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Re-energize Your Career from the Inside Out

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It's that time of year when I think about what I've written and my accomplishments. For the past several years, there haven't been many in the way of writing. With a slew of personal problems, I've barely been able to write in my journal, never mind think about publication.

All of that changed in May when the doctor told me I needed brain surgery. Filled with fear, I thought back over my life and realized that this could be the end. Luckily, there wasn't anything I regretted in my relationships with my family and friends. It was different, however, with my writing career.

Over the past two decades, I had enjoyed some success—four books with total sales of more than 55,000, articles in *Woman's Day*, *Seventeen*, and *Woman's World*, and a script that was produced and aired on a FOX affiliate in Syracuse, New York. These were all things I was proud of.

Add to that the fact that I had helped many people to live better lives through my writing, and I was somewhat satisfied. It was that somewhat that troubled me though. As cliché as it sounds, I had always wanted one of my books to make *The New York Times* best-seller list.

I probably could have lived with not making the List. Maybe it's a long shot and I never will. What bothered me was that I had given up trying. Yes, I had had a lot of personal problems—a divorce and three deaths in a very short amount of time—but that wasn't an excuse for giving up. My dream would never happen if I didn't try.

After my surgery, I made a decision to try. I went on an all-out campaign to re-energize my career and discover the passion for writing that had once ruled my life. Here are some of the things I tried. Hopefully, they can help you if you're stuck. Remember, these tips are not about publishing more. They are about writing more and discovering the passion that brought you into this business in the first place.

Have brain surgery. Okay, maybe not, but the spirit of this can help you as it did me. Think about those things that you've always wanted to write but didn't have time for. Is there an unfinished novel or screenplay in your filing cabinet? Have you always wanted to try your hand at poetry? If so, begin. Don't assume that you have all the time in the world to get to these things. It may sound corny, but living each day as if it might be your last really does re-energize not just a writing career, but an entire life.

Write morning pages. If you haven't read one of Julia Cameron's books, then do so and put into action her suggestion of writing three longhand pages every morning. I did this for many years then stopped. Now that I've begun again, I am

more productive and more passionate about my writing than ever before.

Read *Bird by Bird* again. This book by Anne Lamont reminds writers about the importance of their craft without worrying about the pressures of writing to fit certain publication standards. This book helped me to remember some of the reasons I

started writing in the first place, most importantly an intense love of the written word that had gotten lost somewhere beneath a pile of rejection letters.

Write for fun. Sometimes we can get so caught up in earning a living that we forget to have fun with our craft. Yes, of course, we need to support ourselves, but we also need to enjoy what we are doing, too. Getting up a few minutes earlier to write in your journal or taking a few minutes

at the end of the day after the "real" work is finished to write something that's fun will go a long way in re-energizing your career.

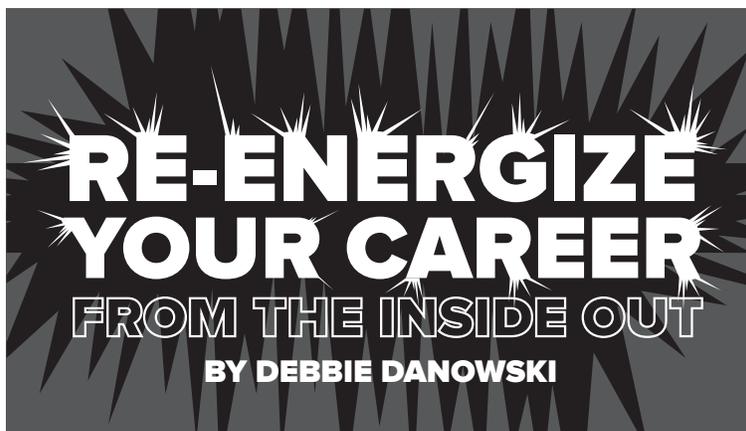
Read a really great book in your field. Do you remember the first great book you read that made you want to write about a certain subject or in a certain area? If so, pick it up again and re-read it. With publications of your own under your belt, you may be surprised how inspiring it still is. For the past several weeks, I've been devouring some of the best self-help books ever written and as an added bonus I'm developing deep personal insights into my life.

Change the scenery. While I don't recommend the hospital as an option, changing the things you look at may provide you with new ideas for articles. Perhaps there's a new coffee shop in town or an art gallery you've been meaning to get to. Or maybe you've just noticed a new specialty market around the corner or perhaps a children's bookstore. Whatever it is, go there and look around. A change in scenery or routine provides new stimulation for creating writing ideas.

Rest. This may seem counterproductive to those of us who are extremely productive, but it's amazing what a few hours of rest can do for your attitude. If a nap is an option, take one. If not, perhaps you can meditate or just sit outside on the front porch. By taking time away, you will replenish your arsenal of ideas and eventually be more productive.

Re-commit once again. Many times the things we most want get lost under a pile of commitments and deadlines that don't further our most cherished dreams. Make a decision to put aside at least ten minutes a few times a week to work toward one of your most precious goals. Right now, I am writing two pages on most days in a book that I absolutely love. There was a time when I would have avoided doing this simply because two pages isn't enough. I thought I had to have more time to accomplish anything. Yet, within a few months I will be almost halfway to finishing a book. This is sure a lot better than never starting at all.

As I sit here revising this article, I am happy to report that these tips really do work. I have in front of me a contract for my next book, *Why Can't My Child Stop Eating* (Central Recovery Press) sold by my wonderful agent Linda Konner. And even better than that, I am almost back to my normal health and still here to write yet another book. ♦



Debbie Danowski, Ph.D., is the author of four books about food addiction, including *Why Can't I Stop Eating?* and *The Emotional Eater's Book of Inspiration*. She is also an associate professor of communication at Sacred Heart University in Fairfield, Connecticut.