Alright everyone, let's get going!

Bear with me, this first bit is dense with a lot for you to churn on after you read it. So hang in there. The first thing we are going to do is a quick review of project management concepts. I apologize to kick off with something that may be basic to some of you, but you all will need to understand the basic precepts and frameworks on which the practical applications that make up the rest of the class are based. Wasn't that an exciting start? It gets better, promise ☺

The following passage (until we get to "Back Planning") is loosely modeled on the Wikipedia definition, with some direct quotes from there as well. I went with Wikipedia because it used the most plain language among the various sources I have. It was far more succinct than my texts from my college and industry courses. Direct quotes are annotated as such.

**"Project management is the discipline of initiating, planning, executing, controlling, and *closing* the work of *a team* to achieve specific goals and meet specific success criteria."**

The important thing to take away from the statement above is that all projects are circular processes with a beginning and <u>an end</u>. They are also team efforts. Like it or not, you can't be a successful author without getting people on board to help you. **Reread that last sentence, it is non-negotiable, utterly unavoidable, and important.** It may just be getting your family onboard, but you can't do it alone.

**"A project is a *temporary* endeavor designed to produce *a unique product*, service or result with a defined beginning and end (usually time-constrained) undertaken to meet unique goals and objectives, typically to bring about beneficial change or added value."**

In this class, we are going to talk about being an author AND about writing books. <u>The two are VERY different and separate processes.</u> Being an author is a lifestyle, life choice, and a reason why you plan your days the way you do. It encompasses how you work, where you work, what you do with your time, who you network and connect with, and how much of yourself you have available to share with the people you love.

Writing a book is very different. It is a specific process with a beginning and an end with a resulting product. We will talk about production and production schedules later, but for now, know that you might not be able to get your family and friends on board with lots of big picture life changes all at once that go along with being an author, but most family and friend type folks are more than happy to get on board with a four to six week plan for you to finish a book, especially if you give them a schedule of sorts and let them know your writing that book won't remove you from their lives completely or permanently. Also, if they know if they help take on some of your responsibilities for a short time, and you could be done even sooner than planned, you might find them surprisingly willing to help. This also will typically kick you into staying on timeline because you are now accountable to people you love.

**"The temporary nature of projects stands in contrast with business as usual (or operations), which are repetitive, permanent, or semi-permanent functional activities to produce products or services. In practice, the management of these two systems is often**

**quite different, and as such requires the development of distinct technical skills and management strategies.”**

This way of thinking about books versus being an author is pivotal in making relevant changes to allow you to complete projects. When I first started writing, I tried to bring everything in at once. I wanted to write, open my LLC, and become an author all at once. I told my family I wanted to write and I needed to make time to do it. I couldn't write without doing things that affected them adversely (as far as they could tell). I let things go that they were used to me doing with me simply saying I needed them to step up and help, with no reason or justification on how this could help *them* and WHY it was important to me. They couldn't grasp "I want to be a writer" on any real level. It essentially meant nothing because it was so amorphous and vague. To them, all it meant was I was dumping my "house work" and responsibilities on them.

Later, once I started applying some PM concepts (and grew a little empathy about my changes), I was able to say "It is really, really important to me to be able to finish this book. I have outlined it and think I can finish in the next four weeks. Would you be willing to help me do that, just for a few weeks so I can accomplish this? If you are willing, I will need you to lighten my load on these things by splitting the work with me. (Gave SPECIFIC WRITTEN list)" I had a list of what I needed done and when and I took the time to train each of them on exactly what to do in a patient and kind manner. There was still some kickback, but nothing serious, and nothing cupcakes or surprise take out on occasion couldn't take care of.  Also, a week of me cooking their favorite dishes once it was done sweetened the pot a bit as well.

I was never able to bring myself to ask anyone to do something FOR me, at least not without me also being invested in some way, but I can almost always get my family and friends to take part of a task on to HELP me, or do it WITH me. For instance, when I am in a four week run to write or edit, I know I can't get my family to do the laundry for me. However, I can get them to gather it, put it in the laundry room, and then put it away once I am done washing it. Splitting the task saves me and hour and fifteen minutes of a three hour task and my family doesn't feel like I am neglecting them. It is also good training for the kiddos to do that on a more permanent basis but if you lay it out that way they tend to shy away from helping. This is just an example, but *partial delegation* may be far more palatable for most family and friends than handing over full tasks.

Begin Quote:

A traditional phased approach identifies a sequence of steps to be completed. In the "traditional approach" five developmental components of a project can be distinguished (four stages plus control):



Typical development phases of an engineering project

1. initiation
2. planning and design
3. execution and construction
4. monitoring and controlling systems
5. completion and finish point

End Quote.

