

"HOW-TO WRITE YOUR OWN CHECK"

By

Kelly Patrick Riggs

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FORWARD

Life has been a seesaw for me, but after merely a few hours of transactional conversation with Kelly Riggs, I've been on an upward escalator. Simply stated, Mr. Riggs is a humble man who faithfully confers his confidence, dignity, and meticulousness upon every level-headed person who wants to distinguish themselves as scholarly.

Yesterday, I was a burdened man who was unsettled and disorganized in the pursuit of my legal and recreational aspirations. But today, because of Mr. Riggs' audacity and professional insight, I have quickly learned to enjoy my life and this wonderful gift of writing that God has blessed me with. Similarly, Mr. Riggs has exemplified and blessed me with his quiet austerity, as he patiently and decisively articulates my legal arguments and in turn, explains the deficiencies in my legal impulsive, half-cocked hastily drawn legal theories. I appreciate nothing more than his astute and attentive practice of breaking down my hurdles into small steps of proficient judicial application.

Mr. Riggs has also inspired me to pursue my greatest life ambition,....to write a full length novel in one year. Thanks to Mr. Riggs' unflappable enthusiasm for personal development, I find that my day also begins before sunrise, with coffee, pen and paper, and the joy of conquering my goals through the art of communication.

With warm regards,
Robert Williams

Author's Note

Hello, My name is Kelly Patrick Riggs and I'm the author of "How To Write Your Own Check."

I know we have never met, so you're probably wondering how I could have any idea what you're going through or why you should listen to anything I have to say. Let's just say that I have been where you are right now as you read this letter. I have been new to prison myself and I know what it's like to feel hopeless while locked away in one of the darkest places this country has to offer. I know the feel of loss and despair. I know what it feels like to be stripped of everything I care about. But, I also know what it feels like to reinvent yourself into someone greater than you have ever been before. And this is my attempt to share this change with you.

When I was put in federal prison, I learned the pain of loss. I also learned that the system was not designed to be concerned with the health or wellbeing of individual prisoners. Although the federal system has the tools to make a big difference, the people who control these tools are not concerned enough to use them.

Within weeks, I learned that programming, rehabilitation, and recidivism were fancy words used only by politicians. These words, unfortunately, are all but worthless unless they are understood by the person who needs them the most - That person is you. So, ask yourself do you want something different out of life? Do you want to leave prison and stay out? Do you want to become something that your family can be proud of? Or, do you just want to pay your way in life? That's a good start. Since you want something different, I'm going to show you how to get it.

In this book, I explain how I changed from an average federal prisoner to a successfully published author, even after I failed two high school english classes. I share with you how writing was a way for me to vent the pain and anger of losing my mother, expressing my frustration about careless lawyers, and creating a steady cash flow with which I support my children. What's most amazing is that I have done all this from inside the two-man cell, where I currently am as I write this letter.

I have blazed a new trail to change myself, and I recommend that you follow. This is not an easy road, but nothing good is ever easy. You will have dark days and mounting resistance, but in the end when you see the light at the end of the tunnel, you will find that the journey will have polished you into the diamond you were always meant to be.

This is my encouragement for you to find a new life of success and prosperity.

From the Author,

Kelly Patrick Riggs

REVIEW

"How-To Write Your Own Check" is a remarkable book with brilliant step-by-step guidelines and techniques to follow. Unbelievably comprehensive with fresh angles and immensely practical examples. Kelly Riggs shows new authors how to magnify their inherent ability to write while preparing the novice to embrace a terrific new career.

Jimison Coleman

Introduction

I wish I was paid a dime every time somebody asked me how I did, "IT". "IT" is how I changed from an average prisoner—who failed high school english—(Twice)— to a published author who is paid a regular monthly check and receives royalty payments every quarter. What's even more extraordinary is that I did it from inside a federal prison, where I was, at times, locked in the S.H.U. The S.H.U. is similar to the solitary confinement you see in the movies.

To make it simple, let's say that my change required me to work. And, I needed a lot of help along the way. If you're wondering, I'm writing this book from inside a two-man cell in Seagoville Federal Correctional Institution. In this book I'll explain how I did, "IT". And, more importantly, how you can do "IT" too.

I'm going to go a step further than my simple explanation. I'm also going to give you the name and contact information of the company that helped me, and made my change possible. I'm sure they can help you too.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Page no.:

CHAPTER ONE-
The Basics.....9

CHAPTER TWO-
Getting Started.....12

CHAPTER THREE-
Marketing.....15

CHAPTER FOUR-
A Good Idea.....17

CHAPTER FIVE-
Research Your Topic.....20

CHAPTER SIX-
Working Title.....23

CHAPTER SEVEN-
Outline Your Idea.....25

CHAPTER EIGHT-
Friends.....27

CHAPTER NINE-
Setting Goals.....30

CHAPTER TEN-
Start Writing.....32

CHAPTER ELEVEN-
Self-Edit.....34

CHAPTER TWELVE-
Rewrite.....36

CHAPTER THIRTEEN-
Final Title.....38

CHAPTER FOURTEEN-
Submissions.....40

CHAPTER FIFTEEN-
Going The Extra Mile.....42

CHAPTER SIXTEEN-
Self Publishing.....44

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN-
Promoting Your Book.....47

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN-
Branding.....51
About the Author.....54
Acknowledgments.....55

CHAPTER ONE

THE BASICS

The idea for this book started as a class I wanted to offer to prisoners at my own expense. My plan was to offer them an opportunity to change their lives before leaving prison. One thing I've discovered by talking to literally hundreds of people who have returned to prison, is that there are very few opportunities for ex-felons. As you can imagine, ex-felons who have no other options will return to what they know if they are left homeless and hungry. They will even go back to prison.

On December 21, 2018, President Donald Trump signed the First Step Act into law. The First Step Act provides that federal prisoners can earn time off their sentences if they are willing to engage in programs and productive activities that prepare them for life outside of prison. That was when I decided to write the curriculum for a twelve week class in which I could teach prisoners how to write, get published, and get paid. No big surprise, The Federal Bureau of Prisons refused to offer the class. The reason I was given was that the Bureau of Prisons was not interested in offering classes that provided income opportunities to prisoners. To date there are no classes that comply with the First Step Act or that have the potential to battle recidivism with opportunity. This fact is evident in all federal prisons throughout America.

Since receiving that denial, I have encouraged and mentored a few inmates. And those few have gone on to become published authors. I was utterly amazed at the transformation that took place before my very eyes. Inmates who I knew to have been planning their next score upon release are now planning their next book instead. Nothing compares to the gleam in a prisoner's eyes when he holds his new book for the first time.

It wasn't long after I realized the potential of what I was doing that I extended the offer to help family members of prisoners as well. But, I felt that wasn't enough. I recognized the need to publish the idea in this book.

This book is the product of the government's refusal to help prisoners succeed. I realized that there are probably millions of people outside prison

walls who are without meaningful opportunities also. This inexpensive book is my contribution to help anyone who wants a better life.

When I first had the idea to write this book, its title caused quite a stir. As a matter of fact it was the cause of a two hour argument between my writing coach and myself. He believed that the title, "Write Your Own Paycheck," was misleading. In his estimation "Paycheck" implied frequent, regular payments. Thus, we split hairs and definitions to determine if quarterly royalty payments qualified as "paycheck" material. What he failed to consider was I also receive a monthly pay check from what is called "freelance writing". What I failed to consider was that not everyone will be able to rely on that kind of regularity. Ultimately, he lost the battle but won the war. His purpose in the argument was, as it always is, to make me think. That single argument changed the focus of this book in a lot of ways. The most important of which is my responsibility to tell you that this is not a "get-rich-quick" scheme. If you work at this, you will one day be paid very well. But, please don't quit your day job yet. Most importantly, the title of this book was narrowed down to "How To Write Your Own Check," and its focus adjusted because of our many discussions.

For those of you who question what makes me qualified to write this book, I have an example for you. Log on to Google, Amazon, or www.freebirdpublishers.com and do a quick search of my name, Kelly Patrick Riggs. What you see on that screen I did in three years from a prison cell. I had no computer, no cell phone, and no co-operation from prison staff. I even had three completed manuscripts taken from me and destroyed by prison guards claiming they were contraband! Now, I want you to imagine your name on that screen instead of mine, If you can see yourself successful and you're willing to work hard for eighteen months, you can far surpass my level of success by following these steps that I followed.

Make no mistake - the contents of this book is not material that I have always known. This material is the summary of what I have learned that works. I'm writing these steps in the hope that you won't feel the need to travel down the hard road of bumps and knocks that I was forced to travel, or make the mistakes that I made. But, if you still feel the need for a rough ride, I'll give you the directions.....NOT!

