

GROW YOUR AUDIENCE

The Author Platform Starter Kit

by Dan Blank | WeGrowMedia.com





Are you a writer who wants to grow your audience? What follows in these pages is an explanation of how to do just that - how to build a platform for your writing career that truly engages readers.

There are six core steps to this process. Too many people try to start by jumping ahead - they want to start marketing without really identifying or understanding their audience. But those early steps are critical. I am here to help guide you through the process.

My name is Dan Blank, and I am the founder of WeGrowMedia.com, where I have worked with hundreds of writers. I help them build an audience for their writing and books, ensuring their work has an impact with readers that builds a lasting legacy.

I teach online courses, in-person workshops and provide consulting services for both writers and publishers. My 6-week online course: **BUILD YOUR AUTHOR PLATFORM** runs from Sept 5 - Oct 23. [More info here.](#)

And if you need to take things further, please don't hesitate to reach out to me.

Thanks!
- Dan

WE GROW
MEDIA

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Cover image by [Quinn Dombrowski](#)

BUILD YOUR AUTHOR PLATFORM IN SIX STEPS

FOCUS *your resources*

DEFINE *your purpose*

TARGET *your ideal reader*

JOIN *your community*

SHARE *your message*

GROW *your impact*

Step 1:

FOCUS

FOCUS ON WHAT MATTERS MOST

Let me guess: you are overwhelmed with choices. How to best create your writing and ensure it finds readers. Maybe this has made you apprehensive, and a bit concerned that any decision will take you off track.

You need to focus. You need to make hard choices. You need to hone your skills as a writer, but also hone your skills as someone capable of connecting with readers. Why? Because the goal is not to publish a book.

Sure, publishing a book is an important - critical - milestone in your journey as a writer. But the real goal is to be READ, and to have an impact on those who read your work.

What will build your reputation as a writer, and leave a legacy for your work? The effect you have on readers.

How will your stories, your thoughts, your ideas shape their lives?

How will you become someone they talk about?

How will you create something whose power is exponential - stories and ideas that spread beyond the pages of the book itself?

What follows in these pages is meant to help you focus on what matters most to ensure you get read, not just get published.

SUCCESS IS GETTING READ, NOT JUST
GETTING PUBLISHED.



SET EXPECTATIONS

Too many writers amble along, suddenly waking up one day and realizing that years have passed and they have little to show for their work. They judge progress in pages written and hours spent editing and in the number of workshops they have attended. Yes, these are worthwhile ventures.

But... some of these writers find they don't have an audience for their work. They are still defined by their day job or role in their family, never as a "writer."

You can't wait for others to define you as a writer, you need to choose that identity.

Setting expectations is about prioritizing. Does everything else in your life come before your time to write and to develop an audience? That you don't write until the lawn is mowed and dishes are done?

When you create specific goals, you are forced to consider what you need to do **TODAY** to reach them. Breaking long-term goals down into short-term goals gives you a specific action plan to get there.

You need to open that door to begin living the life of a writer, not just waiting for others to give you that title.

A woman in silhouette is standing on a train platform, reading a book. She is wearing a dark coat and has a bag slung over her shoulder. The background shows a blurred train with horizontal streaks of light, suggesting motion. The overall scene is dimly lit, with a yellow tactile paving strip visible on the platform.

YOUR WRITING CAREER NEEDS URGENCY

MILESTONES FOR SUCCESS

While goals are nice, they can be hard to realize without aligning them to timeframes and milestones.

Most writers have no momentum in their career. They are riddled with self-doubt. They erect barriers to prevent them from building any kind of momentum. They are stuck in neutral.

What will you achieve by the end of this year? By the end of this quarter? By the end of this month? By the end of this week? By the end of today?

If you don't know, then that's a problem. You have already removed any sense of urgency. You have padded your life with a justification and apology that it's okay to not accomplish your goals.

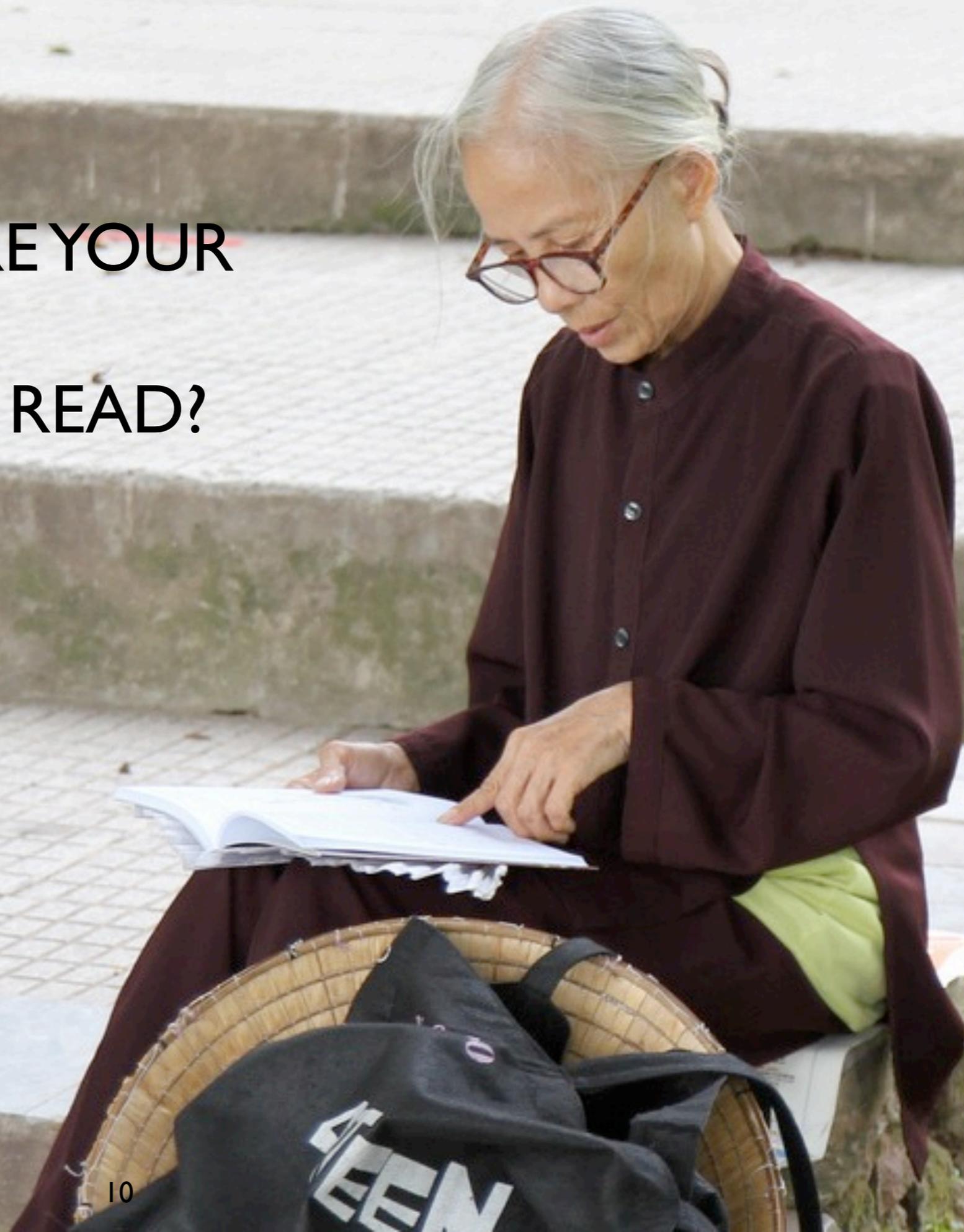
Setting an expectation and milestones for success means taking a risk. A risk that you could disappoint or fail.

But it also means you are framing your life to achieve your goals. That you are fueling it with urgency.

When you set goals, when you say them out loud, you sometimes find that the universe arranges itself to help you out. You begin to find opportunities where before, you only found barriers.

Get out a calendar. Begin defining not just what success is, but the specific milestones and timeframes in which it needs to happen.

**IF YOU DON'T SHARE YOUR
WRITING,
HOW WILL YOU BE READ?**



INVENTORY YOUR RESOURCES

When someone gets laid off from their job, it is common to feel a sense of panic, and even depression. While you felt essential to your previous employer, now that you are on the open market, you feel cut down. You begin questioning everything about your career.