Your books and your career are engineering projects. This diagram and these steps are a way to approach all issues, big, small, new or old, that you want to make a change in. But I don't even know where to start, you might say, stick with me, you will. If you really want to make a change, you need to examine all the ways your time slips away. More on *how* to go about that later. For now, let's stick to the basic process. Before you start this you have to have a goal (those come in Lesson 2).

You identify the goal or result you want, think about it (this is the most important, obvious and most often skipped step), plan and design a *possible* fix (you have to test it, just like a science project), implement that fix, see if it works, tweak, implement again, until you are happy with it, then close, and move on. Even though you will be finishing projects, somethings will be on a spectrum of going from time suck and awful, to doable and a minor inconvenience. It is important to realize what is a short term project (completing a book) and a long term one (spending less time cleaning house or becoming an author) require different process changes to make them work. Longer term projects evolve and as you learn more about how to do things better for your specific circumstances, you will continue to improve the time requirements for those things. Projects are short term, creating the product as quickly and making it the highest quality possible is your goal.

## Initiating

**"The initiating processes determine the nature and scope of the project. If this stage is not performed well, it is unlikely that the project will be successful in meeting the business' needs."**

The initiating stage should include a plan that encompasses the following areas:

1. Analyzing the business needs/requirements in measurable goals (What do you NEED to do, not what do you WANT to do. That's the biggest mistake most authors make. They think since they are in control now they can do what they want not what the business of being an author or finishing a saleable product [a book] requires.)

2. Reviewing of the current operations (What is keeping you from doing it? Why might it not be working? Be honest, brutally so. It's the only way things get fixed.)

3. Financial analysis of the costs and benefits including a budget (What do you need money wise to make it happen, nothing, writing is free, but it isn't, not really, time is indeed money. There is marketing, networking costs, etc. No, it is indeed not free.)

4. Stakeholder analysis, including users, and support personnel for the project (How is your decision going to affect your family, friends, other job, me time, etc. This can also include an editor, agent, or publisher is if you are trad pub type.)

5. Project charter including costs, tasks, deliverables, and schedules (On a daily basis what will be required to make this happen? But I don't have most of that stuff…oh, yes, you do. We'll talk about that later as well.)


This may sound a bit technical, but it is pretty straight forward. When you start breaking down the mass of time sucking tasks often you will find things that you can combine or reengineer to not take as much time. Writers by nature are detail oriented, whether they think so or not. You can't write a novel and not be *able* to sit down and plan your day in the most efficient manner possible, at least it's not that you aren't capable. Part of being able to make time is to realize *you* are in control of your environment. You may have tasks that you can't move much or work on much, but everything is a choice. Even that realization may give you some power back.  If you feel like tasks are dragging you around instead of you doing things as you need to then you are the one to blame. I know that's a hard pill to swallow, but as an author, and a person really, you control all aspects of your business and your life as far as productivity and mental attitude, for better or worse.

I am sure those with dependents, kids, pets, spouses are about ready to write me off after that last comment. Stick with me. I have a nine year old daughter I home school, I run a media company building websites, I volunteer for my RWA chapter, am on the RWA national ethics committee and my husband is a police officer in an understaffed super max so he works ten to twelve hours a day with one to two hours in traffic each way there and home. We have a dog with a strenuous medicine regime. I have an often sick mother brother and SIL with a new baby that need help often and on and on. Sure, there are things that come up that I can't plan for, things that interrupt my routine. So how do I keep making progress? I have a list of a few big things a day I need to do (the ONE things, we'll discuss those later) and I keep a running list of small things I can do in waiting rooms, during dance class, or things I can keep on my phone (like recordings of seminars from last year's national RWA conference). There are dozens of ways you can make progress and continue toward your goal. Small task doesn't mean useless busy work. However, for those to be effective and useful in your grander plan you have to have identified what will actually help you. Doing the small things when you can cuts down on the feelings that you aren't getting anywhere. We will talk about incremental achievement in the next lesson, but for now, you need to know a detailed plan will tell you the *correct* small tasks to plan for and do so you don't lose time because you are accommodating the demands and needs of others. Because that is an unavoidable consequence of being human and I don't have a way around those kinds of things…yet.

Keeping your head straight and realizing even in chaos you control whether or not you are accomplishing something (or more importantly, mentally derailed by it) is a big deal in itself. Being able to adjust and have things you can do when the roller coaster starts will help keep the feelings of defeat and guilt at not achieving a large task at bay. Also, the other big key to thinking things through is to realize the tasks that *need* done versus what you *want* to do. Sorry, we will talk about mental blocks on tasks and projects later, but the key is to only try to do what needs done to complete something, not all the other stuff you can or want to do. Writers tend to be a very capable lot and often try to add on things that are niceties or extras when they are not required for the task at hand. Second helping of rabbit hole anyone? When you plan, be sure to watch for those and put them on a separate part of your list. Maybe in another column next to your actual list.

