

#21—Subtract These Activities from Your Day (To Add Income to Your Career)

The following list includes items that may be taking up space throughout your workday, but probably aren't generating any income. Take these things away and you'll have more time to practice good writing habits that will bring in the moola!

1. Worry.

Any kind of worry, when taken to extreme, can be debilitating. It doesn't have to be a work-related worry at all. The kids may be sick, the dog may be sick, may be the dog bit the kids, or may be even the kids bit the dog!

If you're a worrier then you know you don't even need something plausible to worry about, as pretty much anything will do. Worry uses up the space in your head that should be filled with creative activity.

Worry is to creativity what the California forest fire of 1993 was to what used to be trees. Put it out! Good. Now get on with your work.

Having trouble? Hold on. There are many ways to get your worries or worrying habit to subside long enough to get some work done. Meditation is a good place to start.

Lean back in your chair or on the couch and close your eyes. Lay your hands at your side and chant with me, "Publish...publish...publish..." I never liked "ohm" anyway and besides, perhaps you can subliminally bring about your publishing success!

2. Checking up on queries or manuscripts too often, too soon or both.

Not only is this a time sink but it can drive income away. If you're a pest, you can be replaced. Have faith in your work and just keep creating and forwarding new queries to their appropriate destinations as fast as you can.

Get a move on those assignments too. Good work will get you that return call or e-mail you are looking for, and some dough.

You may be spending enough time each year checking up on queries and submissions to have completed one paying assignment. Would you rather have the money or the response that, "No, we haven't gotten to it yet, and, boy, you sure are a pest!"

3. Chatting by e-mail, phone...and chat!

Socializing can be addictive. If you were someone's employee you'd be concerned about not letting them down or else not getting paid. You are your boss and the source of your income. Don't let yourself down; get off the phone (or other means of communication) and get writing!

4. Procrastination, from a different angle

Writers put off generating ideas, querying, marketing and writing for a number of reasons, two of which in particular come to mind.

One is the fear of rejection or failure. Actually the two are combined in our line of work. Expectations of failure and rejection can bring on the fight or flight syndrome.

That can cause us to take flight away from that which we fear, namely that risky query letter or finished assignment that could bring rejection just as easily as it could generate a nice, fat check.

Withhold judgement and fear about the future. Fear won't keep that rejection from hurting if it does come, and it certainly won't pay the bills.

Another reason for procrastination is the kind of overconfidence that impaired the hare in his race with the tortoise. If you think financial success as a writer is a sure thing because "you think you're all that", you probably need to think again, get humble and get to work.

Your head may be in the clouds, but that blank piece of paper or that blank computer screen is still waiting for you here back on earth.

One last pointer – add to this list of things you should take away, and create a list of things you should add or continue doing. Forgive me for saying it, but the money will start to add up!

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#22—Lessons from a Lyricist on Successfully Writing Prose

I was a songwriter before becoming a freelance writer. I worked hard to learn my craft. I was set on writing a hit song.

After several years, the pain and defeat of failure as a commercial songwriter led me to give up my pursuit, and kept me away from writing for a while.

However, the experience taught me lessons about writing, and the challenges of writing as a business. It gave me perspective. What I learned from song writing eventually helped to make me a better prose writer when I became a freelancer.

Lessons About Writing - First, I learned that good lyric writing is not simply singable poetry. Good lyrics are smooth, rhythmic and symmetrical, yet clear, concise and conversational. The words and phrases are carefully selected to be easily sung.

This way, the artist won't sound tongue-tied, and listeners can readily (usually) sing along. Song lyrics should flow. Good lyrics employ a subtle balance of literary tools like alliteration to entice listeners and draw them in.

All these things are applicable to nonfiction writing. Enjoyable prose is made of these traits. Easy reading, clear communication, and entertainment are qualities of good nonfiction as well as good songs.

Lessons About the Business of Writing - In commercial song writing, the rejection comes always or almost always and is often more cruel. (Somehow music executives don't have a problem telling you that your work sucks.)

You have to persevere longer in song writing with less to show for it to even get anywhere, and the anywhere you get to is usually still nowhere.

Failure as a commercial songwriter gave me a perspective that has been invaluable. It is so much easier to be a truly successful, financially self-supporting freelance writer than to be a financially viable songwriter.

Don't be taken aback; freelancing isn't easy and I don't discount the work that others have done. But, songwriters number in the hundreds of millions. Many write hundreds of songs a year.

They must submit entirely on spec and with a much greater up-front expense in the form of demo recording and mailing costs. All this to have a chance at filling a space for a song on an album, a space that opens up much less often than in magazines for freelancers.

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