The cost of transforming yourself into an author is not terribly expensive if you follow the lead of those who have gone before you. Using your computer, and just a few hours a day, you can be well on your way to being able to Write Your Own Check.

CHAPTER TWO

GETTING STARTED

I didn't grow up with a desire to be a professional writer; I didn't dream of being a published author, nor did I ever think I would be a federal prisoner. But, as you can find on Google, I am guilty of all counts. And yes, I did actually fail two quarters of high school English at J.B. Penninton High School in Blountsville, Alabama. Don't get me wrong, failing English is not a requisite to getting published, but if you did, that won't prevent you from succeeding as an author.

For those of you who work blue collar jobs, construction, or even basic labor, you too are qualified. I worked as an electrician for years before I advanced to being a trainer. My basic rule is that if you can read and write in English, you are qualified.

I myself, have labored in a number of more "colorful" job titles, some of which directly served the United States government. But truth be told, I maintained a deep hatred for writing. That hatred continued from my youth until I was arrested for a crime I did not commit. After my arrest, I was told by my attorney that justice costs money and he laughed when he asked me how much I could afford. When I found out that he refused to take statements from the ten alibi witnesses who kept calling him, I realized that I had to start to write to the court myself. After that first letter to Judge Karen Owen Bowdre, the course of my life changed forever.

By the time I landed in my first prison, Lexington Federal Medical Center, I was writing to someone every day. When I reached Oakdale Federal Correctional Institution, I was writing for other people, every day. In September of 2016, I received an offer from Freebird Publishers to publish my notes on the Post Conviction Relief process. I quickly accepted.

Weeks later, I received the contract in the mail. I was overwhelmed with emotion about the prospect of writing a book. I had never before wanted to write my name, let alone a book. A poll conducted by USA Today revealed that as many as 82 percent of Americans want to write a book. I felt like the exception to the rule. Especially since I didn't want to write a book—yet I had a contract and an obligation.

After realizing how deep my foot was stuck down my throat, I decided it was time to learn how to write—a little anyway.

Long before I committed to writing a book, I had come to know a fellow prisoner named Johnny Smith. He was from Louisiana and had a Bachelor's Degree in English. He often helped make sense of the tirades I sent to the courts, much like the "squelch" on an old citizens band radio (C.B. for short). Needless to say, I spent many hours with him, learning what I could about English and grammar, complaining the whole way. Yeah, he had his work cut out for him. Unfortunately he and I were separated before I could get the book published.

During the process of writing that first book, I also had to battle the prison staff to get it done. Because of my writing to the courts about civil rights violations, the staff viewed me as public enemy number one. And, as such, their favorite punishment was to confiscate all paper products in my possession about every sixty days. Let me take a moment to salute S.I.S. with at least one of my fingers.

In the long run, I won over. Now I write all I want without too much fear of loss. Let my example be a lesson to those of you who are in prison. Don't make enemies of those in power over you—not until you've submitted your work to the publisher anyway.

I'm going to boldly say that if you can read and write English, you can write and publish your own book. How can I be so sure? Because the book you're holding right now was written by someone who at one time could barely do either. And the steps I followed to write it were developed by me and are easily duplicated. Therefore, if you can follow these easy instructions, you can write your own book.

For those of you who are wondering why I'm talking about writing a book instead of a paycheck, let me say "credibility." Before you can start writing weekly or monthly postings and articles for regularly scheduled checks, you will have to gain some authority in your field. Have you ever heard the saying, "He wrote the book on it?" Well, it has some meaning.

Writing weekly or monthly articles, posts, and press releases are a lot like being on the public speaking circuit. Outrageous speaking fees can be what motivates some people to write a book. Celebrities like Tom Cruise and William Shatner do well speaking about a cause without having to write a book. But, for those of us who don't frequent the silver screen, we can write a book and often gain instant authority and credibility as well.

It's not hard to see that writing a book can be the gateway to being paid well by putting your thoughts in print. The books I have written in the past tell the world two things: first, I am a vocal authority on prison issues; and second, I never miss a deadline. So, let's get on with writing your book as the first step to developing your ability to Write Your Own Check.

CHAPTER THREE

MARKETING

Market your idea before you pick up your pen? Huh? Exactly. Ninety-nine out of one hundred people have no idea what the difference is between marketing and advertising. Believe it or not, I used to be one of those people. Lucky for me, Diane at Freebird Publishers (www.freebirdpublishers.com) already had the answers for me.

Coincidentally, I wanted to call my first book "A David And Goliath Story." The book was all about what happened to me. Of course, that was my ignorance talking. My notes, which Diane had agreed to publish, were about prisoners filing for Post-Conviction Relief. So rather than write a book about my fight against the system, she thought that perhaps I should write about Post-Conviction Relief. She was brilliant. She had previously marketed my idea. That means, in its most basic form, that she studied the potential audience to see what they wanted to read rather than what I wanted to write.

"To be successful, find a need and fill it."

No, I didn't just make that up. I recently read it in a book. As applied here, it means that instead of writing about your great idea, why not write about a related idea that the market place indicates people want to read about? For example, the difference between writing about legal practices as opposed to writing about my personal fight with the legal system.

Something else to consider is that marketing your idea comes in two stages. Stage one of marketing comes now, in the very beginning--during your idea's development. Stage two of marketing your idea comes, and continues through, every minute after the development of your idea.

The printing of a book about your idea is not the end of the road. It's often just the beginning. A big misconception about publishing is one I've only recently discovered, and is second only to the misconception about marketing.

"Printing and Publishing are two vastly different things."

This book, for example, was printed for my review before it was made available to you. And you were unaware that I had written this book before you heard about it. "Printing" is very simply making a copy, or several copies, of the material and producing it in a book format. "Publishing", however, is making the public aware of the book's availability. In short, publishers market a book until it goes out of print. They are constantly seeking out markets that may have an interest in your book. Then they make that market aware of the book's availability through techniques like advertising, public relations, promotions, and branding.

Who's responsible for marketing? Everyone, especially the author. I do, however, suggest that you consult your publisher, if you have one. Know that I speak with Diane at Freebird Publishers on a weekly basis.

Marketing your idea before you write about it can help you refine your idea--which I talk about in detail in the next chapter. For those of you who are not locked up in prison, I'll share a few things that are available to you online. Keep in mind however, that I've been locked up for a while, and some things have been updated a little bit.

Because you are about to publish your idea in a book, I suggest that you start with the leader in the book industry--Amazon.com. Using Amazon is the obvious first step in marketing your idea. Go to the search box and select Kindle Store, then type in keywords related to your idea. You will see a menu appear under the search box. What you are looking at are the suggestions made by Amazon based on the keywords that you've entered. That menu is an indication of what the public is looking for under your particular keywords, and they will be listed in the order of popularity. Another good resource is Google Trends, which at one time was available at <https://www.GetFreshKey.com>.

Your next search resource should be Yahoo Answers, or what today's equal might be. At Yahoo Answers, they once listed the types of questions the public was asking in particular areas and topics. It doesn't matter if it's weight loss, health, paintball, or education--search your idea for potential marketability. Market your idea before you start--that will make it much easier for you to Write Your Own Check.

CHAPTER FOUR

A GOOD IDEA

You can be confident that if you have a good idea, somebody wants to know about it. And, if there is one person, there are likely to be thousands.

Just like there are different types of people, there are different classifications of books. These classifications are known as "genres". And, within each genre there are thousands of different writing ideas and topics. So, as you consider your ideas, let's consider what genre you're most likely to be able to market as a first-time author.

Personally, I'm a big fan of John Grisham, Dean Koontz, and Shannon Stacey--well Shannon Stacey if the Kowalski's are involved. I'm such a big fan that when any of these authors announce a new book, I find their book, I read their book, and then I talk about...yes, their book. As a matter of fact, if I had seen "The Whistler" without John Grisham's name on the cover, I wouldn't have read it. But, because I'm a big John Grisham fan, I read it and loved it. I say all this to express that a first-time author might do well by writing something other than fiction. Fiction is written and read for the sole purpose of entertainment, and entertainment is optional.

I suggest that first-time authors write about information. When readers are looking for information, the name of the author often becomes a secondary consideration. But, if the information is beneficial, the reader will remember the author's name, and they will remember what the author said. The second benefit to writing about information is that the book is expected to be short. People who want information want to invest as little time as possible in the process of getting the information. That means that you should keep the book short, concise, and direct.

