



Publishing Nonfiction Books on Spirituality

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MODULE 5

Commentary

In Modules 1 through 3, commentary was provided as downloadable audio files. However, by Module 4, the laptop computer I used to record the audio went defunct, so the course materials that should have been presented as audio, with the category label “AUD” were just the PDF documents of my transcript notes prepared for audio recording. For the final Module 5, what should be the audio lecture portion of the course is now presented as written commentaries. Much of the commentary was written with the intention of being script, so please forgive the casual, informal style of the content. In the course syllabus, all Commentary files will bear the category label “ESS” for blog-style essay.

The Author Platform and Public Relations

By and large, how well your book will sell has less to do with the quality of your book’s content and a whole lot more to do with how well you’ve established your author platform.

Let me tell you about an important rule for engagement when it comes to your author platform and public relations as an author and then let me acknowledge how I totally have not followed that rule for engagement.

Here’s the important rule: have a narrowly-tailored focus for your platform, stay on message at all times, and be consistent with that messaging.

In other words, if you’re a tarot expert, then the focus of everything you do on your author platform—that’s beyond just your book, but includes all of your social media content and public contacts—must be narrowly-tailored to focus on how you’re just a tarot expert. If you start to add too many other disparate interests or pursuits, your target audience gets confused and you lose a bit of that “tarot expert” vibe.

However, clearly I haven’t followed that rule. I’m all over the place. I change my messaging based on what I really think at any given moment in time and guess what—over the course of time, my mind changes, because human... so my messaging changes.

In theory, you shouldn’t do that. It’s bad for your author platform. Repeated, consistent brand messaging is how you get to the top.

Now, the next part of what I want to cover gets a bit wishy-washy. Here's the thing. If you fake a totally consistent, well-defined persona and you live up to that persona in public all of the time, it's going to succeed and you are going to rise to fame. You're going to find yourself attracting publicity, followers, and fans quite easily. It's easy to follow the melody of a one-note song, so people are going to follow. You're a catchy tune. You're that shitty bath product jingle on the radio that gets stuck in people's heads because it consists of five notes that anybody can sing. Consistent brand messaging means you're an easy spiritual guru to connect to. "I understand that guru's message [because it's an easy one-note one-dimensional message...] therefore I understand that guru, therefore that guru is my guru."

So there's, admittedly, merit to faking a totally well-defined persona, making sure every facet of your public image is crafted to live up to that persona, and staying on-script all of the time. That's going to get you very high up very fast.

Here's the problem. There's no staying power. You can be that starburst for a few years, the Age of Aquarius trend du jour, the name on everybody's tongues for a while, but then the moment you slip up—and you will if that well-crafted persona isn't really *you*—and when you do, the public is *not* forgiving. At all. The public and your fans will turn on you faster than they came to love you. I am not going to name names to cite examples and I don't think I have to; we all know those public figures in the New Age community who fell from grace and fell hard.

Why did they fall from grace? They defined themselves by these unrealistic personas.

So my advice—and this isn't expert PR advice or anything, just my personal observations—is to be real. Be accessible. Be someone who could conceivably be your target reader's best friend, someone who is, yes, generally pretty awesome but has faults, makes mistakes, doesn't know everything, has weaknesses, and isn't holier-than-thou. I really believe showing some of your flaws is good PR.

Anyway, if you bothered to follow the progression of modules in this course, then by the stage when Module 5 becomes relevant to you, you would have already established a solid author platform. Back in the day, once upon a time, you could be a nobody and then write a book, and then build an author platform. Gone are those days, for most of us at least. Now an aspiring author must prove the existence of a platform to attract any publisher's attention.

So at this point, you've got a book published or about to be launched into the public eye, an established platform, but you know you've got to take that platform to the next level to promote your new book. How do you do that?

The book tour. Well, the various facets that go in to promoting a book. Taking your platform to the next level now requires author endorsements (also known as book blurbs), infiltrating social media with marketing materials about your new book, generating excitement and buzz around your new book, interviews, lining up people who will write

book reviews, and just getting traction at the grassroots level among readers and prospective readers for your “highly anticipated new book.”

Authors with the most prominent platforms and thus most successful PR campaigns are the authors who share to the world who they are or share an attractive lifestyle. Either or. Or both. I know you want to focus on the content of your book, but in the most effective PR, you need to get the public interested in you first, and then interested in your book.

Make yourself part of the news. You need to be newsworthy or what you have to say, your ideas, your opinions, your knowledge needs to be newsworthy. Seek out the journalists who are writing articles on topics related to what you know. The fact you’ve published a book is often a strong point of credibility to the journalist, so they’re more likely to interview you over others. That gets you in the news.