Career experts advise you to spend time updating your resume. Not just because of its usefulness in the job search process, but because it boosts your confidence. You suddenly realize the amazing and unique skillset that you have developed over time, and how this offers incredible value to potential employers.

For your writing career, write down your resources. Your accomplishments.

When you go through this process, focus on the HUMAN resources: those who you know or are affiliated with. Those who are able to be of assistance.

Success rarely happens in isolation, it often takes a team. Who is on your team? Who helps motivate you, who can provide feedback on your work, who can help you with the publishing process, who has access to your audience, who will take this from a journey of isolation to one where others feel a part of this mission?

BECOMING A SUCCESSFUL WRITER IS A JOURNEY FILLED WITH MANY PEOPLE



YOUR GOALS SHOULD CREATE MEANING FOR OTHERS

My friend Jane Friedman once told me something that gave me chills:

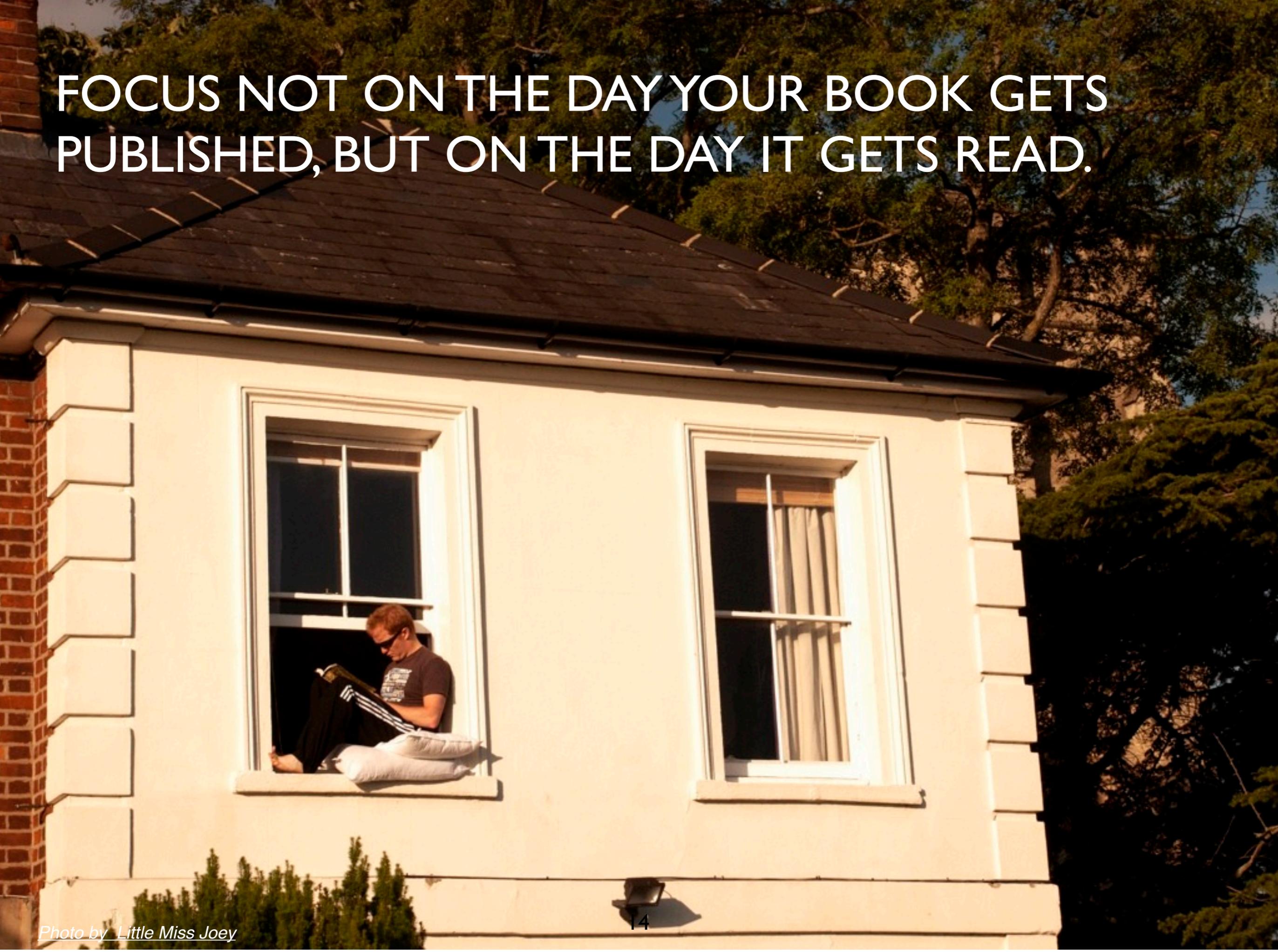
“The most disappointed writers I know are not unpublished writers, but those who have been published.”

These people set their goals on a single day and event - the day their book went to press and was sent to bookstores. Why are they disappointed? Because only a few readers bought their book. Years of work - the best representation of who they want to be - fell on deaf ears. Almost no one cared.

This is why you have to approach your writing career as a journey, not a single destination such as your publish date. You need to constantly connect with your audience, gauge reaction, expand your network, and of course, improve your writing.

You have to judge your work based on impact and effect on readers, not just on the craft of creating a physical object such as a book, or digital object such as an ebook.

FOCUS NOT ON THE DAY YOUR BOOK GETS
PUBLISHED, BUT ON THE DAY IT GETS READ.



Step 2:

DEFINE

UNDERSTAND YOUR “WHY”

Too many writers focus on just the “what” or “how” of their writing - the story, topic or media by which each are delivered. If you want to build an audience, you need to focus on the “why.”

Simon Sinek introduced this concept in his book *Start With Why*, and the basic premise is that people align with your motivation and underlying purpose, not just the form that they take in terms of a product, service, or even book. That, to compel someone to take action, you need to excite them by your purpose.

As I write this, I am sitting in a library staring at a shelves filled with science fiction novels. What will compel me to pick up a single book out of these hundreds and read it? What about the thousands of others in this genre available via Amazon or the millions of other books in all genres?

Understanding your “why” is about understanding core motivation. That someone does not just read science fiction, they read science fiction stories about identity, or empowerment, or the struggle of good vs evil, or other deeper story lines.

People did not read Harry Potter by the millions because they like wizard books. They read it because it was about identity, the nature of good vs evil, and the importance of choosing things other than power.

What is your “why?”

How does your work engage readers on a deeper level? What motivation exists in your ideal reader RIGHT NOW, that will get them to eventually pick up your book?

A person with long dark hair is lying in bed, reading an open book. Their legs are raised in the air. The background is a wooden wall. The text is overlaid on the right side of the image.

KATNISS EVERDEEN AND
HARRY POTTER REPRESENT
MORE TO READERS THAN
BOWS AND ARROWS AND
WANDS.

AUDIENCE AND IDENTITY

You have the ability to write anything you want without a single concern for what others will think of it. You do not need to write a book based on what is popular, or corrupt your vision because you think your agent, publisher, or a bookstore will prefer something different.

