

Going the Distance: Time and Project Management for Writers

with Kitty Bucholtz

LESSON 1 – INTRODUCTION

Welcome to my class! I'm so happy you're here! Goal setting and time management are two things I've been interested in since I was a teenager. I always have more things I want to do than I seem able to get done. Sound familiar?

Over the last few years, my interest in goals and time management has been focused on my writing life, and I've expanded that interest to include project management. Sometimes using these tools has been an uncomfortable spotlight showing me things I didn't want to see (because I didn't want to deal with them!). But learning to understand myself better – including learning how our brains work, understanding what goal setting does and doesn't do, and accepting the constraints of time have helped me to accomplish more of what is really important to me.

During the first four weeks of our class, I will send you a link to a lecture every Monday, Wednesday, and Friday. The first week will be more about preparing your mind and heart for a *new* year, not a rehashing of prior years. The second week will focus on project management, figuring out how to get all of your goals onto your calendar. We'll work on getting more organized in the third week, and try to wrap everything into one big plan for the year in the last week.

On Saturday, January 20, 2018, from 10am to 2pm Pacific Time, we will meet in a live online meeting room using Zoom. I'll send you a link that will bring you right into the room without having to download anything. You'll have the option to be on video or not, and we'll be able to talk to each other as if we were sitting in a classroom.

I'll quickly go over the meat of the class so we can start getting our plans onto our calendars. Be sure to come prepared, if you can, with an initial list of goals for the year, a calendar, sticky notes, and pen and paper. (See what I use at the bottom of this lesson.) This will be a fun and helpful planning session, and it will be recorded if you can't make it.

Back to these written lessons, I will put bullet points at the beginning of every lecture so you can decide if you want to skim the information or read through it in detail depending on your individual needs and time constraints. Please leave your questions and comments in the lesson area on the website or in our private Facebook group. The class will be most helpful to everyone if we share problems and solutions.

Bullet Points for Lesson 1

- *Looking back at how you grew up, how you live now, and what you have accomplished will help you find the rhythms of goal setting and time management that work best for you. A part of your brain already knows what works best; it just has to be reminded.*

- *Start a list of your goals for the year. Include everything in the first draft – **everything**. Start a list of all the things that are most likely to distract you from your goals.*
- *Find a calendar to use to block out the year's "big picture" for project management purposes. Something big enough to put small sticky notes in the squares works best. Decide how you want to manage your day-to-day life. An electronic calendar might work best for that.*
- *Consider sending a daily encouragement email to yourself. Or write something encouraging to yourself in your journal every day. Or encourage yourself and others in the Facebook group. The year needs to begin with getting your head in the right space, a positive space.*

Where I Came From, or Learning From History

Before we go on, let me introduce myself. I grew up in Michigan, married my college sweetheart, moved to Phoenix, Arizona, during one of the many times when jobs were scarce in Michigan, and joined my first writer's group. I was wary.

Andrea, the president of the Tempe Christian Writer's Group, had to literally talk me into coming to the first meeting. My experience with writers in college showed them to be insecure, defensive, and combative to the point of cruelty. Add that to a Midwestern girl's upbringing where writing is considered a hobby or a waste of time to most practical people, and I started out my journey full of negative thoughts and feelings.

But this writer's group had lots of wonderful people in it who loved to encourage others. We had several levels of writers and everyone was willing to share what they had learned. I'd never experienced an atmosphere like that – I loved it!

Within a year, my first nonfiction piece was published in a devotional book called *God's Unexpected Blessings*. I went to my first writer's conference later that year because my friend Janet wanted to try one and didn't want to go alone. I learned so much that I burst into tears a couple times because I was so overwhelmed with the idea that what I'd been taught to believe was "a nice little dream" could become a practical reality.

