

Bill Quain Transcript - 43 minutes of good stuff.

Hi, this is Kat M of Adele Journal, and I'm here with Bill Quain, who is a self-published author and has sold over 2 million copies of his books. Are you here?

Hey Kat, good morning.

Hi, how are you doing?

Fine, thanks.

All right. Well, let's just get right to the topic, in case we get cut off again. The topic is... I want to go into, how to think about selling books. Because, a lot of self-published authors seem to shy away from this topic.

Well, Kat, yeah, and I really appreciate what you're doing for people because you're really helping your listeners, and the readers of your blog, zero in on such an important issue. You know... you have to sell your books. The great thing is, if you're a fiction writer, and I know that the people you deal with are fiction writers, what a great talent you already have! Selling is storytelling, to a large extent. It's helping people find their problems, solve it, but you got to put in a story, so... I think your fiction writers already come with sort of a built in talent for selling. And what have to do is help people realize that and bring it out of them so that they'll feel comfortable with it.

That is such an awesome way to look at it, 'cause, in my experience, the non-fiction writers are way more, I guess, prepared mentally to sell? Maybe it's because they're already in the teaching mentality, and selling is also a lot about teaching and informing.

Both groups bring a nice talent to it. So I'm excited to work with your fiction authors. I think we can really help them, and it's so important. You got to sell your books. You know, folks, it doesn't matter if you're traditionally published or self published; these days -- unless you're a very famous person or author already -- you're selling your own books.

Right, that's so true. I really like that perspective; I think that's great, the natural storytelling. Because I think that's true too. When I was studying copywriting -- well, I'm still studying it, I'm still a marketing student -- that was the #1 thing that all of my teachers tried to hammer in. You have to tell a story.

You had mentioned it one time, too, which is really interesting: the creative process of writing a book and the creative process of selling books are pretty related.

Yeah. Well, as a behavioral scientist, the roots of both selling and storytelling are the same, because they're both about human behavior.

3:00

Exactly, and when people write fiction, they're dealing with motive. Their characters have to have a motive that has to be explained in the book, has to come out. So, anyways, I think what we're saying is, really: fiction writers, they should be natural geniuses at this. Now that still leaves us with the fact that everyone's afraid to sell.

Ok, so why do you think that is?

I think people have a bad image of selling. I think that they... I told you my story about that guy who owned the racehorse, and he goes to the vet and say, "I got a problem with my racehorse." The vet says, "What's the problem?" The guy says, "Well, sometimes he walks just fine, and sometimes he walks with a terrible limp. What should

I do?" The vet says, "Next time he's walking fine, sell him." So I think people have that image of selling, as if we're trying to trick people.

Right. Even I think of it, sometimes, as a hostile situation. Like, me versus Your Money.

Well that's exactly right. We're thinking of it as consumers, and we have to stop thinking as consumers. As consumers, we're trained to look for sales, and this and that -- it's always about price. When you're solving people's problems, which is what people who sell books do, you're helping people. In the case of fiction, you're entertaining them. You're helping them escape, you're giving them transport to new worlds, that kind of stuff... So, that's great stuff.

You're helping them make sense out of their own lives through story, which I think is really important.

Very important. Very good, and so all those things are very noble things to do, and you should be proud of. Listen, we could talk about that for 45 hours, and people'd still be afraid to sell, so... The thing I've found about selling is that success creates success. A few small successes, and it really helps. And if you need the money, then it really, really helps.

True! And even if you don't need the money, you get such validation when you know your stuff has marketplace appeal. Like, it's one thing for your friends to say, "Oh, that's a great book or a great story," but it's quite another for complete strangers to give you money just based on the strength of your... your premise.

You probably hit on another reason why people are afraid to sell: they're afraid of rejection.

Oh, of course. I've been in sales for so long, I've forgotten that, 'cause that's one of the first things you beat out of yourself when you start selling. But yes. I forgot all about that; I'm glad you brought that up.

And you've said this to be before: when you're selling your own book, that's really personal. And when people don't like your book, or don't want to buy your book, it's hard to take that impersonally. So there is that fear of that. But anyway, folks, it's just the road you chose to go down, and you have to find ways of dealing with it, but you *are* equipped to deal with it because you're a storyteller.