In Lesson 2 and 3 we will talk in detail about reviewing current ways you do things. This is always a big eye opener for folks, usually in a good way.

There are some things in writing that are limited when funds are limited but there are many, many things that can be accomplished before you ever get published or if you are published, that allow you to continue to improve your ability and business savvy for little to no cost. One of the most common things I see with pre-pubbed or new authors is they get focused on "building a platform" on social media (without a specific plan) and "writing books" (also without a specific plan). And those folks tend to stay pre-pubbed for a LONG time, far longer than the folks who jump in and actually write often, as planned, and in a habit forming way.

Instead of floundering around on social media going down rabbit holes, make a plan, do what you need to do and otherwise avoid it. Get on and get off. I will talk about a social media guide and plan in a later lesson. There is a lot to do with the business of writing that can be broken down into ten and fifteen minute tasks, or even five minute tasks that don't require any prior focus to complete. When most people write, it takes a bit for them to mentally refocus in order to continue on a story. Bottom line, you won't always have that sort of time. Some people are already in the habit of sitting down and writing, others still require inspiration (more on that later too). So instead of beating yourself up over lack of production when you don't have "time" to "settle down and write", keep some lists of business things, marketing things, promotion lists and do little things that are relevant to your writing. Trust me when I say they add up. Writing is always better, but business beats nothing every time. I will give you a long list of things that fall into these categories in a later lesson.

The stakeholders in this are you and your family and friends (plus a publisher and associated folks if that is your chosen path). It is important (though often uncomfortable when you first start) to bring those you love into the process, even if it is in a small way. I see a lot of writers that have bought off mentally on this writing is a lonely profession nonsense. Only you can do the physical motion of writing, that's true. However, you NEED to make a little bit of time for interacting with your friends, who are most likely authors as well. Even if it is a simple five minute daily check in on social media when you are doing your nightly like and wink pass. Just a blip to say hello is often enough. As to your family, being able to sit down, write or work, and then get back up and show them writing won't take you away from them permanently is a big

deal. Giving kids "work" while you work can help. "Sure thing" you might say, "I'll get right on that". Making them part of the process means your success is their success as well. However, while involving those around you is key, remember YOU are in control and in charge of the actual processes because you are the only one who has the information to determine the best course of action. Do not beg, do not feel guilty, do not over compensate, and most importantly do not mom-guilt this (you don't need kids to have mom guilt…looks at dog). It is OK to ask for, and have reasonable expectations to receive help and tolerance for you chasing your dream.

When you become an author (or write a book) you become an artist and CEO (sometimes literally, other times figuratively). You gain the right to be protective of your work, your time and your creative well of inspiration. The only person who can protect that right and those things is you. So instead of looking at your situation as a mother, wife, child or participant making waves in the family's day, take a few minutes each day and consider your situation as if you were a consultant you hired to help an author start up their career, not you in your own situation or that you are an employee in your business and put yourself in your bosses position looking at what you would need you to do. Pulling yourself out of the situation for just a few moments and looking at it to determine what needs done will allow you to identify things that aren't working well for you. You can't fix a something you don't know is broken, so put away your ego, expectations, given beliefs (the surety that things must be done a certain way), traditions, and open your eyes to exactly what is actually happening around you. (Hint: this part can be a bit upsetting and takes practice to do it well. Your first try will likely be futile. I say that with nothing but love. Mine first try was a complete failure, but keep going and you will start to see shifts in how you look at things.)

There is a meme that floats around social media from time to time with an unknown author. It goes: "Don't hang onto a mistake because you spent a lot of time making it." Letting go of processes and practices that don't work is HARD. Do not berate yourself if something is uncomfortable and you have to make a few runs at it before you are mentally ready to make a change. That is perfectly fine and completely normal. Also, as Winston Churchill said, "The only way to get to the other side of hell, is to go through it".

## Planning

"After the initiation stage, the project is planned to an appropriate level of detail, the main purpose is to plan *time*, cost and resources adequately to estimate the work needed and to effectively manage risk (and stress) during the project. **As with the initiation process, a failure to adequately plan greatly reduces the project's chances of successfully accomplishing its goals.**"

Project planning generally consists of:

1. Determining how to plan (You need a process for planning the process.)

2. Developing the scope (You need to really think about the goal and how big that goal is, at least for now.)

3. Creating the work breakdown structure, schedule, and budget (Even everyday writing can cost money and it certainly costs time.)

4. Identifying the activities needed to complete those task and networking the activities in their logical sequence. (Remember, needed action and basic structure to complete the specific project or phase only, no bells and whistles or extras. You creative types put down the brainstorming journal. Step away from the scatter diagrams.)

5. Estimating the resource requirements, estimating time and cost for activities (Give a little MORE than you think you need, not a little less, that is counterintuitive to saving time but it works better, trust me.)