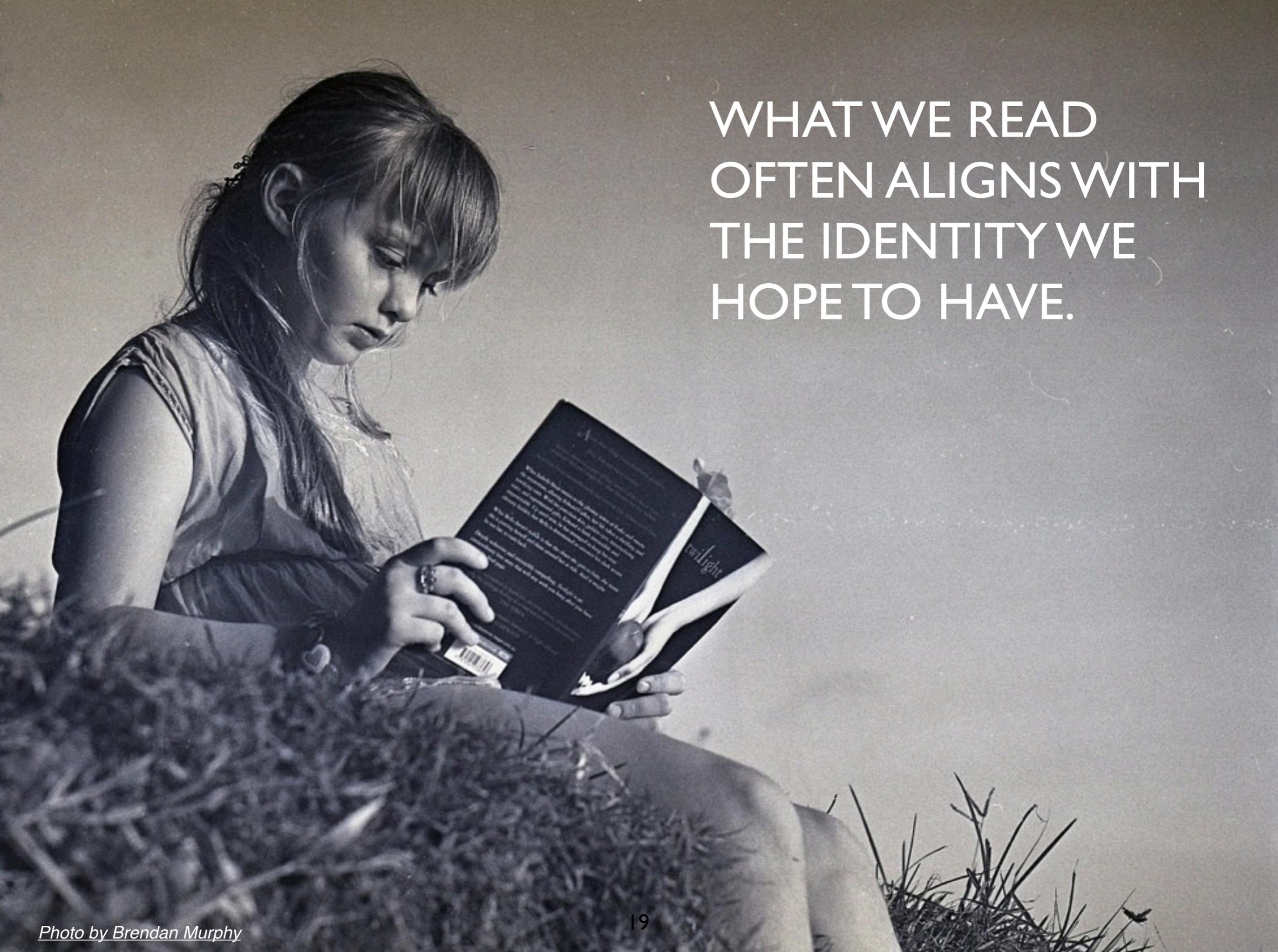
But let's be clear: publishing is a business. If your goal is to sell a lot of books, to engage a large audience, then understanding those readers will help you find success.

If you want to understand how to engage your audience, consider how you will differentiate yourself from the thousands of others writing in your genre or topic. Also keep in mind how you will prove to an agent or publisher that your book will sell. In any case, the more you know about your audience, the more likely you will find ways to be read by them.

We oftentimes identify ourselves by what we read, what we buy, what we consume, and what we do - these are actions to forge our identities. How will your book and the way you market it align with the identity your audience wants?

Steven Pressfield says this in a much more blunt way: "No one wants to read your sh*t. It's not that people are mean or cruel. They are just busy."

Sometimes you can offer people explicit value - a benefit they will receive for picking up your book. Oftentimes, this value is their desire to align to a certain identity.



WHAT WE READ
OFTEN ALIGNS WITH
THE IDENTITY WE
HOPE TO HAVE.

THE ELEMENTS OF YOUR IDENTITY

What are the elements of your identity as a writer that a potential reader may experience? Here are a few:

1. Your books and other writing
2. Your name
3. Your bio
4. Your photo
5. Your voice, messaging, and style
6. How you use email
7. Which social networks you use
8. How you leverage in-person events
9. Your website
10. What you share on a blog

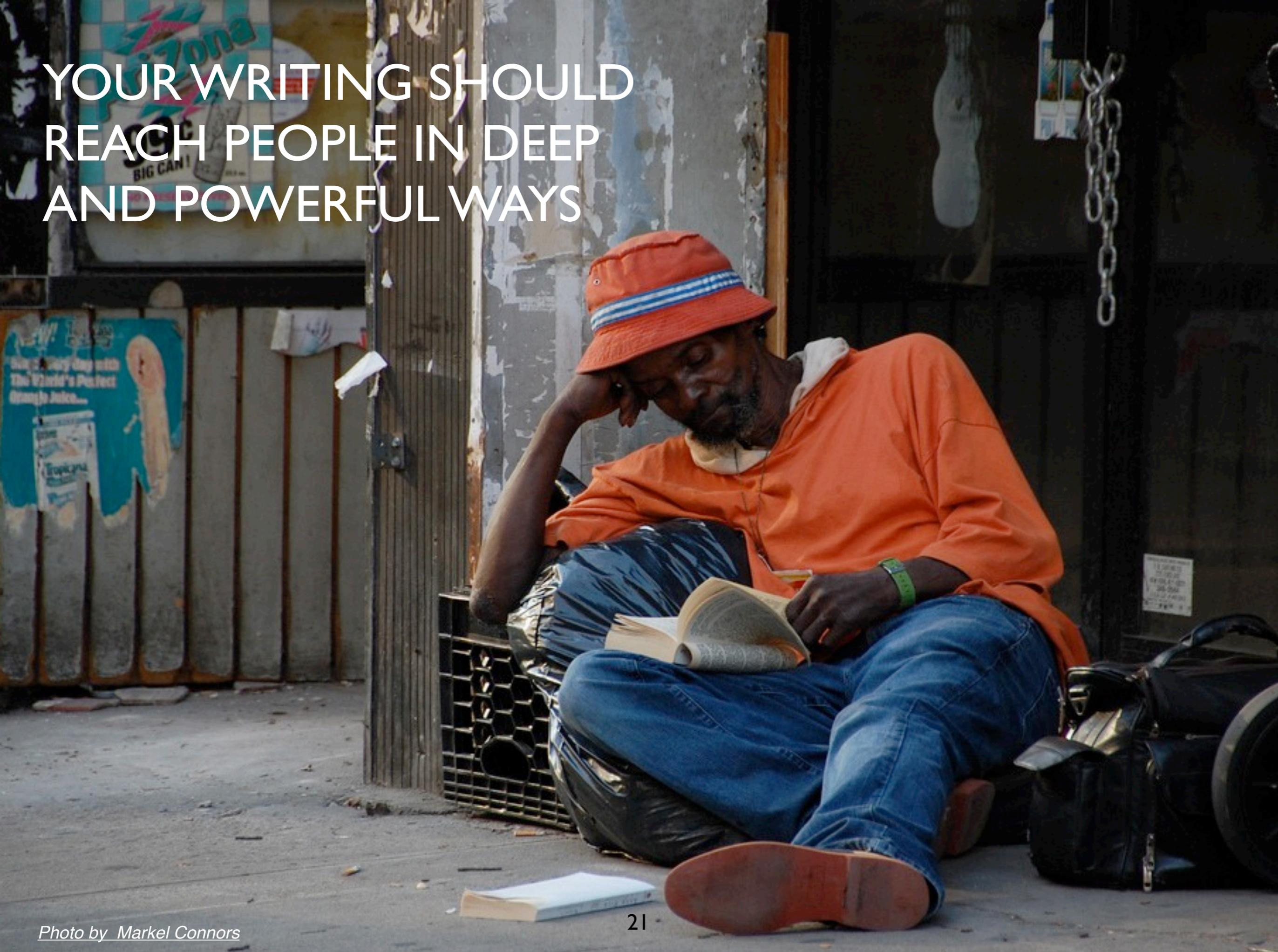
The list could go on, and is not meant to overwhelm you.

To the outside world, these things represent you. Ignoring the many elements of your identity has consequences. Identity is communication, and how you use these channels is meant to engender trust.

Don't make flippant decisions around these elements. Treat each with respect, because they are core ways you will (or won't) connect with readers.

This is one of the core reasons I started We Grow Media: to help authors navigate these areas, and make positive, proactive decisions to ensure their work connects with readers.

YOUR WRITING SHOULD
REACH PEOPLE IN DEEP
AND POWERFUL WAYS



YOUR DIFFERENTIATOR

What makes you so special?

Seriously - figure this out. Too many writers look for “best practices.” They find what a typical author website looks like, and they copy that in order to feel as though they are like others - that they are an “author” as others define it. But the result is often that you simply look just like everyone else.

The truth is, you are unique. And those who are good at identifying what differentiates them from others, and actually presenting that to the world are often those who are unafraid to take off their filters.