6:00

So, do you think that fear of rejection can actually go as deep as the inability or the unwillingness to set concrete goals for yourself, so that you can track them?

That is a wonderful statement. Yes, because we wanted to talk about goal setting this morning. You are so right, because a lot of the time people are afraid to set goals, the way they set unrealistic goals, or unquantified goals, is because they're afraid they won't reach them. And that's something you really have to get over, that's why I tell people, set reasonable goals. I've worked for people who said, "We're going to set our goals so high, we'll never attain them, but we'll ride the glory in the attempt." Those people, I always try to quit that job as fast as I could, because they're crazy people. You set small goals for yourself to begin with. Get some success. By the way, if you have people working for you or working with you, set reasonable small goals for them. Let them prove themselves on a very reasonable goal, and then... get them confidence, help them move on.

That makes a lot of sense.

You and I talk all the time about what kind of goals should authors set, and people come

to me all the time in my consulting business. Lot of times, they have the idea, they want to sell a lot of books. I had one woman tell me she wanted to sell a half a million books. And I said, over a lifetime, you could sell half a million books. But you're not going to sell half a million of a book. When I tell people, "Let's establish goals that we can reach in more ways than just by selling your one book. Let's decide what you want to get out of being an author, and let's look at ways of doing that." That means you might write a serial book, a series of books, you might write a book and do audios that go with it, whatever it happens to be, because there are other ways *around* your book. Your book is one plank in your platform. And there are other ways to achieve your goals other than simply by selling books.

That makes a lot of sense, 'cause even in my small publishing business, I sell books, but I also sell paraphernalia, and I've also done a bit of consulting, things like that. Those are all... As a business, *any* business, it makes total sense to do that. You don't want to look at a business and see that there's only one way of making money. And a book shouldn't be any different.

We all write books for certain reasons. We have a story inside us that just has to come out. It's a great artistic expression, I mean, it's really fun being an author. Well, it's torture, too, and it drives you to drink and all that kind of stuff, but it's still pretty neat. To be able to say to people, "I'm an author."

When it works out, there's nothing quite as gratifying as producing a really great piece of writing.

It's terrific. But I started writing because I needed money. And I think a lot of people would like to, even if they don't *need* money, they would like to make money as an author. So what you have to think is, "Ok, what are the ways that authors could make money," and there's a lot of them. My goals were always like twin goals. I had the goal of being an author, being respected for being an author, that kind of stuff. I liked that. But, I wanted money. And so, I looked at other ways to make money, and I decided to write to make money. But I didn't want money, I wanted money for what money could do. So, it didn't matter to me if I made it all from one book, or a series of books, or books and speaking, or books and audios, or whatever it happened to be. I was looking to change my lifestyle by applying my talents. I want people to just have that perspective, that when you set goals, the goals should be for the outcomes, not necessarily for the certain number of books to sell, or certain amount of money to make. That's what drives you in life. That's what keeps you going. If your goal was to sell 20,000 books, it's hard to stay as motivated for that as it is to say, "My goal is to sell 20,000 books because if I sell 20k books, I'll make this amount of dollars, and I'll... take this vacation." You know what I'm saying? So that the goals, you can mark them in books and money, but understand what you're doing it for.

It's about the lifestyle that you want.

Yes, that's what'll drive you.

11:20

That's what a lot of my teachers say, too. If you chase the money, it's just a tool to get to living your life the way you want. Most fiction writers I know want to be free to concentrate all of their time, or most of it, when it's not being divided by family or other obligations, on writing their books. Although, at the same time, I see a lot of resistance to this idea of multiple streams of income, just coming from a business perspective. It's like people think that it's cheating somehow, to not make money directly from the books, or cheating to sell books in a certain way. Do you find this is true in your experience?

Oh yeah. Yeah, people are very resistant to it because they see themselves as being an

author, not a business person. And, that's ok. If you want to put all your eggs into the book basket, that's fine. I have no problem with that, if it does it for you. But I like to expand because I look at myself as serving a community of readers. I've sold two point whatever million books. And people say, that's a lot of books and a lot of people. Well, it's a lot of books, but there aren't as many people as there are books. I've people that have bought five of my books. I don't know how many readers I actually have, maybe a half million or something?