The key thing here is having a process to your planning. Don't just sit down and think I need to do X. You need to have a specific X you want to make better or finish. The first thing to do after you know what X is, is to determine how the various tasks to complete X are working now if it is something that is already happening. Let's say you are drowning in housework, and look at that.

Take what is working well and write that down then make a second list (or column) on what isn't working. *This is time consuming.* If you are just starting there will be several lists and doing a good starting point evaluation may take a few days or even a week of working in "thinking time" here and there. Car rides to and from errands are great for this. If you are alone you can use the recorder function on your phone and make the hardcopy list later. Consider your projects (books) and your spectrum goals (becoming an author). Consider your daily life, how do you go about "living".

Productivity studies show the most important thing you can do to streamline a project is to start with the best plan possible. In the first two steps of this process both highlight having a well thought out plan, that isn't an accidental repeat. Just like you have to spend money to make money, you have to spend time to make time. Let's break it down. You spend ten minutes a day doing something that could take five minutes a day if done more efficiently, if you took an hour to really look at it, and research the best way to do it and made the change to do it more efficiently, then in twelve days you will have recouped the time to think about it and come up with a better way and will, from then on, have fifty extra minutes a week. That is from ONE change for ONE process. It doesn't sound like much but if you can shave five minutes off ten tasks (realistically, about a week and a half's work looking and thinking here and there) that's about five more hours a week of unclaimed time.

I will give you a real world example. As I have said, I have a small daughter and a husband of which I think are in a contest each week to see who can generate the most laundry. I used to spend hours a week doing laundry. I did a time assessment and realized I was spending upwards of nine hours a week doing laundry. I have three bachelor's degrees, two associate degrees, a professional writing certificate and am a professional speaker and author. In six years I hadn't thought to stop and find a better way to do laundry so that I wasn't spending NINE HOURS washing clothes. I carried a 3.98 GPA, *I should be able to outsmart the laundry, if nothing else*.

As silly as it sounds I spent the next week carefully observing and jotting down when I did anything related to laundry. Here is the break out in hours per week once I added all the "it only takes a minute" tasks together: 1.5 hours gathering laundry, 1 hour sorting laundry, 1 hour putting it in and taking it out of the machines, 3 hours folding laundry, 2. 5 hours hauling it up and down stairs and moving it around and putting only mine and my daughters away.

Then I spent an hour online researching ideas on how to do the laundry more efficiently. As in going to youtube.com and typing in best ways to cut laundry time, then best practices for doing laundry, then I hit Pinterest and did the same. Here is what ended up doing; Since my daughter and I have the least (me) and most (her) amount of clothes, I took all my clothes out of my room and all hers out of her room (which also let me make her entire closet a toy chest with shelves making her room clean up MUCH easier). Then I retro fitted my laundry room with closet bars so that I could eliminate all the running up and down our three flights of stairs to put away clothes. I stand in front of the dryer and either turn around (hers) or lean to the left (mine) to hang up both her and my clothes. To include rolling t-shirts and shorts and putting them in hanging sweater racks.

My husband is a grown up and comes down once a week and retrieves all his clothes and carries them upstairs, but for hers and mine there is no more running anywhere. In the interest of full disclosure, I put my husband's clothes in the biggest basket I could find so he feels like a toad if I have to carry it up (sorry, not sorry). In the adjoining bathroom I added a nine cube shelf with fabric drawers for underwear, socks and bras. If you are folding any of those, other than mating socks, stop. I have several friends that argue mating socks is stupid too, but not matching my socks is NOT an option for me, it would drive me bonkers. That sounds silly too, but knowing ones limits on what does and does not irritate you is important as well. No one cares if your panties have creases, don't waste the time. It literally took me *five months* to break the habit of folding and stacking my under things because I had always been raised to do so. Not a good use of my time in any way, ever.  And breaking that habit was hard, for real, it was difficult to stop doing it. Be prepared for change to give you issues in weird ways.

I let my husband and daughter know that I would still do their laundry, but they were responsible for delivery (both) and pick up (him only) from the laundry room. If they didn't get their clothes down there on schedule they had to wash them themselves. And the really hard part was letting them do so when they fouled it up *because it wasn't the way I did it*. It took a few weeks of grumbles and grouching, but it eventually worked. I also stopped picking up rabbit trails of dirty clothes and began calling each of them down every single time something was left in the middle of the floor instead of just picking it up. I was physically unable to just leave it, it is a limitation of mine that I can't allow that degree of mess in my house. Every time I did it I felt like a nag, I could have picked it up in three seconds. BUT, *I was fighting for my writing time after all and my writing is FAR more important than someone else's dirty sock or refusal to pick up after themselves in such a simple way.* Reread that. It is not unfair or unreasonable for you to expect the people in your house to do at least that much to help keep the work load off your back so you can pursue a dream.  Everyone in your house is either a grown adult or a grown adult in training,

cleaning up after themselves is not an unreasonable demand, it's maturity. So maybe the dog gets a pass…

