

the REWARDS of REVIEWS

WRITE A BOOK REVIEW THAT HELPS, NOT HINDERS

BY DIANNA BOOHER, CSP, CPAE

Sooner or later, a colleague will ask you to write a review of their book on Amazon or Barnes & Noble, and you'll either 1) say "yes" and do it well, 2) say "yes" and do it so poorly that the friend regrets having asked, or 3) say "no" because you think it takes too long or consider it a poor investment of your time.

Make sure you're in the first group.

Why Do Reviews?

First, your reviews of others' books can help your own sales and speaking business. Just be sure to log in from your Author Central Profile on Amazon to ensure that your "official" author signature will appear with your reviews. For example, when I review a book, my signature on that review appears as, "Dianna Booher, Author of *What MORE Can I Say*." (You can change the book title that appears with your name or even add two titles at any time.)

Most book buyers purchase more than one title on any given subject. So,

when they're looking for a book on leadership, customer service or other topic, they'll see other titles mentioned in the book review section, which triggers them to look at your book and consider it for purchase also.

Another reason to learn what goes in a great book review is to help clients who love your book and offer to write a review. They often ask, "What would you like me to emphasize?" Not everyone knows what a good review should do, and their question is your open door to educate would-be reviewers to your advantage.

Other personal reasons you may want to learn to write a good book review:

- ★ To draw attention to your speaking, training or consulting business.
- ★ To run book reviews of other major business books on your subscription sites.
- ★ Or just to look intelligent! Amazon tracks how many of your reviews get helpful ratings. Notice the question

beneath your review, where Amazon asks, "Was this review helpful to you?" Doesn't look too good for you when no one clicks your reviews as helpful!

A final reason: Writing a great review will most definitely be important to your friend's book sales! Amazon tracks quantity and quality of reviews—and counts both in its algorithms.

So, let's get into the specifics. And in case you're thinking, "Won't writing a quality review take a lot more time than just writing, 'Joe So-and-So, the customer-service guru of our modern era, has written the definitive book on giving feedback. This book will answer every question you may have as a new manager. Highly recommended'?" Yes, writing a good review will take more time than that. But not much more. You should be able to write a good review in five to 10 minutes.

One caveat: The following do's and don'ts apply to commercial book reviews to increase book sales—not literary critiques. There is a difference.

Point out particularly helpful sections that the reader wouldn't know by simply reading the editorial copy on the jacket cover.

Review “Do’s”



Write an overview in a sentence or two that states the concept of the book (but don't just repeat the editorial copy).

Restate the author's purpose for writing the book and give your opinion about whether the author achieved that stated purpose.



Comment on how the book compares or differs from others on the market in this field. Dan Janal of PR Leads did this powerfully with this review comment: “If you're a fan of Robert Cialdini's *Influence* or Dan Kennedy's copywriting books, you MUST read *What More Can I Say?* It has up-to-date research on how to influence people. Some of the work will challenge established beliefs like adding more benefits and bonuses actually decreases people's perceptions of your offer.” Notice, too, how Dan also tossed in a great teaser.

Point out particularly helpful sections that the reader wouldn't know by simply reading the editorial copy on the jacket cover. Jacob Paulsen wrote this about *Execution IS the Strategy*:



“I found a lot of value in the sections about training and coaching. Understanding how to best create an environment of mentors, for example, was really helpful.” An anonymous Amazon customer had this to say about *Complainers and Energy Drainers*: “I specifically like the ways to refocus conversations with complainers and the actual words I can use.”



Point out a negative or weakness in the book—if you see any. (If this is a friend or respected colleague, obviously you do not want to write a bad review. Yet pointing out what some might call a “weakness” actually lends credibility to your overall favorable review.)

The following are some examples of a “negative” that I recently wrote in reviews of books by colleagues—each intended as a back-handed positive. About Rory Vaden's book *Procrastinate on Purpose*: “Don't let the title mislead you—this book covers much more ground than the title implies.” (The positive: Don't pass this book up just because you think it's about procrastination; he has a bigger theory here!)

For a review on *Nourished* by Becky Johnson and Rachel Randolph, I wrote this “negative”: “The authors are at their best and funniest in the chapter

on nourishing your marriage relationship; they offer totally opposite viewpoints on adding romance—both valid and substantial.” (The weakness: The two authors disagreed in what they said. The back-handed compliment? Both made substantial points.)

The goal in pointing out a weakness with a colleague's book is somewhat the same as the job applicant's when asked the clichéd question: “What is your biggest weakness?” Answer: “I'm a perfectionist.”



Point out anything about the book's organization or design (photos, diagrams, data, assessments, surveys, downloadables to accompany the book) that's particularly helpful or unique.

Establish the credibility of the author if you are aware of his/her reputation in the field.



Give your overall opinion about the book: Is it worth reading? For all audiences? A particular audience? (Joyce Weiss commented on *Klout Matters*: “This book is perfect for both the experienced and the new social networker.”)

Review “Don’ts”



Don’t confuse a review with a jacket blurb. (Example: “[Title] is a must-read for leaders in any field who want to increase their influence, elevate their brand and accelerate their growth. Read it before your competition does!” Such comments sound like copywriting and will not be taken seriously as a review.)

Don’t write the review as if you’re the author’s best buddy. For centuries, novelists have commented on the work of their peers—both privately and publicly. But your review should be written from a professional point of view.



Don’t write such a lengthy review that the reader has no need to buy the book. Your goal is to write a teaser—to give your opinion about how this book differs from oth-

ers in the field, to point out what key information it might provide a reader, and to help a reader decide whether to buy it or not.



Don’t reveal the ending of a novel or a key story in a nonfiction work.

Don’t slam a book. If you can’t in good faith write an overall good review, don’t write the review at all.



Admittedly, this last “don’t” is my own personal philosophy because I like to get a good night’s sleep. Dorothy Parker must have been having a bad hair day when she wrote these two comments about a book by one of her contemporaries: “This is not a novel to be tossed aside lightly. It should be thrown with great force.” “She runs the gamut of emotions from A to B.”

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Here are a few other famous put-downs that have lived on as part of the author-reviewer’s reputation. Mary McCarthy about Lillian Hellman: “Every word she writes is a lie, including ‘and’ and ‘the.’” Truman Capote on Jacqueline Suzanne: “She doesn’t write, she types.” Gore Vidal: “The three saddest words in the English language are Joyce Carol Oates.” My guess is that you have more positive ways to build your reputation.

The upshot: Do your colleagues and yourself a favor. Read the book, write the review and sell some books!



Dianna Booher, CSP, CPAE, is the best-selling author of 46 books, published in 26 languages, with nearly 4 million copies sold. She

works with organizational leaders to increase their effectiveness through clear communication and executive presence. Her latest books include What More Can I Say?, Creating Personal Presence: Look, Talk, Think, and Act Like a Leader and Communicate With Confidence (Revised Edition). National media such as Good Morning America, USA Today, The Wall Street Journal, PR, Investor’s Business Daily, Bloomberg, Forbes.com, FastCompany.com, Fox, CNN International, Success and Entrepreneur have interviewed her for opinions on critical workplace communication issues. Visit www.BooherResearch.com and www.WhatMoreCanISayTheBook.com.