Still a lot of people!

What I'm saying is, I give them more than just the book I've written. I have podcasts, and I have audios, and I have videos, and I'm on to DVDs now, and the reason is because the readers want it. Today's reader wants more than just the book. See, they have the tools now to find out more about you. You're not just selling your book, you're selling yourself.

You've just unearthed an idea that I've had for a long time, just from a different angle. Man, this is going to lead us on a tangent, but I have to tell you this to see what you think. We were talking about copyright, and if it was artificial, if it was natural, that kind of stuff. Because we're nerds, and that's what we talk about. But... I had thought, maybe, what you're doing is you're protecting the *source* of the ideas, not the implementation of the ideas. Because I also do some work in the fanfiction community, just, I talk to them and do research in it, and they all think that the original source is still valuable no matter how many derivative works they produce, and I tend to agree. And a lot of authors listening to this will probably disagree, but that's not the issue. What you are talking about is that people value *you*, the source of the ideas, not the specific implementation, which would be your books or whatever.

14:30

That's a wonderful way to put it, and it's so true. People aren't buying your book: they're buying the experience, and you are the experience. When people tell their friends about a good book that they've read, they love to tell them about the author as well.

You can't take that away.

Folks, think about this: When you buy a book, and you enjoy it, isn't one of the first things you do is look for more by that author?

Or research the author herself. I'm always curious about who made the thing that I like so much. Recently, I've come to believe that that's a universal impulse, the curiosity. You can't separate the creator from the creation.

That's a great way to put it. You're in creation, and so...

That's why people fall in love with artists so easily... they fall in love with the art.

That's right. This is all so important, and so, you're selling... what you're selling is so much more than a bunch of pages stuck between two covers.

It makes perfect sense to me, and I hope this helps make it more real to people who don't think this way, yet. And you're doing a *great* job of keeping us on topic! Me, not so much. You are definitely a pro, I can tell that you're really working to bring us back around to the topic. I have a very specific question I want to ask you. I was on Twitter, and I was eavesdropping on people's book marketing conversations. I realize that Twitter isn't necessarily representative of the entire self-marketing and self-publishing author community, but, it's telling. Every time I eavesdrop, the conversations are always about specific things to do, like using video book trailers, and using Skype in some way was a recent one. And, to me, it's like putting the cart before the horse?

Because, how do you know if this is going to work for you? How do you know what techniques to jump on, and what to give a miss?

17:00

Bill blows a conch shell into the phone. I want to blow on my conch shell because this is a major point. I use that in my talks, by the way.

It seems like a 'you' thing to do.

I really wish I'd chosen something other than a conch shell because it's a pain to haul that thing around. I keep looking for smaller and smaller conch shells, but I always tell people. My wife bought me that conch shell when we were on our honeymoon in St. Martin's. Now whenever I hear that sound, I get the urge to go run and do the dishes, and I'm not sure why... But anyways, the idea that people want to know, "Ok, what is the 10 best ways to do this, and what about using Skype..." This is where authors waste so much time, and so much money. I just conch shelled you, so I hope that you're zeroed-in right now, on this. People are killing themselves trying to find the perfect technique that works, and it is absolutely the wrong thing to do when you are trying to sell *anything*, but particularly something as esoteric as a book, and an author, and all that stuff we're wrapping up together here. It's just wrong, and the reason is because what you first have to do is create your plan to use your four marketing variables, your product, price, promotion, and distribution, and to reach your target market, you have to understand your target market, and all that has to be done, before you ever select a specific technique to use.

From reading your book, that was a major point. I have to say, for the people who don't know, I'm not all that experienced in self-publishing. My great strength is that I *do* things, I learn stuff and I put them into practice. So, I learned for myself what's worked for me, and that's how I got the basics down, but I'm not very sophisticated. Reading your book on that has led me to think about marketing my book in new ways. I've even designed a product for a huge market that I never thought of. Because I didn't really start with the market first. I didn't really get to know them... I just kind of hoped that it was a good match, and it turned out to be, but it was my first effort, so...

