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Writing the right way

Five lawyer-authors offer tips and tricks on making it through the book publishing process

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Got a great idea for a book?

That's the easy part.

Here are five tips on surviving the publishing process from lawyers who have been through it recently.

Research your idea

Anybody can have an idea. The question is whether you can develop it to stand out in the marketplace.

"When you have an idea about a book, the first thing you want to do is research what else is out there on your topic," said retired Cook County circuit judge Michele Francene Lowrance, author or co-author of two books, most recently "The New Love Deal."

"Figure out how to differentiate your voice," she said.

Added T. Markus Funk of Perkins, Coie LLP, the author of six legal-themed books: "Find a topic you really care about. Make sure no one else has written what you intend to write about it. And start typing."

Identify your audience

While working on his nonfiction book "Sitting On Top of the World," Steven L. Richards of Richards & Marsh learned a valuable lesson about writing for an audience.

"I went to a seminar once, and the guy who was talking said, 'If you write a book about dogs, you can sell that book,

because everybody loves dogs. If you want to write a book about the Civil War, there is definitely an audience, but how do you find that audience?'"

Richards initially targeted his book at a general audience but later realized that "I could not attack it that way" and re-positioned his World War II book specifically for a Jewish audience.

"And that's easier for me — I'm Jewish — because I know where the Jews are," he said. "I can more easily identify and find those groups."

Develop a writing schedule

Carving out writing time is hard for anyone. For attorneys working long hours, discipline is vital.

"You really have to set aside time and treat it like a job," said Illinois Appellate Court judicial clerk Marya K. Lucas, author of the children's book "Jack Chaps, Dog Detective."

"I had to treat it like a job and say, 'Tuesdays? No, I'm busy. I have something scheduled,'" she said.

Even a relatively short piece of writing such as Funk's latest — 40 pages — takes a lot of time. Funk worked "pretty much 7 p.m. to midnight every day, and then all weekends."

"It's either a priority or it doesn't exist," Lowrance said. "When I did (her previous book, "The Good Karma Divorce"), I unplugged the phone from Friday to Monday morning for almost two years. There was no

other way you could do it with a full-time job."

Pick a plan for publication

Among these authors, Funk is the only one working with a publisher on his most recent book. The Federal Judicial Center contacted him to write a guidebook for judges on obtaining evidence from foreign countries. It will be sent free to every federal judge.

On previous books, Funk has also worked with Oxford University Press, Rowman & Littlefield, the U.S. Department of Justice and the American Bar Association.

The other three books discussed here were self-published so the authors could control their processes and products.

Lucas worked with a graphic designer friend on the visual style of the book, did all of the photography herself and formed her own publishing company to release the book.

She never received an offer from a publisher, but Lowrance and co-authors Gemma B. Allen of Ladden & Allen Chtd. and Terry Savage did — a deal that would have included an advance.

Their legal backgrounds served them well while studying the contract, which they did along with a transactional lawyer they hired.

They passed on the offer because the publisher's preferred price was more beneficial to the publisher than them.

"It's so flattering to get an advance and someone who wants you," Lowrance said. "But when you start to examine the contracts, you have to decide how high is the price for the credit of having a publisher. I would advise anyone to have an attorney, look at the contract and to spell out all the pitfalls, because there are many."

Richards had an offer too. Like the Allen, Lowrance, Savage trio, Richards passed.

"The marketing people that I use even have one or two clients with Random House, and the marketing is on the author,"

Richards said. "There's nothing that a small publishing house could give to me that I couldn't do on my own."

Know your sales expectations

The key experience for Funk in working with a publisher is the emphasis on sales. After releasing his 2012 book on child exploitation and trafficking co-written with U.S. District Judge Virginia M. Kendall, publisher Rowman & Littlefield scheduled speaking engagements for Funk and Kendall in Washington, D.C., New York, Chicago and other cities.

"(This is) a different scenario than when Judge Kendall and I were going around the country," he said about his current book. "We had a book that the publisher expected to sell copies of and was tracking."

Richards keeps in mind the realities of the challenge of sales.

"First-time authors sell, on average, 500 books," he said. "If you sell more than 3,000 copies, you're in the 5 percent club."

Lucas went another way: She made a Kickstarter page — a crowdfunding website that allows online donors to financially support projects — which exceeded her pledge goal of \$20,000. She is using that money for printing costs.

"Having a video makes a huge difference," she said about her Kickstarter campaign. "I hired a videographer to do it. And then one of my friends does video editing, and I also hired her to do it. So I had two professional people working on it. ... The video was consistent with the book, in terms of look and feel."

For Lucas, more important than any single element of the presentation was her mindset of treating her book like a second job.

For Allen, the writing process was more recreational.

"Trite as it sounds, I love writing," Allen said. "I make myself do my work first because (writing) is more like dessert for me. I think if you have a passion and you have a topic, your audience will find you."

