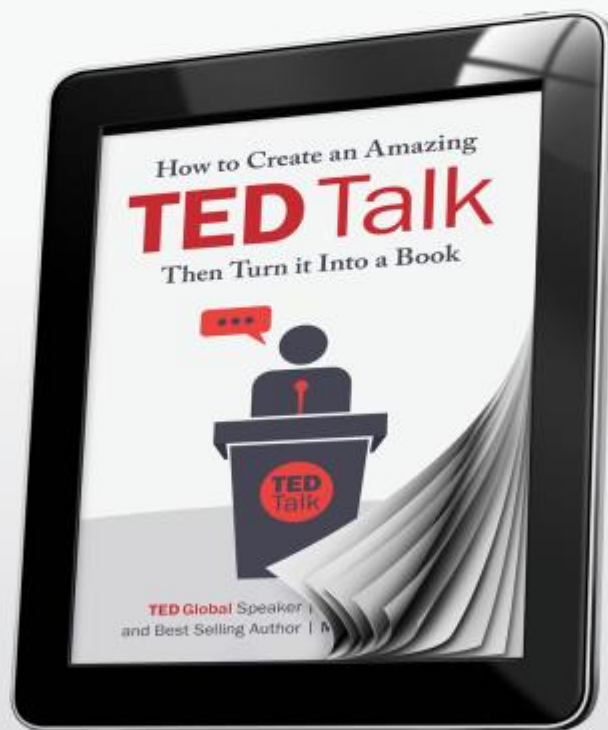


How to Create an Amazing
TED Talk
Then Turn it Into a Book



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and Best Selling Author | **Melissa G Willson**

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Introduction: What it Takes to Create a Great TED Talk

"There's zero correlation between being the best talker and having the best ideas." ~Susan Cain

(If you're not familiar with TED talks, what they are, why they matter, please go to TED.com and familiarize yourself with them. They are among the most fascinating talks in the world, as they should be. They are also some of the most radical and innovative ideas, presented by some of the world's greatest minds.)

The simplest things are the most complex. It only takes one thing to create a TED Talk — an idea worth spreading. Doing that is easier said than done. Brilliant ideas are a dime a dozen. It's the brilliant implementation of an ordinary idea, like selling books online (Amazon), that makes ideas valuable (Amazon.com is now worth an estimated \$230 billion dollars). Again, implementing an ordinary idea in a brilliant manner is harder done than said. So why bother? Because the one thing that makes difficult things possible is passion. When you're more passionate about your idea than in anything else, you will find a way to make it happen and "difficulty" will mean nothing more than fuel for your fire. As it's often said of Martin Luther King, he didn't have a dream — his dream had him.

CHAPTER ONE

ABOUT TED

“The funny thing is, if you do it for love, the money comes anyway.”

~ Richard St. John, TED Speaker

In 2009, when I was competing to win an all-expense paid trip to TEDGlobal, I had never heard of TED. I didn't know what it was or why it mattered. I was competing to win because I thought I had the best idea. That was what mattered most to me — spreading my idea that people, successful or not, should always “Stay Hungry,” and keep innovating, giving, sharing and doing. There is no time to rest on your success if you truly care about saving the world, or saving your small corner of the world. And as I learned, Richard St. John was right.” If you do ‘it’ for love, the money comes anyway. I’m still waiting on the money, but the value has come and I’m confident that one day the money will too.

What I’ve learned is that ideas matter. Hope matters. Generosity matters. Giving back matters. Staying hungry matters. And from all that — TED matters because TED spreads ideas, hope, generosity and more. From TED’s website:

“TED is a nonprofit devoted to spreading ideas, usually in the form of short, powerful talks (18 minutes or less). TED began in 1984 as a conference where Technology, Entertainment and Design converged, and today covers almost all topics — from science to business to global issues — in more than 100 languages. Meanwhile, independently run TEDx events help share ideas in communities around the world.¹

TED’s MISSION

TED is a global community, welcoming people from every discipline and culture who seek a deeper understanding of the world. We believe passionately in the power of ideas to change attitudes, lives and, ultimately, the world. On TED.com, we're building a clearinghouse of free knowledge from the world's most inspired thinkers — and a community of curious souls to engage with ideas and each other, both online and at TED and TEDx events around the world, all year long. In fact, everything we do — from our Conferences to our TED Talks to the projects sparked by the TED Prize, from the global TEDx community to the TED-Ed lesson series — is driven by this goal: How can we best spread great ideas?

¹ <http://www.ted.com/about/our-organization>

TED is owned by a nonprofit, nonpartisan foundation. Our agenda is to make great ideas accessible and spark conversation.”²

TED is not only particular about where their videos and branding appear, they’re also selective about other aspects of TED, even down to who is allowed or selected to attend, and who can repost their videos, and where and why. They’re very opposed to the commercialization of TED talks, and with good reason. Money seems to muddy the pot of free thought.

Even attendees to live talks are selected based on their potential and ability to spread an idea. I can’t say it enough, TED is really all about the spread of ideas that matter, ideas that spark and drive change.

IS TED ELITIST?

Definitely. But in a good way. They explain this themselves:

“In one sense, yes — we curate our speaker list and our TED Talks lineup very carefully. And we "curate" our audience at conferences to make sure we have a balanced, diverse group that can support our mission of bringing great ideas to the world for free.

But we also work hard not to be elitist in ways that matter. We actively seek out ideas from all over the world in multiple languages. We work to diversify both our lineup and our attendee roster, devoting time and budget to seeking out and supporting attendees who couldn't afford to come on their own, but who'll be great contributors. We also devote significant time and money to bringing TED Talks to people who lack access to broadband or have other accessibility issues. We hope the proof of the pudding is that our talks are available for free to anyone in the world.”³

When we listen to a TED speaker we hear solutions and insights and about experiences from a position we never imagined, or couldn’t imagine. What makes TED speakers unique is that they look at common, everyday things from a different perspective. When Jill Bolte Taylor, a brain researcher, had a massive stroke, she got a research opportunity few brain scientists would wish for: She watched as her brain functions — motion, speech, self-awareness — shut down one by one. As a brain researcher, she talked about what it was like from her aspect as a scientist and a medical professional and as a patient. She had a different perspective on strokes, one that touched people and made them more aware, more informed, more educated about strokes.

² *ibid*

³ <http://www.ted.com/about/our-organization/how-ted-works/debunking-ted-myths>

When writer Joshua Klein gave his TED Talk about crows, and shared his research and photos of crows who use tools and how he trained them to use a specially designed vending machine for crows, he showed us the possibilities of a world where people work with nature instead of eliminating the parts of it they don't like.

TED speakers take a subject that we're all vaguely familiar with and flip it on its head so we can look at it from a different perspective. That's what any good idea does. It takes something that we're all used to seeing and it approaches it from a different angle, one that has traction or "legs" and that will inspire those who hear it to act on it. That's what makes an idea a TED Talk. TED talks change us. They change our ideas. They change the way we look at life. Music, art, design, technology — there's a reason innovation is so valued. It opens so many doors to innovation that simple talk and grind cannot.

After my TEDGlobal talk I received hundreds of thousands of comments across all platforms, and emails from around the world. Not all the comments were good, positive or uplifting, but many that told me I "changed the way people looked at the homeless." The emails were 100% good. Most were from students, many were from people who had been homeless and hopeless and who were just thrilled to see someone put a different face to what homelessness was.

