



## What's it Really Like to Write a Book?

Meet Sue Hawkes, entrepreneur and author of *Chasing Perfection*.

In this interview, Sue shares her story of going from idea to published book.

"I wanted to dramatically increase the number of people I impact by writing this book."

Susan Baracco

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# What's it Really Like to Write a Book?



Maybe you are considering writing a book. Maybe your friends and colleagues are telling you to write a book. But something is preventing you from diving in. Maybe you are just too busy right now. Maybe you will be less busy later?

The truth is as a women leader, you are already stretched thin. Just like my woman-author-hero friend [Sue Hawkes](#). She couldn't just hit the pause button on her life while she wrote her book. She has a thriving business, a hectic travel schedule and a family vying for her time.

Sue recently completed work on her third and most important book entitled *Chasing Perfection*. In this book, Sue tackles how to stop chasing the illusion of perfection and eliminate the barriers to your full leadership potential. It will be available everywhere October 27, 2017. ([Amazon](#))

So how did she get it done? I asked her that very question and a few more that you will find interesting if you are thinking about adding book author to your list of accomplishments.

I hope you find Sue's insights valuable as you consider embarking on your own book writing journey.

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## Q: HOW DID YOU DECIDE TO WRITE A BOOK?

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I'd love to say it was a grandiose plan, but it really wasn't. We were doing our strategic planning for our company because we run our company on the Entrepreneurial Operating System (EOS). We were discussing the three-year picture, and I said, "Write a book." It was just there. I did not have an idea at that time. Nothing like "Here's what it will be about. Here's why." I wasn't particularly compelled. I just thought, there will be a book in that picture, and that's where I left it. A year later, it was still just an idea on the plan.

It was probably, I don't know, two or three months after that, when I began realizing what I wanted to write a book about. It's a consolidation of all the things I've done in putting myself in that vulnerable spot. As a result, there's a lot of my own stories, because my world is largely about confidentiality. I can't share about clients, but I can share my own.

I would say it was intuition; it felt right. It emerged from a series of ideas and things I was doing in my work. I write a column called "Inspiring Women" for Minnesota Business, and that played a big part. I was interviewing all these women and thinking "Wow, there are so many threads." I've been facilitating WPO for 15 years, and there were all the threads there. Then I looked at my entrepreneurial teams and saw more threads there. All of a sudden it came together, and I thought, "Their story is my story." So it wasn't a moment. It was a series of events that evolved and inspired me, and it began to flow. It was not any one thing.

## Q: HOW DID YOU GET STARTED?

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That's such a good question. My first thought was about this initial paralyzation that I experienced. I'm thinking "Okay. Now I'm going to start. I've got the idea." Then what? It was an "and then what" with a big gap. I began with a brain dump. I just put a bunch of things on paper, and then started working with it. But it felt like 'garbage out.' I looked at all the ideas I wrote thinking this doesn't go together. I was rather unsure about the whole thing.

I went on vacation about a month later. My mind was quiet. We were in a peaceful place. We were in Mexico. I wasn't constrained by anything. All of a sudden, the chapter titles started to flow. I thought maybe if I can just write the chapter titles, that will give me a structure for where to put all this brain dump stuff.

I had to run away from it and go somewhere to completely disconnect and be in a quiet place. Then the ideas intuitively, organically showed up. I formed a crystal clear picture of all of the chapter titles. They flowed out one morning and I ended up with ten chapters.

### **Q: DO YOU HAVE ANY TIPS FOR FITTING IT IN TO A CRAZY SCHEDULE?**

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I don't know if I have tips I'd recommend, but fit it in with a can opener. For me, it was weekends and evenings, and time on airplanes. My social life was not as robust.

I like to say, affectionately, "This is the summer in Minnesota that wasn't." It was the perfect weather. I got on my bike probably five times total, where usually I would bike every weekend. You make that choice, and it is a lot of work. I would tell people no matter how you go about it, writing eats up free time. You've got to give somewhere. You either say that's what I'm signing up for or you don't.

### **Q: WHAT WAS YOUR ULTIMATE GOAL IN WRITING THE BOOK?**

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If I were to boil it down and oversimplify it, I would say to impact more people. There's only one of me, and I love what I do. I've been asked many times by many people; why don't you write this down? You should be sharing this, put the wisdom out there. And so when I dissected it, I wanted to dramatically increase the number of people I impact by writing it.

The second thing was so that it would be useful. It's a very practical book. There's stuff to do in it. And so I wanted to reach wider audiences, to have more keynotes, more workshops to again, impact more people.

Third, my kids. They are in their late teens, early 20s, and they don't always hear me. But if I could get things in writing, I thought maybe someday that would be something perennial where they can hear from me. And it would be more

meaningful because I'm not always sure they hear me or they want to. If I can impact them favorably, that's the biggest win of all. But that's what I hope for every reader.

The fourth thing is that I've been asked by people, so I decided to write it. It's a really vulnerable place to get it written then read articles every day that are similar to what I'm saying in the book. You think people already know this stuff. And so it's very invalidating, on the one hand, to think that it's already been done. Then, on the other hand, they didn't put my spin on it. I've had a number of my biggest fans say, "It's not the way you did it, and your voice needs to be heard."

### **Q: WHAT RESOURCES OR METHODS DID YOU USE?**

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I used my personal history a lot and my business experience. Also, some came from the curriculum I co-authored with my former business partner along with shared learning and knowledge from the peer groups that I facilitate. So it's more of my eclectic background and the threads and commonalities I saw. I relied on the internet for the validation of things and anything that I quoted.

I chose to use a process through a company called [Advantage Media Group](#). They have an awesome process. They package in as much or as little book support as you need from the very beginning straight through to the marketing.

