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WRITING
TO GET BUSINESS
with Pat Iyer



C-SUITE
Radio

Business Fable Book How Tos

Mari Ryan

If you've ever picked up a book about business that seemed dry and lifeless, you'll appreciate the idea of adapting story-telling techniques to a business book. Mari Ryan's *The Thriving Hive* uses these techniques in an engaging way. Her innovative approach, matched with her collaboration with a book coach, produced an award-winning book.

Listen to this episode of *Writing to Get Business* to discover tips like these:

- Speakers who have books earn more than speakers who don't have books.
- If listeners are engaged with your message, they want to continue that engagement by reading a book by you.
- Readers will learn from and emotionally connect to stories in your books.
- A book coach can play a vital role in shaping and improving your book, especially by keeping you on track and committed to the work.
- Authors are increasingly seeing independent publishing as a way to get their books out in a timely way and to have more control over the publishing process.

Patricia: Hi. This is Pat Iyer, and this is *Writing To Get Business*. We're focusing this podcast on some of the concepts that relate to writing books that advance your business. We've gone through some models of different types of books, how books are utilized, and how they are available to create a platform for you to build your business.

And I brought on the show today Mari Ryan, who is the author of a book called *The Thriving Hive*, which she graciously sent to me. I met her as part of my involvement with the C-Suite Radio Network. The C-Suite is the largest podcast platform in the world directed at business shows. As we were talking about her book, I realized that she had a unique format that she followed. And as I read it in preparation for talking with her today, I was intrigued by the way she put the information together in a story format. Welcome to the show.

Mari: Thanks, Pat. I'm delighted to be here with you today.

Patricia: Let's take you back to where you were the time that you were getting ready to write this book. First of all, is this the first book that you wrote?

Mari: Yes, this is my first book.

Patricia: Okay. Terrific. You could have taken many routes but tell our listener what is the general area of the subject matter that you consult on or you coach on with businesses.

Mari: I'm a workplace well-being strategist. I'm working, generally, with organizations that tend to be larger, have a thousand or more employees. And I'm working with them to help them create a culture and an environment in their workplace where the people will thrive. And when people thrive, the business thrives.

Patricia: And now that we're recording this in July of 2020, it will be heard later than this, but the workplace has changed dramatically. We're no longer having individuals going to a building every day working. Are the concepts that you talk about in this book and the concepts that you consult on, are they applicable whether people are working in their homes or they're working inside a corporate setting?

Mari: It doesn't matter where people are working, because the whole point is that people still need to be working. And in order for a business to achieve their business objectives, they need to have an engaged workforce that is productive. And when we take care of ourselves and when we have the opportunity to encourage people to live healthy lifestyles and provide resources to them to help them do that, they can be more engaged and more productive. So absolutely, this all applies. And in some cases, some might think it's more difficult now because many workforces are now more distributed, but in reality, it's still equally as important. After all, we just paused the entire world to pay attention to our health. We need to be able to make sure we do that going forward.

Patricia: That's an interesting way of describing it. We certainly have gone into some radically different ways of interacting with people, of being with each other. I was thinking about this yesterday when I was in the supermarket in Pennsylvania. And literally, every person I saw was

wearing a mask, and everybody was respectful and keeping their distance. And I thought, how much our behavior has changed just in that one piece of our life of going into the store to do our food shopping, much less our work environments and connecting with people through other means, through online platforms. All of that has changed. And yet, if I'm following what you're saying, our fundamental ways of interacting with each other haven't changed in terms of our work culture or our work environment?

Mari: Well, hopefully, they haven't changed all that much. People still need to feel that they belong in an organization. They want to be connected to the people they work with. They want to be connected to the purpose and the mission of the organization for which they work. So that hasn't changed. And we just have to think about, as you say, we modified our behavior pretty quickly, and we're probably going to have to continue to make modifications to our behavior as we go forward. So, I think it's all still relevant and certainly valid.

Patricia: This has become so much of what you do in terms of helping companies. What was your motivation behind putting a book together on the topic?

Mari: I'm a speaker, as an aspect of business development. And in some cases, I'm paid to speak as well. And I've learned, through my long affiliation with the National Speakers Association, that speakers who have books earn more money than speakers that don't have books. Having been hanging out at NSA for a long time, I've seen a lot of very successful speakers and the books that they've written. So that was one of my motivating factors. And I had a story I wanted to tell.