Changing the way people looked at the homeless was my goal, and I was happy to see my talk having that impact. As the years passed, almost eight years now, just reading the comments about people's newfound awareness wasn't enough. People thought about the homeless differently, but I'm not sure if my talk moved them to act to use that newfound awareness to change their world.

So in January 2016 I decided to write a book, that in turn sparked another conversation, which resulted in a pilot project I call *The Homeless Entrepreneur, From Suitcase to Briefcase*. Along with my business partner, David Durovy, an INC. "Entrepreneurial company of the year two years in a row," I've taken the insights and experience I discussed in my TEDGlobal talk into a pilot project. I'm taking the invisible homeless, the people who, like me, aren't in crisis (yet), but who are newly homeless, working, or only need a little help, not a lot, to get back on their feet and off of the streets.

If you're wondering what, or how that has anything to do with creating a great TED Talk and turning it into a book, here's our (Melissa and I) reasoning:

We meet a lot of potential clients with great ideas. Some are TED worthy, some could be. We want to see those ideas take root, spread, and positively impact the world, as do

our clients. The best way, we think, is to help our clients create a TEDTalk, and then take that talk to book form. Why? Because having “a talk” is a way to help you laser focus your idea. TED Talks average 16 to 30 minutes. At 130 words per minute, that’s about 2,000 to 4,000 words, give or take a hundred words based on how fast you talk. Wait, only 4,000 words? Yes. The average book is 80,000 to 100,000 words long. So how do you go from a TED length talk to a book? You begin by distilling your idea down into 2,000 to 4,000 words. That gives you the core, soul and power of your idea. Once you have that you can then write a book that not only tells the reader what your idea is, but provides the research, case studies, stories, examples, the how-to, and a call to action. Having the talk first gives an author a clean, clear and specific starting point that conveys the idea succinctly and powerfully.

We know that TED stands for excellence in ideas. That means a TED Talk is like any other competitive venture. There are going to be various levels of entry and there’s going to be a ladder to the top. It’s competitive to get into TED at the highest levels. It doesn’t matter if you’re rich or successful. You can’t buy your way in. You can’t schmooze your way in. You have to have an idea worth spreading. You may have a fantastic idea, but can you tell its story, or share it in a way that others sit up and take notice? If you can’t communicate your idea in a way that people embrace it and recognize its value, it’s probably not a great idea. Great ideas have their own power, voice and vibration. Sometimes they get trapped in the translation, but great ideas will always find a way to express themselves. If it’s your idea however, someone else may find that path before you do. How much do you want to be the first one out of the gates with your idea?

By creating your “TED Talk” first, you have a better chance to write a better book. Think about your elevator speech. When you have a clear, concise and powerful pitch, usually less than three minutes, sometimes only a sentence (7-12 words) long, it opens doors. It gets you into places and in front of people where you can pitch a longer, more detailed version of your idea. Creating your “TED Talk” first, whether you actually speak at TED or not, is the concentrated version of your idea. The book just expands on excellence.

How do we help you get from an idea to a focused idea?

Answers aren’t the most important thing, says coach and speaker Tony Robbins. The right questions are.

Focus is controlled by questions. If you continuously ask the same question, you will get a different answer. If you ask a good question, (Why am I always showered with good

things, great ideas and great people?) you'll get good state of mind/feeling. If you ask a lousy question (Why do bad things always happen to me?) you'll get a lousy answer and a lousy state of mind/feeling. The thing is, the brain is like a computer. Ask it a question and it will have to come up with an answer. Bad things don't always happen to you. But if your focus is on all the bad things that have happened your brain will find ways to make sure that lots of bad things happen, or that you see the bad in everything that happens. If you don't believe that's true, then start asking yourself, "Why do I always have this mind-blowing great parking space karma? Why is it that no matter the time of day or the amount of traffic, I always find the perfect parking space?"

Lousy questions create lousy answers. That's why Melissa and I ask the questions to get you focusing on the positive, the amazing, the world changing ideas. Over the weeks and months we work with clients we've found that it's not the idea that's the issue in getting a book written. It's the questions, the mindset and the defeatism that people bring to the table. Have you ever thought about writing a book or giving a talk and had any of these questions or thoughts?

- No one wants to hear what I have to say
- Who am I to write a book? I'm not an expert.
- So-and-so is a better _____ at this than me. What if s/he writes a better book?
- No one will read anything I write.
- I can't write.
- I'm not sure if I tell the truth about my family, job, boss or life event that people will believe me.
- What if what I have to say pisses someone off?
- I'm not the expert.
- I'm not that good.
- There are others who are better _____ than I am.
- I should wait until I'm: more well known, have won some awards, am better
- I really don't have anything new to say, but I think I should have a book
- I've never given a talk.
- Do you think this is a good idea?
- Can you guarantee this will be a best seller?
- What if people laugh?
- What if people realize I don't know as much as they think I do?
- I don't have a degree.
- I don't have ten years experience.
- I don't do well with people.

The list goes on and on and on. The one common denominator we've found is that people don't believe in their idea as much as they hope others will. If you don't have the confidence in your idea, why would others? We often spend more time convincing authors their ideas are good, and in asking the right questions to get them to feel confident than we do in actual writing.

That's why we tell people that writing a book, or collaborating with a ghostwriter who does, is primarily a healing, personal growth experience. By the time we help you focus on asking the right questions and exploring the idea itself, the process changes you. You're not really just paying for a book — you're paying for life coaching and therapeutic changes.

The neuroplasticity of the human brain (neuroplasticity = The brain's ability to reorganize itself by forming new neural connections throughout life. Neuroplasticity allows the neurons (nerve cells) in the brain to compensate for injury and disease and to adjust their activities in response to new situations or to changes in their environment,⁴ is amazing. The minute you start asking the right questions, your brain begins to change. Ask the right questions long enough and you will begin to change. Just ask Tony Robbins. His close to miraculous on-stage changes are directly related to getting his clients to “ask the right questions.” In fact, he even tells his audience the most important thing they can do is “ask the right questions.”

Our brain's ability to change for better or worse continues throughout our lives. Changes in our brain's neural pathways, in how we think and what we think about, can happen at any age although the younger we are the faster and greater the changes. This ability to change, to reroute neural pathways and to create or erase memory plays an incredibly important role in our brain development (or decline) and in shaping our distinct personalities. Knowing that is a huge motivator for anyone wanting to improve their life, write a book or reinvent themselves.

⁴ <http://www.medicinenet.com/script/main/art.asp?articlekey=40362>

CHAPTER TWO

THE POWER OF A TED TALK

The power of a TED Talk is in having an idea that spreads, with or without the TED platform. As Seth Godin says, “No one is going to pick you. Pick yourself.” What does he mean? From his blog about being picked:

“It's a cultural instinct to wait to get picked. To seek out the permission and authority that comes from a publisher or talk show host or even a blogger saying, “I pick you.” Once you reject that impulse and realize that no one is going to select you--that Prince Charming has chosen another house--then you can actually get to work.

If you're hoping that the HR people you sent your resume to are about to pick you, it's going to be a long wait. Once you understand that there are problems just waiting to be solved, once you realize that you have all the tools and all the permission you need, then opportunities to contribute abound.”

No where is that truer than when it comes to writing a TED talk, or publishing a book. Melissa and I get inquiries from dozens of would-be authors who ask, “How do I get a big publishing house to pick my idea or pick my book?”