As I often do, I advised a young man to write a how-to-book about overcoming addiction. I made this suggestion for four reasons: one, he knows the subject; two, he successfully applied the subject to his own life; three, he's excited about the subject; and four, he wants to learn how to write his own check. By the way, watch for "Sex, Drugs, & Paintball" by Ray Millaway. It's funny, dramatic, and purpose-driven. A great read.

More importantly, how-to books are a great first step into the book industry. They are shorter than the average novel. You don't have to possess any specific writing knowledge to write a how-to book. And, a good idea can come from everyday life. There are how-to books on everything under the sun on the market today. The subjects range anywhere from disposing of baby diapers all the way to how to write a best-seller.

It's helpful if you have some personal knowledge about the subject you're about to write about (and I hope it's not about how many times you can use the word "about" in one sentence). The reason foreknowledge is beneficial is because of the "jargon". Every aspect of life has its own jargon. I don't care if it's your job, your hobby, or your sport—all areas of life have their own specific jargon, A.K.A., language.

Having some foreknowledge of your subject and an understanding of its jargon makes it a lot easier for you to write about it and do it more quickly. Just like Mr. Millaway and his "Sex, Drugs, and Paintball", I pointed him to his own areas of interest. This is where I try to point every new author for their first book, because I think that it is important to get that first book written and out of the way.

I also like how-to books because their relevance will last a long time. For instance a book about raising a child with red hair will be relevant as long as children are born with red hair. But, a book about an upcoming Rock-n-Roll concert will no longer be relevant once the concert is over.

A book about Donald Trump as president, or the current hot celebrity probably won't be a relevant book ten years from now. Needless to say, its usefulness will decline rapidly after the subject falls from its current popularity.

Look at other long-lasting books. For example "How to Win Friends and Influence People" by Dale Carnegie, has been on the best seller list since he wrote the book in 1936. Mr. Carnegie's book covered an important subject in 1936 and has continued to be an important subject ever since.

When you think about what a good idea is, think about a need. Think about what you personally know about it. Think about things that you often explain to others.

If you still haven't nailed down your idea, then let's go back to Amazon.com.

Let's spend some time searching the how-to books. You're looking for how-to books that are popular and that cover a subject you know something about. Let's say you know how to lay tile flooring. Find the most popular book on laying tile flooring and read it. A lot of times, you will find that you possess knowledge of an additional step to the process, or an easier way to do something. You may even learn something that makes your method better.

Add any extra knowledge you find. Incorporate what you learn with what you already know. Remove anything that is outdated or unnecessary, and you'll have made your idea better. Then, start an outline of the steps that make the process easier or complete. I encourage you to write about what you've learned in life, so you can develop a way to Write Your Own Check.

- SPECIAL NOTE -

All prisoners who are thinking of writing about their crime should review Title 18, United States Code, Section 3681(a). This is the special forfeiture law in the federal code. I highly recommend you consult an attorney before writing about the crime you're incarcerated for.

CHAPTER FIVE

RESEARCH YOUR TOPIC

Now that you have an idea that you like, let's see how much you know about it. I don't care who you are or what you're writing about, you don't know everything about your topic. No one does. Now is the time to test your knowledge. Go to Google and search your topic. This is also a good opportunity to better refine your idea to better fit your market.

Read the first twenty listings that come up. Be thorough. You'll want to discard all the trash and continue until you have twenty good information sources. Once you have read all your sources, you'll want to categorize them.

For those who are currently incarcerated, you can use papers and magazines. Those of you who read my introduction know that I was incarcerated when I did my research for this book. In my preparation, I read a lot of newspapers and magazines. When I found something that was relevant to my idea, I would simply cut it out and put it in a file marked, "Write Your Own Check." Once I was ready to start my outline, I pulled the file out and started to organize what I had gathered by category. This gave me a head start on my outline.

With a file full of organized articles, I started to list all the steps I went through to get where I am today. I organized once again, adding the steps I had written down. I had to see if I had any holes in the process—just like you're going to find in yours, I had holes in mine. Once again I made a list, but this list was of the things that I thought were missing. Then back to the library to appropriate a few more articles. Those of you who are not locked up can use the internet; you won't lose any points for cheating.

If you're an overachiever, as I like to believe that I am, you may have already done what I'm about to tell you to do. But, for those of you who haven't, you might want to review a few of the most recent books that have been written about your topic.

Reading what others have to say about your topic can sometimes provide guidance as to what information the market is looking for. Again, use only the most recent and most popular books. Reading the books that are already out there, and making notes as you go along, will give you a big advantage as you move on to making your outline.

Also remember that you cannot copy directly from anyone else's book. If you copy someone's work in the publishing arena, you can be sued and even imprisoned for violating the copyright laws. You can, however, "synthesize" the information you find interesting. "synthesize" means that you have read the material, applied your own thoughts and other material to it, and then rewritten it in your own words. The resulting product, in your own words, is "synthesized" information. You could use as little as two other books on your subject, read what they contain, then write the information in your own words. In doing so, you will have effectively synthesized that information, and it's not illegal nor will you have infringed on someone else's copyright.

I have found that an author is authorized by law to quote from others' works, but only if the length of the quote is reasonable. This book is not written as a replacement for a lawyer's advice. Nor is it designed to provide legal advice in any way. I suggest that you stay within legal limits by researching the term "Fair Use" on the internet. "Fair Use" is the doctrine that defines what quotes and previously written materials you can use in your own book. And know, that when you QUOTE from someone's work, it is essential that you give them credit for what they have written. By naming another author as a source, you maintain your public reputation of honesty in the eyes of your readers. And, you're likely to make a friend of the author you quoted for validating their work.

- IMPORTANT -

There are three rules to quoting another author. VERIFY! VERIFY! And then VERIFY AGAIN! When something sounds too good to be true, don't disregard it as most likely false, but be sure to verify the material. Don't assume anything is correct just because it's in print. A good example happened a few weeks ago. I received news about the federal system's probation program being found to be unconstitutional by the Supreme Court of the United States. This news came to me through an email newsletter from an ordinarily reliable source. The news, of course, was very important to me for two reasons: one, I'm a federal prisoner who is subjected to the whims of the U.S. Probation Department; and two, I'm an author that writes self-help books about Post-Conviction Law.

Needless to say, the invalidation of Federal Probation was big news, but I exercised good judgment by suppressing the glimmer of hope that shot through my

spirit, and I verified the report. It turned out to be false and within only hours I received the retraction of the earlier report.

Let me say again, VERIFY! When something sounds too good to be true, or beyond the limits of ordinary good reason, there's a good chance that it may not be accurate. If it sounds too good to be true, don't discount it, but verify it without delay. And above all, don't quote it unless you make sure it is accurate.

For those of you who are not in prison, you may use the internet in your research. I suggest you use a reliable news source because, as you might have guessed, not everything you read on the internet is completely true. That's why I used my rule of three: VERIFY! VERIFY! And above all, VERIFY AGAIN! You must be accurate if you intend to Write Your Own Check.

CHAPTER SIX

WORKING TITLE

Explaining the concept of a working title in most cases is an easy task. But, since you're most likely not used to the writing and publishing industry, I'll try to be a bit more thorough than usual.

First, "working title" is a common term for the title the author thinks up and slaps on his manuscript before the professional marketers get ahold of it. In the past, especially before the internet age, pre-marketing was a lot more difficult than it is today. Back then a person couldn't search "keywords" or "most-searched topics" on Google, Yahoo, or Amazon. As a result, many working titles found their way to the market on the cover of printed books. And, as one might expect, those books didn't always sell very well.

In today's publishing industry, an author will be told quickly if his title is not a selling title, but sales is not the purpose of a working title. A working title is one that speaks to the author and the author alone. It's a focal point that spurs its author on to his own specific thoughts about his book's destination.

In the world of writing full throttle—as you try to write as fast as your flow of thought travels—an author needs a single focus that points back to the book's purpose. That is what a working title does for me—it pulls me back to my reason for writing a particular book.

This book, for example, has nothing to do with publishing your first novel. You could, however, use its techniques to accomplish that goal. "How To Write Your Own Check" is about showing you how you can write and earn a check for your efforts. Although the steps of writing a how-to book take up a great deal of space between these covers, I, as its author, must remember that my real goal is to teach you how to do more than just that one step. Don't get me wrong—I have a great deal of passion for writing books, and I could talk about that at length. Because of that passion, I need something to keep me focused on the task at hand. I need a working title. The working title for this book,

before I refined it to the "final title", was "Write Your Own Paycheck". That kept me focused on the end goal that I was trying to share with you—how you too can get paid to write, even if you have never done it before.