They are unafraid to be real, to be who they are deep down. Oftentimes, this is polarizing, so we soften it.

How can you bridge the gap between your writing and the reasons a reader would love it by being more honest, more open, and more understanding than anyone else?

How can you illustrate that you “get” your reader by sharing things openly that others often mask?

How can you create something that is not promotional, that is not “stock,” that makes people pause and truly consider things that matter to them?

How can you get them to pause for one moment in their day, and really feel something? THAT is your differentiator.



ARE YOU A UNIQUE AND
SPECIAL SNOWFLAKE?
PROVE IT.

Photo by Soilse

LEAVE ROOM
FOR OTHERS TO
ENGAGE WITH
YOU, TO SIT
DOWN NEXT
TO YOU AND
CHAT.



Step 3:

TARGET

UNDERSTAND YOUR AUDIENCE

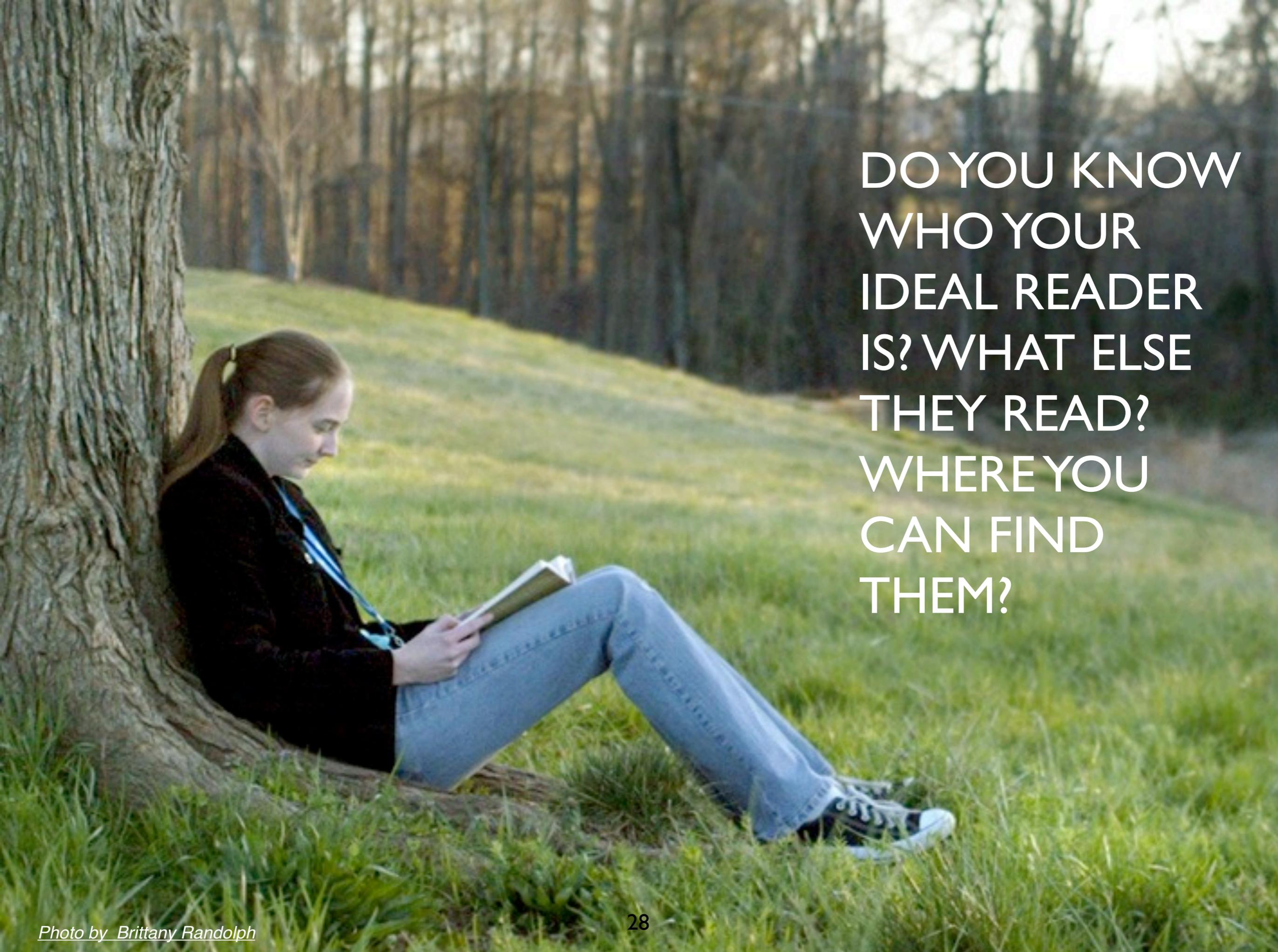
Most writers do little research as to who their audience is. This is a mistake because every other decision about connection and marketing hinges on it.

Many writers can't even name competitive books - books that are similar to theirs - or even name the genre or topic they write under.

When this is the case, the message is clear when you approach an agent, a publisher, or the readers themselves: you simply don't care enough to figure out how your work can connect with others in the real world. You are living in a fantasy world where your work defies definition, but where the publishing industry and droves of readers will somehow find you, spend 15 hours reading your book, and adore you anyway.

The nice thing is that this pervasive ignorance actually works in your favor. If you can be the one author in a thousand who really connects with and understands their readers, the market their book will compete in, and how the publishing industry tries to connect the two, you are far ahead of most other writers. And yes, agents, publishers, bookstores, and readers will appreciate this.

It is not the world's job to take your writing and make it successful. Market research is something that you should be doing constantly. Luckily, it can be as simple as a conversation with someone who reads books like the one you are writing.

A young woman with a ponytail is sitting on the grass under a tree, reading a book. She is wearing a dark jacket, blue jeans, and black sneakers. The background is a grassy field with a line of trees in the distance.

DO YOU KNOW
WHO YOUR
IDEAL READER
IS? WHAT ELSE
THEY READ?
WHERE YOU
CAN FIND
THEM?

IDENTIFY THOSE YOU ALIGN WITH

I always ask writers to tell me about their audience. I often get very broad answers: “women over 40,” “anyone who loves a good book,” and other answers that tell me they have no idea who their audience is.

As we continue speaking, trying to work out who their audience is, I will sometimes make them an offer to help frame the conversation, to provide context for their audience:

“If I were to offer you \$50,000 if you could find five people who would love your book within the next hour, where would you go? Who would you reach out to? How would you identify these five people out of thousands or even millions?”

Suddenly, with \$50,000 on the line, your mind begins to race. You consider organizations an ideal reader is affiliated with, places they hang out, events they attend, blogs they read, and people who have access to the audience that reads books similar to yours.

Suddenly, the answer to the question is no longer “women over 40,” you are working hard to find five specific people with certain attributes and behaviors because \$50,000 is on the line.

Create a persona for your ideal audience member - consider everything about who they are, and go beyond just what they read. Understand them as a whole person.

A man with dark hair, wearing a dark jacket with yellow stripes on the sleeves, blue jeans, and tan sneakers, is sitting on wooden steps. He is holding an open book and looking down at it. A brown messenger bag is on the steps next to him. The background consists of large, weathered wooden beams and a building with the text "BULLOCK'S BUILDING" visible. The overall scene is outdoors and has a rustic, industrial feel.

WHAT ELSE
DOES YOUR
IDEAL READER
LIKE BEYOND
BOOKS?

RESEARCH VIA SOCIAL MEDIA

Social media is a brilliant research tool. Forget about talking for a moment, let's spend time LISTENING. I often get asked how someone can best leverage LinkedIn or Goodreads, and they are always looking for ways to be "active" on it - how they can say something on these platforms and get a response.

But I often encourage them to use services such as these as ways to learn about their audience, not just speak to them.

Let's say you find someone who your ideal readers already respect and listen to. Maybe they are a blogger or conference organizer.

It can be eye-opening to see their work experience on LinkedIn. Not only does this give you a hundred conversations starters with them, it provides a real-world look at who these people are beyond this one narrow focus - the books they read.

Do you wonder who will read your book? Find existing books like yours that have been published in the past few years, and look them up on GoodReads. Read the reviews, and check out the authors of these reviews. See what ELSE they are reading.

You will begin to create a profile as to who these people are, and understand those porous boundaries between interests, genres, and how we define books on deeper levels.