The truth is those clients are looking for three things:

- Low or no risk
- Confirmation
- Guarantees

They don't want to risk their time, money or reputation on something that might not be a best-selling book. They want confirmation that their idea is worth picking, and worth listening to, and that we can give them a book worth reading. They want guarantees — guarantees they won't be embarrassed, that they won't fail, that they won't be humiliated, and most of all, that they won't be ignored. Most of the time they come to us without a strong, clear idea. They say, “My therapist told me I should write a book.” or, “All my colleagues have books, so I figured I'd better write one too.” They aren't passionate about their idea as much as they're passionate about the idea or vision of an income, a platform and an opportunity to make money. That's not a good TED talk beginning.

I (Becky) recently launched a pilot program called “Suitcase to Briefcase.” It’s a local program here in Virginia that teaches the working homeless to create their own business. We meet officially from 2-4 p.m. on Tuesdays, but throughout the week I drive into town to meet with each student one-on-one. I attend Mark’s radiation treatments, or I give someone who needs to move their belongs from shelter to another a ride so they don’t have to make eight trips on public transportation with eight containers of their sole worldly belongings. I buy another student lunch while we talk about his idea for a creating a new type of backpack for both the homeless and outdoor users. We text and call throughout the week as they encounter problems they can’t handle alone — yet they are so motivated to “do it themselves,” their texts are more often ones of pride about how they figured out a solution to a challenge rather than a plea for help. Someone asked me how I planned to “monetize” the program. “I hadn’t thought about that,” I told him. “I’m doing it to help the homeless and rebrand what ‘Homeless’ means to society.” That, I think, is an idea worth spreading. What if, instead of hating the homeless society learned to look past where someone lives to who that person is, and is striving to become — and then helped them? That’s why all the classes, the material and the handouts are available for free. I’m hoping the idea spreads and that churches, schools, scouts and other organizations around the country take the idea, make it their own and help the homeless.

So now, what’s your great idea? Who will it help? How will it change the world? Why is it an idea worth spreading? The thing is, when inspiration hits any of us we’re mostly compelled to think our ideas are great, whether they are, or not. One way to find out if you have a great idea is to share it with friends and colleagues.

Ask, “What do you think about _____?” Test it. Learn to pivot. Be flexible. Twitter, Facebook, Google and even Amazon didn’t spring fully formed and created from the get-go. They developed over time as the creators realized things about the business that needed to change. Doubtless few people saw any of the greatest ideas as world changing at the time they happened. But the creators went ahead with them anyway. Do the same. Don’t wait for someone to tell you it’s a good idea. Don’t wait for someone to fund it, or you. Don’t wait, period. I learned that the hard way. I sat with my idea to teach the homeless business skills for five years. I could keep sitting, but I finally opted to launch once I realized I could learn as I went along. I learned I didn’t have to be perfect, or a millionaire, or even have the funding. I just had to start, and I did so with a book in January 2016. Eight months later I was convinced (based on feedback from readers) that it was time to move to the next level. My end goal is not to give another TED Talk. It’s to create an idea that spreads, an idea that changes the world. If your goal is to speak at TED, let’s look at the options and motivations:

There's the TEDx Talk, which I call the entry-level TED talk, because it gives people in any community the ability to create their own TED style theme and conference, whether it's one to three days. It opens up the opportunity to "speak at a TEDx event." Anyone can create a up a TEDx event. The instructions are all on the TED.com website. Pick a topic or theme and then invite experts in your area – state, city or region – to come in and give their own version of a TED Talk. This is to help ideas spread at the local, state level. It gives everyone with an idea a chance to make a difference. The best part about a TEDx event is that it is not supposed to be a platform for professional speakers or professional life coaches. Its purpose is to give a platform to those who don't often have one.

There's TEDx, then there's TED and then there's TED Global, which in the scheme of things, is like the super bowl of TED talks. ALL TED talks are about ideas worth spreading. It's just that a national or global stage, like TED or TEDGlobal, spreads ideas further.

TYPES OF TED CONFERENCES

In the interest of accuracy, these descriptions are taken directly from the TED website.

TED

The flagship TED Conference is held annually on the North American West Coast. The breadth of content includes science, business, the arts, technology and global issues. Eighteen-minute talks are interspersed with shorter presentations, including music, performances and comedy. [Learn more](#)

TEDGlobal

TEDGlobal travels the world and is slightly more international in nature. The full TED format is maintained, with a wide-ranging roster of speakers and performers for a week of inspiring sessions. TEDGlobal was held in Oxford, UK, in 2005, 2009 and 2010; in Arusha, Tanzania, in 2007; and in Edinburgh, Scotland in 2011, 2012 and 2013. In 2014, TEDGlobal went "South!" to Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. [Learn more](#)

TEDWomen

TEDWomen is a three-day conference about the power of women and girls to be creators and change-makers. The program of speakers, workshops, events — and daring discussions — has sparked some of TED's most iconic moments yet. TEDWomen was held in 2010 in Washington, DC, in 2013 in San Francisco, CA and in 2015 in Monterey, CA. [Learn more](#)

TEDYouth

TEDYouth is a day-long event for middle and high school students, with live speakers, hands-on activities and great conversations. Speakers share short talks on what they do best, serving both as a source of knowledge and inspiration for youth around the globe. TEDYouth was held in New York City in 2011, 2012, 2014, and 2015, and in New Orleans in 2013. Learn more

Other TED events

TED also regularly hosts other special events around the globe. TEDIndia was held in November 2009 in Mysore, celebrating and exploring the beckoning future of South Asia. TEDCity2.0, powered by the 2012 TED Prize, presented a day of new thinking about urban life. TED Talks Live took place in 2015, bringing six separate programs of curated TED Talks New York City's Theater district.

TED also hosts smaller events, including TED Salons, evening-length events with speakers and performers, and TED@250 events, curated by TED staff in our New York office to explore issues of interest. Meanwhile, TED Institute events bring TED's curatorial lens to the ideas found within large companies.⁵

No matter what TED event you attend, start or watch, the one thing all TED talks strive to achieve is to promote “ideas worth spreading.” Keep that in mind as you begin thinking about your TED talk.

⁵ <http://www.ted.com/about/conferences>

CHAPTER THREE

BECKY'S TED Talk PATH

"Obstacles do not block the path. They are the path."

The one thing all great stories have in common is a hero who overcomes great challenges and obstacles. There is nothing fun, entertaining or exciting about reading about someone who waltzes their way to success. The Wizard of Oz, The Old Man and the Sea, Star Wars, The Matrix. They all share the story of struggle, challenge and underdogs overcoming adversity. Without obstacles our ideas, our stories, our books, our lives are boring. Great ideas follow a path much like that. Few people recognize a great idea when they see it. They have to be shown, prodded, pulled and convinced to see something in a way they're not used to seeing it.

J.K. Rowling, Stephen King, Agatha Christie, all rejected by publishers. In fact, Agatha Christie was rejected for five years before landing her first book deal. Her book sales are now in excess of \$2 billion. Only William Shakespeare has sold more books.

J.K. Rowling's last four books set records as the fastest-selling books in history, on both sides of the Atlantic, with combined sales of 450 million.

Louis L'Amour received 200 rejections before Bantam signed him. His 330 million sales make him their best selling author.

Dr. Seuss was told he was weird and too different to warrant selling. He now has 300 million in sales and is the 9th best-selling fiction author of all time.

Zane Grey was told he had no business being a writer. That was before more than 250 million copies of his books were in print.

C.S. Lewis, Jack Canfield and Chicken Soup for the Soul; Dan Brown's The Da Vinci Code; Judy Bloom, J.D. Salinger's Catcher in the Rye, The Tale of Peter Rabbit by Beatrix Potter was rejected so many times she self-published it. It's now sold 45 million copies. Richard Bach's Jonathan Livingston Seagull sold 44 million copies after the publisher said, "No one wants to read a book about a seagull."

