

Book Signings Are Your Best Friends

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So you've written a book, had it published and you are now facing the dreaded book signing or book launch. Your palms sweat at the thought of facing droves of people and actually having to talk to them. You are a writer, not a salesperson, right? *Wrong!* If you do not have the guts and determination to sell your own work, then why should anyone else do it for you?

Book signings are your *lifeline*—your best friends.

Before you step out into virgin territory and cross that boundary that is called a book signing, endless questions will bombard your brain. How many books should you expect to sell? What if you don't sell any books? And what if someone should ask that one little question that makes you quiver and shake in your shoes: "*What's your book about?*"

In Canada, according to many of the managers at Coles, Indigo and Chapters bookstores, an average book signing is approximately \$100.00 in retail sales. So if your book retails for \$20.00, then selling 5 books would be considered okay. However, many authors have gone home without even one sale. **Approximately 80% of authors will sell \$100.00 or less; 15% will achieve \$100 - \$300.00 in sales; and only 5% of Canadian authors will see more than \$300.00 in consistent sales.** So where are the hundreds of book sales that you hear about in the news, and the long lines of people anxiously waiting all night? Unless you are J.K. Rowling, Stephen King, Nora Roberts or you are on the New York Times Best Selling list, the reality is there won't be a lineup longer than a family of four, and \$100.00 in sales represents a good Canadian book signing event. Now that is not to say that you can't sell more.

What makes a good book signing? YOU DO! *You* set the tone by how you lay out your display on the table, how you dress and stand, how you think about signings, how you approach people, and how excited you are about your book. You represent your craft, your talent and your product. So how can you achieve sensational sales?

Follow these simple guidelines and watch your sales soar:

- Tables should be covered with *clean* tablecloths. Books should be displayed in stands and not left in stacks on the table. Signage should clearly state why you are there and who you are. Posters with your book covers, book reviews and excerpts can be displayed if you have the use of a wall or a tabletop easel. Draw people in by giving away a prize. Have them fill out their email address on the entry form so that you can invite them to sign up for your e-newsletter. And **NEVER, EVER GIVE AWAY YOUR BOOK.** If the prize is your book, do not be surprised when your sales are non-existent. Why should they buy when they can win it?
- **Present yourself in a friendly, approachable but professional manner by dressing accordingly.** It is also important to dress according to the image you present as a genre or expert writer. For example, if you're writing a book on riding with the Hell's Angels and the photo on the back of your book is of you in black leather pants, don't show up in a three-piece suit. However if you're writing steamy romance novels, don't expect to show up wearing a dress with a ripped bodice. Professionalism is key. Dressy casual always works. And during Christmas time, glitter attracts attention. If nothing else, people will stop by just to see what all the sparkle is about.
- **Body language can make or break a sale.** If you stand with your arms crossed, no matter how comfortable *you* are, people will assume you don't want to be bothered. They will think you are unapproachable and will steer clear. You will get the same reaction if you turn your back. **NEVER** turn your back to talk to someone behind your table. Many sales have been lost by this thoughtless gesture. Stand with your arms loose by your sides or clasped loosely in front or behind your back. This shows that you are relaxed and easygoing. Monitor the crowd by sitting for short durations. Every crowd is different. Some prefer to check out your table while you sit. **But never hide behind your table!** Once you or they initiate conversation, stand up, smile and sell them on your personality.
- When you are preparing for an event, **make sure your attitude is turned UP! Attitude is contagious!** If you are excited about your signing, everyone you meet will be excited. If you are dreading it or telling yourself you hate book signings, everyone will see that and your sales will take a

nosedive. *Love* those book signing events! They are your best friends, remember? There are golden opportunities at every event. Media will often contact an author they have seen at a signing. I have personally had four interviews within two months because of a chance encounter at a signing. And there is no better way to become known than by public exposure.

- **Everyone you meet should be approached with respect.** Treat them as if they are the *President* of your Fan Club. Have a handout ready to give to anyone who passes by, but do not be the pushy credit card salesperson. Look for eye contact. Smile and greet them. Then offer something to draw this potential fan to your table. Business cards, brochures and entry forms for a contest work wonders. Talk to them while they fill out the form and tell them: **Who** you are, **What** you are doing, **Where** you'll be next, **When** you'll be there and **Why** they should buy your book **now**.
- Know exactly what to say when someone asks: "What is your book about?" Think of a movie trailer for your book. How would the announcer describe it? Be prepared by writing down a script and practicing it before your signing. Be enthusiastic, positive and animated, and your audience will be intrigued. When the opportunity presents itself, hand them a copy of your book to feel and look at. **The action of placing that book in their hands will dramatically increase your sales.** Invite them to read the first page or chapter. Then let them know that you would be happy to autograph the book for them.
- **High, consistent sales depend on three things: a good product, knowing your target audience and having a great attitude.** If your product is full of obvious typos and glaring errors (especially on the back cover), you've wasted your money and your potential fan's time. Make sure your books have been **edited by three pair of unbiased eyes** *before* you self-publish. Nothing will turn off a sale faster than improper use of punctuation and spelling *missteaks*. Know your target audience. Know exactly who would buy your book for themselves and who would buy it as a gift. And always monitor your attitude, reminding yourself throughout the day that every person you meet is a potential sale.

Follow the guidelines above and remember that the most important aspect of any event can be summed up by two words: **HAVE FUN!** Relax and enjoy the fact that you are a published author and that you have a book that is worthy of public adoration. If you have an exceptional product, are positive and lively, know your target audience and follow these steps, then you will be one of the few authors in Canada who will consistently sell more than \$300.00 per book signing. You must BELIEVE in your book in order to effectively sell it. You must also believe in yourself, in your skills as a writer. **You must become a shameless promoter.** Why should you feel shame? Your book is worth promoting, right? Enjoy every opportunity you have of turning a book signing into pure gold.

"Fear is contagious. So is courage. Courage can't help you, unless you allow it to."

~ Cheryl Kaye Tardif

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*Cheryl Kaye Tardif is the author of **Whale Song**, **Divine Intervention** and **The River**. She has appeared on television and radio, and has been featured in newspapers and magazines across Canada and the US. She also operates sites that promote Canadian and American authors, such as BookAdz.com, and AlbertaAuthors.com.*

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