You’ve got to do a *lot* of hunting. Hunt through all the major online news and entertainment sources—Huffington Post, Broadly, Vice, The New York Post, Variety, Entertainment News, Rolling Stone, AVClub.com, Hollywood Reporter, E! Online, Spin, Vibe.com, SF Gate, the Pop Culture or Entertainment and Lifestyles section of Today.com, or ABC, or any of the major news outlets, Extra TV, Gilde Magazine, The Dead Bolt, Aced Magazine, and so on. In fact, I hope you just took out your own sheet of note paper, listed out all those outlets I just named, and have made a mental reminder to yourself to look each one up and figure out how you can get your name printed on their pages.

Go through the articles on these sites and see if you can find a handful that even tangentially relate to your book’s subject matter. If yes, then consider writing an article and submitting it to the magazine for publication. Another option is to find those articles, note the byline, and then find the contacts for those journalists. Then reach out to them with your media kit and all but impliedly write a newsworthy piece for them that you don’t have a problem with them writing themselves and passing off as their own...because they’ll be citing you as an expert, of course, and you’re going to get quoted as an expert.

How do you get good at PR? You’ve got to be a news junkie. Follow trends like a psychic hawk and as soon as a trend comes anywhere close to the topics you’re an expert in, jump on those trends and get some free publicity for your book. Write articles on those trending topics so you can get more eyes on your work. Agree to be part of feature articles or even video documentaries by independent filmmakers, and seriously, don’t overlook YouTube. Doing video interviews with big-name YouTubers will generate a great deal of buzz for your book.

Also submit your book for book awards. There are a plethora of independent book awards out there, including ones that consider self-published authors. Here’s a dirty little insider secret. By and large, the tiny-town book awards are meaningless. Plus, you need to pay money to even be considered for the book award, which can kind of leave you feeling like you paid for a prize. However, getting to say you are an “award-winning author” boosts your platform immediately. Do a cost benefit analysis for yourself and see if the submission cost is worth it to you. When you’re traditionally published, the publisher typically pays the

submission fees, so that's good news. However, you may need to be the proverbial squeaky wheel at the publishing house and proactively persuade your publisher to submit your book for consideration. So always take the initiative to reach out to your publisher with specific book award competitions and ask them to submit your title to those competitions. Don't wait for the publisher to just do it for you automatically. Be proactive.

To win at PR and raise the prominence of your author platform, you must write out an organized, comprehensive PR strategic plan. The workbooks in Module 5 will help you with that. You have to do this. Don't be "intuitive" or try to play it by ear. Write out your strategic plan, go out of your way to do an enormous amount of research on media platforms, magazines, journals, news and entertainment sites, and prominent YouTubers and bloggers who might be interested in interviewing you about your book.

Work locally. Local media outlets are going to be the most interested in supporting your work. Local bookstores tend to be populated by happy book lovers who are friendly and will help you set up author events, promote those author events, and even set out front display stands for your book, since you're local, and local is always cool.

I once called a bookstore in my hometown, but did so from out of state since I no longer lived there. I asked about stocking my book at their store. I had seen online through their listing that they didn't have *Holistic Tarot* and yet had other well-known tarot books. Initially they seemed unimpressed, and weren't all that interested. Then I casually asked about the local high school, noting how I missed it—I'm alum, after all. The voice on the other line changed instantly. I was speaking to a fellow alum as well (though...ahem...much younger...not that much younger, just a little bit younger...just a few decades...we were almost classmates, you could say...). We reminisced on certain teachers and whether so-and-so teacher was still there. We ended the conversation with her really excited about ordering a stack of my books for their store. The store ended up putting that stack of my books on a front display stand along with a sizeable poster of my face. Why? Because my book is good? Nope. Because I'm a local. Total nepotism. But in kind of a good way. Make nepotism in favor of locals work for you. Always be sure to drop the mention that you're a local and live just up the street on Pine Cone Drive and *Gooooo Thunder Cats!* (Well, don't be annoying about it. You get my point. Be normal. Cool.)

Advancing yourself as newsworthy to get PR for your book is a totally different flavor from being over-the-top with self-congratulatory promotions on your own social media.

Work behind the scenes at promoting yourself. That means work hard at trying to convince other people to talk about you. Don't talk about yourself. No one wants to hear you talking about how great your book is, but almost everyone will listen to a credible figure talk about how great your book is. So the most savvy PR is when you never actually promote yourself. Instead, nurture strong relationships with those in the media and make yourself available, generous, and supportive to those members of the media. That's how you win at PR.