Jacqueline Susann's Valley of the Dolls was rejected numerous times. It has now sold 30 million copies. Gone with the Wind was rejected 38 times before becoming a classic book and movie. Apparently publishers don't like history. The Diary of Anne Frank was

rejected 15 times. It's sold more than 25 million copies since then.

Double-Day books rejected Peter Benchley's book JAWS. He rewrote it and it sold 20 million copies and was turned into a movie classic. The publishers are going to need a bigger boat to hold the ongoing sales.

The Lord Of The Flies. 15 million sales. The Shack, 15 million in sales. The Princess Diaries sells 15 million copies. The Wonderful Wizard Of Oz sells 15 million. Little, Brown & Company passes on a two book deal for Alice Walker. When complete her novel The Color Purple sells 10 million and wins The Pulitzer Prize. The Great Gatsby by F.Scott Fitzgerald; Frankenstein; On Watership Down by Richard Adams, one of the fastest-selling books in history; after being told negative stores don't sell Stephen King's Carrie sells 1 million in the first year alone. Pearl S Buck's The Good Earth becomes the best-selling US novel two years running in 1931/32, and wins The Pulitzer Prize after being told "Americans don't like stories about China."

Dune, The Notebook, A Time to Kill. Alex Haley got 200 consecutive rejections over eight years before his novel Roots becomes a publishing sensation, selling 1.5 million copies in its first seven months of release, and going on to sell 8 million before being awarded The Pulitzer Prize.

Don't think for a minute that your idea isn't great because no one immediately embraces it. Remember that great ideas have momentum. They take on a life and a path of their own. The best most of us can really manage to do is to hang on for the ride. The authors I noted above certainly learned that. And if the idea you've chosen to hitch a ride on is of TED Talk quality, be prepared for the ride of your life. Why is a TED talk powerful? Because TED Talks are ideas that change the world. If you have a TED level idea in you, the most powerful, elegant way to present it is in a talk. Once you polish and refine the talk, then you create the book. Just as the ideas that so many publishers rejected refused to die, your idea isn't dependent on who approves or "picks" it. As so many authors have learned — write it and they will come and eventually those who can handle and digest the idea will find it.

Books are challenging. Most of us find it far easier to create a talk first. Talking is easy (for some). It's far easier to delete our voice and start speaking again than it is to agonize over words on a page (for some). It's easier to convey emotion, timing and tempo in a talk. And, if you're an extrovert who thinks better by thinking out loud, a talk is the fastest way to organize your thoughts.

TED Talks, contrary to most beliefs, don't always have to be about advances in technology, entertainment or design. Some of the most popular TED talks are about life, and the ordinary, commonplace parts of it — presented in unique ways from different perspectives. For instance:

In 2006 I was living in a stripped out Chevy van with my Rottweiler and my cat in a Walmart Parking lot in Highlands Ranch, Colorado. For those of you not familiar with Highlands Ranch, it's a very wealthy suburb of Denver. The car dealerships are Rolls-Royce, Mercedes and Lexus. You don't find many, if any, Ford or Chevy dealerships there. Yet, they did have a Walmart. I was homeless in Colorado for 8 months, but homeless in total for 18 + months. At first glance there's nothing "TED" worthy there. There are millions of homeless people in the world.

What made my experience TEDGlobal worthy? It wasn't the fact I was living in a van, had pets, suffered or related the usual experiences of being homeless. It was the fact that *I had allowed* being homeless to define me, but then discovered *who I was* had nothing to do *with where I was*. I discovered that *who I believed I was*, was what defined me.

The takeaway for me was, If we allow others to define us, they will. You don't have to be homeless to experience other people taking advantage of the opportunity to define you. People label, pigeonhole and limit us every day. The only time those labels stick is when we allow it. My homelessness is just the experience I had in order to discover that. It's not typically the sort of thing most people think about when they're homeless. I did. So then I connected the dots so others could see how easily we allow others to define us, and what it takes to break free of that definition.

I brought my unique story to what it means to be homeless and who the homeless are and why so many stay stuck in the powerful belief that they aren't worthy, that they are where they are, not who they are. That story and the concept of how we define self is still sparking ideas about homelessness that will change the world. That's why TED is so exclusive, and so powerful. TED Talks aren't just about ideas that matter, they're about ideas that move people to action, and ideas that will change the world. They're not so much about ideas that will spark a multi-million dollar business, although that may be side-effect (sometimes) TED is more about the spread of ideas, not capitalism.

A lot of people either don't understand what TED is all about, or the only part of TED they do understand is they can leverage a TED talk into making themselves a lot of money, or into promoting themselves, their book or their company. They let ego take over and the idea of speaking at TED becomes more about "me, me, me" and how they can generate the attention and cache' of speaking at TED than it does about how their

idea can change the world. Fortunately for the world, the kind of people who focus on making money off of TED are the kind of people who rarely have a world changing idea. It's not that the ideas aren't out there — they just don't have the kind of eyes that can recognize that kind of opportunity when it presents itself. Being generous, sacrificing your time, resources and money to help others, or change the world isn't usually seen as a financial opportunity for most.

The theme of the 2009 TEDGlobal talks where I spoke was “*The Substance of Things Not Seen*.” It featured more than 40 remarkable speakers presenting over the course of four days, from July 21-24, 2009, each speaking to that theme from their perspective.

The TEDGlobal 2009 program was designed to explore and make visible the substance of things that run unseen through our lives. These hidden forces — social conventions, biological links, cultural frameworks, coded meanings, complex processes, creative impulses, scientific speculations, software, networks — are the connective tissue that binds societies together and the engines that propel organizations forward. When illuminated, they offer vital insights into our relationship with each other and our world.

“TEDGlobal is TED's twin conference, with the same focus on identifying novel voices and bringing to the stage inspired ideas, experiences, technologies, and performances — with an even stronger international perspective,” said Bruno Giussani, European Director for TED Conferences.

It was that stage and that environment that I shared not only what it was like to be invisible as a homeless person, but what it was like to battle the perception of homeless people as lost causes.

CHAPTER FOUR

WHY A TED TALK?

“Many highly talented, brilliant, creative people think they’re not because the thing they were good at in school wasn’t valued or was actually stigmatized.”

~ Sir Ken Robinson, TED Speaker

I didn’t even know what TED was, or that it was the prize when I entered a writing contest Dan Pink sponsored in 2008. He was looking for somebody to come up with an idea about an extra chapter for his book, *The Adventures of Johnny Bunko*. The book is a graphic novel about what it takes to succeed in life and business. It’s like the Seven Steps or Seven Truths of business. Dan was looking for what the next step character Johnny Bunko needed to take after the last step in the book. You can download a copy of the winning chapter **here**.

Unlike other contestants, I thought out of the box. Rather than ask for people’s votes, I offered them something — a free book. I came up with an idea for the final chapter of Dan’s book, wrote it, then asked friends to illustrate it for me, and then offered it to readers for free. That was what help push the votes over the edge. Then, as I was pulling ahead in the voting on the last day, Seth Godin, stepped in and asked his millions of readers to vote for me, resulting in pretty much a landslide victory. That secured my trip to TEDGlobal, but only as an attendee.

At the time I didn’t even look at what the prize was. I just wanted to get my idea out there and win. It didn’t matter what. I just liked to win writing contests. It wasn’t until I won, and actually found out what the prize was that I got scared. It was 2008. I didn’t even know what TED was at that point, and there I was winning an all expense paid trip there.