19:40

Yeah, and people often times write the book for themselves, rather than writing it for their market, and that's ok -- then you go find a market, you can do that. But so many people say to me, "Bill, what do you think of this idea? What do you think of that idea?" You can waste so much time. I know I've told you this story about, couple years ago... Listen, I've sold two plus million books of actual books. I also write books for authors, and I don't even count that seventeen books I've written and the number I've sold. I'm actually a literary person who writes books, so I keep those two things separate. Even with me, with all my experience, and I was a *marketing professor* for twenty five years, you'd think I would know better. This publicist talked me into hiring them to get me 20 radio shows for \$2000. I did the 20 radio shows and never sold a single book from it. I spend \$2000, and I've made a lot of money on books, but \$2000 is still \$2000! I'd like to have it right now. I'd split it with you!

Not to mention the time you spent preparing for it...

Yes, and the hope.

The emotional investment.

Does being on radio shows make sense? It might, but it didn't in *my* case. And if I had sat down and said to myself, "What's my plan?" And I had a plan, written out. If I'd just read it, because there's nothing less read than a marketing plan.

No kidding.

We write them because we think we should have them. What I show folks is how to go - and it's only five steps. I give them worksheets and that kind of stuff to use for it. It's easy to do -- it takes a little time, but it doesn't cost you anything to do it, that's the beauty of it. Not only are you not wasting your money and your time, you're saving your money and your time. And so, it's just so important to understand... My good friend John Kremer wrote a book called, "1001 Ways To Market And Sell Your Book." All of those ways, I've read the book -- it's 704 pages, fantastic. Great book, terrific. But guess what? Every one of those things works for some books. And in some situations, and for some markets. It's the combination you need to put together for *your* market, your book, and your situation, that you've got to plan out. Otherwise you run out from hither to yon. And it's not the hither, it's the yon, that gets people.

I am blown away by people talking about how much money they spend on various techniques, like multi-year long book tours, and things like that. I haven't gotten the heart to ask them, "Did it help you sell books?" Because I don't want to make them feel bad. But when they talk to me, they're obviously very frustrated with how much they've spent and how little they've gotten in return. You think that the answer is really getting to know your market and knowing exactly what they're going to respond to.

People buy in certain ways. You have to understand how your market buys, why they buy, and when they're going to buy. And you've got to carefully select your markets, and there are so many markets to go after, but you got to target markets, you have to pick the ones that are going to help you reach your goals. And, not worry about the other ones.

Can we do a hypothetical example, to make this more real? Let's say that I am a historical romance author, and I've written some Regencies. So, obviously, that book, even though I write romance, which is an incredibly popular category, it's not going to appeal to every single romance reader.

Correct. And let's start with the broadest thing: Are you writing for men or women, first?

Oh, women.

Women, obviously, yeah. I was just talking to a romance author recently who couldn't understand why men weren't buying her book because it would make them better in a relationship.

Oh, dear.

I wanted to smack her! Wait a second, of course it would make them better in a relationship, but men don't care.

Most of them would never read a romance book for that purpose. Some books, sure, but romance novels... is like really off-limits. It's like going into Victoria's Secret.

Absolutely. So, that's what I'm saying. People are so unclear what their markets are. So, getting back to your example, we've got women... women who read romance novels. Now, that's not every woman. Let's find out what characteristics there are for women who read romance novels. Now we're getting into women who are interested in *historical* romance novels. Who would they be? You start getting into these different things. I have to tell you, once you start getting into that group, you start getting some pretty loyal people. And if you're creating mailing lists, or whatever you're doing, you want to market *hard* to those people. You want to market *aggressively* to those people. And here's what's going to happen. Some people are going to get a little upset about

your marketing. "Wait a second, I'm not really that interested in this stuff."

Well, they can just unsubscribe.

You *want* them to unsubscribe.

Right. Even if it's technically free to have them on your list, I know from experience, they create trouble later. They end up costing you money.

They do! What's the old saying -- don't try to teach a pig to sing, it wastes time, and annoys the pig. You're looking for people who will be your fans. You're looking for people who will celebrate everything you do. I've got people who, when my new book comes out, they can't *wait* for my new book to come out. They love what I do. And I've got people who can't stand me.

