

THE WRITING LIFE

by Bobbi Linkemer

bobbi@writeanonfictionbook.com

Dance of Strangers

Clients' needs are different; their books are different; their goals are different. "What do you do?" they usually ask when they call. "What do you *want* me to do?" is the question I'd like to ask them in return.

But that is the essence of our first exploratory conversation. It's like a dance. Potential clients either want to tell me every nuance of their books or are reluctant to share any information at all.

My job is not unlike that of a salesperson. First, I have to build trust; then, elicit needs; and, finally explain how what I do will meet those needs.

Trust doesn't only mean they think I'm a nice person who won't steal their ideas and who actually knows how to write a book. It often means that I already know something about their subject matter.

Eliciting needs is all about determining where they are in

the book-writing process, which can range from having a vague idea of the what they want to write about to having a 1,000 pages of copy they don't know how to organize. It also means figuring out whether they want someone to write their books for them, guide them through the writing process, or edit what they have already written.

Explaining how what I do is what they need entails identifying the required level of help and which of my hats — ghost-writer, coach, or editor — I should wear.

I'm always amazed at coaches who tell me they have a single conversation with a prospective client and then hammer out the details of an agreement. How do they do that? "It's strictly business," they insist.

But, to me, it's so much more than that. The potential client and I are strangers, dancing around the idea of a partnership. That is well worth a little time, in my book. ■