
Full Transcripts For
Writing To
Get Business

WRITING
TO GET BUSINESS
with Pat Iyer



C-SUITE
Radio

Overcoming Writer's Block

Marjorie Saulson

Do you worry about writer's block? Do you get great ideas that you later forget? Do your creative and editorial minds fight each other? If any of these are true for you, you will benefit from this interview with best-selling author, Marjorie Saulson. She has dealt with all of these issues in her own writing, and she will share the simple solutions she's discovered and practiced.

Tune into this episode of Writing to Get Business Podcast for these tips.

- Short paragraphs are far more readable than long ones.
- You don't have to begin writing at the beginning of your book or article.
- Read your work aloud to catch errors.
- When you hire an editor, be coachable by listening to her/his recommendations.
- Learn to listen to your unconscious wisdom and write down its messages.

Patricia: Hi, this is Pat Iyer with Writing To Get Business. I have with me today Marjorie Saulson, who I met as part of a coaching group called the Joint Ventures Insiders Circle. Marjorie is a master at communication, and I thought it was appropriate, since this podcast is all about written communication, that I bring her on the show to talk with you about her books and her insights regarding mastering written communication. Marjorie, welcome to the show.

Marjorie: It's my pleasure to be here, Pat. Thanks so much for inviting me.

Patricia: I know that you're the author of a book, and you've also contributed a chapter to a book that is a compilation book. I'd like to start, first of all, with asking you about your first book. And can you hold that up for the people who are watching this podcast on my YouTube channel? She's holding up a book. Can you read the title for us?

Marjorie: Yes. It's *Empowering Business Owners To Overcome Speaking Fears*, whether you're talking with one person or one thousand. See, my thing is I originally called myself a public speaking coach, Pat, but I didn't like that title because people think public speaking, and they think speech. I think public speaking is any time you talk to anybody other than yourself. And it's the same when you say, you don't say that when you're writing, you're just writing a speech. You're writing all kinds of things.

So, I changed my title to communication confidence coach, because people want to feel confident about what they're communicating. And whether you're writing it or you're saying it, you want to feel that you have the right message and that it makes sense, it's well organized, and it resonates with your ideal people. And so, I have some tricks I'm going to share with you about how to write more easily and access your subconscious, which is your secret weapon. That's my international bestseller on Amazon.

Patricia: Perfect. All right. Well, we're going to unpack that.

Marjorie: And the other book, this is a compilation, and you have 50 authors in this compilation of *America's Leading Ladies, Stories of Courage, Challenge, And Triumph*. And if I can brag a little, I'm in there with Oprah Winfrey and Melinda Gates, among others. To be asked to have been in this book was a huge, huge honor. I'm really thrilled to be in it.

Patricia: You were approached then about adding a chapter to that book?

Marjorie: Yes, yes.

Patricia: Is that what happened?

Marjorie: I was invited to do that, yeah.

Patricia: How did the person who organized that book come across you? Do you know what the connection was?

Marjorie: Yeah, she found me online.

Patricia: All right. That's another vote for the value of websites.

Marjorie: Absolutely. Absolutely. Well, actually, where she found me is that I had been named both Top Speaking Coach of the Year and Top Motivational Speaker of the Year by the International Association of Top Professionals. So that's where she found several of us who are in the book. I'm lucky that, obviously, she felt that I deserved to be there.

Patricia: What did you write your chapter about?

Marjorie: I wrote my chapter about overcoming the fear of public speaking. You know, on the list of fears, that's the number one fear. And there's a very funny YouTube video from Jerry Seinfeld where he points out that people are more afraid of public speaking than death. And that means at a funeral, most people would rather be the body in the box than the person delivering the eulogy.

The other thing about public speaking, my other favorite quote, I know we're talking about writing, but this is from a writer, Mark Twain, a lot of people don't know, he lost his book money in some kind of boondoggle. So, he made his living the latter of his life going literally around the world giving speeches. And he said that there are two types of speakers, those who are nervous, and those who are liars. And the fact is if you're writing a book, eventually you're going to need to talk about it.

Patricia: Absolutely. That could be the subject of a whole different podcast, is how you market and promote that book to make it worthwhile and to make all the effort that went into it pay off.

Marjorie: Yes, that's true.

Patricia: Going back to your first book, and I know we've touched on this so far, the fear of public speaking was your topic. How did you get interested in that topic?

Marjorie: Well, my very first business coach said something I've never forgotten. Your mess is your message. I didn't talk till I was four years old, I was a shy introvert, I had a hard time sharing my thoughts and ideas, and I had to do a lot of work on myself to become a confident communicator. When I first got into the idea of growing in business, I had been a volunteer for many years. I had chaired things, and I had been president of things, and I was a certified adult trainer

and did workshops and so forth. And I think at some point in your life it's important, periodically, to reinvent yourself. After several decades of being a volunteer, and my definition of a volunteer, Pat, by the way, is somebody who gets aggravated for free.