Over the next eight years, I published more nonfiction, unexpectedly ended up in a screenwriting program and got some work from that, became the editor of a small regional investment magazine in Phoenix, and started my own writing business. (I was praying one day that God would help me have the courage to ask my IT manager to let me work four 10-hour days so I could write a full day each week. Before I had a chance to ask, three days after praying, I got fired! All I could think was – well, maybe God thinks I should write more! So I started my writing business.)

I started taking annual trips with a couple friends to have a writing week away. During one trip, one of my friends asked if I'd ever heard of chick lit; it was new and my voice sounded like it would work. Within a few months, I'd re-tooled my romance novel in a way I felt was more "me" and I got an agent. We received two "we almost bought it"

replies from major publishers just as chick lit started its downward slide. My agent suggested I write a new book.

Changes in My Writing Life

At that point, I was sick of working on press releases and chasing down clients for the money they owed. I decided to get an outside job again so I could pay the bills without stress and use the extra time for writing. Owning your own business requires much more than 40 hours a week, so I ended up with more writing time when I got another day job. I also wanted a break from nonfiction. I wanted to tell stories, so I focused on novels.

But I didn't realize that just because your agent gives you suggestions, it doesn't mean you have to do everything she says. I was taking all of my agent's notes as if they were demands, and my writing lost its energy and its heart. It finally got to the point where I stopped writing for a year. Eventually she and I worked out that what I wanted to write and what she was good at selling were less similar than they once were, and we parted amicably. I was on my own, in some ways starting over, and I felt excited again!

My husband had been working in animation and special effects in the movies for a while, and we'd moved from Phoenix to Burbank, California, to Sydney, Australia, to Santa Monica, California. All that traveling was exciting, but all that moving was time-consuming. By the time we were in Santa Monica, I knew I was going to have to get serious about how I spent my time. If I knew that any day John could come home and say, "Honey, start packing again," I needed to have a writing plan that would work with that lifestyle.

In fact, since coming up with that "I need a plan" thought, we've moved *many* more times, and I expect to move again in the next few months. One time, due to the way John's job works, we had to pack up and move from Sydney back to California in less than three weeks! But I'd gotten enough of an organizational plan together that I packed a few essentials to take on the plane with me, and I made a little corner of our friend's guest room into my workspace. Even though I didn't know when I would move again or get our belongings off the ship, I could continue working.

I want to help you look back on your life history and learn from it the keys to what makes you tick, what makes you feel hopeful and excited, and what makes you feel hopeless and ready to quit. I want to help you find ways to work within your lifestyle so you can get the maximum amount of work accomplished within your circumstances.

Changes in My Lifestyle

Over the last few years, I took everything I'd been learning about goal setting and time management, and I learned some more. I tried everything once, and some things lots of times. I tried to take into account my personality, my personal history, my insecurities, and my strengths to come up with a plan that was more than a piece of paper. I needed to actually accomplish something. I've been doing a lot of research into how our brains work so I can help my brain do what I want it to. Today, I'm still living a somewhat

month-to-month lifestyle due to John's career, so keeping organized is a must, but it's not easy.

Why am I telling you so much about my personal life? Because now I want you to start thinking of your personal story. Did you grow up with encouragement or discouragement when it came to writing or dreams? Do you mostly believe in your ability to keep writing and improving your craft, getting more and better stories out? Or is it a hope, a dream, but deep down you don't really believe your writing career will be everything you wanted? Who supports you? Who supports you in lip service only? What gives you energy and joy when you write? What depletes your energy and joy so you don't write?

ASSIGNMENT

Answer the questions in the paragraph above **on paper** (not just in your head). This is a pretty personal first assignment, and it's completely up to you if you want to share any of it with the class. But to give you some ideas, these are the kinds of kernels you're looking for:

- I grew up in a very pragmatic part of the country, so my plan was to either make a living writing, or quit trying and do something else to earn a living.
- I grew up without much encouragement for my writing, so I've had to work for years to exorcise the negative voices in my head. I also have to be especially encouraging to that little girl who lives in my head and tells me the stories; it seems she's always waiting to be told to shut up.
- I went to business school, and my practical, logical brain says there is always a better way to do something. I need to put forth the energy to find the better way, and I'll be rewarded with accomplishments.