Once I was confirmed as an attendee, then I found out that the TED organizers opened up a contest to have anyone who was attending TEDGlobal pitch a story idea. The theme was “The Substance of Things Not Seen,” or “being invisible.” Being homeless fit the theme perfectly, and after submitting my talk, I was selected, along with 12 or 13 others, to speak.

When you’re homeless, you’re invisible. Nobody wants to look at you. Everybody avoids eye contact. You’re pretty much shunned or ignored on the street. If you didn’t feel worthless or invisible before, you will then. When you’re homeless, nobody really

looks at you and nobody wants anything to do with you. You're a pariah. It doesn't take being attacked to traumatize you.

Studies have shown that being ignored and treated as invisible or unwanted has a severe impact on people. Being given the cold shoulder, in a family, a relationship, or at work, can be very emotionally traumatic.⁶

My experience being homeless was really interesting. When I became homeless I didn't change. I was still who I was, with the same skill sets, talent and personality, but everyone's perception of me changed based on what had happened to me.

It happened again when I came back from TEDGlobal, everyone's perception of me changed based on what had happened to me — that people smarter, richer, better and more attuned to great ideas had “picked me.” Their perception was never about who I was, it was based on what they thought about what had happened to me, and what other people thought about me. It had nothing to do with who I was. That was an eye-opener for me.

People think about you, and react or respond to you based on who they are, not on who you are. I think that's why ideas are so powerful. They can step out of the day-to-day bullying and hating and alter people's perceptions. The way I was treated both before and after TEDGlobal had nothing to do with me personally.

It had nothing to do with anything. It had to do with this idea I had, this story I told. It had to do with the way I presented what it meant to be homelessness to them. When I let people define who I was as homeless, the way that they treated me was very poor. When I got to talk about what homeless was, it altered their perception. That's how an idea can change.

People have perceptions of what homeless is based on over a century of the media telling them that the homeless are roaches, addicts, bums and thieves. But I put that idea of what homeless means on its head. I turned it around. I wasn't just an addict in the street, I was a journalist who had made some poor decisions. I had encountered problems I couldn't overcome, and my life was changed because of it.

If you haven't seen the TEDGlobal talk yet, the turning point that came at eight months was when I heard the late Tim Russert was talking about me on CSPAN. There I was in the back of Chevy van and Tim's talking about me on national television as a storyteller

⁶ <http://www.healthypplace.com/abuse/emotional-psychological-abuse/the-silent-treatment-are-you-getting-the-cold-shoulder/>

and writer. So I found the closest bookstore I could and went into and found the book and read my essay. I said, "I'm not homeless. I'm a writer." That's when everything changed for me. Success in life is all about your perception.

THE JOURNEY HOME

I left Colorado on my birthday, Oct. 15, 2006. My brother loaned me \$600 for gas to get back to Tennessee, so I piled everything I had from my storage unit into my van and I drove cross country with my Rottweiler and my cat in three days.

I parked the van in the driveway of a former editor where it promptly died. It took me two weeks to figure out what was wrong with it, and fix it. Then I couch surfed with a former publisher, and got a job at a local newspaper. I spent more time in the van than on a couch, so for the next six months or so I was homeless in Tennessee. At least I was among friends and could get a shower, or fix a hot meal when I needed one.

Eventually I found a journalism job in Virginia, and moved there, sleeping in the van in a campground, and staying in a hotel (courtesy of the paper) once a week. I did this for two months until I could find an apartment I could afford, and that would take my animals. Because of health issues and bullying by co-workers, the job at the paper lasted less than a year. So by the end of 2007 I was under-employed, working on Elance.com, and on the verge of homelessness once again.

I had joined Seth Godin's new social media group, "Triibes.com" and began to connect with other entrepreneurs, artists and talented small business owners online. I was working just enough to survive and keep a roof over my head.

In between freelance work and Triibes, I painted the outside, and remodeled the inside of my van. I decided once again try being a full-time RVer, and working on Elance as I traveled and lived in the van. But, I stopped to take care of a friend I met online who had had back surgery. One month turned into nine, and I stayed with her until she healed. During that time I went to TED. It wasn't until I came back from England after talking about having been homeless, when I realized I was actually still technically homeless. I wasn't living in my van, but I was living with a friend, taking care of her, and still without a job that paid enough for me to make smart decisions about my future.

My friend was getting married and moving to Chicago and I had no idea what I was going to do. She was moving and all I could think was, "She's going to be out of here in a few months and I have to do something." I had applied for jobs and I couldn't get a

job. I didn't want to be homeless again. The only thing I could really do was to start a business. I got back on Elance, which wasn't paying much. Then, I got online and I started writing and pitching articles to magazines. I landed an associate editor's position with *Air Stream Life Magazine*. Initially it wasn't enough to pay the bills, but over three months time, I was gradually able to land enough clients to save some money and move out and get my own place.

It wasn't easy, fast or wealth building, but it was a powerful experience. It was like I was in control of my life again. It was like, "I can do this. I don't have to be homeless again."

From there, I just kept going. In 2015 I took a business class through the Charlottesville Community Investment Collaborative (CIC). As a result of that class, I wrote the book *The Homeless Entrepreneur*. When I shared my story during the session I learned there were four people in my class that were homeless or had been homeless. They were living in their cars or couch surfing with friends or were in and out of the shelter themselves. Now they were there learning how to start a business so that they too could get off, or stay off of the streets.

I think all of them now are working and have a business and are off the streets. But, at the time and when I went public with my story in class, they all came to me afterwards and said, "I'm homeless, too," or "I was homeless and just got off the street," or, "I just got my apartment," and it changed me. I realized there were other people who had taken a financial hit but hadn't let it define them. That's really what defines the entrepreneurial spirit.

There are a lot of people around us all that aren't going to let life get them down. They're going to do what it takes. Right now, there's not really any place that specifically supports that, and that's too bad. Homeless entrepreneurs have different challenges than somebody who has a job or a house. They're not thinking about business. They're thinking about where they're going to sleep, eat, they don't have anywhere to fix a meal. Every day is very stressful and it takes twice as long to do anything. When they do decide to put the stress of starting a business on top of being homeless, that really is another challenge.

They've got the perfect mindset for it because it doesn't get any worse. If you start a business while you're homeless, you can make it succeed.

You've got to find somewhere to shower, you've got to find a bathroom, you've got to worry about cleaning your clothes or staying clean. You can't just take a shower when you get dirty. You've got to plan for when you're going to shower, eat, where you're

going to stay, where you're going to go and how you're going to spend your time. It takes twice as long.

Then your money. Your financial resources are zip. You've got to think, "Where am I going to get my next five or ten dollars?" I would go for three and four days without eating. I was working full time, but I was putting all my money into car repairs and doggy daycare for the animals. They were living better than I was. They were \$30/40 a day so that they didn't have to stay in a hot car.

I've got a solid talk, so I have the credibility. I have influence among people that have the wherewithal and resources to make things happen. I've been generous with friends and strangers and clients, so I have that. That's my foundation.

I also just started a pilot program called *From Suitcase to Briefcase*. Homeless people live out of suitcases, literally. A lot of them drag those rolling suitcases behind them on the street, hence the name.

For two hours a week for eight weeks we're learning about business, about life, about money, about selling, branding and marketing and most of all about telling our stories. The classes are not so much the nuts and bolts about how to start a business as it is about how to change your mindset, how to reframe wherever you are. Homelessness is where they are, it's not who they are. It's just where they happen to be right now. We're giving them that positive encouragement and that support in a place where they can start a business, where they can start thinking about ideas or they can start their own little TED Talk idea. How are they going to look at life and what they're doing in a different way that will help them get customers or clients with what they try to do?

