into itself, restricting the diaphragm and breathing. Improve your mood and lessen anxiety by pulling in a deep, ribcage-expanding breath and exhaling until your ribcage

sinks into your body. While it may take days or weeks to feel an improvement in your various muscles from exercise and deep breathing, you'll have an immediate improvement in mood and anxiety through simply breathing correctly. Prioritizing these things can fight poor performance over time and compares taking time to get healthy to taking the time needed to write a good book.

"I tell my clients, there is going to be progress, just like when writing a book," Kurtz said. "Use your three to five minute break on the hour to lift light weights, walk, stretch, or breathe and you'll feel better overall."

Now, I know what you're thinking. "I'm not going to do any of this." But trust me; paying respect to your body's needs is important for career longevity.



Meaningful

Building a career isn't enough. I've said in a variety of ways that we need to know what is meaningful to us. Things that are meaningful expand our heart and are fueled by passion. Would you agree?

Here is what some famous writers have said about why they write.

William Wordsworth “Fill your paper with the breathings of your heart.”

Patricia MacLachlan “I, myself, write to change my life... . But other people write for other reasons: to see more closely what it is they are thinking about, what they may be afraid of. Sometimes writers write to solve a problem, to answer their own question. All these reasons are good reasons. And that is the most important thing I'll ever tell you. Maybe it is the most important thing you'll ever hear. Ever.”

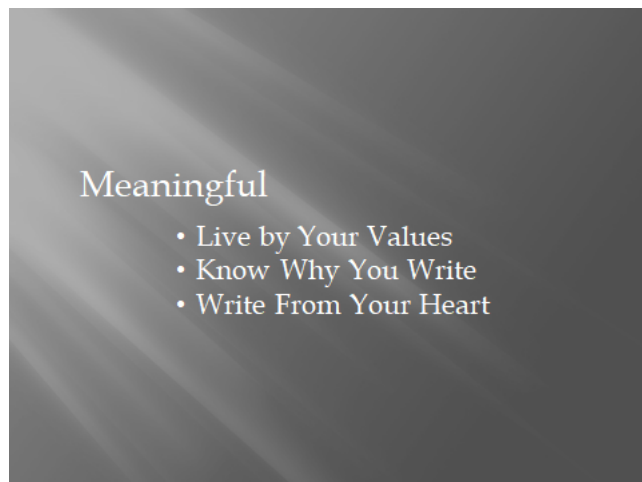
Kurt Vonnegut “Write a six line poem, about anything... . Make it as good as you possibly can. But don't tell anybody what you're doing. Don't show it or recite it to anybody, not even your girlfriend or parents or whatever. Tear it up into teeny-weeny pieces, and discard them into widely separated trash receptacles. You will find that you have already been gloriously rewarded for your poem. You have experienced becoming, learned a lot more about what's inside you, and you have made your soul grow.”

I struggled for so long in my writing life. I was all the things we've talked about. I had self-doubt, fear of being discovered as a fraud, feeling disappointed with my career. I needed a reason other than money to remind myself why I wrote. At a particularly opportune moment, I watched a writer being interviewed on Public Television. The writer's hair was gray (so he had a little experience on him) and he had won a prestigious award for at least one of his novels. The interviewer asked him to respond to something he'd been quoted saying about his writing process. I thought his response was beautiful and worth filing in my brain and heart under “things to remember.”

The writer said that every time he works on a story, every time he sits down at his typewriter (yes, he said typewriter), he feels unable to write a story.

"I have a voice in my head from childhood that says, 'Who do you think you are?' But I keep at the story," he said. "I see that I am bridging the gap between despair and the light. If I denied the faith in that, that would be wrong."

This really resonated with me and raised my view of myself. It is the meaning of why I write. And I write romances because I am interested in exploring ways to be in relationships. I am not bored when I write. I accept that I can lean into the light and can affect readers' lives. I accept that not everyone will like my kind of writing and I'm okay with that. Even if I didn't sell any books I've written, the process keeps me satisfied. I respect writing because as I said earlier, it helped me to love myself and contain bad things that happened to me. I don't think of things as bad, so much anymore. Everything is a learning experience and I get more joyful and peaceful with each one. I take pleasure in the process of writing and promoting my stories, so whether they're top sellers or not, I have a sense of meaning.

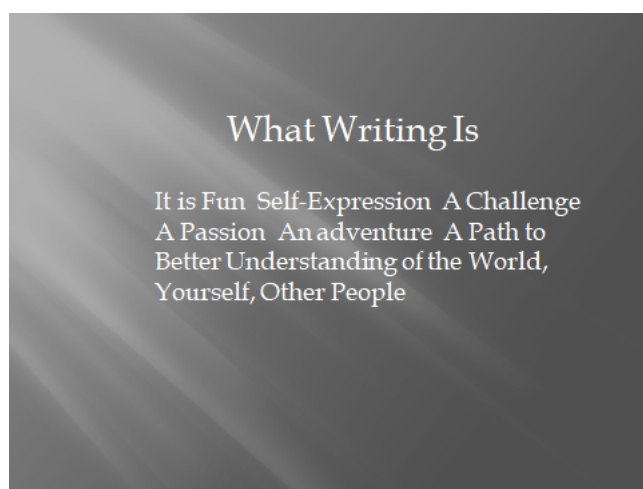


We've discussed what writing is not but what is it? Its self-expression and an avenue for self-exploration and –determination. For me, it's an understanding that writing is fun. It's an adventure of challenging myself to try new things just to see if I can do them. I appreciate that passion will see me through hard things and precipitate joy. These are some of the beliefs we need to navigate our world.

This definition is what fueled the inspiration for this presentation. It's why I can say, many writers create successful careers. Many create successful careers but don't know they have. Many writers feel they miss the mark that gives them the successful career they want. And many,

many writers invest in their writing career in ways that are detrimental to it. They neglect fundamental health needs, and misunderstand where and how they can sustain good health. They don't see how they can even enjoy a writing career when they don't achieve best seller status. They define themselves as failures when they don't need to.

I've cried over 4-star reviews, low click throughs, and mediocre stats on Amazon. It tortured me when a book released to low numbers. I had pounds of self-doubt and constantly asked myself if I was truly a writer. Over the years, I've learned I can have it all. Literally. Hard reviews, rejections, and a USA Must Read award-winning author status, as well as have balance, peace, and satisfaction, regardless of achieving top-selling status or not.



So in this talk I haven't told you how to finish a book in a month, or how to promote yourself and your books, how to network, or garner great reviews. But give a try to learning more about what you need, can control, and can do, and you'll find knowledge is exactly what you need to be healthy, happy, and as prolific as you want to be.

Thank you for joining in this hour. Here is how you can contact me with any questions. I love interacting with others, so feel free to reach out to me any time.

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In parting I want to share something Donya Lynne said.

“Love and blessing to the writers and storytellers of the world, for they are magicians whisking us away on adventures that can only be taken in the mind.”