Because I've learned how my brain is most likely to work, how I used to think, and how I came to think differently about myself and my writing, I can find the best ways to motivate myself. This is what I want to help you do. Perhaps you've already figured out a lot of what I'm getting at. After all, we writers have a tendency to do a lot of thinking. 😊

Over the next month, I'll share a lot of different ways to decide what your goals are (for this year and into the future), how you'll go about achieving them, and how you'll make the best use of your time. Not all of these methods will work for everyone. (They don't all work for me, but they all work for someone.) If you are already thinking about how you naturally get things done, and what things you always, *always* put off, and what things trigger you to throw up your hands and curse the sky, you'll be able to figure out more quickly what methods will work best for you.

What You'll Need

Please start preparing for some of the upcoming homework assignments. Some of the things I'll ask you for include:

- a list of your goals for the upcoming year (include everything so you can plan to accomplish all of the things that are important to you this year, not just your

writing),

- a list of the most distracting areas in your life, good, bad or indifferent; Internet-related and family-related will probably top most lists,
- a calendar - decide if you want a laminated wall calendar (annual and quarterly are sold at Staples, Office Depot, etc. for reasonable prices), or if you'll use a monthly paper calendar (consider one with pictures you love so you'll be happy and inspired when looking at it), or a daily planner, or an electronic calendar.

If you're interested, this is the calendar I often use: <http://bit.ly/2Deh7q8>

And these are sticky notes I use: <http://bit.ly/2rh1Cwj>

Also, I'd like each of you to find or buy a small pocket/purse-sized notebook to carry around and only write notes that pertain to this class in it. It will help you be more organized if all of your thoughts are in one place. And if it's pocket-sized, you can always have it with you. A clickable pen is quicker to use to dash off a note than a pen with a cap, and you don't need both hands. ☺ (If you just *have* to write something else in this notebook, rip out the page when you're done and put it someplace else.)

If you need additional room to make notes - more than a small pad allows - decide in the next day or two the *one* place (a Word document, a separate notebook, a legal pad) where you will write your notes. This can be a good opportunity to use one of the half-used notebooks you have stuck in the closet.

I've used Scrivener in the past because it's such an easy way to have separate files, yet have everything in one place. But a friend introduced me to the ARC notebook system at Staples (also the Circa notebook system at Levenson) and now I'm hooked! You can pull the pages out of one section and press them into another. **And** the notebooks come in various sizes from pocket-size to letter-size.

One of many ARC notebooks: <http://bit.ly/2DilzIC>

Circa notebooks: <http://bit.ly/2reQKyN>

Circa sampling kit (costs \$40, gives you a sample of several items, and includes a \$40 gift card to buy more of what you like!): <http://bit.ly/2mOBS5D>

DAILY ASSIGNMENT

We're also going to make some daily goals for the class. The first daily goal is an encouragement assignment.

Please post to the Facebook group every day, or as often as you can, telling us what you loved about your writing today (or your other creative endeavor if you're not writing). Even if you didn't write, what do you love about your story today? For instance, "I loved how my new romantic comedy is getting funnier." If you need encouragement in another area, post about that: "Today I'm more organized than I was yesterday" or whatever you need to encourage *you* about today.

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/wnwgoingthedistance/>

This will help us to re-wire our brain circuitry to think of our writing (and/or other creative endeavors) as something that brings us joy, that we love to work on. As we re-train our minds and those neural pathways get stronger, we will naturally want to write more, and it will help us ease into better writing habits. Soon we'll be accomplishing more than ever! Trust me, I've been doing it and it works! ☺

My goal is to help you find ways to accomplish more of your writing tasks so you get closer to achieving your writing goals this year. I'm excited to be able to share what I've learned, and I encourage you to share with each other the tips and tricks (or pitfalls!) you have experienced.

Talk to you more soon!