WHAT DOES
YOUR IDEAL
READER KEEP IN
HER PURSE?
WHERE DOES
HE SPEND HIS
WEEKENDS?

COMMUNITIES HAVE A STRUCTURE

When people use social media, they often focus on scale. On getting more followers or fans or likes. This is the wrong way to use social media, and the wrong way to build an audience.

Instead: focus on one person at a time. And yes, you can be strategic about this. Understand who is at the center of the communities that reach your ideal readers. Who has access to them?

Begin to understand the structure, niches within niches, and nuances of these communities. Focus on people's names and faces.

Who is accessible? Who is the “top dog,” and likely getting three dozen emails a day of people trying to get their attention?

Who is a bit on the fringes, but still an active member of the community? Who is most like you?

What ideas, mood, tone, personality and style is pervasive in this community?

What gets these people to stop and take notice?

WHAT IS THE
ONE PHRASE
THAT WILL
PIQUE THE
INTEREST OF
YOUR READERS?

MANAGE THE LISTENING PROCESS

Overwhelmed by social media? By all the voices? By all the opportunities to talk and listen? Me too. So focus on just a handful of voices, and get to know them very well.

Always focus on expanding your circle, but do so just a few people at a time. It is better to engage fully in just one or two blogs than it is to try to comment across two dozen blogs.

You need to create meaning for those you hope to engage, and this has to be done on a human level.

Put limits on the process of listening, but work on building habits where you are consistently - every single day - connecting with your ideal readers either online or off. Even for just a moment.

Focus on the qualitative aspects of audience development, not the quantitative aspects. That it is better for you to paint a detailed picture of why people read the types of books you like to write than it is to just build up a large number of “followers.”

That relationships matter more than numbers.

WHEN IS THE LAST
TIME YOU ENGAGED
SOMEONE IN
CONVERSATION
ABOUT WHAT THEY
LIKE TO READ?

Step 4:

JOIN

FOCUS ON YOUR STRENGTHS

Many writers spread themselves too thin. They try to be everywhere online with the thought that this is their way of scaling. That if they ignore any social network, that they are somehow missing out.

But the result is often someone who does five things at 20% instead of doing one thing at 100%. You are only partially present, and this means that you miss opportunities to truly engage with others.

These writers focus on sharing content on Facebook, Twitter, GoodReads, Tumblr, Pinterest, LinkedIn, YouTube and a few other places. And they do each of them poorly. They end up just like everyone else - doing the same “best practices,” which often translates to the “bare minimum” expected for that platform.

What amazes me about the way the web and social media has reshaped the way we connect with each is how it rewards being who you really are. That people appreciate the sometimes odd, awkward, silly, shy person you might be deep down. The aspects of yourself that are often covered up by nice work clothes, a “professional” demeanor, and a business card.

Realness matters.

Structure your platform to your strengths. Focus intently on a few key areas, and fully engage with them.

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ark

FOLLOWING “BEST
PRACTICES” OFTEN
EQUATES TO
DOING THE “BARE
MINIMUM.”



ELEMENTS OF YOUR ONLINE PRESENCE

The most important element of your online presence is not a “thing.” Not a website, a blog, or a social network.

The biggest element of your online presence is how you engage with others. Oddly, this is often the thing most writers think the least about.

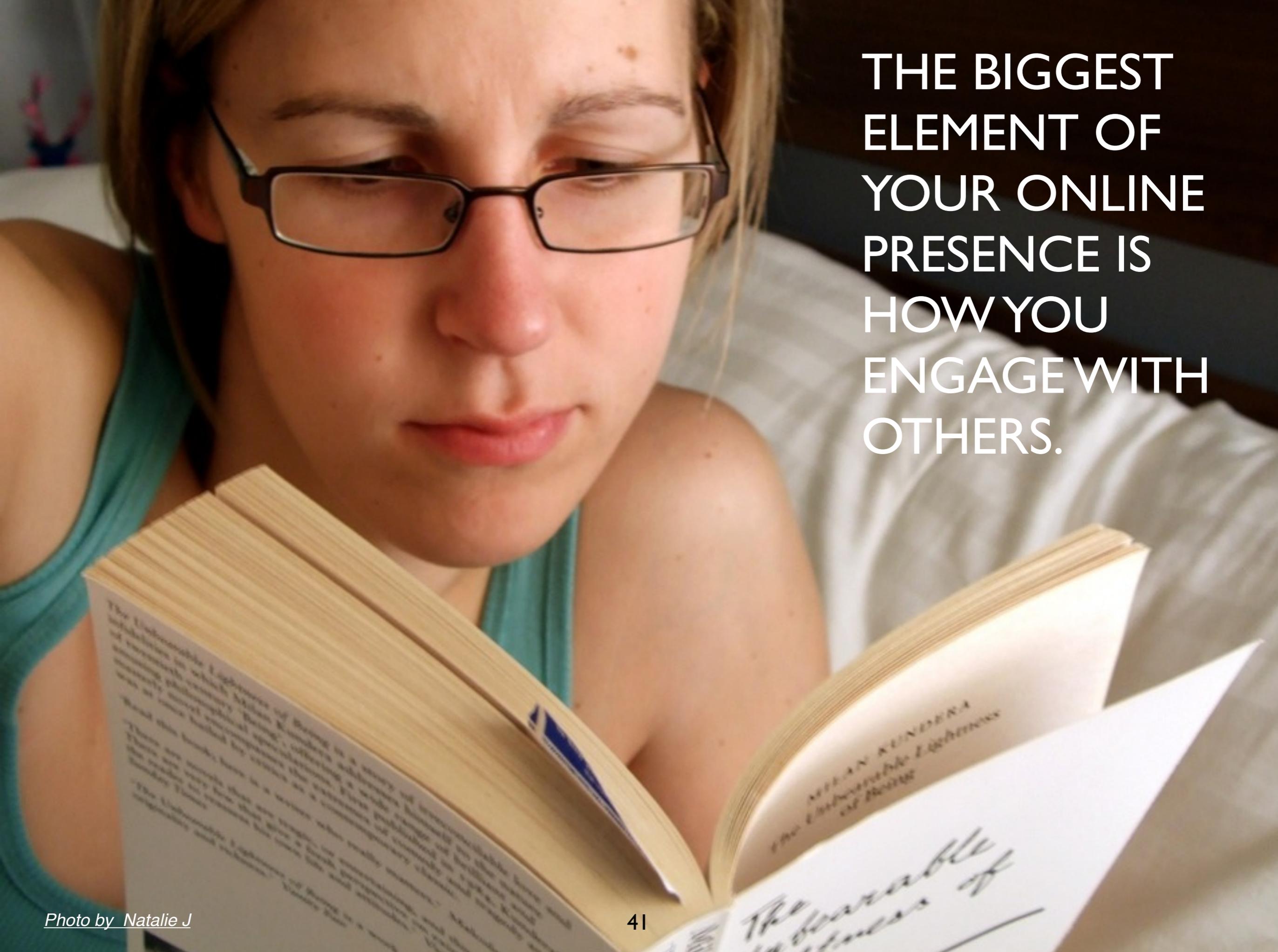
Instead, they spend months trying to build their blog and website, hiding from the world until every detail is worked out. They obsess over fonts and colors and website templates. They design a perfect place in the desert when no one knows they even exist.

Focus first on the places that you know your ideal readers hang out. Where you know there is already an engaged community around the topics and stories you write about.

Focus on their interests, needs, and a sense of common purpose, not from the desire of collecting followers and fans.

Don't just start blogging hoping that others will find you, and begin to hang out on your blog. There is a learning curve here, and you need to first forge relationships. It is best to do so by engaging where your audience is already comfortable, where you can learn the nuances and rules of connection with the the least amount of risk.

THE BIGGEST
ELEMENT OF
YOUR ONLINE
PRESENCE IS
HOW YOU
ENGAGE WITH
OTHERS.



YOUR WEBSITE

You need a website. Even if you don't plan to blog or update it very often, it's nice to have one de facto place people can find out about you, even if it merely points them to a forum or social network where you spend 99% of your time online.

At the most basic level, a website can act as your business card.

Don't overthink it. Make it as simple as possible. Don't obsess over the nuances of how each pixel needs to represent the depth of your creativity - of who you are deep down. It won't. Certainly it won't in the very beginning. That type of thing comes over time, after many iterations.

If you don't have a lot of experience building your audience online - blogging and engaging in social media - then don't spend a lot of money on your website design when you first get started. Oftentimes, this first design is a mere guess at what you hope your website to be.

