

ONE BIT OF ADVICE

**A short essay
by Ian Rowland**



One Bit Of Advice

Every now and then, people ask me for a word of advice about one subject or another. This leads to a dilemma. On the one hand, I like to be helpful where I can. On the other hand, I try not to get into the advice business.

There are two reasons for this. The first is that I'm not sure I'm a good source of advice. The second is that I often wonder if offering advice ever achieves anything. On the rare occasions that I *do* offer advice on something, nobody ever takes any notice. I don't mind about this and I'm not complaining.

Here's a case in point. It's a piece of advice that I believe in and that I've offered to many, many people when they've been asking me about something relevant:

1. Choose a subject that you know quite a lot about — preferably based on your personal experience. You need to feel happy and enthusiastic about sharing what you know about this subject.
2. Write a book about this subject, minimum 50,000 words, and self-publish it.
3. Try to get people interested in your book. Send out some review copies. Give copies to people who might like it and ask them to tell all their friends.

Why do I think this is good advice? There are lots of reasons. It's a very satisfying and fulfilling thing to do. Also, you *might* make a bit of money out of it. However, the main reason is simply this: *you never know what it will lead to.*

When you self-publish a book, it becomes a sort of roving ambassador that will represent you all over the world. People pass books around, lend them to their friends, share them, talk about them, leave them lying around in their homes or at the office. You never know what might happen just because you have a book out. It might lead to all sorts of opportunities you never imagined. Most of all, it's a way to meet people you would never otherwise have met.

Whenever I give people this advice, I mention three things that happened to me after I self-published my first big book, 'The Full Facts Book Of Cold Reading'. Please don't get me wrong. I am not telling you about these three things in order to brag or to try to impress you. I am sharing them with you to illustrate the point that, once you get a book out, you just never know what it will lead to. Here are my three short stories.

1. I live in England. After I self-published the Cold Reading book, someone flew me to Australia and back, *first class*, just to give *one* lecture. I got a wonderful holiday out of it!
2. The book brought me some opportunities to travel and see the world. I'm probably the only person you'll ever meet who has been to Komodo Island (to see the famous Komodo Dragons), Easter Island, Hiroshima, Iguazu Falls, Saint Petersburg, the Berlin Wall, Repovesi National Park (Finland), the statue of 'Christ The Redeemer', Cappadocia, the Kilauea Caldera (Hawaii) and Milford Sound. All because I wrote a book!
3. Thanks to the book, I got hired by the FBI to train their field agents. I'm still the only person from outside the US ever hired for this purpose. Just for the record, I've also been hired for corporate gigs by the Crown Estate (three times), the Ministry of Defence, the British Olympics team, Cap Gemini, Unilever, Marks & Spencer, Google (twice) and Coca-Cola.

Plus I made hundreds — no, *thousands* — of friends all over the world that I would otherwise never have had the pleasure of getting to know. It's a lot of fun to have experiences and adventures that you *didn't expect* and *couldn't have guessed* you were going to have!

It's true I also made some money from the book. I still make some sales every month and enjoy this 'passive income' very much. As you can imagine, it's a strangely pleasant and extraordinary experience to have some money coming in without even lifting a finger! But the money really isn't the main benefit.

You don't know what will happen once you send your book out into the world. The only way to find out is to do it. But you know exactly what your book will lead to if you never start it, never finish it or never self-publish it: *absolutely nothing*.

What if you're in the, "I could never write a book in a million years!" school of negative self-talk? It's true that we all have varying aptitudes so we're good at different things — which is great because diversity is strength. Some people are good with words... others not so much. But anyone can get a book out. There are only a few main steps involved: writing, editing, page layout, publication and promotion. If you can take care of some or all of these steps without help, great. Where you need help, it's widely available. If you can pay for the help you need, great. If you can't, then barter. If you're determined enough, you'll find a way to get the job done.

That's it. That's the advice that I give all the time and that nobody ever takes any notice of. I am content with this. But I'll carry on offering this advice because I think it's worth offering.

I'll just add one extra note...

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Choosing The Subject For Your Book

What should your book be about?

Don't think it has to be a completely new subject that no one else has written about. There are already books on every subject under the sun. This isn't a problem. You can add your unique voice, value and experience to the existing literature on any given subject. That said, it's obviously best to avoid subjects that are clearly over-saturated and on which a new book seems to emerge every week. It's hard for a raindrop to be noticed in a downpour.

While it's good to have a target readership in mind, remember that you never really know who might buy your book or love your work. When I published my cold reading book, a Canadian woman wrote to say she loved it and found it invaluable in her work. She was a professional hand therapist. I've still no idea what this job entails or why she felt my book was relevant. So, don't get too obsessed with having a 'target audience', despite what the marketing gurus will say. Just ask yourself if it's reasonable to expect a few hundred people might want to buy your book during its first year on sale. This is all you need to start with.

Choose a subject that you're passionate about. Aim for your book to be something you *love* working on and really *want* to bring into the world — even if it means getting up at 5am to finish off a chapter! Writing a book can be a long journey. Passion can sustain your motivation.

— Ian Rowland

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You might suspect I've produced this essay to market my services. It's true that I offer a comprehensive range of writing, editing and publishing services (see www.ianrowland.com). I've been doing this professionally for over 30 years. But this isn't why I wrote this short piece. I wrote it because it *is* a good bit of advice.

Most people need consistency more than they need intensity.

Intensity: run a marathon, write a book in thirty days, silent meditation retreat.

Consistency: don't miss a workout for two years, write every week, daily silence.

Intensity makes a good story or headline.

Consistency makes progress.

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