Once you have a working title, write it down. Put it someplace where you'll see it everyday. Before I even started writing this book, I wrote it on the cover of my notebook with a magic marker. That kept my thoughts focused on the task at hand.

By the way, I use "working titles" for every chapter as well. More about this in the chapter about outlining. But, to share my little secret, I make and write down a name for every chapter. Those names often end up in my finished table of contents. Once you have a good "working title", one that inspires you, you'll be on your way to being able to Write Your Own Check.

CHAPTER SEVEN

OUTLINE YOUR IDEA

I don't care what kind of book, paper, or report you happen to be writing, the outline is its backbone. As such, your outline should be the logical support upon which the information you're providing rests. In my Post-Conviction Relief series—which are books that I use to explain legal processes—I followed the court rules as a step-by-step outline. That's because the court will follow the rules—in theory—one after the other, to reach the conclusion of the process. Therefore, it only makes sense for me to explain the process in the same order that the court will follow.

The same logic goes for how-to books. If you're explaining how to do something, it's best to start at step one before going on to step two. The same goes for fiction novels. Start a timeline of events that you plan to tell your reader about, beginning on the start date, event, or condition, and of course end on the stop date or the concluding event or condition.

Now that you know what an outline does, let's go over the why. Your outline will help you focus on the task at hand. Just as a working title helps you focus on the book's purpose, an outline will help you to cover each necessary step for you to write.

As you can see in this book, I title every chapter. I do this for two reasons: one, it keeps me focused on the topic of the chapter; and two, it helps the reader to refer back to what they may later decide to read again.

Now then, let's start with the first step in creating an outline for your own book. Take a pen and paper (or your computer for those on the outside) and jot down your thoughts. Remember that you're trying to explain something from start to finish.

Also, when providing information, (and all books do on some level) you must follow a logical sequence of steps. In how-to books, a natural sequence already exists; all you have to do is follow it. Once you finish writing your steps, it's time to gather your research material. With your written steps close at hand, let's compare it to the research that you have. Just a hint: When I do my first

outline, I take a blank notebook and list one step per page; that way I can add pages between the steps if I missed something.

For those of you who are writing fiction, your outline is your timeline of the story's sequence. Of course your outline will be a bit more forgiving, but still one step per page. You'll thank me later.

Keep in mind that your outline will one day serve as a table of contents. When you think you are finished, take an objective view of what you have created and ask yourself if it's laid out in a logical sequence. In a how-to book, ask yourself if you could complete the task by following only the steps you have written.

There is a good chance that your outline is not up to par with that of a professional author—not a big deal—neither are mine. Your outline is designed for your use only; if you're submitting your work for sale, you'll be creating a new outline later on in the submission process. For now, this outline is for you to follow and it should remain relatively fluid until your book is done. For an example of a simple, yet functional outline, use the table of contents of this book for guidance. That was once my outline to Write Your Own Check.

CHAPTER EIGHT

FRIENDS

Everyone I know has, at one time or another, been told to choose their friends wisely. If you haven't heard this, then let me be the first to tell you, "choose your friends wisely." This age-old advice is no less important to you now than it was the first time you heard it. If you allow it, your friends can make the difference between succeeding and failing as a writer. On average, friends come in two flavors; Those who use you to feel better about themselves, and those who want to see you do your best for yourself.

The ones who want to use you are easy to identify—they're happy failures. And, they want nothing more than for you to fail worse than they have so they'll always have you to compare themselves to. Ultimately, a user needs you to be in a worse position than they're in so they can feel as though they are doing better than somebody. This kind of friend often sticks out because they're usually trying to "get over" on somebody or something. These kinds of friends are self-serving. Thus, they're no friend at all.

Now, for the friends who want to see you doing your best. These are friends of true value. They feel their best when they see you succeed and want to help you do it. These friends are nurturing and supportive, but they're also often brutally honest. These are friends you need if you want to change your life.

I don't know about you, but I've noticed over the years that if you announce something to your friends and even some of your family members—like telling them that you want to be a writer for instance—they'll remind you about it forever, or until they see you either succeed or admit failure. To some people, this brings about a sense of vulnerability and deprives them of being able to rely on friends and family, even to the point that they can't separate the two types of people they'll face. This is caused by the fear that so-called friends will expose your future failure publicly.

I'm sure by now most of you are shaking your head wondering how I—someone whom you've never met—just identified the majority of your friends. That's because you're not alone in this; I went through it too. When I told my friends

that I was going to write a fiction novel, most dismissed my statement and some even laughed at me. Because of the ridicule I suffered after sharing my dreams, I decided to write most of the book in secret, then I never published it. Because of that one horrific period of my life, I abandoned my thoughts of writing fiction. Remember that when I was growing up I never dreamed of being an author. It was over twenty years after I abandoned my first book before I returned to writing and publishing my first real book. But I was in prison with a whole new circle of friends. Those friends gave me support and approval, because they felt that my knowledge should be made available in a how-to book. Thus, I wrote and published "Post-Conviction Relief: Secrets Exposed," distributed by Freebird Publishers.

So who wants to go through all that? Neither did I. That's one of the reasons I wrote this book—so you don't have to suffer the mistakes I made. I'm going to show you how to separate your friends without having to expose your interest in writing. I'm also going to show you how to do this without having to defend your feelings or ambitions. And without alienating any of your friends in the process.

You're holding the secret to this stage in your hands right now. This is the reason that the cover of this book is the color that it is and the contrasting print is so bold.

The title will also be offensive to your friends who are happy failures. The title itself implies that control of your financial circumstances are indeed your choice. And, that that choice is up to you alone to make. Therefore, you don't have to announce anything, just show your friends the cover of this book. Simply ask each of them, "Have you read this book?" "Do you think someone can really do it?"

Once you have done this, you will get either good, bad, or indifferent responses. They'll be easy to identify. The bad or negative responses, and even those that are indifferent, represent a class of your friends you need not approach with anything you are preparing to do. You don't have to disassociate from them, just simply don't share this area of your life with them.

The other class of friends will be distinguished by their curiosity and encouragement. Some of them may even want to explore the possibilities with you. Make a list of these people. That list will be your "Positive Friends Circle". You'll want to remember who they are as you follow the rest of the steps in "Write Your Own Check".

CHAPTER NINE

SETTING GOALS

If you search Amazon.com, you'll find that there are many books that pertain to the subject of setting and achieving your goals. You'll discover that many of them are related to a specific task as well. You'll also discover that not one is an all encompassing guide that everyone can follow to achieve all possible goals. This book is not a perfect fit for everyone either. My goal here is to teach you how to get in the habit of setting reasonable goals that are tailored to your lifestyle, how to break your main goal into smaller goals, and how you can achieve your main goal through reasonable time management.

One thing I suggest is that if you're writing your first book, you get the feel for reaching goals consistently before you commit to any deadline to complete your book. You might have a better feel for the process if you write half of the first manuscript before trying to estimate the book's completion date. If you see that you hit all your minor goals by their due date, then perhaps it's time to offer a completion date on your Major goal.

Just to be sure that I always keep my goals in the forefront of my mind, I use a capital "M" to define my Major goals, and a lower case "m" to define my minor goals. And yes, that does not follow the rules of "good grammar". But this is my book and Webster's Dictionary says that I have what is known as an author's "license". A license is defined as "deviation from fact, form, or rule by an artist or a writer for the sake of the effect gained." Welcome to the world of writing that you control!

Before we get too far along, let me explain how my practice of goal-setting works. Personally, I settle on an idea and finish my outline (table of contents) before I even start setting hard goals. For example, in January of 2019, Diane at Freebird Publishers discovered that almost all the books on the subject of ineffective assistance of counsel had gone out of date and were no longer available. Not long after making her discovery, she sent me an email asking me what I thought about writing an updated book on the subject. (Again, Diane's brilliance was displayed in her seeking out a leading authority on her subject of interest). I told her that I thought writing the book would

be a great idea; I also told her that I would get back to her. In the ten days that followed, I researched all the information that I could find on the subject. Then I confirmed my research through a second source and finished outlining the project. I set my Major goal—the completion of the book. I then set my minor goals, the small steps that made up my Major goal. Only after that did I set a completion date of July 2019. But again, by that time I had a great deal of practice in setting goals and making these goals.

For those of you who are first-timers, let me set forth a couple of more explanations. First, your Major goal is the completion of your book. Avoid setting a completion date at the beginning because that only increases the pressure to finish too quickly. Second, your minor goals should be each element that's found in your table of contents. This works well with fiction as well; a great example is my first novel, "UNDER SEAL".

