



The Downside of Beliefs

By Linda Formichelli
Freelance Writing Success Coach

I've been reading a book called *Inner Engineering* by Sadhguru, and this quote jumped out at me:

When I say "devotion," I am not talking about faith or belief. [...] People who believe something often think they are superior to others. All that happens the moment you believe something is that your stupidity acquires confidence. Confidence and stupidity are a very dangerous combination, but they generally go together. If you start looking at the world around you, you would clearly understand that what you know is so minuscule that there's no way to act with confidence. A belief system takes away this problem; it gives you enormous confidence but it does not cure your stupidity.

I like what this quote is saying, not only as a life lesson, but also for how it relates to the writing life.

On the one hand, maybe holding beliefs about the writing business is a good thing: Having set beliefs like “Pitches must be written *this* way,” or “Never say *that* to a client,” means that instead of being overwhelmed or freaked out like most writers, you feel certain that you are always doing the right thing. Even if you're wrong about this, it's a good way to move forward with your writing when you would otherwise be feeling stuck and confused. As we know,

moving forward is the main thing that will get you work, even if you're making mistakes along the way. So why not adhere to a set of rules about the writing business?

Because that kind of confidence takes all the vibrancy and *juice* out of your writing life; it keeps you from doing the meandering and experimenting that can lead to the best ideas and the funnest freelance writing jobs. It's the writing version of being set in your ways. Your writing life goes from a creative expression to a dry, step-by-step process.

It reminds me of when I worked at Burger King in the mid-1980s. When management realized some employees were doling out a few too many fries in each order, they made us weigh each package of fries before giving it to the customer. If the package was an ounce overweight, we'd have to shake a few fries back into the bin and reweigh it. I don't know about you, but I don't want my writing career to be quite so regimented!

Most of us get into writing out of a passion for the craft, a need to help others, and a desire to express ourselves and express our ideas through writing. Of course we want to earn well too, but for many of us the freedom and creativity of writing are a huge part of why we love this job.

When you hold tightly onto your beliefs, they become a rigid set of rules. Where is the freedom? Where's the love?

NOT EVERYONE BELIEVES YOUR BELIEFS (AND THAT'S OK)

If you've ever attended a webinar or class that Carol Tice and I put on together, you might notice something funny: We will often disagree with one another. I'll say, "It's OK these days to send your clips as attachments," and she'll say, "Oh no it isn't!" Carol will say to not bother following up on your pitches, and I'll insist it's better to follow up. And we often start out sentences with, "Carol/Linda is going to hate me for saying this, but..." And then we laugh!

The same with me and my Renegade Writer Press partner, Diana Burrell: Her way of pitching has always been to deeply research a publication and come up with ideas to pitch to its editor. And she has a very, very high acceptance rate. My way is to come up with an idea without any particular publication in mind, and then find a handful of markets to pitch it to at the same time. I have a much lower acceptance rate, but because I'm pitching in volume I make just as many sales.

When I first started teaching my (now defunct) Write for Magazines class in 2006, I was very set in my query ways. Every query had to have X, Y, and Z, in that order, to be successful. But then something interesting started happening: I'd have a student send me a query to critique,

and I would send it back covered with red. “This is wrong, don't do this, I would never do that, you forgot to make an ‘ask’ at the end.”

And then the writer would come back to me and say, "Oh, I already sent it out and got an assignment!"

Why somebody would email me a query to critique when they had already sent it out to an editor is beyond me, and beside the point. **The point is, the query format that worked for me wasn't the only one that worked.** I still teach my way, because I know it's very effective, but nowadays if someone "breaks the format" I don't push the issue.

CHANGE HAPPENS

To think we can understand the inner workings of a potential client or reader is just silly. We're always hearing experts and marketing gurus saying things like, “Clients like to hear X” and “Editors hate it when you do Y.”

But: **Are you the same person every day?** Even every minute? Have you ever had an experience where one day you love something, and then, for some unknown reason, the next

day you can't stand it? Have you ever changed your mind so fast, or experienced a change in mood so quickly, you gave your loved ones mental whiplash?

Even more: Is your business the same from day to day? Have you ever decided on an exact, step-by-step path for your business for the next 12 months and committed to each pre-planned step come hell or high water throughout the entire year? No?

Neither do your writing clients. **Even if your client is a gigantic corporation, while on the outside it may look like a stationary behemoth, on the inside it is constantly in flux** as employees acquire new information about their market, learn about shifts in the industry, or simply change their minds about something.

Case in point: I've had articles killed, multiple times, simply because the editorial department of a publication decided to move in a new direction, and my article didn't fit their new vision.

Then there are those times when we see so much of something we get sick of it. First we're told long-form landing pages are obligatory if you want to sell an information product, and when we finally master them someone else tells us, "People are onto those long form sales pages. They're sick of them. Now it's all about tiny landing pages." We're told we need to do guest posting to build our mailing lists, and then we see 24-point headlines trumpeting that guest posting is dead

because readers are tired of reading author bios and clicking on their links. Then, a year later, someone comes along and says, “Guest posting isn’t dead. You just need to do it a different way now.”

It's not that the experts were wrong in the first place. It's that things change. And we need to change with them. If we have a rigid set of beliefs about writing, and an overblown sense of confidence that we know everything about the writing business, we'll never change with the changing times. We'll be stuck. We'll be dinosaurs.

Understanding that you have absolutely no way of knowing or predicting how somebody is going to respond to your writing or marketing can give you a great sense of freedom. You don't need to hold to anyone else's rules about pitching, communicating with your readers, crafting your articles, or anything else, because you know those rules were created based on a set of beliefs—and those beliefs were created in an attempt to feel confident about an art and a business *that has no rules*.

THE CONFIDENCE OF HAVING NO CONFIDENCE

Of course, I'm not suggesting we writers walk around in a state of insecurity at all times, feeling like nothing we do is ever right. There is a way to develop a different kind of confidence, one that won't keep you cemented to one way of doing things.

The trick is to **stop requiring that you feel confident before you can take action.** To stop feeling that you have to know everything there is to know before you get started. And to stop believing that a set of rigid beliefs is anything but fear masquerading as confidence.

Just start moving, play with the “rules,” experiment, figure out what works best for you...and through experience you’ll gain a different kind of confidence. This is the confidence that even if you screw up, even if you misread a potential client or write a clunky sentence, it will be OK. This kind of confidence gives you the security to move forward without fear, but also the freedom to enjoy your creativity as you run your writing business.

Your Freelance Writing Success Coach,

Linda Formichelli

P.S. Looking for help breaking into freelance writing -- or making it to the next level? Do yourself a favor and learn from a veteran freelancer with 20 years of experience. (Ahem...that's me.) You can take a look at my Freelance Writing Success Coaching [here](#).