Tangent because this keeps me sane: If you are like me and can't allow unmated socks, try this; I strung a lingerie clothes line in the laundry room right above the washer and dryer. All unmated socks get hung over that line. I mate them as I take them out of the dryer. Because I have a six foot mini-clothes line for them to lay over I can see every single one of them at a glance. No putting them in a basket and taking them elsewhere. Every two weeks, anything without a mate goes into the trash once all the laundry in the house is done. No more time laying out a memory game of unmated socks that cover the whole bed or couch and sucks up twenty minutes to find the pairs.

I also made them sort their own laundry. I bought three big toy bins (the ones with the rope handles) and painted "DARK". "WHITE" and "COLORS" on them in giant letters. It doesn't look all that spiffy sitting along the wall before you walk into the laundry room but it is easy and it works for them so they actually do it. Little pretty bins on wheels didn't work, those mesh sorters didn't work because I had to be there to tell them what went where. Make the process so simple someone could walk in off the street and figure it out. That part is important, make it where anyone could look at it and figure it out. Our families don't intend to impede our progress, but they often may not realize how important it is to us for them to be able to complete a task in such a way that we don't have to redo it, which not only cuts our time, but results in resentment from us that those family members may or may not even be aware of. Make your changes, ask for help, but make sure you are fair about how you do it. Don't set yourself up to be a victim, intentionally or unintentionally. That's not cool either.

Suffering in silence is not your friend. If you are suffering in silence, guess what, no one else knows or cares and you won't ever get a medal for all your quiet suffering, it is worthless and pointless. You can make changes, ease your burden, and dump the pointless guilt and anger. It will be healthier for you as well. With the changes I just spoke of, I took about eight hours overall to make, I cut laundry time from nine hours a week to three. In those eight hours of "thinking and examination time", I took the time to stop, look at the process and look at where the bottle necks were and think up ways to lessen the time required to complete parts of the task or prevent those bottlenecks. I thought about those fixes in the shower, going to the bathroom, in the car with the kiddo watching Netflix on her Kindle and when I was waiting in line at the DMV to get new paperwork when my husband lost our boat registration. When I had a plan I implemented it. I lost eight hours to figure out the new process but I made up those hours in a week and a half.

**That one change, in that one simple repetitive process, freed up three hundred and twelve hours per year. Don't underestimate the power of "small" or "everyday process" changes.**

## Executing

"This phase involves proper allocation, co-ordination and management of human resources and any other resources such as material and budgets."

In other words, when you get ready to start shaking up your household (if it involves more than just you) call a family meeting, lay out your plan, listen to objections, and ask for feedback. Then don't ignore the feedback, but don't fold either. Sometimes your family will not only come up with a better idea, they may offer to take on tasks as a whole. If you present it as "Could you help me do this by owning a portion of the process?" not "We are changing this and you are going to grow up and help whether you like it or not." You will often have much better results.

You can also offer up temporary changes. Four times a year (quarterly), my family knows I take one week and go into hard writing mode. I don't cook, I clean very little and if they are lucky I at least remember to shower. I sit at my desk every waking moment (besides stretch breaks and walks, which they are welcome to join) that I am not required to keep someone from starving and I crank out as much rough copy as possible. Then the rest of the time that quarter I edit a few pages a night (every night or I lose the train of thought). I can swap thirty minutes a day of editing late at night for sleep but if I do more than that it impacts us all and I am grouchy and over tired. I can't create large stretches of text in a few minutes a night though, if I do, it feels jerky and disconnected in places. I just don't work that way. We do a family meal prep day for the week and everyone knows I am mostly off limits besides short evening snuggles for the adult, the child and the dog. One each, don't get greedy.

Communication is key for this to work. My husband and I set up daddy daughter trips and fun things for them to do all week while I am binge writing. The sucky part is I don't get to go have the fun with them but I get my draft cranked out. This is where the need versus want in my process planning tends to bite. I make sure the day prior to my week starting I spend the day with the kiddo, do all the laundry and dishes and wipe myself out getting them ready for me to be mostly absent for the week. Because I don't do it often and burn them or me out, I am able to do it occasionally with success.

I have a pal who took this class and her family does this every Thursday night. As soon as her husband gets home from work, he gets a kiss and she bails. No hesitation, no how was your day, she is literally waiting at the door laptop in hand. He knows it is Thursday and agreed to not make her feel bad or be needy on that night. It is sort of odd to put it that way, but they made a contract as a couple that he would help her do this and giving her a night to go write was the best way for him to support her dreams.