### **Q: DID YOU HAVE A CLEAR VISION OR DID IT DEVELOP OVER TIME?**

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I think it morphs, but I think the topic shrinks from more to less. I didn't have a lot of significant direction changes. I had one chapter that we went back and forth on, but for the most part, once I had the chapters set it began to take shape. I used 18 different leaders in the book to emphasize particular lessons.

The challenge was figuring out where to put everything, how to organize it. And so it didn't deviate drastically, but we have one chapter that we played around with. We settled on this new idea that came up, using it as a summary of the book and a bonus chapter.

To be honest, the paring down process nearly killed me. The editing process was three waves of editing and a lot of writing, a lot, a lot of writing because they

capture your voice, but they don't capture the spirit of what you're doing. I was very grateful to have a partner on the structure part because that's not something I naturally do. I just brain dump.

## **Q: WAS THE PROJECT EASIER OR HARDER THAN YOU EXPECTED?**

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I think I had reasonable expectations. And yet, it's hard. I think you can go into it and it's similar to training for a marathon. You have a sense of what it's like, you put in the work, you manage your expectations, and then you do it. But even while you're doing it, it's just hard. I don't know how you would be prepared until you did it.

The beginning of that process is thinking 'this is a masterpiece.' Then you think, oh, it's junk, and it's horrible, and it's too long. Then you start really editing. You have friends and colleagues, and people who are willing to criticize it. We had probably ten people give us feedback beyond the team of editors. I will tell you it is a humbling experience because good editing challenges what's on paper. It is what you fear in some regards.

People give you feedback like, "that part really is bad," or "If you're going to do this, why aren't you doing that?" My book is about entrepreneurs, leaders, business owners. They're a tough crowd anyway. And so I wanted people who aren't afraid to tell you the truth. Was I prepared? I think so. And yet, your ego gets a good bashing in this, because nothing's sacred. You want it to be good for whoever's going to pick it up, but you also are hopeful that the editors are going to say it is amazing. And they're not.

Editors read thousands of manuscripts. So they know when it's good. But they'll tell you here is where it's really bad and here is where it could be better. That's their job. Yes, I would say I think I was as ready as you can be.

## **Q: TALK ABOUT THE INVESTMENT PART OF THIS PROJECT**

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Well, I had some great guidance from people who had done it. I recommend talking to people who have written books before. Depending on how you do it, how quickly, what your expectations are, your goals, what outcomes you want for the book, the investment is going to vary.

There's time, energy, and money. You can't be working while you're writing a book the same way you're working when you're not writing a book. You're going to pare some work down. If you have time, that might not be the case. My schedule was pretty full, so I had to make adjustments.

My intent is for this book to become a bestseller. That's my intent. That's the goal. As a result, we are investing a lot of time, energy, money. There are two parts to it, from what I experienced.

The first part is that you write the book. For some people holistically, that's the goal. That's all there is. It's about having it written. Then whatever it does, it does. That's the birth of the baby. It took me about nine months, so it very much parallels pregnancy. There's the time, energy and money to do the first part.

Then the second part is the marketing of the book, which is an entire second career. Based on your goals you decide how much you want to spend. Because you can invest a ton on PR, social media, SEO, marketing companies, and how to get it out there. It's about finding great opportunities to connect with people who will spread the word and help.

For example, it's getting your network involved, like with a book launch. Do you want food at that? Do you want trinkets? How many of those? I began to realize it is so much more. I thought I was just paying for the editing, the publishing, the printing, and the tens of thousands of dollars to do just that part.

But then you've got to ask; how is the world ever going to find out about my book? Unless you are on a stage regularly shucking those books, it doesn't happen magically. It is an entirely separate subject to discuss the marketing of a book. Then there's interviewing PR companies. Many of them won't touch authors. They will tell you that books are a dime a dozen. They want celebrity. They want newsworthiness.

So how much could you spend? A lot. How much is it really? One of my mentors told me, "plan on \$250,000 when all is said and done." Not just cash out of your hand, but opportunity lost for earning your regular income. The marketing does distract your attention away from working in your own business. It's like a startup company. You've got to consider your time, energy, and actual investment cost. You level-set the expectation of your goal or intent with this book. And then consider how much you are willing to invest.

Then ask: What discretionary income do I have? How much time do I have? What's the lost opportunity in my own business? Because this is a whole different business.

## Q: WOULD YOU RECOMMEND THAT WOMEN LEADERS WRITE A BOOK?

Here's what I would say. I don't think it's for everyone, but I think if it's truly in your desires and your heart, then absolutely do it. Is it easy? No, but it's the same question; should everyone run a marathon? No. But if it's one of those things where you believe that it would matter for your legacy or the life you want to lead, it's something that matters to you and has significance; then it's worth it.

I wouldn't tell everyone, "Absolutely do it." It's nine months of your life. It's a commitment, like anything else. Throw your heart into it.

The other thing I would say is be ready for the ebb and flow. The day I was signing off on the galley was probably the worst. Honestly, I was thinking, "I am so sick of this thing. I never want to read it again." There are ebbs and flows in your emotional attachments to the book where you love it and hate it. When I saw the version of the cover though, I thought that was the most exciting thing in the entire process, to see what it was going to look like and settle on it. Very exciting.

This is where I just say if it's in your heart to do it, the universe takes care of you.

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As an executive ghostwriter & editor, I help women leaders organize and translate their wisdom and ideas into powerful thought leader content. Think of me as your personal writing concierge.

The programs I offer allow you to take the 'try it on' approach to thought leadership. I take care of the research, writing, and editing. You serve as the idea generator as well as editor for final review before publication. From a simple multi-article project to a full-length book, my clients appreciate leaving the heavy lifting to me.

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