Patricia: Somebody who gets aggravated for free?

Marjorie: Yes.

Patricia: Interesting. I have been a volunteer for many parts of my life, so I love that definition.

Marjorie: Yeah. Anyway, I decided that I would like to go into business, and because I had trained as a teacher. I have a teaching certificate from Michigan. I taught Russian and French, and then I got a Master's in Audiovisual Education. I saw this community course for voice acting. And you know, voice actors are those folks that where you hear the voice, and you don't see them. They're the ones who tell you to watch your luggage in the airport, and do commercials, and cartoons and stuff.

I thought that might be fun. Then I took the voice acting, which I'm delighted I did. Then I decided breaking into voice acting is just about as easy as breaking into acting, period. But everything I learned as a voice actor helped me help people make their talks and presentations more interesting so that they don't sound like a robo-call.

I decided to switch to coaching people about communication. When I did my market research, Pat, it was really interesting. Everybody I talked to said they wanted to feel more confident. I kept hearing that word "confident." "I want to feel confident when I communicate."

I think this is true for writing as it is for speaking. The thing with writing is that generally you have time to go over it, and if you're doing the speaking live, it's out there and you're done. I think that's one of the reasons people feel so nervous about it. But I decided that that's what I wanted to do, I wanted to help people. And because I'm a writer and a former magazine editor myself, I didn't want to call myself simply a public speaking coach, because people think that's only giving speeches, and I think it's any time you talk to anybody other than yourself.

And writing is a very important form of communication, and not only what you write, but how you lay it out. I invite everybody who's listening to this, go look at your LinkedIn profile. Is that About section in what I call a big blob of text in a small font graphic school design. Do you send an email to somebody or have you gotten emails that are this big blob of text?

I will tell you, this is not how to write, but when you're laying out your writing, the studies show that people tend to skim, and they read the first line, maybe the second line of a paragraph. So, when you labor over your writing, and you want people to read more of it, make your paragraphs very short, ideally, no longer than about four lines. Then put a blank line in between so that people can very easily read what you've written.

You've worked so hard to write it, you want people to read what you've written. I wanted to stick in that visual piece along with it. Because when you're writing, and when you're laying out a book, if you're writing, whether it's a book or an email or an article, keep the paragraphs short, and people will be able to read what you've written much more easily.

Patricia: I think that's a huge trend that we're seeing, Marjorie, as time goes on. Paragraphs used to be the ideal length of 10 lines. And now it's gone down to at most six, because all of our attention spans keep shrinking and shrinking and shrinking.

Marjorie: That's true. That's absolutely true. Anyway, I think, Pat, when you invited me to speak, you wanted me to share my secrets to how you let your subconscious mind do your writing for you.

Patricia: That sounds like a noble subject, let's go with that.

Marjorie: Okay. First of all, keep in mind that you do not ever have to have anything that is called writer's block. The reason I think people get writer's block is they sit down—Hemingway described writing as sitting down in front of the typewriter and bleeding.

I think the reason people get writer's block is they think, "Well, I've got to start at the beginning." No, you don't. You just start anywhere, just keep typing. On the old days when you couldn't do cut and paste, I remember starting writing and having it on a legal pad and then

drawing a circle, and then an arrow going here because this had to move there and whatever. Just write it. Just create a crummy first draft.

When you know you have to write about something or you're thinking about writing something, all of a sudden, an idea will pop in your head and you'll think, "Oh, that's a good idea." Write it down. It is a gift from your subconscious. Write it down. Because if you don't write it down and you wait till later, "Now, what was that great idea I had?" Your subconscious will not give that gift back to you.

Always write down any idea you have, even if it is not fitting with what you're writing right then. In fact, you might want to keep a notebook. I used to keep one of those three-sided files and write things on 2 by 5 cards or pieces of paper and throw it in there, and then periodically dig it out. You will get some great ideas that way.

When you actually sit down to write, just you've got two sides in your brain, you've got the creative side and you've got the editorial side. When you are engaging the creative side, just tell the editor to shut up. There is nothing that's going to slow you down faster and frustrate you more and turn off your creative juices than trying to edit yourself as you're creating. Just create, and don't worry, by the way, about the big blobs of text with a small font. If stream of consciousness works for you, do it. Just write it, your kind of scrappy, crummy whatever first draft.

Patricia: And it's so tempting to get into the editing mode, it's like a siren song that says, "Oh, Marjorie, you could revise this sentence and get rid of the passive voice. If you just do a little fiddling instead of writing the rest of it. Just make it perfect now."