Of course! It's like being a politician. If you can't create that love-hate, you're never going to get popular enough to get the vote.

I saw a review of one of my books in the Village Voice, two years ago. Now, the book was written in 2000, so I don't know why they were just reviewing it then, and the guy wrote in there, he said, "This is the first book I ever wanted to punch in the crotch." That's what he wrote!

I would post that on my website all over the place!

Exactly. I wrote to him. I was trying to stir up a controversy. My readers of my books hate the Village Voice. I don't hate the Village Voice, I think it's OK, but my readers hate the VV. So, if the VV hates my book, this would make my readers really happy! They'd have pitchforks, they'd be burning down barns and stuff like that, so. That's the kind of person you're looking for. So the person writing this historical romance, she's looking for people that that's all they want to read. When they go to the bookstore, they go to the historical romance aisle. She needs to understand who those people are: what their motivations are. And then within that, there's going to be different groups. There's going to be the gift market, the scholarly reader, book clubs, women who read these books to learn lessons. There's all these things within that, and you want to know what those targets are. Buy books online, that's another target. You're going to refine these niches. Remember, there are riches in the niches. You want to find your niche. Once you find that niche, you want to market to them like crazy. And this is where people get nervous, they think, "Oh, I don't want them to be upset with me."

Oh, I have too. I face this too, every time I send out more than X number of emails per day to my list, I think, "Oh, they're going to be annoyed, they're hearing too much from me." But that's rarely the case.

Well, your fans won't. My friend Mike Litman, he just gave a talk the other night. He said, "You know, people are afraid to aggressively market. But think about all the things you enjoy in life, if they had not been aggressively marketed, you would not be enjoying them." He said, "For example, the Blackberry. That took some pretty aggressive marketing. I couldn't live without my Blackberry. I'm so glad that that guy was aggressive." He said, "Steve Jobs. I love my iPod. And my iPhone. That was really aggressively marketed, and if he hadn't, we wouldn't have it. What would my life be like without my iPod, my iPhone, and my Blackberry?"

29:30

That's a good thing for authors to keep in mind for when they're marketing their books. Is that, they don't want their fans to miss out.

Yes, remember you're solving problems. And when you stop solving problems, they're

going to stop buying anyway. So what are you worried about? This is why you've got to create your community. This is why you've got to create your fanbase, and you've got to feed that fanbase with more than just your book.

Because especially, it takes a long time to write a fiction book. Most people don't do it in less than half a year, and everyone I know has jobs and whatever, and it takes them at least a year. If they had to wait a year between *anything* from you, that would be annoying. Like, "Oh, great, they're only writing me because they want to sell me their book."

Right. So, what if you did something like, you said, "Ok, listen. I've got some pretty interesting characters in my book. What happened to them after the book?" The ones that die, we know that. But the ones that were still living at the end of the book, what happened to them? Your fans can write in with what they think happened.

That is the heart of fan fiction. I know this call isn't about that, I've been thinking a lot about this, so, I'm glad to hear someone else say it. Because I think that fan involvement in your material, that passion that fans have for your stuff, that's awesome! If I could write a fiction book that was popular enough to get half a million fanfiction stories, I would be so happy about that.

I don't want to get into techniques too much because we're talking about creating a plan, here. When you pick that market, when you learn your niche, now you start... You take your four marketing variables (product, price, promotion, and distribution) and you create specific plans for each one of them. Product plan: I'm going to create a CD, or whatever it happens to be. And you start to write these things down for yourself, and I always tell people you're making a to-do list. But then you're going to take that to-do list and convert it into a to-sell list. And now, now you can go out and start hiring a publicist, or now you can go out and start building your followers on Twitter. Because now, you're building followers on Twitter, but you know why.

And you know the kind of followers, people who will buy no matter what channel you communicate through.

Yes. Because you want to reward your fans and annoy the heck out of everyone else.

That's a good thing to keep in mind. I'm totally guilty of being too wimpy in my marketing, even though I know I have 6000 hard core fans, and a good percentage buy from me every time I mail out. I'm still a little bit nervous about offending them. And it's not that I feel the sting of rejection every time someone unsubscribes. I've had people write in and say, "You are so annoying, I can't stand you as much as I can't stand Rachael Ray." And my brother and sister hate Rachael Ray so I know about the hatred. And I just laughed and said, "Good for you!" It's some totally bogus reason that has nothing to do with the end result of being rejected that creates it in my mind, so.