Patricia: I've been involved with NSA for a long time as well, and I can think of times that we have had a magnetic speaker, and then we go out into the hallway and there are piles and piles of that person's book available, and the author is sitting behind a table and handing them out. I've gotten books from some really well-known speakers that way and have always gone to the bookstore at every conference and browsed through and said, "Oh. I've got to buy that book from that speaker. He was great," or, "she was great." What do you think is behind the fact that speakers who write books earn more money? Let's pull that apart, because I do believe that that's true.

Mari: I think there's a number of things. I think when you are delivering a message from the stage that is really impactful, or today's stage which is here, people feel a connection with that. And when they feel that connection, they want that to continue. So, it strikes something emotional for them and makes them want to learn more or hear more.

And this is where the add-on element of the book can carry that forth. And then it also gives them the ability to be able to share that. If it struck them personally or hit them emotionally, as we hope to do with our motivating stories, then they're going to share that with someone else. So, you could take that book that I sent you and hand it to the next person and say, "This is something you really want to read. It's a great story." And I think that all translates into dollars, because the more people are feeling a connection to what you're doing and to the message that you're delivering, then organizations are willing to pay for that, and people are willing to pay for the books, or the organization buys the book as part of your speaker deal. So that all translates to dollars.

Patricia: And when did your book come out in relation to where we are now?

Mari: The book was published in the fall of 2018, and then in the early part of 2019 it won a national business book award.

Patricia: So, the timing of this was that when your book came out you were able, at that point, to be on stages. We didn't get shut down from stages until about six months ago from when we're talking now or February and March. Did you have situations where organizations wanted your book for each person in the audience?

Mari: Not at this point, but that is one of my goals. That's what I aspire to.

Patricia: And then tell us about the business award that the book earned. How did that come about?

Mari: I submitted my book as an entry for a national business book award, it's called the Axiom Business Book Award. And they have about 25 or so different categories for the books. It's a very well-recognized national business book award. So, I submitted my book, and I was fortunate that Patrick Lencioni didn't write a book that year, because I was in the category of Business Fables. And I won a second-place award.

Patricia: I've read some of Patrick's books, and I remember that model as being intriguing. So, tell us what is a business book fable? What does that mean?

Mari: Well, it's really a story. And if you think about this, we're both speakers, and we know that when we tell stories, we can deliver a message and, at the same time, be able to give the listener and the reader something really memorable that they can relate to, that may strike some emotional aspect for them, may strike memories for them. And when we think about how messages have been passed in history; they're passed through stories. So, stories are a very powerful way to be able to deliver a message.

And I chose to use this story or the fable or parable, whichever word you want to use, format, because I love to read, I read 50, 60 books a year, and I love stories. And I thought, wouldn't that be a fun way to really be able to deliver some messages? If we think about this from a business perspective, *Who Moved My Cheese?* was a huge book that, for ages, everybody knew what *Who Moved My Cheese?* meant. Well, that's a parable, right? So that's the way I wanted to be able to deliver the message in my story.

Patricia: Your story takes place with a woman who is troubled, who goes to visit a man who has retired and is a mentor and a business leader. And you use the description of a beehive with very functional, healthy behaving bees, and another beehive where there's some really dysfunctional behavior. What led you to think about using bees as a way to get the fable about functional versus dysfunctional organizational behavior?

Mari: Wow. It's a great question, Pat. Thanks for taking the time to read the book and for that thoughtful question. I was looking for that metaphor for the workplace. And I could have just set it in two fictitious companies or one fictitious company that went through a transition, but I liked being able to use the bees as the metaphor, because bees are very interesting.

And I will tell you that I didn't know a lot about bees before I wrote this book. So, I had to do a lot of research around bees to be able to, mostly, because not always, portray them correctly. But I also wanted to be able to show this contrast between the fact that what might be

thought as a more traditional type of workplace, more command control, top-down driven, what might be considered like an old style of management, that maybe doesn't work so well anymore today.

And while that's a sort of a black and white characterization, part of what you do in a story is these characterizations. You show this stark contrast between something that works well and something that doesn't work so well. So, the dive hive, which is the perhaps less desirable hive, characterizes that command and control type of behavior, where people really aren't cared for, and where everybody is just really working towards one goal, which is profit.