Now, back to your book. Outline your book based on your thoughts and research. Select the research for the first three chapters and get it organized. Now let's set a goal. Chapter one—how many pages do you think it will take? Remember the average book contains 250-300 words per page. Using these numbers, reduce your page count to a word count. Now, how many words can you write in a day? Take into consideration interruptions by the boss and changing baby diapers for those of you who are stay-at-home moms and dads.

When you're done, you can make an educated guess at how many days it will take you to write chapter one. Do the same for chapters two and three as well. Once they're written, you will have your reasonable word per day average. Using that average, you can set your minor goals for the rest of your outlined chapters. Always take into consideration that the unexpected often happens. Don't forget that "Murphy" guy who made up all those laws. Setting and meeting goals is an important part of the process if you want to Write Your Own Check.

CHAPTER TEN

START WRITING

If you look back through history you'll find that people have been writing, in one form or another, for thousands of years. Even today almost everyone writes something. Whether it be a high school book report, a grocery list, or a text message, we're all guilty of writing. My goal in this book is focusing what you're already doing and bringing it to the fine point that accomplishes a financial purpose. Don't forget that your purpose is "Writing Your Own Check". Writing your own book is only a productive step in accomplishing that goal.

To do all this you must take a daily first step of starting to write. Yeah, you guessed it—my most challenging handicap is getting started every morning, but once I do start, my next problem is stopping. Anyway, back to you and your book.

By now you have estimated your target daily word count and, barring any interruptions by the boss, diapers, and other emergencies, you should seek to reach that minor goal before you stop. Feel free to write every day, every other day, or one day a week—it's up to you. My personal goal is 3000 words per day. That's ten pages. But if you get into a groove, a hot spot, your zone, or whatever else you call it, like I did when I wrote this chapter, you can simply continue. I never turn the flow off until I absolutely have to... That means when things are flowing, don't stop because you've reached a minor goal. When you're in a good flow, stay in it. You'll have some harder days when things take longer to get going, so take advantage of the good days to get some extra words in.

Get comfortable physically. Pick out a good chair that you like, with a good level of lighting so you don't have to strain your eyes to read your notes; dress comfortably and turn your phone off, if you can. The less that you are forced to think about the easier it is to let your mind roam freely.

Also, don't let drawing a blank stop you from writing. In the past, I have written a page of nonsense before my brain picked up on what I wanted to do.

This often happens to me, especially when I'm working on a new fiction novel. What I'm trying to tell you is "just write something." I don't care if the whole session becomes a wash, write something until you reach your target word count, then edit later. It wasn't long ago that I started to write letters to friends and family about the chapter I just couldn't wrap my head around. I didn't resume any productive efforts until the next day, but at least I wrote letters to my wonderful children.

Above all (barring emergencies) stay focused! Whatever your set time is. put aside all other things. I don't care if it's your yard work, a surprise lunch invitation, or a news alert, don't allow distractions to take over—at least not while you're trying to Write Your Own Check.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

SELF-EDIT

Just walk away, that's my practice. When I write, I start out slowly and my penmanship is easy to read because it's crisp, but I get faster as I go along. When I do, my writing begins to look like scribbling, or maybe even like those pictures on the wall of a cave. My problem is simple—when I get into a good flow of thought, my hand can't keep up. The result is illegable writing, and I even miss a few words here and there. If you're outside of prison and using a computer, it won't be so bad. Maybe you'll still skip a few words and letters. This is why editors are allowed to co-exist with writers... just kidding. Editors really are a necessary element of the writing and publishing process. That's for sure.

Editors are a breed all their own. They don't suffer from the same issues and shortcomings that writers have to live with, so in a writer's eyes, a good editor can become enemy number one. They mean you no harm; it's just the nature of the business. Their job is to make sure that errors in an author's work don't make it into the public's view. As you can imagine, this means that an editor is going to point out every grammatical error that the author makes. But all-in-all, editors are in the business of keeping writers from looking bad, so maybe we should all treat our editors better...nah, not really.

That's why I suggest a little self-editing before you face the big guns. This is also where I employ that "Positive Friends Circle"—you know, that list you made a few chapters ago.

The trick to this step is my "twenty-four hour rule", and yes, I made this one up. Here it is—when you write, do all you can to make it sound correct. In other words, write some, read some, and write some more until you've reached your daily word count.

When you're finished writing, lay it aside for at least twenty-four hours. After that, and I mean not before the next day, read your work as a reader as opposed to as a writer. Don't use your writing time to do this. You want your mind focused on readability. Ask yourself, "does this make a clear statement?"

"Does each sentence seem complete and necessary?" Once you've done your reading, make your notes and/or corrections. When you're finished and you feel it's the best it will get, ask one of those "Positive Friends" of yours to read it as well. Keep in mind that you don't want to use that friend of yours that's a perpetual cheerleader, the one who agrees that everything you do is just wonderful. You want a hard core nurturing critic. You want to know if something is unclear.

Practicing this step will also make for a better relationship with your editor, your publisher, and the public. Remember, relationships are essential in establishing an ability to Write Your Own Check.

CHAPTER TWELVE

REWRITE

I may have mentioned earlier that I hate reading my own writing. Most often I read notes that I've taken only to be reminded of information that I previously decided was important. This is especially true with my legal writing, such as when I'm writing a motion to a court. Because of this—my own personal problem with reading my own writing—I have resorted to rewriting almost everything I write.

A rewrite serves a few different purposes. All of which, by the way, I use to produce my best work.

First—I get to see the thoughts of the friends I previously asked to read the work. By the way, when I was choosing my "Positive Friends Circle" I nominated one of them as a writing coach. I also made a big mistake that you may not want to repeat—I gave my writing coach his very own RED PEN.

Second—Again, I hate reading anything that I have written, but for some reason, I don't mind rewriting it. Therefore, I rewrite everything I write. I do this because it compels me to read my work for clarity and makes me read it slowly. When I read slowly—and I mean word-for-word, I have a good opportunity to make sure I'm making a good solid statement.

Third—I get the opportunity to do another self-edit during my rewrite. I get to stand back and focus, which allows me to see and correct everything that's wrong, as well as stuff that could simply be stated better.

Fourth—I get a chance to put a finer point on what I've written. This is helpful to the readers and the writers in legal writing and in how-to books.

Fifth—I get to read every line for readability—did I fail to use a contraction like I would if I had been actually speaking? Which brings me to a point—if a line or passage feels as though it isn't clear or is stilted, read it out loud so you can hear how it sounds.

Sixth—I get to add anything that seems to be missing. In a rewrite, you can add things that you missed—which we all do sooner or later.

This list could probably go on for quite some time, and you could probably add a few benefits of your own as well. However, I'm now going to get into how I rewrite without going stark-raving mad.

I do all my first writing with a pen and a lot of paper. I probably caused the death of a good-sized tree to have enough paper to write this book. Anyway, I write on plain old lined notebook paper and I write in double spacing for early correction; then I finish by typing it into the prisoner email system. This works especially well for me because when I'm finished I can email the manuscript directly to Diane@freebirdpublishers.com.

Of course you will have to develop your own method, but, please remember, rewriting is an essential step if you want to Write Your Own Check.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

FINAL TITLE

Don't stumble over deciding on a title. I've written books where I had the final title before I had even finished the initial concept and some titles that didn't become known until I had finished the last chapter. To be clear, having settled on the title doesn't have any specific deadline.

On the other hand, it's important to refrain from sharing your title outside your "Positive Friends Circle." That's because you could cause a lot of confusion in the market. Imagine for a moment that you mention your working title on social media. Depending on your number of followers, you could have tens of thousands of potential readers waiting for the release of the working title instead of the "Final Title." So in the event the publisher's marketing department decides to change the final title, and you lose contact with some of your social media contacts, then you could miss out on thousands of book sales because those readers are waiting for the release of the working title.

For those of you who are self-publishing, keep in mind that your final title has nothing to do with your focus on your writing—the purpose of your working title. It has everything to do with marketing; i.e., putting potential readers on notice. You're trying, in one or two words, to tell the reader about the book.

Your title should be short, sweet, and powerful. It should say something about the book, something that the reader will look for all the way to the last page. In a manuscript I finished recently, the last word in the book is its title. It's also the title of a book that one of the characters in my book had announced he was going to write. Yes, I did the unthinkable, I created a character who's writing a book in the book that I wrote. But don't worry, he decided to write his book about his fictitious experiences in the last chapter. Maybe Dean Koontz will forgive me.

I suggest that you get a pretty good handle on your final title before you begin the submission process. Regardless of whether you start sending submissions after the manuscript is finished, or if you're sending out concept proposals, having a good handle on a final title will tell your potential publisher a lot about you and your work. Still, don't worry too much about having a fixed title because it still could change.