And if people are saying to you, "You're just like Rachael Ray," you are doing great.

Yeah, that's what I thought too. I thought, "Wow! I'm the Rachael Ray of my niche! This is really cool! I should start calling myself the Rachael Ray of my niche."

It's the 80/20 rule, and I think it's more 95/5. That's the beauty of niche marketing. You keep getting stronger and stronger and stronger, and you can have more than one niche. But every niche has got to feel like you wrote this book just for them, that this fan page is just for them. That's the secret to it, is making people feel special.

That makes a lot of sense.

You're doing it because you want a different lifestyle. That's why I say it's so important

to... I'm very much a fan of saying, "I want to sell this many books and make this much money this month." Because it's measurable and easy. But I want people to keep in mind why they're doing it. All the old techniques you hear, such as cutting things out of magazines and putting them on the fridge with a magnet, that all works. The day my life changed... I happened to be with my wife, something happened, it was really cool. We looked at each other, and we made a decision that we were going to change our lives. One of the things we did was, I don't know if your listeners know, I'm legally blind from macular degeneration, so I can't drive a car... We went home and took big pieces of poster board, and we wrote our very specific goals on there, and lifestyle goals. And we put them on the wall above my chest of drawers, so every night I'd take off my watch and my ring, I'm reading my goals. And every morning, I'm getting ready to go to work, I'm reading my goals. This is back when I was a college professor. And now I'm a full-time author. It drove me, and I'll tell you what it was. We wanted to live on the water. We weren't living on the water, we were living in Orlando, and I'd just given a talk, and we were sitting on the dock having lunch at a restaurant in Ft. Lauderdale, when a huge yacht went by. That was when we made the decision to change our lives. And we set a goal for ourselves. We said, "We don't know how we're going to do this..." I did it through books, but at the time, we didn't know exactly how we were going to do it, just that we wanted to do it. We set the lifestyle goal first and then we went out to decide how we were going to do it, and here's the goal: "We're not going to let the sun set on a day that we don't take one step toward our goal." Every day, just do *something*.

I have that same principle. I suffered from extremely low self esteem in college and high school, and then I finally woke up and said, "Well, you got to do something. Otherwise, you're just not going to do anything."

It's the life changes that are going to set you free. The things Kat and I have been talking about, such as getting over your fears of selling and marketing hard to your niches, that kind of stuff, you'll get blown out of the water by the first person that gives you a hard time, unless you have a reason for doing this. The first yahoo that comes along and tells you that this isn't going to work, or you shouldn't be doing this...

Or even getting flamed on a story you posted in your Livejournal. "Oh, this really sucks." You can laugh off the flames and say...

Maybe they're right, so you just rewrite it. You have to realize that you're on this journey to achieve something that most people won't achieve. You'll be an author, and most people don't even achieve that. The great thing is, you're going to go after what you want by being an author. The minute you're an author, you've done something special anyway. Don't let them take that away from you. I get really excited, I get passionate about this kind of stuff.

I think we've proven that it's impossible for us to have any kind of discussion without going into metaphysical stuff, you know, the big questions like what are you doing with your life. Cause that's a big topic to me, too, just on a personal level.

The way we're talking here, this is the way you got to talk to your audience. To sell. You're not selling them facts, paper with words on it, you're selling them experience. You're transporting them. You're giving them something that they can't get anywhere else. You're reaching a part of their soul. When you write a novel that people really enjoy, you've done something very special for that person. They ought to give you money! So, get passionate about it. And get just as passionate about the selling and marketing as you do about the creating.

As you point out, it's an incomplete path without both the marketing and the writing of the book. Because you write your book, you want other people to read it. And if you don't market your book, no one is going to read it... very few people are going to read

it. Especially the internet is so crowded now, just by posting something on your blog, you can't count on it ever getting read. Even for the noncommercial writers, like my blog, it's still just as important to me to get the readers as if I were making money from it.

Absolutely.

-- sign off chit-chat.

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