Your presence online will evolve again and again. The language, the colors, the design and structure, and even the content you share. Leave room for that growth.

Don't load the site down with too much - with too many pages and design elements. Focus your readers attention on just one or two places and then really put your efforts there.

FOCUS YOUR RESOURCES.

DO LESS, NOT MORE.



EMAIL

Email is a critically important way of engaging your audience. I know, you are probably sick of email, and cringe at the idea of being seen as spam in someone's inbox.

But the reality is very different. People rely on their email. They open their email. They check their email. They send things there that they cannot possibly miss.

If they have the time or desire, they check Facebook or Twitter or Pinterest or LinkedIn. But they always check email.

Companies and organizations desperately rely on email to get their message out and grow their revenue. It is the one way you can ensure you will be in front of your most engaged audience the moment you hit the "send" button.

People opt-in for email. They actively choose to receive your newsletter or email subscription.

Whenever I talk to those who have been growing their online presence for years, one of their biggest regrets is nearly always that they started an email list too late in the process. They consider how much bigger their list and presence would be if they had offered it from the very beginning.

Who reads your blog? It's often hard to tell. Beyond blog comments, traffic numbers are just that: numbers. But an email list consists of names and the exact way you can reach these people again and again. That is powerful.

Create an email list and newsletter. Now.

A photograph of an elderly man with glasses sitting on a wooden bench in a public square, reading a book. The scene is captured in a warm, golden light, likely during sunset or sunrise. In the background, several other people are walking, and the architecture of the square is visible. The overall mood is quiet and contemplative.

FIND THE CLEAREST
PATH TO YOUR
READERS

SETTING UP SOCIAL PROFILES

People shouldn't have to guess as to who you are, what you are about, or even what you look like. Social media works so well because people are hard-wired to be "social."

Use a real photo of yourself in social media profiles, not a photo of something else that you feel "represents" you, but really just masks your shyness about having your photo taken.

Use a recent photo where we can actually see your eyes clearly, not some artistic blurry photo, or a photo that was taken five years ago at your friend's wedding.

Fill in your little bio, and focus it from the perspective of what will engage your reader most. In other words, if you write science fiction novels it is more important to say that FIRST, and then mention that you are a mother of three, love pop tarts, and have a poodle.

Include a link to your website, and craft the language to illustrate a reason - a benefit the reader will experience - if they check out your blog or sign up for your newsletter.

Write in the first person. Everyone knows you are the one writing all of this!

THE WORLD IS FULL OF DISTRACTIONS.
FOCUS THE ATTENTION OF YOUR AUDIENCE.



BE ACCESSIBLE

Building an author platform is about connection. If you are going to try to build an audience for your writing online and off, then you must be accessible. There needs to be an easy way for people to connect with you. Don't put up barriers.

If you were doing a book reading at a bookstore, would you make people walk through a maze in order to come up and speak to you? Too many writers hide behind contact forms, and are sheepish about putting an email address out there.

This is about connection.

Don't hide behind professionalism - a retouched headshot, a publicist, a contact form, or fear that the only reason someone would reach out to you is to spam you.

Differentiate yourself by working to take down walls between you and your audience, not build them.

One example: I put my personal cell phone number on my website and blog posts. Even though I deal with as much "information overload" as everyone else does, I don't want that to remove opportunities to do the one thing I love doing: talking to writers. And even that simple act: sharing my cell phone number, is representative of my goals and my passion. What's yours?

How can you be accessible to your ideal readers?

PEOPLE WANT
CONNECTION.
MAKE THAT EASY
FOR THEM.

Step 5:

SHARE

CONTENT AND STRATEGY

Connecting with others, developing an author platform and building a readership is inherently about sharing. Not just your work, but a worldview, a purpose or message that others align with.

But don't get lost in a sea of Tweets, status updates, pins and blog posts. Many writers jump into these areas only to find that thousands of updates later, they are not sure what they have created or who they are even sharing things with.

Instead, you need a strategy. A strategy that does not confine the content you share, but ensures it aligns to your goals, focuses on building trusting relationships with your ideal audience, and is manageable with your lifestyle.

A content strategy can help you map out what you share, when you share it, how you share it, and most importantly - how the cumulative effort adds up to a RESULT you desire.

There is not a one-size-fits-all approach for content strategy; your own mood and style will help define yours.

But a good strategy provides JUST enough structure to prevent the feeling of being overwhelmed, and enough room for modifications to allow you room to be creative and to grow.



STRATEGY SHOULD
GIVE YOU A SENSE
OF FREEDOM, NOT
RESTRICTION.

HOW TO CREATE COMPELLING CONTENT

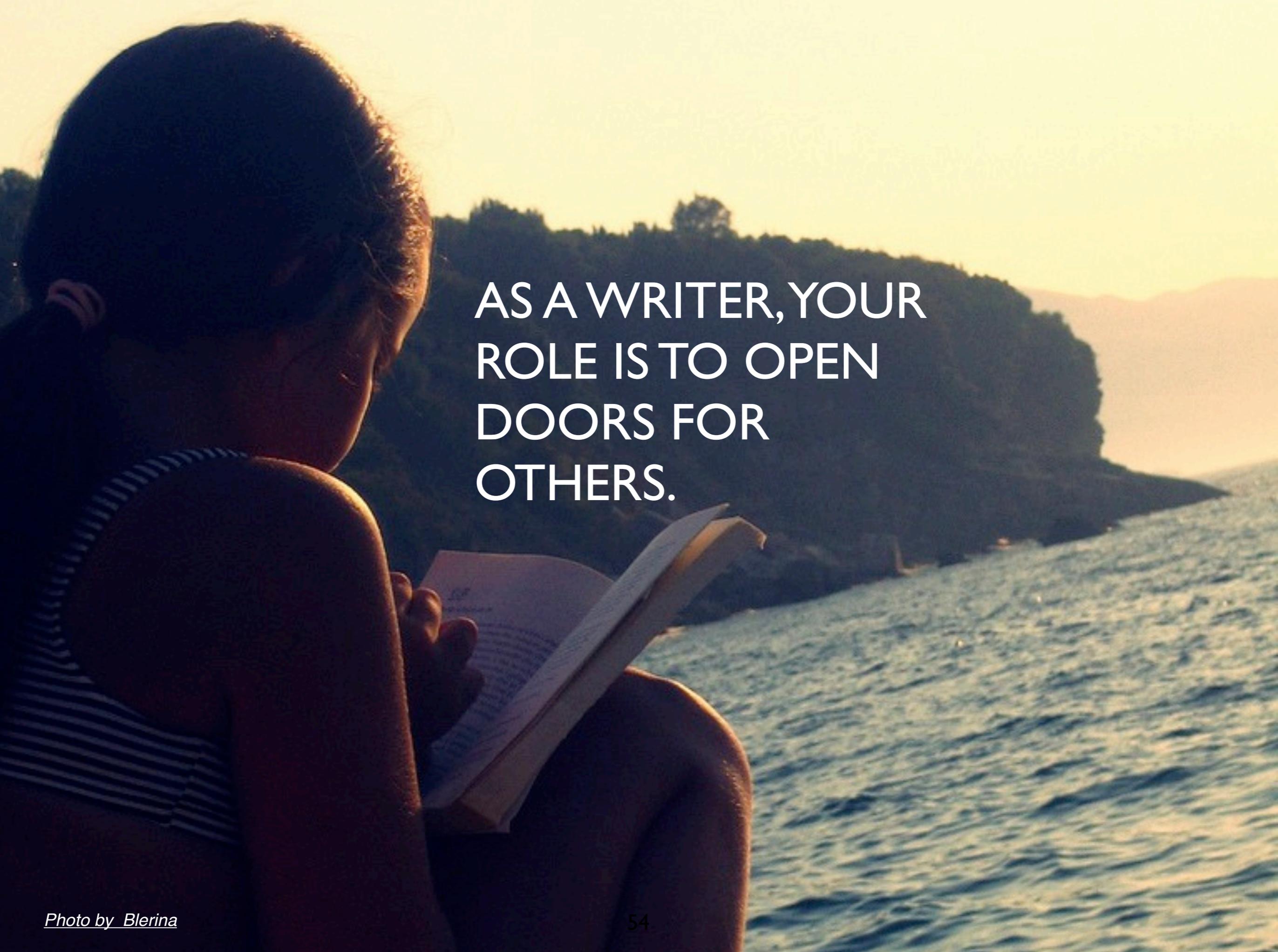
Most people, when developing their author platform, begin with a misstep. They skip right to sharing stuff on Twitter. Now, that can be an effective strategy if you have the time and patience to allow things to evolve. A few years back, NO ONE had even the slightest roadmap as to what worked on social media. So they just kept sharing and slowly learned how to hone their communication style.

