

M G L → EXPERT ADVICE

10/Questions

for Your Ghostwriter

IN THE BUSINESS WORLD, BOOKS HAVE BECOME A MARKETING TOOL ALMOST AS UBIQUITOUS AS BUSINESS CARDS. BUT FEW EXECUTIVES WRITE ALONE. **HERE'S HOW TO HIRE A GHOSTWRITER TO HELP TRANSFORM YOUR PRINCIPLES INTO PROSE.**

01 *This is my book—why do I need your help?*

Because business writing and book writing are entirely different. “Even in a business book, there is still a narrative drive,” says Karen Kelly, a Pennsylvania-based writer who has collaborated on more than 25 books. “That’s not something you learn in business school.”

Even if you feel you have the literary skill to craft a book, you probably don’t have the time. “You don’t get successful without being busy,” says Jeff Haden, a Virginia-based ghostwriter of over 40 nonfiction books. A good ghostwriter can take what’s in your head and put it on the page.

02 *I want to write a book, but I don’t have an idea. Can you provide that much content?*

Yes...but it will cost you. “I do

have people who will occasionally say, ‘I have no idea what to write about,’” says Haden. “I end up doing the whole book from concept to final, but it’s more expensive than the client who has a theme and 10 to 12 major points.”

03 *Do you have a background in my industry?*

Your ghostwriter should be at least conversant in what you do, if not expert. “I always try to pair executives with writers who are comfortable within that particular field,” says Madeleine Morel, head of New York-based ghostwriters’ agency 2M Communications and Venture Press, a ghostwriting publishing firm.

04 *Have you been published before?*

The answer should be yes, but you need specifics—for example, how many times and where. “I only work with writers who’ve been published on many occasions” and by the top publishing houses in the U.S. (Hachette, HarperCollins, Macmillan, Penguin, Random House and Simon & Schuster), says Morel.

05 *What is your fee?*

A book proposal, which is typically 25 to 40 pages plus a full chapter, can run from \$10,000 to \$20,000. A book ranges from \$50,000 to \$200,000, depending on the writer’s credentials.

06 *Can I see samples of your work?*

Ghostwriters typically sign non-disclosure agreements, but a ghost should be able to show you sample chapters at least. “You are looking to make sure the voice sounds

unique in each of the books,” says Kelly.

07 *How do you work?*

Whether you spend a few weeks with your ghost, Skype or send a shoebox full of notes, a good ghostwriter should conform to your work style and schedule.

08 *How do I provide feedback and edits?*

Before signing a contract, agree upon when you will see and revise pages. Most often, ghosts will send chapters while the book is in progress, then a completed manuscript. Try not to rewrite everything the ghostwriter sends. “If you want to micromanage every sentence, you’re almost better off writing it yourself,” Haden says.

09 *What kind of credit do you expect to receive?*

An invisible ghost won’t be mentioned anywhere in the published book, but don’t be fooled: “At least 75 percent of all business books are ghostwritten,” Morel says. It is becoming more common for ghostwriters to get some mention, whether in the acknowledgements or even on the cover. At a minimum, most ghostwriters will request being able to include the book on their C.V.

10 *Can you help with other projects?*

Some ghostwriters also write speeches, articles, blog posts and so on—which helps ensure that your public writings are cohesive. “Once a writer gets you, it’s a shame not to leverage that,” Haden says. 📖

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