It's all about the numbers, it's about making money, it's all about profit. And we've seen that that is a message that, at least in many ways today, we're hearing from many very influential business leaders that profit is not the only goal. Profit is an outcome, but it's not the goal. And by setting up these contrasting hives, we see that in the alive hive, where the leadership cares for the people, where they have a purpose that's bigger than just profit, it's creating an environment and a world in which the bees pollinate the plants and the fruits and the vegetables so that people have healthy food to eat. So, it's tied to a purpose. And purpose is really a key element in the organizational story of being able to help people really connect to something that's bigger than themselves.

Patricia: I know that when you were giving your acknowledgments to the book that you referred to the fact that you spoke to some CEOs, I think there was 10 people, in order to frame some of your thoughts related to the book. Were any of these CEOs the command and control type of people?

Mari: Actually, they weren't. When I was interviewing CEOs, the questions that I asked them were ... well, there might have been one. He, actually, was a former boss. For the most part, they were really caring people who recognized that if they only focused on profit and didn't care for the people, they were probably not going to achieve their business objectives. So, I asked them questions about what in their mind created a highly effective organization. And it was interesting to hear what some of their answers were. And a lot of the stories, some of the stories that they actually told me are embedded in the parable in

the ways that they managed and led their organizations to really put people first.

Patricia: Then I'm assuming if you had the examples from them about what was really effective, you were able to flip that so that when you were describing the dive hive, you were talking about the antithesis of that behavior. Is that a correct assumption?

Mari: Yes, absolutely. And in addition to which with my own experience of many years of working in business and the stories of people I have worked with in my career, I think it's pretty easy to be able to create the dive hive characterization of leaders that don't care about people, that will do whatever they can to use up the people and then push them aside and bring in the next round of people who will help them accomplish their goal of profit. So, it's a characterization that has existed, I would say, in business for many years. So it wasn't that hard to be able to create that characterization. Have you ever worked in a dive hive, Pat?

Patricia: I have not. I worked for seven years in a hospital where there was a great deal of forward thinking, a great deal of recognition of the value of having highly educated people on staff. I was Director of Staff Development, my first job after I got my master's degree. And I came in with lots of knowledge from my program. I was just talking about this, actually, with another person, because one of the things that I learned about in graduate school was change management, which directly relates, I think, to what we're talking about.

And I came across the term *change agent*, and I asked my instructor in my graduate program what that meant. And she said, "Well, why don't you look it up?", which is a perfectly good academic response, because it forced me to go to the library before we had the ability to sit at our desks and use computers. And I learnt about change management.

And when I took my first position as Director of Staff Development, I spent a week working in the hospital. I was in charge of the nursing staff development. I spent a week working on each of the nursing units as a staff nurse. This took six weeks. And I took care of patients, and I charted, and I got to know the people. And those six weeks yielded me years' worth of benefits, because the staff saw me as

somebody who could do their work, same work as they were doing. They realized that I was there to learn and to get to know people. And I developed relationships that I could then build on throughout the seven years that I was in charge of nursing education. It prevented me from getting into the mindset that I think is part of the command and control of, “Do it my way. I don’t really care what you have to say.”

Mari: Right.

Patricia: “I know best. You don’t know best.” I learned how to listen and to absorb and to recognize everybody’s perspective that went into making sound decisions.

Mari: Excellent.

Patricia: So now I can’t say I have worked in that environment, but I became an entrepreneur because I really wanted the freedom to be able to be in control of my life and not have to go through a committee process or wait for weeks and months to implement a new project. When you own your own business, you can make a decision today. You could say, “Today, I want to do this,” and you put it in place, and it's done. But if you're part of a bureaucratic structure, that doesn’t work that way.

Mari: Right. Well, congratulations. I’m really delighted to hear that you've never had the experience of working in a dive hive. I think many of our listeners will relate to the story about the dive hive, because so many of us have. And you're very fortunate to have the opportunity to have worked in a place that was much more nurturing and forward thinking.

Patricia: Thank you. I think that comes from the woman who was the Vice President of Nursing, who got it. Let's go to the structure of your book, again, because I’m curious, when you sat down and you started to write this, did you have this all mapped out, or did it evolve as you were writing?