BOOK IT: NEW READS FROM CHICAGO ATTORNEYS

• **“Jack Chaps, Dog Detective: The Curious Case of the Cow & The Great Chicago Fire of 1871”**

Author: Marya K. Lucas, clerk for 1st District Appellate Justice Terrence J. Lavin
Synopsis: Children’s book about a dog detective who travels Chicago searching for clues about the Great Chicago Fire.
Self-published: July or August
More information: E-mail jackchaps@gmail.com

• **“The New Love Deal: Everything You Must Know Before Marrying, Moving In, or Moving On!”**

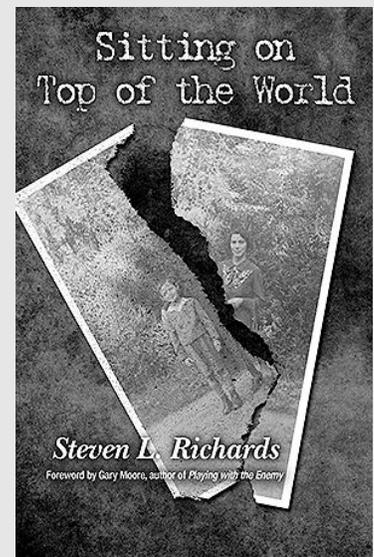
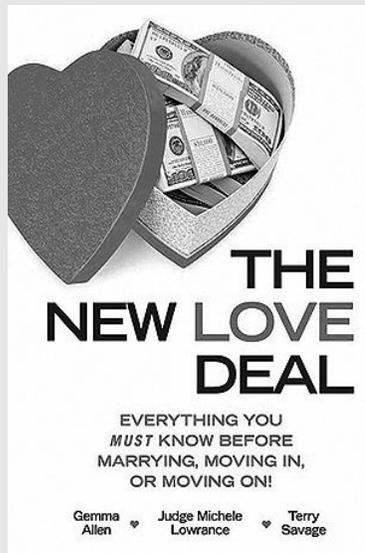
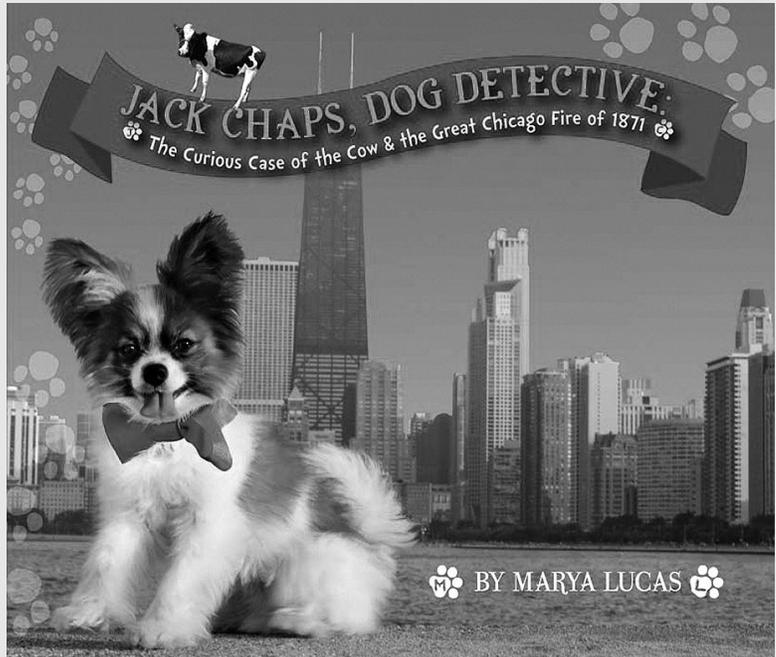
Authors: Gemma B. Allen of Ladden & Allen Chtd., JAMS mediator Michele Francene Lowrance and Terry Savage
Synopsis: A family law attorney, a retired family law judge and a financial adviser guide readers through the process of talking about money within intimate relationships.
Self-published: May 18
More information: thenewlovedeal.com

• **“Mutual Legal Assistance Treaties and Letters Rogatory: A Guide for Judges” (not pictured)**

Author: T. Markus Funk of Perkins, Coie LLP
Synopsis: Guidance for judges on how to obtain evidence from abroad.
Published: April 28 by the Federal Judicial Center
Read the book: tinyurl.com/cdlbfunk

• **“Sitting On Top of the World”**

Author: Steven L. Richards of Richards & Marsh
Synopsis: The true story of two brothers living in Germany during World War II, one raised by their Jewish mother and maternal grandparents, the other by their Christian paternal grandparents. The latter becomes a member of the Hitler Youth.
Self-published: April 8
More information: sittingontopoftheworldbook.com



As for Richards, he viewed his book in more specific terms than the other authors.

“I looked at the book as a

client,” he said. “Was I able to represent my client-book the way I would represent a client in a personal-injury case? Are you

in it 100 percent or are you not? If this is a hobby or a lark, you’ll never make it.”

If it’s not, Richards said,

you’re in for a great experience.

“Other than my family, it’s been the most important thing I’ve ever done in my life.”