

8 PERKS OF GETTING PUBLISHED FOR THERAPISTS

by Sylvia Cary, MFT

There are perks to getting published, even for therapists who have no desire to be writers. Getting published is surprisingly do-able, so why not consider doing it? After all, you've spent years learning your craft so don't be satisfied sharing your expertise with only a few hundred people over the course of your career when you could be helping *thousands* of people by putting what you know in print.

Within the book, magazine, journal and newspaper worlds, there are thousands of potential markets for a therapist's writings on a wide variety of topics: Women's issues, men's issues, health and fitness, all aspects of psychology, inspirational, educational, self-help, how-to, healing, aging, disabilities, sex, recovery, biographies, profiles, interviews, personal experiences, essays, memoirs, book reviews, religion, spiritual, regional -- and the list can go on and on -- thousands of places to publish and get yourself those all important "clips" (proof you've been published) that can help you build a writing portfolio.

Once you do get published, here are some of the "perks" that can result:

1. *Qualifies You as an "Expert":* Once you publish a couple of articles or a book on a specific subject, other people begin to see you as an "expert" in that area. Just flip through any magazine and see how often people (such as therapists) are quoted. Reporters are always scrambling around to get experts to weigh in on whatever topic has momentarily captured the public's attention. You could end up being one of the go-to people used by the media when they need somebody's wisdom on topics like "depression," "post traumatic stress disorder" or "addiction in teens."
2. *Helps You Build Your Practice:* The obvious fall-out from becoming more high-profile (as the result of being published) is that you get more client referrals to your practice. Getting published isn't the only way to get clients, but it's a good way. When you are a published expert, clients feel more comfortable coming to see you, and those who hire speakers and panelists for special presentations feel more comfortable about hiring you - which, in turn, attracts more clients. And so it goes.

3. *Serves as a Marketing Tool:* Say you've developed a specialty as a therapist: You treat families in which the grandparents, rather than the parents, have raised the child or children. You've even published an article in a newsletter on the subject. What you do next is make copies of the article (using the magazine's masthead on the first page) and you send it out to potential referral resources (doctors, other therapists, agencies, etc.) with a brief cover letter and your card. In your cover letter you can say who you are, say you are enclosing an article, and say that you specialize in treating this population and have groups, etc. Enclosing the article or "clip" is impressive and makes you more credible. It may even result in getting you referrals over somebody else who simply sends out a business card and a letter. The article can make the difference. Going one step further, you can put together a do-it-yourself "press" kit (includes copies of your articles) which you send to the local media, stressing your area of expertise, and offering yourself as an "expert" to keep in mind for interviews.
4. *Financial Gains:* As a therapist who writes, you are probably not going to make out like John Grisham financially, but once you go through the steps of a) writing for free (*pro bono*, meaning "for the public good"), b) writing in exchange for free copies of the magazine, and c) writing for peanuts (try \$15 an article!), you will finally graduate to d) making some bigger chunks of change. But the freebie stuff is critical in the beginning so you can get yourself the necessary collection of clips to send out with your query letters to magazines. Look through *Writer's Market* to see what the various magazines pay. If you aim too high before you are ready, you'll probably get shot down -- but there's no harm in trying. Set a goal for yourself: "Next year I'm going to earn 10% or 25% of my income from my writing." One writer parlayed her articles and workshops into free passage for herself and husband on the QE II in exchange for giving psychology lectures on board. Save your article research because you can always re-slant and recycle articles to appeal to (and sell to) different markets.
5. *Listening Differently:* Once you start writing you begin to listen differently. In your practice, you may find yourself hearing things you didn't hear before, and making connections you might not have made before - all because you are focused on the topic you are writing about.

When I was writing my book called *Jolted Sober* (about spontaneous remission), I'd find my ears burning when clients would talk about any kind of sudden healing experience. I'd even listen to TV talk shows differently, zeroing in whenever guests mentioned moments of clarity or "aha" experiences. I was "researching" even when I was off-duty.

6. *Provides a Service:* I believe that people with special talents and wisdom (which is the case with many therapists) have a responsibility to society to share the wealth with other, pass it on so that others may benefit. If other "perks" don't inspire you to write, consider this idea of responsibility. Write down what you know and try to get it published as your unique contribution to our world. The world needs it.

7. *Mortality:* Maybe this sounds morbid, but I think it is *human nature* to want to leave something of ourselves behind when we kick the bucket, something that will immortalize us - at least in the eyes of our friends and family. An article or book with our by-line represents some of the work we did and our point of view about things while we were on earth. I have copies of books written by friends and family and they are dear to me. I keep them on a special shelf.

8. *Psychological Satisfaction:* Getting published feels good. When you've put your heart into writing something, it's deeply satisfying to see it out there in print. It's also a relief because *there's nothing more you can do about it now!* So you finally get to let it go. Getting published the first time is also an important milestone: It makes you "legit". You are now a *real* writer, not just a *wanna-be* writer. Getting published can also be cathartic, especially when the article or book is about something personal. We get to dredge up, cope with, and finally get rid of feelings or concepts that we may have been carrying around too long. It is therapeutic to deal with it and move on. Many people experience as great sense of relief or lightness when they finally see something they wrote in print.

To sum up, the experience of therapist Marti Laney, Ph.D., who recently had her first book published (*The Introvert Advantage*, Workman Publishers), incorporates a number of the above "perks": "*I think this book has been a growing experience, like having a baby--dealing with a*

whole industry (publishing) I knew nothing about, fighting with my editor, developing some unused muscles, learning to speak up with the publisher, finding I could do a book tour, and experiencing the fact that I actually helped people with my book, has been very enriching. I have gotten clients, feel better about fees, and I am grateful that I have the opportunity to now do another book."

Here's an exercise: If you were going to write an article, or even a book, what would you most want to write about? What are you itching to say? Think about it.

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Bio:

Sylvia Cary, MFT, is a Los Angeles area licensed psychotherapist and writer and has been a member of The Scriptwriters Network for nearly a decade. She was the winner of the 2003 Carl Sautter Screenwriting Competition (for Features). She is the author of 4 books, 5 educational films, and numerous articles in national magazines. She is currently "book-doctoring" and writing script coverage for a film distribution company. She can be contacted at sylvia@sylviacary.com. Her website is: www.TherapistsWhoWrite.com.