Assuming you didn't start reading this document on this page alone, you already have so much in your arsenal. Everything we discussed earlier applies. What you share with your audience needs to align with your core purpose, with the themes that most deeply reflect what you are about, and what your writing embodies.

What you share also needs to be focused more on others than it is on yourself. This is not about holding yourself up as the Grand Poobah of your genre or topic. It is often about promoting others, sharing their thoughts, their work, and encouraging others to check them out.

Who was that teacher or mentor in your life who at one time opened a new door for you. They introduced an idea, a lifestyle, a place, a way of thinking that forever changed you.

Chances are, that person's image is burned in your memory. How can you be that person to others?

A person is shown in profile, reading an open book. They are positioned on the left side of the frame, with their back to the camera. The background features a body of water in the foreground and a dark, silhouetted landmass or cliffside in the distance under a bright, hazy sky, suggesting a sunset or sunrise. The overall mood is contemplative and serene.

AS A WRITER, YOUR
ROLE IS TO OPEN
DOORS FOR
OTHERS.

IDEAS FOR CONTENT

You may be stumped as to what to share on social media, at in-person events, or elsewhere.

Create a list of core topics and themes that you know resonate with your audience. Sometimes these will be very broad, such as “examples of loyalty” or “underdog stories.” Other times they can be more specific: “innovative new gadgets in cars and other vehicles,” or “the perils of space exploration.”

Then, brainstorm ways you can illustrate these themes. Maybe you have your own thoughts on them; perhaps you interview experts who can address them; you can aggregate the best articles or blog posts on these topics; you can review other books that deal with these themes; you can ask for guest posts on the topics to share the thoughts of others; etc.

Creating great content is a process and a habit. So focus on understanding the process and habit that works for you.

Spend time - an hour - brainstorming the topics. Outline sources for content. Identify those who can help you create compelling content. Understand the media, organizations or places that people go to or consume to experience these themes already.

Be the ultimate curator of the themes you hope to embody elsewhere in your writing. This way your book and overall author platform are very much aligned, but also unique from each other. They complement each other and focus your ideal readers.

WHAT NARRATIVES
DO YOUR READERS
LOOK FOR EVERY
DAY, EVERYWHERE
THEY GO?



BE A PERSON NOT A BRAND

While you may utilize aspects of branding in your writing career, it is important to note that you are not a brand.

If you want to really engage an audience, to establish trusting connections with the community you care about most, you need to act as a person, not a brand.

This comes down to tiny details about how you choose to engage with others, what you share about yourself, and how you are there for people in ways that a brand never could.

The differentiator between someone at the center of a community and someone at the edges is caring. But not just that, it is about how caring leads to action.

Many people make token donations or volunteer three hours a year to a cause or community. If you want to differentiate yourself, commit yourself to taking real action to support a community. That is how you will make an impact on others.

As with all things related to platform, if you view this as an unwanted obligation, you will find it a tough road. Every task will seem arduous.

Those who find success in developing their platform reframe their thinking. They see connecting with readers as an opportunity. They understand this is about creating **MEANING** around writing and how others experience it.



“CARING IS A
POWERFUL
BUSINESS
ADVANTAGE.”

- Scott Johnson

CONNECT ONLINE TO OFFLINE

Do you know what the least crowded channel is? Not Pinterest, not Twitter, not a blog post, not even an email or phone call. Sitting face to face over lunch for an hour is the least crowded channel of two people connecting.

For that hour, you are fully engaged and unable to be very distracted. The fact that a meal is served sets an expectation for time, and forces a commitment. This is my favorite way to engage with someone.

Too often, writers hope to scale quickly by leveraging social media. They dream of crafting a Tweet promoting their book, and hundreds or thousands or tens of thousands of other people ReTweeting and reading it.

This is akin to the “promise” of a lottery ticket. It allows you to dream of such things, but it is more likely for lightning to strike you here and now, than for you to win the jackpot.

Work to connect those you meet online to offline interactions. This can happen via conferences and events, through organizations or affiliations, and or with email, phone and meetups.

Likewise, when you meet people in person, work to connect them to your online life - your blog, newsletter, Twitter feed, etc.

One complements the other and creates exponential potential in that relationship.

FIND THE LEAST CROWDED CHANNELS BY WHICH TO ENGAGE YOUR AUDIENCE



Step 6:

GROW

HAVE A PROCESS, NOT JUST GOALS

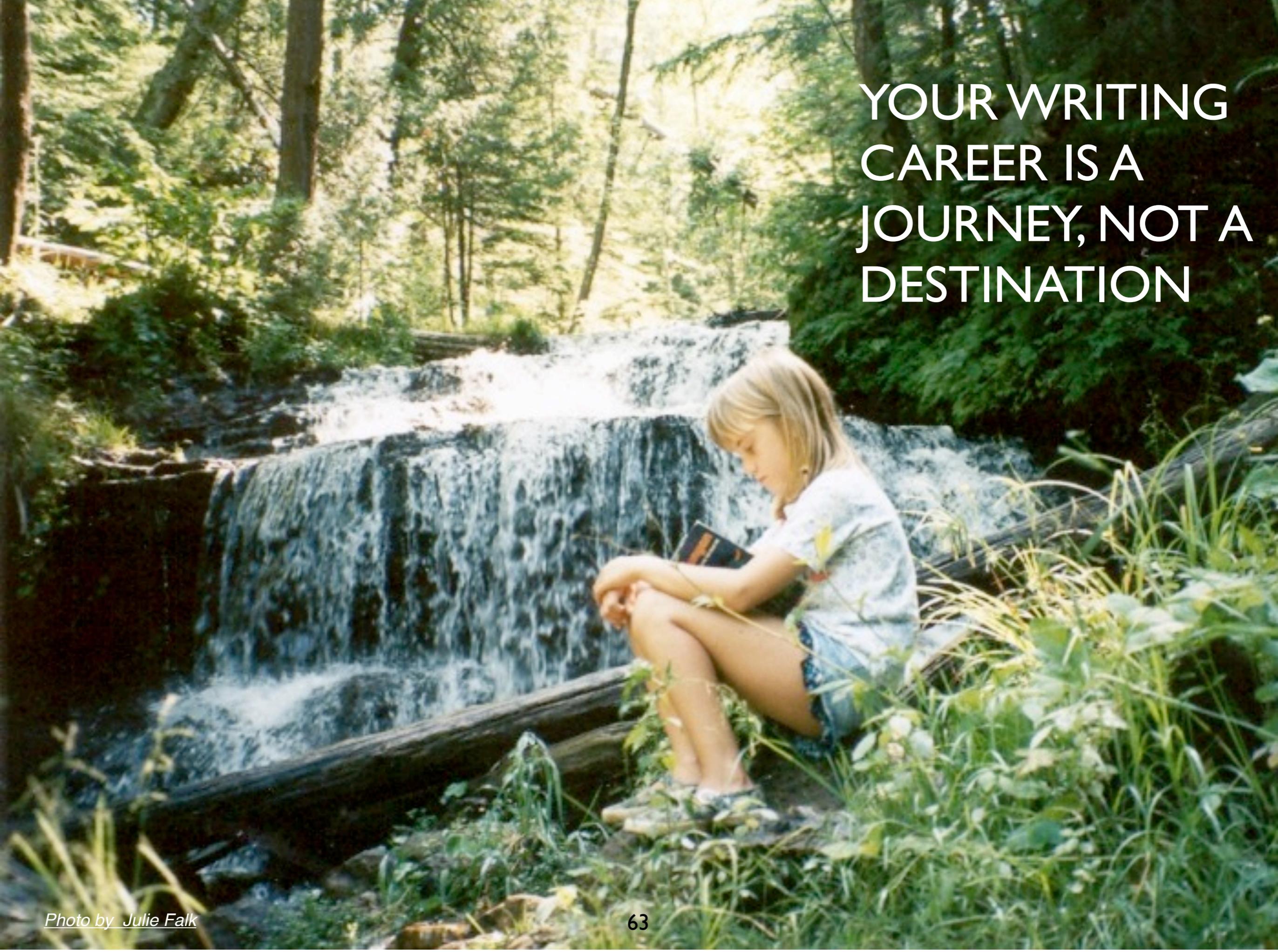
Having a successful writing career is about building good habits, working hard, and waiting for serendipity to happen along the way. Even though we outline goals and a strategy, it is the day to day process that makes it all happen.

