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Know When to Call a Ghostwriter

by Dan Poynter

You do not have to be a *writer* to be an *author*. According to a recent *New York Times* article, “On any given week, up to a half of the books on any non-fiction best-seller list are written by someone other than the name on the book.” The reason is simple: being an expert, an eyewitness, or a celebrity does not necessarily mean that one is also a skilled writer/communicator. Enter the ghostwriter.

Ghosts typically work for four kinds of clients. One is the expert, who writes to preserve and share his or her knowledge. Another has an extraordinary first-person experience to relate. The third is a celebrity or aspiring celebrity, who wants a book to memorialize or launch a career. The fourth has a fictional story to tell, but not the necessary storytelling skills.

You don't think Lee Iacocca wrote those two best-selling books all by himself? Iacocca is the *author*; it is his information, but he does not have time to be a *writer*.

“Writing is the toughest thing I’ve ever done.”
—Richard M. Nixon, 37th president of the United States.

The ghostwriter fills in for any skill or knowledge that the author lacks. In return for their expertise, ghosts are typically paid a cash fee plus a percentage of the author’s royalties. In return, the ghost takes a vow of perpetual silence.

If you are not a fully-skilled writer, but have expert knowledge or an extraordinary experience to share, or seek to launch or enhance your image, that’s when you should call a ghostwriter.

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