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FULL EPISODE TRANSCRIPT - CAREERFLUENCER PODCAST



095: Being a Professional Writer, Pivots, and the Power of Self-Belief with Amy Draheim

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Welcome to the Careerfluencer podcast. This is Amy Draheim. I'm a writer, a marketing consultant and a podcaster, currently based out of Bend, Oregon.

When you get asked that question of how did things start for you, why not go back to when you were 10 years old and what you loved back then - that's the advice that I would give was way back, find what you're truly passionate about, and then be relentless in the pursuit of it.

I kept a diary all the way through college, I started documenting everything. I started writing stories about my neighbors across the street and about my own family, about the places we went to about birthday parties and about my crushes and graduated with an English degree. And I moved to Los Angeles, and I was trying to be an actress.

But I realized that I felt like I looked like everyone else. And acting wasn't really distinguishing me from the crowd. But I did have this journal from college. And I was waitressing just to make ends meet. And one day I was working at a party for a big agency in LA, the guys were smoking cigars, and I was serving like canopy is like on a tray. And they said, Hey, what do you do? And I said, Oh, I'm writing a book about killing all my ex boyfriends. And it's Sex in the City meets American Psycho. And they thought it sounded like such a funny, interesting concept.

They asked me to bring my manuscript to their office the next the following Monday. And that was the beginning of my career as a professional writer. So within a year, I had a publishing deal with Simon and Schuster. And that was when I knew and like that was when I could officially call myself a writer, I like to say that I was just naive enough to really believe in myself and believe in my own story, when I wrote the manuscript, I mean, it wasn't going to be enough for me to write it and put it on a shelf and let it collect us.

That wasn't, that wasn't what was going to happen. I felt like my story needed to be told and that people would be entertained by it, and women would relate to it and feel empowered by it. And so I could have gone the straight path of going and getting my MFA in creative writing. The problem with that is that you end up learning how hard it is to get a book published. And you end

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up learning that it's one in 100,000 manuscripts that becomes a novel that you see in the on the shelves are nowadays online, right? and published by a mainstream publisher that is, so I didn't know all of that.

And while some of my friends were in those MFA programs and sort of reaching out to me to say, Amy, it's gonna be so hard to get this thing published, like don't even bother. And even my own parents said, Great job, Amy. Now, why don't you move on to something else? And I was just like, no way, no, I'm gonna get this thing published, I just had it in my mind. And like I said, I think I was sort of naive enough to make it happen.

I wanted a publisher, and I knew I needed to get an agent. So you know, the guys that I had met, they loved the manuscript, they started sending it out to publishers that they were friends with. So this is called hip pocketing, and the industry. At the same time, I started looking at the New York Times bestsellers list, this is this is my path, right?

Looking at this list, and clicking on the fiction novels, because my novel was a work of fiction, looking at the author's then getting into those first pages of the book, the book that they had written, and reading the acknowledgments. And in those acknowledgments, they were thanking their agents. So then I went to the literary agents website, and I started reading those literary agents bios. And in those bios, they were saying I'm looking for, and one of them said, Young voices, especially humorous. And I thought, you know, this, this guy seems like he'd be the perfect agent to represent my book.

So then I googled "query letter" because I knew I needed a query letter. And I read what that would look like. So I wrote one to this one guy, and I literally sent my letter to one agent who I thought fit my story. And he bit and he said, Send me the manuscript, just like the big talent agency people at that catering event. I sent him the manuscript, and suddenly, we had a competitive bidding war with two different publishers, and a deal after that, I definitely didn't have it all figured out.

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I say this a lot. If I had it all figured out. I don't think I would have accomplished that. And that's sort of the funny truth of it. And that theme has carried me through the next 10 years of my life as I got into a career. in hotels and marketing, where if I had had the formal education, I don't think I would have been as successful by being a bit naive. Or you could call it having a beginner's mind.

I just sort of went for it. I learned as I went, I used Google. It's amazing that you can learn just about anything that way. And, you know, I think I was a little bit scrappy. And I think that is a key to my success. Because it wasn't all written out. I wasn't following a checklist I was navigating and learning as I went, I now understood that at being a professional writer required sort of a variety of things.

And one of those is to diversify, and to do a lot of different things. So not just focus on novels, because those are really long form, but use my writing and other ways. And so actually, it was my dad, who's a business professor who suggested that I get into marketing. And so I started working in marketing, I started in a tech company, and I was working for somebody and I was sort of moving up the ladder as you would in a corporate environment, a couple of years in, there was this happy hour events, and I was chatting with some of my colleagues and their spouses.

And there was this opportunity to leave my marketing assistant role and go become a marketing manager for a hotel group. And I was like, ooh, like the industry I was in was Self Storage, Senior Living is not that sexy. And I could trade it for steaks and spas and hotels and travel. And so of course, that was an easy decision for me. And I actually sold myself to the head of the company, as somebody who really had no experience in hospitality, but was smart and was eager and could learn just about anything.

And my book was sort of a testament of the work that I could accomplish, even though it was a you know, it's a fiction dark comedy novel. But it is a testament to sort of playing the long game, I spent about five years with that company from start to finish. And the finish was really when I got all the way to the top, as high as I felt like I could go, and I got frustrated, I could only go so

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high. And I was sort of relegated to a position of taking notes sometimes and like branding sessions, and meetings. And I didn't like that I was like, I'm, you know, doing all this great work. And so I decided to go out on my own.

So I took a cue from my 23-24 year old self, and decided, screw it, I can do this myself, I can pick and choose my hotel clients. And so I did it. And three years ago, I started my own creative agency, I got into hotel marketing. And things were great. And I had lots of clients, I had lots of connections from the work that I'd done. And so I was able to start to do marketing for independent hotels all across the country.

And then 2020 came, and hit my industry, which is hospitality, so freaking hard. The hotels that I was working with, I've been working with consistently for about two years with great contracts. They had to shut their doors, I knew I needed to pivot, because my hotels, I mean, the business was was drying up. We didn't know how long this was going to last.

But I also knew that hotels really needed to continue to communicate. And that's the niche that I've carved out over these last few years is really content marketing for hotels, writing the content, communicating, finding their voice and, and sharing it with customers across their websites across email, social media in May when we had, you know, not one, but sort of two crisis's that we were facing as a nation.

One was the pandemic two is systemic racism really sort of coming to the forefront. I knew that I also could use my podcast as a way to give a voice to people in our industry that we don't often hear from, do what you're passionate about.

And sometimes it takes looking at your silly hobbies. Like keeping a diary when you were 10 years old to realize where that true passion lies.

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I think there's so many distractions today from you know, social media, which I work in every day to you know, just the media in general that to be able to clear out the clutter in your mind and and sort of understand where your true passion lies.

So my advice is look way back, because I always say I really haven't changed. I'm still that little girl who was in my room, writing about my neighbor across the street what she had, that I didn't have and then making it my own goal to go out and get that