Just between us, I'm still very surprised that I got to keep the title of this book so close to what I imagined. In my defense, however, this book is all about how you can Write Your Own Check.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

SUBMISSIONS

I wish I had time to share with you how troubling it was for me to write this chapter. I wish I possessed an all-encompassing formula to guarantee that your every submission would be accepted, but unfortunately, no such formula exists.

In my view, The most important thing to know about submissions is that sooner or later—and it will most likely be sooner—you will have a submission rejected. This is a hard fact of a writer's life. But, also know that rejection isn't always a reflection on your work or your ability to write. Experienced writers know, and new writers will learn, that rejection is usual for all kinds of reasons. The most common reason is that there are more good book ideas than publishing opportunities.

Whatever you do, don't let a rejection stop you from writing. And above all, don't destroy the manuscript you worked so hard to finish.

Let me give you a few tips that will make your submissions more productive.

First—be sure you have a nicely refined manuscript to send out.

Second—shop around for a publisher—this means that you should choose a prospective publisher just like you would choose a target audience. Bottom line is, if you send them something that they are known to have an interest in, they're more likely to give it due consideration.

Third—follow their instructions. If you go to a publisher's website, you'll find their submission instructions. By all means follow their instructions if you want them to consider your work. For those of you who are incarcerated, you should invest in the latest copy of "Writer's Market". It contains a list of publishers. Some of them will send you a printed copy of their instructions and some will print their instructions in their listing. If you happen to be writing anything that's of interest to prisoners, your first stop in the submission process should be to contact Diane Schindelwig at Freebird publishers.

Prisoners can send her an email: Diane@freebirdpublishers.com, or send her a letter. The mailing address is:

Freebird Publishers
P.O. BOX 541
North Dighton, MA 02764

My personal experience with Freebird Publishers is a very long story, but, as challenging as I was to work with, they managed to turn my very first submission into the lucrative writing career I enjoy today.

Fourth—exercise modesty first and foremost if you're a first-time author. As I said earlier, there are a lot more manuscripts being submitted than there are publishing opportunities available. That translates into an acceptance being a gift in any circumstance. Your purpose in publishing your first book should be to establish yourself as an author, rather than haggling over a few points in a contract.

I recently encouraged a fellow author to submit his manuscript to a publisher. He too was an unknown first-time author who had never been published. The publisher took a chance by offering him a generous contract. The author, however, got greedy and sent a counter-offer. The counter-offer was ridiculous and the publisher withdrew its initial offer. The author in this example was still unpublished at the time I was writing this book. Let this be a lesson to you—even a contract for five percent will get you published. You can start making your fortune after you've sold a million copies. Look at your first book as training; You can make a profit on all the rest to follow.

Keep in mind that you will likely have to write more than one book before you're truly able to Write Your Own Check.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

GOING THE EXTRA MILE

By the time you've come this far in any writing project, you're getting really close to being finished. But close isn't close enough. There's more to do. This chapter is relevant to everyone regardless of whether your submission was accepted or rejected. This chapter is, however, more critical to those of you who are moving on to self-publishing.

Let's start by reading your book one more time. By now it's been through your "Positive Friends Circle" and maybe even a professional editor. That means changes have been made to your manuscript. Don't get me wrong, this is a good thing. But, in the end, it has to be your book. When someone who knows you reads your book, they will know if it sounds like something you would say in person—they will know your voice.

Those who are reading your book, having never met you, are learning your voice. And they will know if you sound different in your second book. So read your book to see if every page sounds like something you would have said. This will be very important in the future as you establish your fan base.

As you re-read your manuscript, obviously you should do a second word-for-word edit. This is another time to employ your "Positive Friends Circle." The use of many professionals is very helpful in finalizing your book. I'm amazed at how many mainstream books are published with errors in them. We're all human; I don't care how good you become—you'll make some mistakes. The same is true for your proofreaders, so the more that you have the better off you are.

Although I have never tried this before (due to my lack of access to the internet) I noticed that an author named Vic Johnson invites his readers to identify errors in his books in return for a small gift. Just so you know, Mr. Johnson's books are a source I often use for personal development. So, when I discovered that he printed this invitation in his books, I decided that it's probably a reasonably good idea.

So what about the extra stuff? In every book I write, my publisher requires me to prepare extra pages that go into it—including my Amazon summary. Now that you know this is coming, you might as well get ready for it. Rather than wasting more paper by telling you the obvious, you can use this book as an example. Take a look at all the stuff that's telling you about things other than the main subject: the copyright page, about the author, table of contents...etc. Of course, use only what you need and skip the rest. Also keep in mind that you can advertise your website(s) and future books on the back. As you can see, I always support other people, and you're welcome to follow my lead. We can all prosper from extra networking.

A very important step in marketing is picking attractive covers, both front and back. We have all heard the saying, "you can't judge a book by its cover." Yet people do just that every time they walk into a bookstore. When anyone walks into a bookstore or searches the internet, the first thing they respond to is what they see. And if the cover of your book fails to get a person's attention, they will move on to the one that does.

Your front cover should get the reader's attention. It should make them wonder what is inside. But that's not all—if the front cover gets their attention, they'll almost always look for more information, So they read the summary on the back. Hence, the back cover should give them enough to drive them to read the book. Remember also, that if your book is a how-to or a do-it-yourself book, your potential reader is also going to want to be able to read about the author. Reading about the author is important because most readers want to know if the author is indeed a credible source for information. So giving this your best effort will help you Write Your Own Check.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

SELF-PUBLISHING

I'm simply amazed by the number of people who believe that if they write a book and send it to a publisher, they'll become instant millionaires. Luckily, after the first rejection, reality begins to seep in. Not long after that, they start to consider other options. One of those options is self-publishing.

One of the most important benefits of self-publishing is that you're the boss—you make the final decisions. The downside, however, is that as the boss you bear all the responsibilities that go along with the mistakes. One of the first responsibilities is understanding the difference between printing and publishing, and realizing that you will be better off if you rely on the services of professionals for some things that have to be done. As you may have learned by now, you must first get your book into print before you can accelerate the publishing process. Also, if you decide to use a print-on-demand (P.O.D.) service, such as those publishers who list on Amazon, your book will be up for sale. But that's only the beginning of the publishing process. Just like marketing, publishing is an ongoing effort that should continue until your book is out of print.

When you decide self-publishing is the way you want to go, you must also develop a can-do mind set. You're going to be required to take on all the duties that any other publisher would perform on your behalf. You must keep in mind that your book won't sell itself. No matter where you make it available someone has to take the time to drive potential readers to where your book is offered for sale. Stop! Don't panic. I'm going to give you the answers in just a minute.

First, let's talk about getting your book between a couple of covers. In other words, let's get it into print. This is the part of the process where I suggest that everyone should use a professional. I know that there are many services that offer do-it-yourself printing out there. But, you'll discover that there are a huge number of critical tasks that must be performed—preparing cover art, getting an ISBN assignment and a bar code, locating a printer, creating an account for the marketing pages for Amazon and other online sellers...this list

goes on and on. Just as I wouldn't suggest that you perform your own brain surgery, I don't suggest that you tackle the printing process on your own, either.

For self-publishing, I highly recommend that the first-time author use a print-on-demand distribution option. P.O.D. is a method of printing that prints only one book at a time—when it is purchased. The greatest benefit of using a print-on-demand option is, of course, a much lower upfront cost. You also won't have to worry about storing the 10,000 copies of your first book—copies that you would ordinarily have to store until they are sold. Your other savings is that you won't have to worry about making a minimum purchase—that would cost thousands of upfront dollars. With print-on-demand, your book is digitally stored on a file system by the printing company. When a book is ordered, they print a book and send it out for you. That means that you don't have to worry about paying upfront shipping costs either.

There are two types of writers who benefit much more than others by using a professional self-publishing company. That's prisoners and writers of how-to (and/or self-help) books. Prisoners will nearly always need someone to provide access to the online services. Self-help and how-to authors, however, enjoy some additional benefits also. When using a professional self-publishing company, your book will end up being for sale on Amazon.com and other P.O.D.s. If you are as wise as I was, it'll be on Freebird Publishers online bookstore also. This is a big help to how-to and self-help writers because books that offer information often sell themselves to some degree. People from all walks of life demand information, and where do they go first? You guessed it, the internet. If they can't find the information they want on their own, their next step is to search out how-to and do-it-yourself books on their specific topic.

Also know that any worthwhile self-publishing company will have a list of promotional options you can choose from. You would be amazed by how effective a simple "shout out" advertisement can be when sent out to the right market.