We're doing it with 8 students. We're videotaping it. And we're having each one give a TED talk, and write a book. I'm doing that to show ANYONE can have an idea worth spreading.

I've written three TED Talks now, including my own. The biggest challenge people have with creating a TED Talk is their ego. They can't get out of their way because they're like, "I'm going to be a TED speaker. I want to be a TED Talker. I want to be known for being this," and it's all about me, me, me. But an idea has to be totally devoid of ego to spread.

You can watch any TED Talk and the really good ones are about the ones that give back or give out. A really good TED Talk is about ideas, concepts and perspectives that open other people's eyes and help other people. It's not about you or, "I'm great," or, "I'm smart," or, "I thought this." You have to tell your story that, in a way, people see

what's in it for them. In a way that it touches them or changes them. That's why it spreads. It's kind of a hard concept.

People like to hate on the homeless. But if you think about it, back in the 1900s and before, when the immigrants were coming from all over the world to America to seek their fortune, most of them arrived with nothing. Penniless. Just the shirt on their back and a suitcase.

Arnold Schwarzenegger came to America with \$4 in his pocket when he hit the shore. He couldn't do that now, but back then you could. These immigrants came to America with no money, they're penniless, a lot of them are homeless living on the street, but they make something of themselves. We have all these biographies and autobiographies and we call them the rags to riches stories. If you go back and you read these biographies, these millionaires and billionaires started out penniless and homeless. We see it as a testament to their character that they were able to go from rags to riches.

Somewhere along the line, that changed. Instead of seeing people as starting off poor and building themselves up, we jump on them and kick them when they're down.

Tony Robbins was homeless. He talks about his story of growing up poor and leaving home at 17 after years of protecting his younger brother, sister and himself from an abusive and alcoholic mother.

Robbins didn't wallow in self-pity. He used his less-than-stellar home life as motivation to help others. It took him awhile but he began to thrive. Now, more than three decades later, he is setting an example for those who come from nothing or find themselves in the middle of nothing. He has proven that anyone has a chance to pursue what they love. You don't have to let hard times and no money hold you back from your dreams. From janitor to billionaire, he proved it's possible to change, to get out. He didn't let where he was define who he was. We're inspired by those who get out.

Motivational Speaker Eric Thomas was homeless. Now he's a millionaire because he not only has a story worth telling, but he has ideas worth spreading.

It's kind of like in the 60s when women were pregnant, you didn't talk about it. Pregnancy meant that you had had sex and everybody was like, "Oh, my God, she's had sex." But once you had the child and you were a mother, motherhood was revered and what you had to do to get the child was forgotten. Sex was taboo in the 50s and 60s. There was that awkward transition from an undesirable to a desirable state. Who

you were was based entirely on other people's perceptions. It's like the rags to riches stories of famous CEOs. Do you think Steve Jobs was impressing anyone when he was collecting bottles and cans for pennies so he could eat? Jobs was homeless after he dropped out of college. In his commencement speech to the 2005 graduating class at Stanford he said, "I didn't have a dorm room, so I slept on the floor in friends' rooms. I returned coke bottles for the 5¢ deposits to buy food with, and I would walk the 7 miles across town every Sunday night to get one good meal a week at the Hare Krishna temple." However much Jobs scrounged for food in his youth, the businesses he built made him a billionaire many times over and people ignored his homeless past, until he brought it up again.

That's what I'm trying to do with this homeless entrepreneur pilot project. I'm saying, "This is not who they are. This is where they are." I keep saying that over and over because it's so important. It's not who they are as a person, it's where they are as a person. I am going to write a book about this program, but first I'm going to write a second TED Talk. Then I'm going to write the book.

The TED Talk, it's not who you are, it's where you can go with this idea. When you talk about a book or an idea for a TED Talk, book or this, you have to think about where that idea will take you. Where will that book take you?

TV and Hollywood has us all believing that everything in life is horrible and then suddenly we get discovered or "picked" to be rich or famous and then everything is a Holland America cruise after that. It's not. I have days when I think, "I'm going to be homeless again," and then I have weeks where I'm like, "I've finally arrived." Give it time and it will change. People need to realize that. They don't.

I think our strength is that depth of research. Because you and I do so much research on what's out there, we're able to differentiate it. We were talking about disruptors and any company or individual that comes in and disrupts what's already there usually does so by finding a way that they can make the customer experience better. I think that's what you and I do.

We go into a book, we see what's out there, we see the well-worn path that everybody else has taken and we break off of that path and do exactly what you do with a TED Talk. We find a different way to approach it, we find a different way to explain it. The strong point that you and I have is we network with other people. We bring other people into it. We give back to other people. We make it a networked book. We do the interviews, we bring in other people's expertise and their viewpoints and we give people a rich, three dimensional environment of ideas in the book. I think that that's what we

do differently.

Most people take a book and they say, “This is how I did it. This is why I succeeded.” They’re telling their own story. It goes back to the ego I was talking about.

A TED Talk or a TED level book, they take the idea and they take away the ego and they say, “Let’s look at this from a different perspective. How will this change you?” That’s what makes something go viral. People see it and they say, “Wow. There’s something in that for me. It’s not just about the expert, how great they are, what they know and what they say.” When you present an idea that anybody can take and run with, then you’ve done something different.

That’s what you and I do because we research it. We research the hell out of it. I’ve seen you do 40/50 books. You see what approach all these other authors have taken and then we talk about it and I say, “What about this?” and you say, “What about that?” Together, we come up with that different idea. We differentiate our authors through our research and through applying that. This is a TED Talk idea approach. I think that’s what we bring to it. We take the ego out.

Something that a lot of our clients never realize is that when you write a book, any book – even if it’s a non-fiction thing about business – it changes. The very act of putting something on paper changes the way you think about a thing. A lot of are surprised. They’ll do their outline, then they’ll write their book and then halfway through the book they’re like, “Oh, my God. I didn’t know that. I didn’t think about that. We have to change it.” It becomes an evolutionary process of their idea. I think that throws a lot of people through a loop when they’re not expecting that.

The other thing that people find out or discover when they do this is they want the attention. They have the ego and they want the attention, but by getting rid of the ego, they actually get everything they wanted. It comes back around and ultimately you do get the attention you’re seeking, but you don’t have to point to yourself and say, “Me, me, me,” to get it. It becomes grassroots. It’s organic. It’s natural. It’s from people who truly appreciate you, so it’s richer and deeper and, I think, ultimately a lot better.

It’s just so critical because you and I do it naturally. The more I talk to people, the more I realize they have no idea what it means to let go of ego. They’re terrified to let go. They think if they don’t talk to people and tell people how wonderful they are, that people won’t get it. You can’t do that. You’ve got to perform, do it, and let your actions speak for themselves. That’s so much stronger when it’s organic and it’s not you

saying, “I’m great. I’m wonderful. I’m the best and you should listen to me.” Because people don’t. People are in it for themselves and your book, your idea and your TED Talk all have to be, “This is how this is going to help you.” That’s when people listen.

My sister is incredibly talented. She fills the rooms for big, big conferences and is very, very successful. She was at a conference where it was all about food, which was very much focused on great food, candy and all kinds of gifts to give in the food area.