She goes to a local Mexican restaurant and has a regular corner table (because it has a plug in under it). She tips the server ten bucks before she even orders then settles in with her head phones and works for five straight hours every Thursday night. Her average output since she preplans what she needs to write (because she can do that over the course of the rest of the week as she edits) and there are no distractions, is eight to twelve thousand words (and sore hands the next day). The server knows what she is up to and quietly keeps her iced tea full and brings her dinner at the requested time with another ten dollar tip at the end of the night for sucking up his table all evening. It works for her. Getting her out of her home situation is key for her to have a successful write night. The rest of the week she mostly belongs to her family and everyone is happy with the deal. It took me weeks to convince her not to feel guilty about it. She completes an eighty thousand word MS about every four months with a full family and job load.

## Monitoring and controlling

"Monitoring and controlling consists of those processes performed to observe project execution so that potential problems can be identified in a timely manner and corrective action can be taken, when necessary, to control the execution of the project."

The bottom line here is is it working? If yes, then pat yourself on the back (realizing you are making progress and solved a problem matters) and move on to the next issue. If no, look at the process again and see where it is breaking down, find a new fix to try and try it. You can normally tell where things are breaking down in your house or life in general because that is very literally where the mess is. If your laundry process is breaking down you will find stray piles of clothes. Why are they in that particular spot instead of in a hamper? If your desk is constantly snowed in with paperwork not related to your writing figure out a way to stop that paperwork from making it to your desk in the first place.

For me, I moved the recycle bin to the side of the entry stairs to our house, to the left at the bottom of the stairs before I even get into the house. It looked a bit off at first but I got used to it. I stop there every day on the way in before I even get in the door and drop all junk mail, circulars, flyers, etc. into the recycle. I need to write worse than I need to know what shoes are on sale at Macy's. It is hard and I want to look at those things, but I do it. If they don't come in the house I don't stop to read them. Be ruthless. I intentionally keep the bin outside so I don't linger and start flipping through things.

I have shelf by the door in my office with plastic bins. One is labelled bills to pay next paycheck, action required, and records. I leave the bills until the next payday, the action items get opened, jotted down in the calendar and then back in their bin so I don't stop what I am doing and foul up that days list to focus on them and I file all the records once a month. It keeps all the mail off my desk and out of sight so I am not tempted to mess with it. But I had to think of a way to keep that clutter off my desk so I didn't get overwhelmed by it. It is hard to literally leave it at the door, but I do it. I did it because if something is laying on my desk I will try to "do" whatever it needs to make it gone. It was a distraction and an interruption. I didn't have time or the ability to really block those out so I had to make a better plan. For me, it was getting them out of sight.

One thing at a time, shooting for as little disruption to your daily existence as possible but it will take time. Think of it as a slow swing to a more efficient way of going about things, not a big implementation of a bunch of new things at once. Trying to fix or improve too many things at once normally won't work because you can't isolate a single cause and effect if you have multiple variables changing at once. Try to think of it as a spectrum of decreasing stress and relieving the general feeling of being overwhelmed and unproductive. You don't make it go away with an overhauled laundry room, but you give yourself some breathing room, and by doing that, you relax for a few heart beats then you refocus on what is next on your grand plan to what you want.

There will be changes as you try to fix things. You will notice the more you do this the better you get at it. As I mentioned earlier, if you can get your family on board, sometimes they will have a better idea. I am going to talk specifically about where to find better ideas on how to do

things if you can't come up with it on your own in a later lesson. Don't get discouraged, I encounter a lot of people who deal with adversity every day in a very defensive way. Life throws issues at them and they have to solve them right then. To keep reevaluating your situation and solving problems is to relieve one more bit of stress and keep you in an offensive frame of mind, feeling in control often helps. You are challenging yourself to make your situation more efficient and you can stop at any time. If today really is too much to allow you to think of anything else, that is OK. Allow yourself to roll with the issues of the day, just don't do it every day. You are in control of how you react and how you feel when things get complicated. So if you get frustrated, let it go for a few days, ask a pal how they solve that particular problem, or try an external source. Don't give up because something is hard. YOU CAN DO HARD THINGS. Give yourself a moment to regroup and refocus then try again. If this job was easy everyone would do it, so don't be too hard on yourself.

## Closing

"Closing includes the formal acceptance of the project and the ending thereof. Administrative activities include the archiving of the files and documenting lessons learned."

When you are done with a process or product, let it go and leave it alone. MOVE ON. Look at it and make adjustments to cut down on mistakes or tight time lines next time around and move on. My first book was so hard for me to let it go. I wrote the book in six months and then edited it for three years. The bottom line is I was a coward. I was afraid to put it out there so I made up all sorts of excuses to not let it off my desk. I should have found an editor, took my hits and put it out. Or, I should have left it alone and came back to it when I was mature enough as an author to put the book on the market.