If you still have no clue where to start, then let me share my experience. As you can see on Google, I have several books in print. But not all of those books are under contract with Freebird Publishers. The other books I decided

to self-publish. I chose self-publishing for some of my books because of my own situation.

I was confined in a federal prison in Coleman, Florida, when my mother passed away. When I heard that she was gone I suffered greatly. Only hours after I was informed, I started writing to vent my feelings. I wrote about many things and experiences that were meaningful to my mother and me. As you can imagine, these things have very little meaning to anyone else. Of course Freebird Publishers couldn't justify investing in a book that had such a limited market—which consisted of—well, just me. Thus, when I decided to publish the short book, as a memorial to my mother, my idea was rejected. I then chose to self-publish. It was because of how professionally Freebird Publishers handled my first book that I decided to use them to self-publish "The Mourning After." My goal was to publish the book in my mother's memory—I didn't care if it sold or not. In the end, Freebird Publishers handled the project just as professionally as they would have if it had been a million dollar deal. I was very pleased with the job that they did for me. They performed far above my expectations. And, I have sold many more copies of my self-published books than I ever expected.

If you're writing your very first book, and you intend to self-publish, I strongly suggest that you consider Freebird Publishers as your first choice. I did, and now every month, I Write My Own Check.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

PROMOTING YOUR BOOK

Let me start this chapter by admitting that any professional marketer could write a lengthy volume on what I don't know about marketing. The same goes for advertising and promoting, for that matter. So what exactly do I have to offer? Well, experience. Don't get me wrong, I'm a long way from being on Oprah. I'm not a New York Times Best-Selling Author—yet. But, I do enjoy a level of prosperity that is far beyond that of my peers. I do well enough financially to invest the required time and money to write this book without concern for who will pay to publish it. You can do the same.

Needless to say, I'm not yet where I want to be in my profession—but I'm well on my way. I owe my upward momentum to the efforts of Freebird Publishers and to my own drive to learn everything I can that will help in that effort. I've learned a lot about promoting myself and my books by reading hundreds of books, articles, and lesson plans about marketing and promoting. As you might imagine, my study has been limited to book and author promotions. However, I've had to read a lot of unrelated material to determine if it was helpful.

What I'm going to do for you in this chapter is reduce what I've learned down to only what I've found that works. By all means, strive to learn more than I offer here, but know that what you will read next will put you out front in your effort to promote your book and yourself.

Here you are, you've written a book and it's up for sale—or is it? If you're a print-on-demand customer that's easy enough to answer, but if you're sitting on ten cases of books in your garage you'll face some additional challenges.

I have learned that no matter which distribution process you use, you must let potential readers know that you have a book for sale. I use my own "1-2-3" short plan. And again, I use this plan as a supplement to the promotion package that you should have purchased from your self-publishing company. My short plan consists of a market analysis, a platform review, and a promotion plan.

MARKET ANALYSIS—Although the odds are against a first-time-author hitting the jackpot, it's not impossible. But no matter who the author is, it's important to know who will buy their book. A market analysis consists of classifying your book and getting a clear view of who will want to read it. Your next consideration should be whether the book is priced properly. There is nothing worse than pricing the book out of the reach of its readers. Imagine a children's comic book that costs \$100.00

My own personal experience in marketing the book you now hold consisted of evaluating who would want or need the information you're now reading. Although some people think that this book should target published authors, its actual target is people who are unpublished. The goal of this book is reaching people in order to elevate them from their current station in life to the level of financial independence.

Please note that I'm targeting a much larger group of potential readers. There are far more people who are unpublished as opposed to published authors—and who doesn't want to make more money?

PLATFORM—Your platform consists of the people and organizations that support what you're doing in life. Unless you're a troll living under a bridge you have a platform, even if it consists only of your grandmother and your little sister. Now it's time to list and categorize your platform. You should start by taking time out to determine who you know that would benefit from your book, along with who is going to talk about it. You'll find that family members and friends will become more receptive to your efforts when they learn you've already published your book. Who doesn't like to say that they know a published author.

When you're considering who is in your platform consider family members, people in your church, parents from you child's little league team, people who come to you for advice, and anybody who talks about you already.

For those of you who seek to grow your platform, start by doing things for other people, especially if it's related to the subject of your book.

For example: I write books that educate prisoners who want to turn away from a life of crime. I broaden my platform by actually helping some prisoners and their family members develop their first book. Believe it or not, they're always telling someone what I did to help them.

PROMOTION PLAN—The most important thing you can do before you start promoting is to develop a promotion plan. By the way, this is one of those mistakes I made that you should probably try to avoid—promoting without a plan.

For those of you who took my advice and purchased a promotion package from your publisher, you should start your plan by listing what your publisher is already doing for you. You don't want to duplicate any efforts, nor do you want to do anything that's counterproductive.

So, let's start by listing everything that is being done now. That too, is part of your Promotion plan.

Next, list those people in your platform who you know will talk about your book. Word of mouth exposure is very important—it's a gift that keeps on giving. People like your grandmother, who has always pinched your cheeks because she can't contain her pride—well, drive over and give her YOUR copy of your book. She'll talk about the book and you until you give her the second book. And of course, go see all the other people who will be excited for you and share the news about your book with them as well. In all seriousness, giving books away in a limited number is a good idea, and it's tax deductible.

Evaluate your personal and professional social media platform and adjust it accordingly. Something that is very important about social media is the consistency of your coverage. Be sure to provide a consistent presence, and above all, interact with others on your site in a positive manner—always, and I mean always, leave posts and comments on the subjects important to those you are connected with. Be a part of their life; they're much more likely to support you if you support them.

Keep in mind that bookstores love to sponsor authors. Start a relationship with a bookstore and offer to do events with them. Never, ever give your books away at an event sponsored by a bookstore. If you want to give books away at a

bookstore, give the free books to the store for them to sell at a discount, and of course, sign them for free. You would be amazed by how many people collect signed books—especially signed first editions.

Also consider radio interviews, mass social media campaigns, and joint partnerships. Speaking engagements are also a huge help in getting the word out about your book. More about speaking engagements in the next chapter.

Keep in mind that successfully promoting you and your book is not a me-me-me campaign. People always want to hear about what you're doing for them and their communities. If you want to make it big in this industry, make a plan and stay focused. Only ten minutes a day, everyday, will put you on your way to being able to Write Your Own Check.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

BRANDING

Just to give you a warning, this would be a really good time for you to remember that this book is more about mistakes—mistakes that I've made and that you should not repeat. My failure to consider my brand is a mistake that I only recently started to recognize.

When I first started writing, professionally anyway, I was angry. I was angry because I was put in prison by a vindictive judge—it's a long story, but our personal history and her gender are a big part of why this judge is punishing me—for a crime she knows full well that I didn't commit. Rather than sit around and whine about my circumstances, I decided to seek out others whose sentences were questionable, and I found many. My next step was to help them get relief. I didn't know it at the time, but I was at the tip of what is now a national movement—the fight against mass incarceration in America. There is no doubt that the American people see daily snippets on the news about prison reform. I have gone even further by founding my own prison writing program. This is my contribution to America—my effort to fight crime through education. This is what I'm known for—this is my brand.

You, just like me, can become known for something. But with some guidance, you unlike me, will recognize this fact and use it to your benefit early in your writing career. In simple terms, your brand is the emotional effect that you have on the hearts of others—it is what you are known for.

When establishing your brand, think beyond what you currently make available on your social media. Forget about what you let people see; step beyond the facade and think about how you make people feel. Everyone you interact with has the ability to develop unique feelings about you as an individual and as an author. The way they feel will stay with them longer than anything that they have seen you do or heard you say. When you start to establish your brand, as opposed to your image, you should put more thought into the emotions you want to invoke in people as opposed to what you want people to think.

As you consider this, also know that you can guide those feelings in a direction that's beneficial to your purpose. I can also tell you that there have been thousands of hours of psychological studies conducted on the principles that affect branding in general, but here are some steps that I've learned that will help you get started.

Take time to figure out what feelings you want to trigger in others. List the emotions that you want others to feel when they visit your author's page and website. Do those feelings match what they feel when they read your book? Take a look at your page—really take the time to get an objective view—you know, the third party type of view. Now think about the words that pop into your head. Compare those words to the words and emotions you want others to develop about you. Ask yourself, "do they match?" If not, you have some work to do.

Think about this—if someone else was describing you and your brand, what words would they use? What emotions would they describe? Do those answers match what you would like for people to think and feel about you? You can trigger the correct feeling by using specific words in your content: books, social media posts and your author page. Use pictures and colors in your media and book covers that express your overall message.