She came back with two huge bags of high end candy. She said, “Look what I got for you.” Anyone would assume that the two bags meant that one of them was for me. At least I assumed that. I’m like, “Oh, my gosh. This is so kind of you.” She brings the bags in, sets them down and pulls like five candies out of one and said, “Here’s yours.” I went, “What?”

I think that’s an example or a metaphor for how people feel. Here you are and they’re all excited and they want to hear what you have to say and you’re like, “Here’s a couple pieces of candy.” You feel like you’ve been cheated on the experience of the sharing and the caring.

You want that from the idea. You have to put yourself in a situation where you thought you were going to have something, you’re excited and you wanted it, but you don’t get it. That is where people are when they’re reading.

You walk away feeling cheated. As we all know, people forget the price and remember the experience. Long after they’ve forgotten what a great deal, they remember how the product made them feel. It is all about feelings. The whole customer experience is all about the feel. Was it easy? Was it fun? Did I have good time? Was I respected and delighted with the experience?

If you don’t do that with your idea, if you don’t delight people with the idea, they’re not going to be impressed with you.

That concept of being there and expecting it, you do have expectations set up. I’ve asked people, “Have you gone to events where you’ve paid \$20?” They usually have. “Have you gone to events where you’ve paid \$1000?” Many also have gone to higher paid event. Then I ask, “What’s the thing that you say event?” Nine times out of 10, they’re going to say, “If I got one thing from that event that was worthwhile,” whether they paid the \$20 or whether they paid the \$1000. The idea that the threshold for you making them happy doesn’t mean that you have to give them dozens and dozens of great ideas.

What that means is that the bar is not so high for you to actually get in there, move your ego aside, if you need help to get it and figure out the way to position the thing that you want to write about. It really is about how you do it. Of course, with Simon Sinek, which he's delivered so powerfully the why, if you come from that place and you're prepared and gone through it and you really understand your why. In Networkding, the process I've created for networking, that's where we've started. It's with the why. What are your top four values? We found that that worked. It was figuring out what your value priorities are.

It used to be that my top value was integrity and then making a difference and then creativity and innovation. Of course, what I like to say to the group is family and friends are always first and foremost, but these are what I wake up every day and I think about. Mine is I realized I've got to make a difference for people. I realize that it doesn't take as much effort as I would think. Even doing a little thing for someone makes a big difference. That's where I also think that we put a lot of our energy in. It's pulling out the talents, the thing that the individual has.

The idea of the cross paradigms, the uniqueness and figuring out what you have and knowing that the hurdle that you have to jump in the beginning is not as high as you think it is. To move away from ego into an idea that will spread.

One of thing in a book that I was working on was the top tips from experts. Listening. Expert listeners. They all say the same thing: people connect and bond with you based on how well they think you understand them. The more you allow them to talk about themselves, the closer and more bonded they feel with you. If you never say two words other than nod your head and say, "Really? Fascinating," they will walk away thinking that you all have established a connection because they felt heard.

As the author, you have to have your reader walk away saying, "I think she heard me because that's how I feel about this topic." They will feel more connected to you because you *heard* them, even though they're the ones reading the book.

That's what we look for. We're always search for what people are saying and, in particular, what they are *not saying*. Where is that underbelly? What aren't they saying that begs to be heard? We keep asking questions. We don't use the Socratic methodology.

Put yourself in the position of the reader. Start asking questions. Ask everyone you can, your friends, your colleagues, anyone you talk to regularly. "What are the stories

I've told you that are interesting?" One of the questions is, "What's the best question you've ever been asked?" I'm always collecting those ideas and doing the research. With all of the noise out there, there's still a lot of opportunities for new ideas.

Tony Robbins says it's not the answers that matter. It's the questions you ask. It's the questions that turn things around. It's questions like "What if?" What would my life look like, if this happened? What would this situation look like if that happened? What would my life look like if I let go of _____?"

You and I do that kind of research and ask those kinds of questions. We ask our authors, "What would this look like if we took a different approach? What would this look like if you had a different solution? If you did this or did that?" I think it comes back to asking the unexpected questions.

MELISSA: Throughout our process, we pose different questions for the reader. "When you were 10 years old, what were you doing that does or does not have some connection with what you're doing now?" It's

When she was younger my sister wouldn't let my uncle have any of the candy that he had bought for us when we were doing a puppet show as a fundraiser in our community. She was very clear about it being *her candy*. Flash forward 15 years and my sister has graduated college and is ready to start a career, but she doesn't have a clue how to take her social work degree and use it to get a job where she would be successful.

I offered her my insight, stating, "You really should go into sales. Remember when we had that puppet show? You were the one selling penny candy for \$.05 a piece? You were a natural! Also, I'd move to a growing community. Get out of this small town where we live and find a great place to live." I suggested Charleston as I told her I had read they have some of the nicest people living there and she would enjoy the beautiful weather in the winter. We lived in Ohio so you get my point"

For whatever reason, my sister took my advice to heart. She moved to Charleston. She looked in the local papers and found there was a sales job opening at a local advertising firm. Even though she was clueless about what was involved in a sales career, she asked to be chosen for the position. The owner appreciated her bold approach and told her he would *give her a try*. He told her to go sell the owner of a new gas station that just opened up near the center of town on \$10,000 of advertising. My sister, again, not knowing any better, went and sold \$50,000 worth of advertising to the owner. And, you guessed it. She got the job.

So, there is no question, asking questions about events you were interested in and exhibited skills you were passionate about from your childhood can lead you to insights as to what you , events that defined you or sparked something important, or that later became how you were able to shine in certain situations. Those defining moments are powerful, not just for the author, but for the reader. Readers relate to things from other people's childhoods. We often hear authors say, "I don't think anyone would care," but the opposite is true. Readers do care. Childhood memories, especially of events that define us, especially losses or failures that define us, are things readers strongly identify with. Childhood is a time of powerful emotions and loss of innocence, or dawning awareness for all of us — whether we had great childhoods, or bad ones. We like to hear how others "got through it," or how others survived because it gives us something to compare our own experiences with. Childhood, high school and college memories are powerful stories.

Going back in time like that starts to open up really unique thoughts. Staying in that space while you're generating your idea and having fun with it, that's the whole magic of a TED talk, or writing a book. It's figuring out what you have to say, what you want to say without worrying about what other people will think or say. It's empowering. That's why we say, "Don't rush into it. Slow down to speed up." Our authors are surprised how quickly they bubble up with ideas when they take a trip down memory lane, or go back to their childhood. Get your friends, get a coach, get a whatever to help you evolve those ideas and recall those memories.

CHAPTER FIVE

WHY A BOOK?

Why a book or a talk? Because a patent only lasts 20 years. You can put a lot of money into a patent. It costs thousands of dollars to even apply for a utility patent. But a book isn't like that. It's a very different kind of investment. It lasts for your life plus 70 years. That makes it a very powerful product for you to create. As a result, why would you want to do anything but write a great book. Not a good book, but a **great** book.

Challenge yourself to take the time to write your book. Don't put it off as we have discovered that the many people we have helped write books all agree, this one effort, more than any other, has taken their career or business to a high level of success.

So, do what you need to do to create that great book, whether it's involving someone or not. Get out there. Don't do it in isolation. Tap into the power of beta readers once you have your book completed. This will help ensure you get the best return for the big effort writing a book involves.