Don't confuse knowing you are not mentally ready to own being an author with not being capable of writing a book. The two are very different. You can finish a book and put it in a drawer and know it only needs edits and that is fine. That does not mean you can't write a book or more books. That could mean that in your heart, you know you are not developed enough professionally to feel comfortable releasing or querying a book which is just fine.

I took four years of observing, stalling, over volunteering and over tasking myself for me to finally accept I didn't feel like I knew enough to be "an author" yet. But I *am* ready you say. Good for you, I wasn't. I needed to understand the business aspect of it enough to know I wasn't getting taken advantage of, I needed to know I could write a good book (for real, not just my ego ra-ra-ing me into thinking I was writing a good book). I needed to learn that my writing style is not conducive to winning contests because I take the first two chapter to build both my protagonists in. I didn't know if I could ignore an agent's request to change this or that even if I KNEW I had it right for my story. I didn't know if traditional versus indie publishing was right for me. It all took time for me to figure all that out. So if you are not finishing your books, consider that you might have some big picture things you need to work out before you publish even if you are well past THE END. Once I finally had those answers, and enough experience to be confident in them, things fell into place, almost as if by magic.

Taking the time to figure out your long term plans and goals can save you tons of money, time and effort. Do not underestimate the value of really thinking about where you are trying to go, even if you don't have the exact destination set. It can be downright demoralizing to have to start from scratch on marketing and promotion platforms because you didn't think out your plans. More on how to do that later as well. Don't ever short change yourself the time to think things through no matter what everyone else says or is doing. I am a webmaster for two RWA chapters, have been on a RWA chapter board on multiple occasions, liaison to other RWA boards for various things and have been on a planning committee for the largest writer's conference on the West Coast for six years. I am a big fish in my little pond and have met and networked with dozens of editors, agents and publishers over the years. I have had eighteen requests for fulls that I stared at and felt like a failure not bringing myself to submit. I kicked myself daily for three straight years because I couldn't get the lead out and just finish to a point I was happy with already. I wasted hours researching this or that agent or editor. I pitched at our conference every year and always got requests for fulls.

I didn't send any of them. They didn't feel right. I knew in my gut they weren't right for me. Last year, I decided to look at it from a strictly business point of view. For me, traditional publishing didn't hold that much of a draw. The more I read about contracts and boiler plate agreements the less I liked them. I wasn't comfortable with losing my rights for the life of the work. I didn't want to sign over film, foreign and audio rights in part or on the whole. I shopped around for an attorney and found one I liked. We talked it over and she advised me to indie publish and start my own company. I realized for me to be happy I needed to maintain control of my life, my schedule and my work. AND I had every right to do so, I didn't have to do anything any certain way.

So I reconsidered everything. I thought about what I wanted to do and how I wanted to live each day to get to those goals. It took me almost four weeks to really determine how I wanted my work day to go. Let that sink in. Work, yoga/health, decent eating, kid time, spouse time, dog time, adopt essentialism, all of the things ended up being a pretty short list and were non-negotiable. But figuring out how to put each of those into my daily routine then decided if being an author was right for me and fit that list. It did but not without work and some effort. I had to make sure where I was going to end up was the direction I was actually driving my life. I am not telling you all this to say look how cool I was. I am telling you all this so you realize it isn't easy and the road will be different for each of you.

I spent four months thinking, talk about having to figure out how to stave off guilt... I did nothing else for my writing but think about what I wanted and who I wanted my writing personas to be. It made all the difference in quieting the white noise and allowing me to move forward. Once I felt like I was ready to make the decisions, they were easy to make. Don't short change yourself by not giving yourself a chance to come to terms with and make sure what you want is what you are going after. I don't mean any of this as a complaint against traditional publishing, BTW. It just wasn't right for me. However, it took me a long time to realize it really wasn't for me and I would never be happy there. How I came to that realization is covered in Lesson 2.

## Back Planning - What it is and why you care

If you are prior military the following section will be old news to you ☺

When the military deploys or large organizations embark on projects they do something called back planning. Instead of making a to-do list and going through it as they are able, they do the reverse. They start with the end goal and work back to the beginning to make a list of exactly what steps are required to get there. That often means that during the planning phases they have to research each step to find out what it entails and how long it takes. Planning forward, from where you are to where you want to be is defensive and often goes awry because you don't know if you will have enough time for each step and sometimes things go completely off track at the end. Back planning begins from the event you want to happen and is an offensive (as opposed to defensive or reactionary) way of going about it because you determine how much time you wish to allow for each step and there isn't a scramble at the end because you start in a better place.

Remember, as an author you are essentially a business. I spend the first fifteen minutes of each day drinking a hot tea and pretending to be my own secretary. I don't look at the individual events and think about it as what I personally have to do. I look at it as a secretary checking the day for my boss. Times, order of events, calls that can be made between events, etc. I make my daily list in that mode. Then tea time is over and it's time to be the boss instead.