Marjorie: Now, listen, Pat, if you're writing and you think of a better way to write something, then just write it. Just keep writing it. Let it come out of your creative brain. Then let it rest. Let it rest. Then you can go back and then play around and bring out the editor.

One of the things that you can do that I find really a marvelous way to edit my own stuff is I read it aloud. It's interesting because one of the reasons I do that is because, for some reason, I'm always writing 'of' when I mean 'to', or 'of', 'to', and, yeah, I mix up my prepositions,

and they're always crazy. The thing is when you read something and you just read it over visually, your eyes skips right over anything that doesn't sound right.

When you read what you've written aloud, and you hear yourself saying it, you can hear whether it sounds good to you, you can hear whether it makes sense, you can hear if you, in my case, put 'to' where you meant 'of', or 'of' where you meant 'to'. Editing your own stuff aloud is, to me, the best way to do your own editing. Now, granted, you want a professional editor if you're doing a book, because that's a whole other level, but you don't have to have all kinds of messy stuff that causes your editor to do a lot of extra work which ends up costing you more money for the editing.

And you want whatever you write to sound like it's in your voice, and the only way you really know if it sounds like it's in your voice, if you say it aloud. Letting your subconscious help you, and by the way, what's interesting, when you're editing and saying it aloud, that allows your creative brain, you will start channeling all kinds of good stuff that will come from the creative side of your brain as you're editing. It's amazing how that works. As long as you're not beating yourself up that, "Oh, I can't believe I said it that way." No, forget it. When you read something aloud and it doesn't quite flow the way you want, then play around with it. Say it a few different ways until you like it, and then write it up.

Patricia: I want to go back, Marjorie, to something that you just said that is a thought that circles around in my brain at times, and that is preserving your own voice when you're writing. I think that that works for the majority of people who can formulate sentences and be coherent and clear, but there are some people whose voice is not coherent, who speak in a disjointed way, who are disorganized or not using English properly.

I think that they benefit, of all of the population, this is my opinion, and I'm curious to see if you see it this way, but they really benefit from having an editor because their voice sounds normal to them, that's the way that they speak and the way that they write, and yet they're violating a lot of rules of English. Tell me about how far we as editors go to helping people preserve their own voice when their own voice is not that good to begin with. Let me just be blunt.

Marjorie: Okay, so speaking as a former magazine editor who had to walk this narrow way, walk this very narrow bridge, first of all, let me explain my bias. I am a former language teacher. It annoys me no end when people use incorrect grammar. And so, I think when you're the editor of somebody whose grammar is bad, I think one of the things you might want to do is say, "This is my standard of editing. My standard of editing is correct grammar and correct usage. And if that is something that is important to you, I will do that. If it's not, maybe you better find another editor."

There are some people who are not a good fit to work with me. I work with people who need one or all of three things, which is what I consider the three-legged stool of effective communication, what, how and allow. What's your message? Does it make sense? How are you either writing it or saying it? If you're speaking it, are you doing it with an interesting way of speaking it, and if you're writing it, are you writing it so that it's easy for people to read, like we were talking about not a big blob of text? And the third piece is are you allowing yourself to do it, getting over the fear?

And so, I help people with all of those, and not everybody is a good fit for me. If somebody is not open to getting help or you know, when you are working with somebody on something that's their baby, it's got to be a good fit. I don't know about you, but if you start working with somebody and you start dreading, and you wish you could fire this client, maybe that's somebody who needs to work with somebody who is not as particular and who does not hold that high standard of language.

On the other hand, if you tell somebody upfront, "Listen, this is the way I operate. Everything that has my imprimatur has correct usage. And make sure that I'm not going to change your ideas, but I am going to change how you express them if they're incorrectly expressed."

And so, I would just ask permission right ahead of time for somebody like that and let them know upfront. And if they're not willing to, you know, I have to tell you, my sister once said to me, "Will you stop correcting my grammar?" This is where this advice comes from, by the way, Pat. I decided my relationship with her was more important than, yeah. But if it's not somebody like that, then you have to decide,

is this somebody who is open to the kind of gift that you provide. When you are editing somebody, you are giving them the gift of your mind, your heart, your understanding, your wisdom. And if they're not open to that, they're not your person. Sorry to offer a little tough love.

Patricia: And it's a reflection on that person's professional credibility and authority that what they have put together in the form of a paper or a report is accurate. I know this territory well, Marjorie, because I had a business for 28 years supplying expert witnesses. And after a disastrous experience with an expert who couldn't write simple English, I decided that I needed to proofread all of my experts' reports before they went to the attorney.

When the attorney is calling you up and saying, "Pat, did you see this report before she sent it to you?", you know that's not a good question, that there's going to be more to that story. So, the vast majority of experts whose reports I proofread and then employees within my company proofread, the experts appreciated the changes.