As Steven Pressfield writes in his books, including his latest *Turning Pro*, there is a difference between the professional and the amateur. Habits play a key role in this.

Become a student of your own productivity. What times of the day or week do you have the most creative energy? How can you combine tasks so that you get more done? How can you find a sense of balance between the many aspects of your life?

Time is a finite and precious resource. No one I know feels as though they have enough time in the week to get everything they need accomplished. Work to get past that feeling.

A process will help you understand what works and what doesn't, allowing you to optimize how you spend your time.

A young girl with blonde hair, wearing a light blue patterned shirt and shorts, is sitting on a large, dark log in a lush forest. She is holding an open book and looking down at it. Behind her is a small waterfall with water cascading over several levels of rocks. The forest is dense with green trees and foliage, and sunlight filters through the canopy. The overall scene is peaceful and natural.

YOUR WRITING
CAREER IS A
JOURNEY, NOT A
DESTINATION

STRENGTHEN LOOSE CONNECTIONS

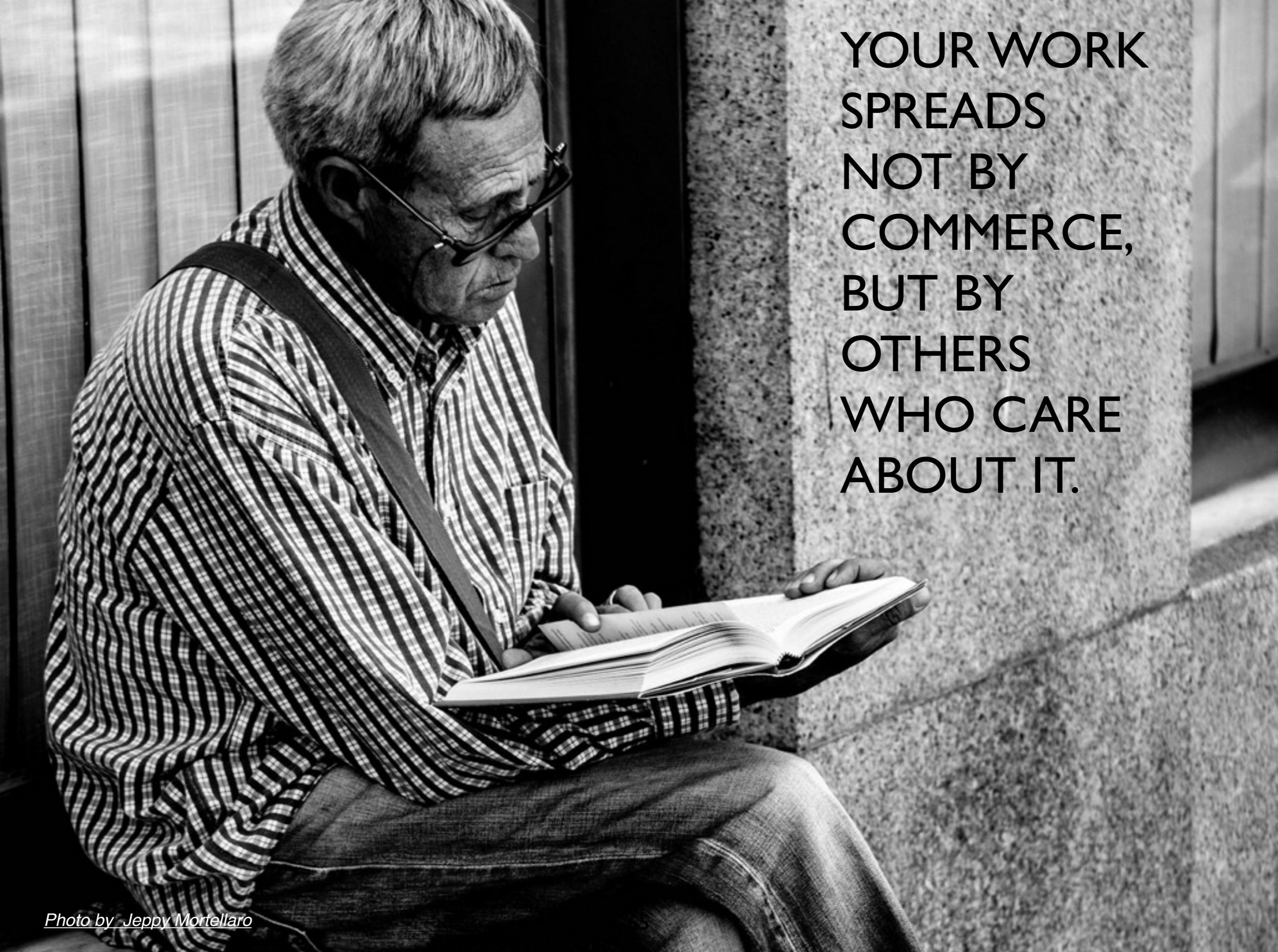
Too often, we let relationships lapse, only to try to rekindle them when we need something.

Work to strengthen loose connections. Find meaningful ways to re-engage with those you meet who are active members of the community you want to reach.

Introduce like-minds to each other, organize ways that you can meet with small groups of people.

Create a book club or association with those who provide the identity you hope to have as a writer, and allow you to better experience the themes your work embodies.

Make a conscious effort to understand the scope of your community, and how you can strengthen it.



YOUR WORK
SPREADS
NOT BY
COMMERCE,
BUT BY
OTHERS
WHO CARE
ABOUT IT.

CREATE SOCIAL PROOF

Trust is what makes people open to hearing your message. It is the difference between getting a flyer on the street promoting something vs a recommendation from a trusted friend.

In a world with so many writers and so many books, trust is what makes people open to learning about you and your book.

If you are affiliated with respected organizations, this helps engender trust. If well-known authors in your genre or topic provide testimonials of your work, this builds trust. If those your audience already trust vouch for you, this builds meaningful connections.

Consider the many ways that you can create social proof for your work. Think of ways to illustrate that those people your audience already trusts enjoy and appreciate your work.

**TRUST IS BUILT VIA
RELATIONSHIPS,
NOT PUBLICITY.**

TEST AND ITERATE

You can rarely predict exactly what will or won't engage others. Instead of creating the "perfect" strategy for spreading the word about your writing, embrace a process of testing ideas, measuring results and iterating your methods.

This can apply to the language you use in your Twitter bio, to the topics you blog about, the types of things you share on Twitter, what events you attend, and so many other things.

As Eric Ries outlines in his book *The Lean Startup*, focus learning more and more about your ideal audience, and work in small iterations to learn what engages them.

Your strategy should evolve. Yes, there will be little failures, but they are critical. If you don't fail, how can you learn what does and doesn't work?

To many writers avoid taking action because they are paralyzed by the idea of failure. That if they fall once, they can never pull themselves back up again.

But when you look at the journey of a successful writer, you see it was filled with little setbacks. But they persevered. They learned. They tried again until they got it right.

BUILDING A
PLATFORM IS
NOT ABOUT
KNOWING, IT IS
ABOUT LEARNING.



STAY MOTIVATED

Everyone pretends that time is the resource you need to manage most carefully, when really energy and motivation are what you need to focus on most. A motivated person can get more done in the same period of time than an unmotivated person.

This is also why I suggested earlier that you pay attention to when you have the most creative energy. You can't create a 25th hour in your day, but you can rearrange your habits to make the most of your energy level and moods.

I know, we aren't supposed to talk about how we are moody. We are supposed to pretend that this is all objective, and all about strategies and tactics. But people are moody, and these moods help determine nearly every aspect of our days; what gets done, and how we feel about that work.

Create a support structure to stay motivated. Review your accomplishments on a regular basis: weekly, monthly, quarterly, yearly.

Identify people who can act as resources - those you check in with, those who keep you on task, those who give you new ideas, and those who push you forward, not those who hold you back.

MANAGE
YOUR
ENERGY,
NOT JUST
YOUR
TIME.





Need more?

My 6-week online course: **BUILD YOUR AUTHOR PLATFORM** runs from Sept 5 - Oct 23. In the course, I work with you to grow the audience for your writing. [More info here.](#)

Feel free to reach out to me to see if there are ways we can work together to help you develop your audience and writing career.

Thanks!

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