

THE WRITING LIFE

by Bobbi Linkemer

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Ghostwriting for Novices

I'm trying to determine which came first: deciding to become a ghostwriter or getting my first ghostwriting job. I think it was the latter.

The project was to write a book for a major health care system that had won a prestigious national award. My credentials included 35+ years of writing experience, hundreds of interviews, and background in health care. I was competing with one other writer, who probably had much more experience and came highly recommended. I considered it a miracle that I got the job.

I realized very quickly that I didn't know anything about ghostwriting, the organization, or the award. I had no idea just how complex this project would be when I said I could complete it six months.

Lessons learned:

1. Find out who I will be reporting to and, if that person is the ultimate decision maker. If not, who is?

2. Do my homework on the front end. Learn as much as possible *before* the formal start date. Use outside sources as well as those provided by the client.

3. Reach an understanding with the client about how we will work together: how often we will meet, what he or she expects, the nature and frequency of feedback, and, most important, his or her management style.

4. Be assertive. If I have a problem with any aspect of the project, discuss it openly, without getting defensive.

5. Realize that when the project ends, that's it. I am a freelancer, a supplier of services, not a member of the staff or team.

I finished the book on schedule (another miracle), received a compliment from the CEO for learning so much in so short a time, and left feeling as if I had given up my child for adoption. Five lessons learned on the first job; 500 still to go.