Think about the feelings and the message you want to resonate. There is a big difference between triggering a feeling, and having that feeling resonate. Triggering a feeling will draw attention to your brand, but the feelings that resonate are the ones that a person is left with—the feelings that stay with them. What do you want your readers to continue to feel long after reading your author page? What message do you want your visitors to remember? Make your mission clear in your media and make sure it's about what you'll do for your readers—as opposed to your bottom-line.

What promises are you making to the public? By making a promise to your readers, and keeping it of course, you establish trust. Trust produces satisfied readers who talk about what you're doing. This produces both repeat customers and your best word-of-mouth advertisers.

For those of you writing how-to and do-it-yourself books, trust translates into credibility. You become the authority that people will seek out because you're the go-to person on your subject. When you become the go-to person in your field, you have successfully built a strong brand. Remember that your brand is your promise, and that is what your audience will come to expect from you and your business.

Maintain your brand—Keeping your brand strong requires that you fulfill your promise. You do this by being consistent. I recently read about a cycle—"Make a promise, deliver, build trust, and repeat." I agree that this is a good principle of consistency, and one that will make readers choose you over your competition. Thus, be consistent, satisfy your audience, and Write Your Own Check.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Kelly Patrick Riggs is the author of a series of legal self-help books and an advocate for criminal justice reform. He is also a freelance writer, a living kidney donor, and the founder of a prison writers' program. He served as a "Jailhouse Lawyer" for over seven years—resulting in the early release of hundreds of federal prisoners.

Mr. Riggs is best known for his Post-Conviction Relief Series, published by Freebird Publishers. He has also emerged in the mainstream market as a novelist. He is currently conducting research for his next book from inside a federal prison—his children patiently await his return.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

As with most long projects there are many people to thank. I have no doubts that I have likely failed to name someone who has been involved in the experience that I've written about in this book. If I have failed to list your name, please know that you have not been forgotten.

The idea for this book started out as a literary program that was inspired by a young man named Michael Tyler, Jr. "Merchh Mulah." When he and I met, I noticed he had a quiet, yet high, level of maturity. He worked hard to earn his GED while in prison, and I did my best to encourage him to become a writer. Writing was not his first love like it is for me, but I have no doubt that he will strive to achieve some other level of excellence. Others that I owe my gratitude to are the people who are in my "Positive Friends Circle." Thanks to them, I have enjoyed the encouragement and painful criticism of truth. So, let me say thanks for the thoughts of:

Chip Hilts (my writing coach)

Charles "Ereez" Martinez

Charles Allan Nave III (Chad)

Robert "DC" Brathwaite

Most importantly, I would like to thank Diane Schindelwig, the CEO of Freebird Publishers, for believing in me and giving me my big chance to become a published author. She, of course, still spurs me on today. I encourage all my readers to give Diane a call if you're serious about writing a book.

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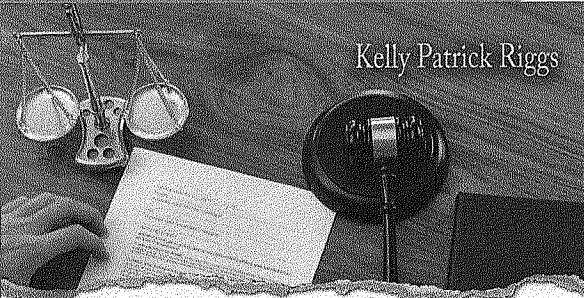
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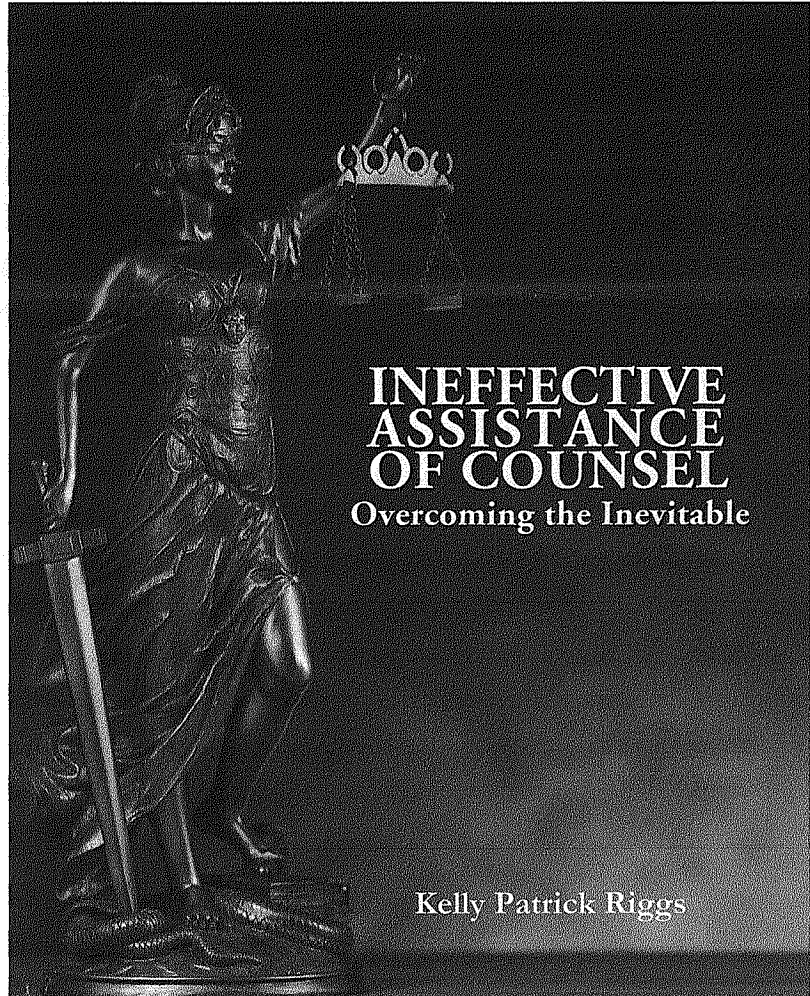
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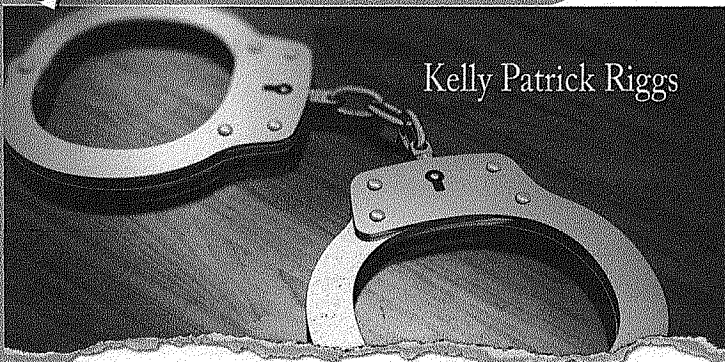
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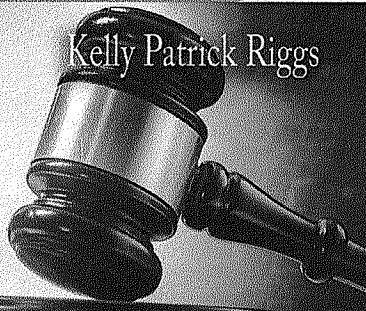


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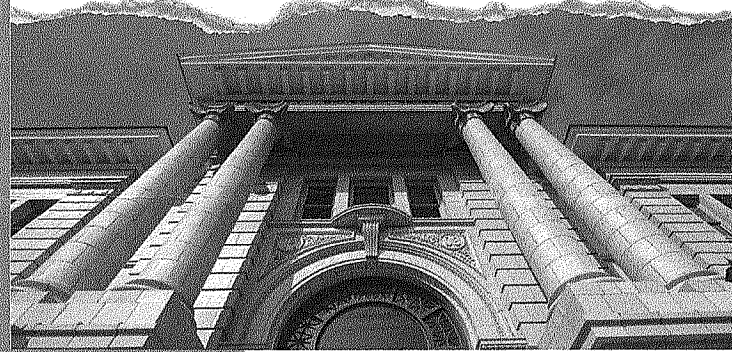
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present motions and petitions that are more pleasing to judges, who in most cases want you to have what you deserve under the law. It will teach you how to refine your pleadings by understanding the importance of critical word usage and syllogistic reasoning. You will learn the importance of presenting a clear set of facts as opposed to a theory in law they already know. This book includes a full and accurate copy of the Federal Rules of Civil Procedure and other resource materials.

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