That covers process management and the general idea of back planning. We will briefly revisit both on occasion as they specifically apply to writers in the coming lessons. I don't have home work to post but I want you to get in the right mind set for Thursday's class. We will be talking about goals. So instead of the standard approach of tell me your five, ten, etc. year goals, don't bother. I know we all want to be authors.

**Imagination vs. Reality**

What I want you all to do over the next few days is pretend you are already the writer you want to be. Think about what it means and entails to be a writer doing the daily grind and consider if you really want to be one or if you like the *idea* of being one. Think specifically about what kind of "author" you want to be. Consider things like traveling for conferences and signings, how does that really affect your family over time? Will it still be fun after the first year of it? What if you quit your day job to write? How would those days really go? Could you sit down and stick to writing day in and day out once it is not a novelty? If you are in a chapter and/or pals with someone who does write for large parts of her day and see if he or she has a minute to tell you what it is really like and what parts of it they don't like or didn't expect. Do a little research and find out what it is really like day to day, not just the fun glamorous parts or the conference euphoria moments but the more unpleasant aspects of being a real live no kidding author.

I run a media company that does web design, book covers, head shots, runs virtual classrooms for authors to teach from, and several other random things to support working authors. When I get new clients I hear a lot of the same things. I don't want to do promo. I don't want to market or brand. I don't want to ever see people or do book signings. I don't want to put myself out there like that. I don't want to deal with people at all really. I tell them that they don't want to be an author then, they want to be a paid hobby writer which, from my experience, doesn't have much large scale financial success. The truth is all of those things are a part of writing and you

have to be willing to do them regardless of the publishing path you chose. Contrary to popular belief, traditional publishing houses help with marketing and promotion, but will not do it for you. They also don't control your schedule completely, all that is still you, so don't think you aren't going to have to do those things because you are looking for a traditional publishing contract.

Take some time to check out the websites and social media of a few authors you think live an ideal existence or one similar to you as your succeeded self, that is an existence you want for yourself. Look at how many appearances they do. Do you want to travel or more importantly CAN you travel? Do you have dependents and responsibilities that prevent you from doing that? I have animals and a young child. My husband is a law enforcement officer who can be called in at any time and we don't have relatives nearby. I couldn't go to a conference in another state if I wanted to, and won't be able to for some years to come. My business is based mainly off internet interaction because that is what I can realistically do at this point.

I am not comfortable spending thousands of dollars on conferences because I am still a tiny fish in my genre even though locally I am known well enough. It is not always the best call for me to spend family assets to that end. If I can order the recordings and don't need to pitch, why would I go and upset everyone's routine? The networking you might say. For me that part is doable online therefore being at a conference in person is a want right now, not a need. Do your authors do book signings and have large social media presences? Do they require a personal assistant to keep up with it all? Do you not want to be on social media all that often because it is a time suck and often terribly depressing? You need to think about all these peripheral things because if you don't plan for them they will eat up all your time and happiness.

Do you want control of your work or do you want the notoriety and respect of a big five contract? Are you in this for the money, the art, or a little bit of both? Really look at what is in front of you and separate it from what you imagine it is. Think about how a day in the life of those men or women really goes. Do you really want to sit in front of your computer for five to six hours a day in your house writing or are you a social type who needs face to face interaction every day? Or are you like me and the solitude and chance to write stories invigorates you and you feel charged and excited after a few productive hours at the keyboard (even though I gave up watching nearly all television and recreational time to do it)?

There are no right or wrong answers, only what will make you happy. If you aren't happy you will not sustain it.

We will talk about this a little more in Thursday's lesson but start considering it now. Research being an author like you might any other corporate job. Look at things like health care, retirement planning, financial stability. One of the first things I learned as a writer is that most banks require three years of you showing a profit before they will loan you money on large purchases like cars, land, or houses. Do you have savings or a spouse who can get your family what it needs on his or her income alone if your books don't sell? Do you want to quit your day job? Do you do something you are proud of and don't want to lose the prestige of that job? Can

you live with the constant competition some authors perpetuate and the constant search for readers? Can you bounce back from a harsh edit and not take it personally?

All of those things are part and parcel of being an author. All those questions are part of the reason I stood up my company. Before I did that I was scared and a little lost. I figured out what I wanted and began moving toward that goal. It was one of the toughest times in my life for various reasons (mainly fear and feeling like I was in way over my head and wasting everyone's time). If you don't know what you want no amount of struggle and fighting will be enough to get you "there".

This lesson was dense, long and packed full of things for you to roll around until Thursday. My apologies on that score. Most of the lessons are not as tightly packed ☺

Until then…

Warm Regards,

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