Mari: I did not have it all mapped out; I will admit. So that was one of the things. I knew the key points. So, the key points that I wanted to make and the key kinds of behaviors that I wanted to identify and describe, I had those mapped out. And then what I needed to do, I did work with

a book coach to help me with this, who also served as my editor and did the production work when we get ready to publish.

We would meet once a week. So, I would be writing every week with the goal of having certain parts done. And we would brainstorm about where we go next or he would give me feedback on what he read. And that process, the back and forth, really helped me build the story, identify the arc of the story, where it gets to a place where there's a catastrophe and they have to respond, and we see the differences of how the two organizations respond to the catastrophe. So, it really was a very helpful process to help with how to carry that story arc through and go back and forth between narration of dive hive and the alive hive.

Patricia: Interspersed with comments between the two human characters as well who are carrying the story forward.

Mari: Right, the narration aspect. Yeah.

Patricia: As you talk about the story arc, I realize that I was reading it, it didn't strike me at the time, I wasn't analytical enough to say, "Ah, that's where the crisis occurs." But you are right, as I got pulled into the story, I could see there were two very different ways that they were approaching that problem. One with alive hive where people were effectively problem-solving and looking at the problem from all different perspectives, and the other where the queen was basically asleep and missing in action and not providing the leadership that the group needed.

Mari: Exactly, there's the message right there.

Patricia: Well, we won't give away the end of the story, because people who plan to read *Thriving Hive*, that is your book ...

Mari: That the book is also available on Audible. It's paperback and audible and e-book as well. So, we meet everybody's varying needs and interests and how they like to read. And one of the things I love about the Audible aspect of it and having someone read you the story is that it comes to life in a way, and the woman who did the narration for the audio book, she told me afterwards, there are 80 characters in this book and she used some different voices, different ways of

personifying the bees, the characters. So, it's really fun to listen if our audience prefers to be listeners rather than traditional readers.

Patricia: You know, that is a challenge. I mean in a book with that many characters, how could you alter your voice that many ways?

Mari: She was fabulous. She's really good.

Patricia: Wow.

Mari: Yeah. So, for those who prefer audio books to reading, then I'd highly recommend it. It's really fun. And it's short, it's under three hours on Audible.

Patricia: And I'll bet she had fun with that, too. That's not the typical book that an audio narrator is asked to present. More like a novel. Novels tend to have lots of characters as well.

Mari: Exactly.

Patricia: At least some novels.

Mari: And she did a great job.

Patricia: I noticed that, and maybe I'm correct in this assumption, that this was an independently published book?

Mari: Yes, it was.

Patricia: Pequossette Press, is that how you pronounce it?

Mari: Yeah. Pequossette Press.

Patricia: Okay. There's been debate, and some of our guests have talked about the advantages and the disadvantages of independently publishing your books. What was the driving factor behind your decision to do that as opposed to go to a traditional publisher?

Mari: I think there were two things, one was timing, and the other was control. It would have taken a lot longer for me to shop the book, if you will, to a traditional publisher. My book coach had advised that the parable format is less common and less typical for traditional publishers. And it gave us much more control, to be able to control the

timing and get it out in the format that we wanted. It has illustrations in it, so being able to have all the illustrations exactly where we wanted. It was mostly those two reasons.

Patricia: I noticed the illustrations; they really got my attention. Did you work with an artist who read the manuscript, or did you tell the artist, “This is what I’m looking for,” because they are quite distinct illustrations.

Mari: We provided guidance. It was not a matter of reading the manuscript and then interpreting it. We actually gave the guidance of what we wanted to see in the illustrations.

Patricia: Interesting. I interviewed another person, Jennifer Fondrevay, who you may know from C-Suite as well, who hired a person who did caricatures. Her book was on mergers and acquisitions, and some of the personalities that develop during the process of trying to integrate two different companies. And she went through the same process that you did, of explaining the concepts of the book. And this person was creating the drawings as she was writing the book, before she was finished. And it was spot on in terms of the final product that he came up with.

Mari: It's a great approach.

Patricia: Yours, I think, really enhanced the book for sure.

Mari: Thank you.

Patricia: What's next for you? Do you have another book inside you?

Mari: That's always a good question. I sometimes think about that, as to whether there's another story that I want to tell, would I want to write a more traditional book? I still contemplate that question and haven't determined whether that's where I want to put my energy right now.

Patricia: Well, you know that Patrick has done quite well with his business fables.