But I do have a vivid memory of a woman who got highly affronted, in all caps, exclamations, bold size 18 font that anyone would do anything to her masterpiece. It cost her thousands of dollars of work that she would have gotten from my company if she had been open to the idea that her reports were disorganized, they didn't include full sentences, they weren't coherent. She didn't see those flaws and she got so upset with me that she said, "I'll never take any more work from your company again." And I thought, "Good. You're not hurting me by doing that, you're hurting yourself." But we parted ways. She accepted 97. 98% of the changes that I suggested that she put in her report, and then we stopped giving her work.

So, you can have a direct financial impact by not being coachable, or willing to accept another viewpoint, or recognize that you need to make some changes so that other people will understand what you've put in writing.

Marjorie: The other thing I think is really important, before you ever start writing anything, it helps to have an outline of what you really want to share. When somebody is giving a talk, I recommend not more than three points because people aren't going to remember them. And my

basic outline is to find a wonderful opening sentence, tell people that you're going to be covering these three points, then say, first, this point, second, that point, third, this point. Then say, "I share these three things with you," and then have a wonderful closing sentence.

What happens when you're writing, one of the reasons people get writer's block is they think they have to start out with this fabulous first sentence. The fact is that when you are in the middle of writing whatever, all of a sudden, a great opening or closing sentence may just pop right into your brain. Write it down immediately so you don't forget it. Any gift you get from your subconscious, write down immediately because it could disappear, and you might never get it back.

But those are the two things I would say, listen to your subconscious, and don't think you have to start at the beginning, just start writing. It's more than two things, actually. Keep your editor quiet. "Shut up, we are creating now. You will have your turn." And then read whatever you've got aloud, and then you will hear the things that don't quite make sense. It's amazing how your eye just floats right past all kinds of craziness, and the minute you read it aloud, you think, "Ooh." You can do a lot of your own editing, and when you read it aloud is when you'll get a lot of other good ideas to include.

Patricia: Wow. That was such a nice summary, Marjorie. You told us what you were going to tell us, you told us, and then you told us what you told us. I think I've seen that formula used once or twice before.

Marjorie: Yeah. Well, I just read a statistic, that we tend to remember after three days, about 5% of what we heard presented orally. That's why it's important, if something's important, write out the notes. And what's interesting, in writing with your hand rather, you know, typing, tends to help you remember things much better, even if you never reread the notes. It's involving your sight, your hearing, and the kinesthetic, actually using your body to reinforce what you're learning.

Patricia: You know, I always take written notes when I'm listening to a talk or I'm involved in a virtual conference, and I feel like it helps me understand what I'm hearing better when I'm writing those key points in my notebook. And I think you're right, I very rarely go back and

look at it, but I feel like I'm absorbing it better whenever I write it down.

Marjorie: Absolutely. It forces your brain to listen more carefully, and it helps imprint the ideas in your mind.

Patricia: You know, and another interesting thing that comes out of that, Marjorie, is that if we have such poor retention, and we are both marketers and we're both sharing information with people, we have to think about how our learners absorb information. For example, I just completed a four-day conference, and we are, as part of the package, selling the video recordings, the audio recordings, and the transcripts. And my co-planner and I talked about, "Well, are transcripts really necessary?" I said, "Yes, I think they are." For the people who want to be able to go back and refer to that 95% of content that they forgot, but they don't want to listen to an audio to find that five-minute segment that had key points they wanted to refer to or they don't have the time to sit through watching a video again, to me, a transcript makes perfect sense to be able to quickly locate information. Has that been your experience?

Marjorie: I underline, I highlight, I put arrows, I put asterisks in the margin. Yeah, I love transcripts.

Patricia: Perfect. Well, then we see eye to eye, which is always reassuring. I love to talk to people who I see eye to eye with.

Marjorie: Yeah.

Patricia: Well, how can our listeners find out more about you, about your books, about what you offer?

Marjorie: All right. Well, I invite everybody to go to my website. It's vibrantvocalpower.com, because my goal is to help people come into the full power of their voices. So, it's vibrantvocalpower.com. When you get to my website, you will see that there is a link. I have a complementary report, "Communicate With Confidence."

And in there are 10 powerful pathways to overcome your public speaking fears, so even if you struggle with them for years. And when I updated it, I added an 11th pathway, how to get your nerves to serve you instead of sabotaging you when you need to speak in public, or

on what happens when you have the same subject matter but you keep morphing it and developing it and moving it into different directions, and how each of those moves led to yet another book by Joanna.

Joanna: And another program. Each one of them kept spawning new programs, so I was able to stay out on the speaking circuit with brand new material.

Patricia: Perfect, even better.

Joanna: Even better.

Patricia: That's what Writing To Get Business is all about.

Joanna: That's right.

Patricia: Thanks, Joanna.

Joanna: And thank you, Pat.