HOW TO TURN A TALK INTO A BOOK

When Becky was an ROTC Army Ranger cadet in college in 1973 she served under a master sergeant who had survived three tours in Vietnam almost unscathed. He was a big man, 6'4" maybe 280 pounds of muscle. But he could walk across a field three inches deep in dry leaves and twigs and you'd never hear, or see him coming or going. He was like a ghost. He would just appear beside you. You'd look away and look back and he'd be gone. You'd never hear him leave. He knew a lot about how to survive in the jungle — including how to see in the dark. One of the things he taught her, that she uses to this day, was to look just left or right of whatever it is you want to see at night or in a dimly lit room. It's called "averted vision."

There's actually a scientific reason for why averted vision works as well as it does. It has to do with the way our eyes are structured. Our eyes see with both "rods" or "cones." Cones detect color under well-lit conditions and are densely packed in an area called the **fovea**, near the center of our retina. Cones help us see color and fine detail. If you want to see something like text, photos, movies, people's faces, tiny print on things, etc. you look directly at them. Our rods are located mostly away from the center of our retinas. We see less detail and no color with our rods, but because they're much more sensitive to light we can see shapes and form, movement etc. We don't "see" with our

rods like we do with our cones, but that's because of why rods do what they do and how light acts on our retina.

We can see the faintest objects, or objects at night or in dimly lit rooms only if we look 8 to 16 degrees off center because then we're looking with our rods, not our cones. The exact angle is a little different for each person, but by experimenting you can figure out your own best angle. This technique only works if the object you're looking at is on the nose-ward side of your eye. The cool thing about averted vision is that you can see objects that are 20-40 times fainter when you look at them with direct vision. That's a huge difference.

If you learn how to avert your vision in the right direction, it exposes the most sensitive part of your eye to what's in front of you. That lets you see much fainter objects. If you avert them in the wrong direction, you'll expose the blind spot of your eye and you won't see a thing.

When we learn to "advert" or change the way we access our thoughts, emotions and what we think we "know" about things, we do a similar thing. We activate parts of our brain that don't function unless we activate them in different ways. This is what happens with hypnosis or trance states. Yes. Hypnosis is a real, powerful technique. Ongoing studies with Magnetic Resonance Scanning (MRI), and Positron Emission Tomography (PET) scans show the brain responds differently when under hypnosis than it does when it's not hypnotized. We actually become more focused and are able to tune out non-essential chatter and information.

Think of athletes who "get in the zone." Or remember a time when you were so engrossed or enthralled with something you totally lost track of the time, didn't hear people calling your name, or didn't notice the passing of people or cars or objects around you. That's the power of the focused brain. That's why it's the state of mind we get our clients in when talking, thinking about or writing their book. If you're going to write your own TED talk or book, you need to learn to do the same.

Melissa and I both work with a lot of people who want to create "a TED talk." Someone has told them "they're amazing!" or that they should, "Give a TED talk." We even meet authors we truly think should give a TED talk, and tell them so. But then we find out they're unwilling to avert their gaze to discover their remarkable story. They want guarantees, something safe, a sure thing. That's why they cling to what they know and shun any attempt to get them to let go and explore their minds.

For a lot of people the ego and pride around considering themselves a potential TED speaker gets in the way. That pride and ego is exactly the thing that shuts down their ability to come up with a TED worthy idea, let alone communicate it in a meaningful way. Honestly, that's where most of our potential authors are when they come to us. But we're not deterred. We see the potential in everyone because we ask the right questions. We don't take the well-worn path, or tell the same old stories. We look for the things that make you, and your idea worth spreading. It's a skill, a gift. We not only have it, we teach you how to find the divine, the idea worthy, the buzz and the TEDworthy in your idea. It's a journey. It's not easy, but it's worth the effort.

We invite you to let us help you write your TED talk, to find your core idea and to learn what makes it an idea worth spreading. Once you do that, you'll be ready to turn your "TED talk into a book." and from there? Your idea can change the world. Whether you make the TED stage or not, your ideas will reach the world stage.

To this end, feel free to reach out to us at [Networlding](#) and we will be happy to offer you a no-cost, no-obligation session to see if we can be of support. But, if you also want to turn your TED Talk into a book, read on!

CHAPTER SIX

TURNING YOUR TED TALK INTO A BOOK

Below is an overview of the process we use to take your idea, turn it into a TED Talk and then a book that helps build an even stronger and more sustainable platform for your success. We've been using this model over the past three years with great success. Take time to look it over and you will see that the process involves utilizing both the right and left-side of your brain. Why? This is because each side benefits you as it taps into the dominant strength of that side.

For example, brainstorming, something writers utilize when they start creating their books, This is where you tap into the **right** hemisphere of your brain that coordinates the left **side** of your body, and performs tasks that have do with creativity and the arts. Later, after you have completed a first draft of your book, that's when you start to do what all successful authors do—tap into your left brain's hemisphere that coordinates the right side of brain. This is all about strong and effective editing.

As you are completing your book we start helping you prepare for publishing successfully, and even more importantly, launching successfully. This is where Melissa utilizes her 20+ years teaching networking to improve the success of authors who want to more effectively get their books out into the world and into the hands and hearts of eager readers.

Throughout this complex process, Melissa and her team make it much easier for authors to optimize their book's reach and power. She also helps you look at your book as a possible series, creating ongoing, sustainable support for authors who have a body of work they want to use to benefit the world. Finally, Melissa has created a partnership with a distribution expert to help seasoned thought-leader authors who fit her make-a-difference criteria, get their books into libraries, book stores and other locations.

On the next page is a high-level overview of Melissa's process. Look it over to see how you might begin the important task of writing your book. Also note, below, following the diagram, in the About the Author's section, Melissa has spent the last two years creating a Do-It-Yourself program to help you, if you want to keep your costs down, a way to get started on your book today.

Note that at any time, we are available to gift you with a free outlining session with Melissa's time-tested outlining template to help you get started on your path to success.

WHAT IS OUR PROCESS?



BEFORE YOU GO – ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Becky is a rare find as far as ghost writers go. Her 23 plus years of journalism have given her the ability to not become attached to words and phrases, but to stay focused solely on the story. She seeks the author's voice, not her own. She isn't distracted by what everyone else is writing about the topic. She focuses on what part of an author's story or idea makes it worth spreading and teases it out until she can set it to paper and watch it grow. Most authors come away from their book with their friends and family not believing it wasn't written 100 percent by them, that's how accurately she captures their voice, nuance, pacing and thought process.

Melissa is probably the best collaborator a ghostwriter could have. She is also a ghostwriter herself, having worked on over 100 books by thought leaders like the president of Holland Cruise Lines, the head of HR for the National Basketball Association and an Inc. 500 winner . . . seven times. Seven years ago Melissa started a turnkey book writing, publishing and launch service for authors who want to get the best full-service support with their books.

She is also a bestselling author of five books. Not only does she have one foot in the writing world, the other is firmly planted in the world of marketing. She understands what people want, what moves them and why they resonate with the stories they do. She creates a perfect blend of business and story.

She's also a master networker, with eight books on the subject with one of her books licensed by both Yale University and another by Motorola University. Now, she uses her networking expertise to help authors launch their books successfully, She is like oil on water, able to smooth over the stresses, frustrations and choppy waves the writing process can create. Her extensive network, her knowledge of all things publishing and her insider's understanding of the publishing process make her a powerful force when it's time to promote and publish a book.

Melissa now also offers a Do-It-Yourself book writing program called "Write, Publish and Sell Your First 10,000 Books to help new authors on a tight budget get their books out of their heads and out into the world. For more information on that program, [click here](#). To reach out to Melissa, email her today at melissa@networlding.com. Finally, feel free to visit www.networlding.com for updates on all kinds of great free and low-cost tips, techniques, templates, webinars, podcasts and more.