Mari: Yes.

Patricia: Those books have sold well, and he's done several that were in that genre of that top people concepts of management. I'm trying to think about when his books came out. At least 10 years ago or maybe 15 or

20 years ago. But I always think of him related to, yes, he's got that perfect example of putting a story together. Now, I've got another model that I can point to, which is your book.

Mari: Thank you.

Patricia: Any other points that you'd like to share? Any last-minute tips that you can give a reader who is thinking about writing a book and is saying, "You know, is it really worth all the work that goes into it?" What would you say?

Mari: Well, I think you have to really reflect on why you're writing the book, what's your purpose, why do you want to do this? And if it supports that why, then I would say absolutely go for it. One of the things I found most helpful for me was having very specific designated times when I was going to be writing. So, I blocked the time on my calendar. For me, I needed to do it early in the day, that's when my energy is highest. And I was able to complete my first draft in just under three months. And it was through that discipline of having the time designated, of being held accountable by having a book coach.

So, I think that's an important thing to think about. Not only was I accountable to have something done by the time we met next, but I was paying this person, so it was my money that I was investing. And that, I think, also helped me really stay focused. I tend to be a fairly self-disciplined person, so the focus and being able to find the time to write wasn't that difficult for me, but it was really fulfilling when I finished the project and when I was able to get feedback from the reviewers and other people that read the book. And then, of course, when I won a national business book award, like, "Hey, somebody besides my mother really likes this." So, it was fun and fulfilling.

Patricia: How can our listener find out more about you, the services that you offer, and order a copy of *The Thriving Hive*?

Mari: Well, my company is called Advancing Wellness, and we can be found on the internet at advwellness.com. And you can read more about my book on our website. You can find me on LinkedIn. And the book is available from Amazon in paperback, e-book, and also available on audible.

Patricia: And let me spell your name, it is M-A-R-I, Mari, and then Ryan, R-Y-A-N. And for those of you who are listening to this on our audio channels, the book is called *The Thriving Hive*. And for those of you who are watching this on our YouTube channel at Pat Iyer, you have seen me hold up the book, *The Thriving Hive*. The title of the book is the same whether you're listening or you're watching, but I wanted to make sure that I was clear on the title because I sometimes forget that not everybody is watching our show, and it adds another dimension if you tune into our YouTube channel.

Thank you so much for being our guest and talking about your book, and thank you to you, who is listening to this, have invested a half an hour of your time to get inspired, to get new ideas about writing books, to see what books can do for your business, and how you can take an area of expertise and create a business fable, yet another genre of book for you to consider.

It's important as you think about the message that we've heard today, to recognize that one of the things that Mari talked about was the importance of having a business coach. A business coach who is helping you with your book, or also a book coach, is an individual who can help keep you moving forward, because it is so easy to lose your focus, to say, "Oh, I'll do it later," or, "I've got other priorities."

And you've heard from Mari that a business book coach helped her stay on track so that she could get it done. I help people in that capacity as a book coach to assist individuals shepherd the book through the process from the idea to the completion and the publication.

So, if that is of interest to you, please, be sure to connect with me through my website at PatIyer.com. And be sure to listen in next week when we have a new topic, a new guest, or if you're listening to shows and binge listening, you'll find another episode cued up right after this one. Thanks so much for being a listener of *Writing To Get Business podcast*.



Hi. This is Pat Iyer with Writing To Get Business, and I have with me today Marjorie Saulson. We just finished a podcast recording, and I wanted to ask Marjorie, what is our listener or viewer going to get from your show?

Marjorie: Well, Pat, perhaps if you're a writer, maybe the most important thing I share is how to totally avoid writer's block, and then how to use your subconscious mind to help you write, and how to separate out your creative side from your editorial side so that when you're being creative, you can tell your editor to shut up and stop interfering with your creation.

Patricia: Those are great points, Marjorie, and they are ones that people find to be aggravating, because they can get into a creative mode and then, all of a sudden, their own instincts to do editing interfere with the writing. I'm sure that people will enjoy your program. They'll understand, if they'd been doing any writing at all, and especially if they're working on a book, how knowing these tips can make their process flow much more easily. And thank you for sharing what you just did on the podcast, and be sure to look for Marjorie Saulson, S-A-U-L-S-O-N. Look for her show on *Writing To Get Business Podcast*.