

Use Etiquette to Improve Your Chances To Sell

By Rita Award-winning author Dianna Love Snell

I see new writers blowing sometimes their best opportunity to sell for one simple, easily fixed reason - bad etiquette.

Any new writer wonders where to turn for help and how to ask for advice. Getting involved with a writing organization offers the benefit of being exposed to published authors who can answer many questions. But even then some people don't know how to do the right thing. And the writers not involved with an organization may have their first exposure to publishing professionals at a major conference, which can be intimidating.

I've heard horror stories of unpublished writers who pushed a manuscript up under a bathroom stall occupied by an editor. Yikes! You would never do that, right?

But you might unintentionally do something just as damaging to your career.

Finding out what is acceptable and what is not can make a difference in selling your first story.

Let me share some of my journey to selling and a few tips I hope will help you.

I remember being a new writer walking into a Georgia Romance Writers meeting filled with people – unpublished, multi-published and NYT best sellers – who all seemed to know each other. I'm comfortable meeting with CEOs of Fortune 500 Companies, but that room was pretty intimidating. I mean, these were REAL authors! I wondered if I'd ever fit into this "writing" crowd since my background was art and business. But I enjoyed each meeting so much and was so eager to learn, I kept going back. The best advice I can give any new author is to join a writing organization like GRW where writers of many different genres, not just romance, meet to discuss business and the craft of writing. Critique groups are formed and friendships made.

So the First tip is if you try this don't walk in the door asking for a critique or "what the organization can do for you."

I can truly appreciate wanting a critique, because I waited six months for someone to critique my pages (which ended up being another unpublished person – Mae Nunn – who wanted hers read too...we've both sold since then to mass market publishers). During my first year a multi-published author I'd chatted with a couple times offered me a critique. I was thrilled.

So tip Number Two? Be patient when you meet people in this industry, you might be surprised.

I did more than show up for meetings. I volunteered, helping with our Moonlight & Magnolias conference, which is one of the largest regional writing conferences held each year in Atlanta. Now I'm the Vice President and Chair for our 2007 M&M conference. Volunteering gave me a chance to learn more about our group and the publishing industry. I met editors and agents at our conferences. During that time, NYT best selling women's fiction author, Haywood Smith, offered writing retreats in her home and was instrumental in helping me polish my book that sold. Before long, "I" knew all those people in GRW that had looked so unfamiliar to me at one time.

Tip Number Three – Step up to the plate and get in the game.

Traveling across the country to national and regional conferences, I've met both published and unpublished authors that have since become friends. I've met editors

and agents who I see socially. I know several excellent publicists. What do we discuss in these meetings? The same thing you discuss with your coworkers at a casual meal. If I'm not in a professional setting, I don't bring up business...unless someone asks me specifically about my writing. I don't meet new people with the thought of "what can that person do for me?" I value my personal time and my friendships. I don't use relaxed time to 'schmooze' someone - never have, not even in my own business. The people I see socially are friends, regardless of what they can or cannot do for me. As friends, we DO help each other any way we can, just as I do for my non-writer friends.

Here's tip Number Four – Have honorable intentions when you encourage a relationship or that may come back to bite you when they discover your real intent. In other words, don't buddy up to a major author with an ulterior motive that is self-centered. A relationship started that way will likely not end good.

Now for some simple basic tips:

It's NOT acceptable etiquette to ask someone to read/critique your pages if you don't already have a relationship (as a friend or critique partner or working with them in some capacity) established. When you become friends with another author, email a question, but be polite and brief, and don't continue to email "just to keep contact." They have families, critique partners they are reading full manuscripts for, deadlines, copy edits, meetings, conference workshops and on and on to deal with as well. Be considerate of everyone's time.

What about meeting editors and agents at a conference?

The rule of common courtesy applies for ALL people, including editors and agents.

a) Don't hand them ANYTHING in print (except your business card), b) Don't ask them to read your full manuscript (send only what they "request"), c) Don't walk up to them while they are conversing with another person regardless if you know both parties (they are most likely in a private conversation even if they smile politely) and d) Don't become belligerent if you inquire about a manuscript of yours on their desk (always, always be polite). In fact, I think as Bob Mayer says it, "Don't open your mouth to say anything that will have a negative effect on your career."

No truer words have been spoken about life in general.

Now that you've heard all those Don'ts, here are a few Dos. Always speak to anyone in this business and say hello. Treat them like you would anyone else. Strike up conversations with other conference attendees and be sure to *share* the conversation. You'll be surprised by who you meet in a line or riding a shuttle to the conference.

Above all, never forget why you join an organization or attend a conference, which I hope was to further your writing career in the most positive way possible. When in doubt on any etiquette question – ask for guidance. I guarantee you someone will be happy to share their insight.

Now go out and sell that story. ☺

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