



## Publish Your Purpose Podcast 7

Jenn: Alright Mark. Here we are again for another episode. How's your day going? How's your week going?

Mark: Fantastic. Doing really good.

Jenn: Well, I'm happy that it's fantastic because I'm sure that there will be other points in this process where it might be a little less than fantastic. I might be the reason for said lack of fantasticness.

Mark: You are really good about that. About managing expectations. I like that. I'm getting a little nervous though because you've said it more than once.

Jenn: Yeah. And I would rather make you over-anticipate, than all of a sudden you'll be blindsided by "wow, this is hard." I would rather when it comes you will be "Oh, that was it?" I would much rather have that reaction vs. driving to Hartford to pillage and plunder.

Mark: Right.

Jenn: I want to talk today about writing rituals. When I say rituals, I'm just talking about habits. Everyone has a different kind of writing style, different type of habit, different way to ensure they actually get the writing done. I want to hear from you, I know that writing is a fairly recent thing for you, because it's not like you're an everyday journaler for example. I think that people who might be doing that already, it's part of their habit; it might be an easier transition to say "hey now I'm going to start writing on a book I want to work on."

What is your current lay of the land look like? As far as how you're writing, where, when... just all of the details.

Mark: This is a great conversation because there isn't one formula. There isn't one exact way of doing this. Once I started to realize that, early on in the Academy, I think I was just smart enough to figure out let's at least start toward the path of writing a checklist of adding writing to the checklist. Now, I'm pretty regimented, being a military guy and everything. I do things very matter-of-factly and in order. But for writing though, that's very different



because especially what you're writing about. You've got to be motivated. You've got to be in the mood. And all these things have to happen, before you actually do it.

I think for me, the biggest thing that has been helpful is putting it on the task bar; putting it out there as something that has to be done today. I gave myself a little bit of a break. I just figure out when. This is where you can get really creative. You can use all the technology that is available to you. I think about a quarter of the way through the Academy I fell in love with the dictation device on Word. Because there's an exercise we did where you continue to write, didn't worry about auto check, auto spell, and the red squiggly line; you just woofph, you just put it all out there. That was really helpful that it didn't have to be picture perfect at that moment. Just start the process and get going.

I find that in the morning, it's really quiet here, I'm really productive and fresh, right? I spend a little bit of time, because the day will quickly begin in the next hour. I take some of that time – even if it's just writing a short, real quick outline of what I'd like to write about later that day. That's something else I will do. What was pretty helpful for me in this process is I had many pieces, parts, notes, napkins, you name it. Picture the briefcase/suitcase full of all these scratch pieces of paper and now it's just a matter of pulling one out and addressing more of it and getting more detailed with each one. So that's been pretty helpful too.

Jenn: Tell me a little more about the dictation and using Word. Remember the person listening to this may or may not be on the author journey yet, tell me a little more how that came to be, how it's working out. Is it time saving? Anything really.

Mark: I think like most of us in today's day and age, we're multi-taskers. Let's face it we're just multi-taskers. If the news is going on in the background, the kids need something, if you're working on something at your desk, so I was doing just that. I had to do something mindless. I was just putting stuff together at my desk, but in the mean time I could talk to my computer like a crazy person. It was in the class, actually, the Academy, was telling us these great resources that are out there. You know, your voice recorder and what do you do with it afterward? How do you get that transcribed? For pennies you can get that done. And for the word dictation, I like that one. You activate word and click on the dictation. Is it perfect? No. You're not turning this in for the A+ paper. But, I was able to get the writing down through dictation and then if you're okay with it, you have to give yourself permission here, that it's not going to be picture perfect. There are going to be misspelled words, the dictation is not going to pick it up. That was okay because I was able to take the dictation and then, in short order, clean it up and then wow, I had 2000 words written. Then you just keep doing that.



Sure, that might be over kill at some point. That you've told that story a couple of times. I don't know how many times we start chapter one! Almost, in the process, "I'm not reading that again!" I'm not going to read that for a month!

Jenn: So there's a writer, Jeff Goins, who is pretty well known. He's written a handful of NY Times bestselling books and he talks about a method that he has where he looks at his writing in three buckets. I am paraphrasing, so if I am off base for anyone watching or listening, feel free to correct me. My understanding is that he has three buckets. He has the writing bucket. Every day he has to work on writing something. Say, we're talking about a book (in his case he was talking about blogging), say we're looking at ten chapters. Today he's looking at bucket number one, of I have to write one of these 10 chapters. It could be chapter two. Bucket number two is editing. But, it is not editing that same thing that was written. I wrote it yesterday, I slept on it overnight, meditated about it perhaps, now I'm coming back now. I might be writing new on chapter two, but now I'm editing chapter one. And then the third bucket is idea generation. It's just as you're writing, I don't know if this happens for you but it does for me, I'll be writing something and then that ADD squirrel brain, says "ooh, I could totally do this, this, this and this."

Mark: Yeah

Jenn: It's a matter of keeping that list somewhere so that you don't lose that stroke of genius that does happen to come, I think, quite frequently when you're sitting in the zone and writing. He talks about having these three buckets at once, that really help facilitate that whole process. You try to edit right there while you're writing. That self-editing, that critical demon that pops out, that's what stops a lot of people from really being able to prolifically put words on paper.

Mark: I totally agree. How I ended up doing that strategically is... we talked about my Spark conference that we had in Savannah and my job was... There was one color of the post it notes, just like you were talking about, as I was either reading what I had already written or I had to write some things, I would get "Oh, what I forgot to say... Oh, I meant to say this... or, I want to talk about that." And that's what I use for that one color on that sticky and that was in the parking lot. I was able to just write it down as a memory jogger and take that sticky and put it up on the wall in the parking lot. I left that as my homework for continuation from the Spark Conference of what I had to do, then go back and start filling in. Very similar.



Biggest thing, if you're watching or listening, you've got to develop something at least works for you. These are all just ideas. Your ideas are probably going to be much better and more creative, but find something that works for you. What I learned in the Academy, just the construct, just the outline of it; it wasn't the mechanics of it, it didn't say "Okay - 8:35 you sit down and pick up your pen." It wasn't anything like that. The moral of the lesson was if you don't plan to write, how are you going to plan to publish this book?

Jenn: I feel like that could be a good title of this episode. It's so perfect.

Thinking about that, you said that you add it to your task bar in Outlook. You're outlining before the day starts. "I need to write today and here's what I'm planning on writing." These four or five points. How are you making time to actually get that writing done in your very busy schedule? Is that writing time blocked on the calendar? Are you anticipating when you think you have time? What is that part of your routine look like?

Mark: Every day is different. It depends on what is going on the calendar or schedule. I give myself a little bit of a pass. What we just talked about with Word and dictation? That's my writing time. What we also talked about is multi-tasking. I'm not a really good runner and talker. Either I'm running to run, that's it. I'm listening to music and running. I can't do a lot of multi-tasking there. I'm thinking a lot. But I do ride my bike a lot (to save on the old knees), so I can also voice record with the headset while I'm riding. To me, I kind of cheat. That's my writing as well because I'm going to take that, download it and get it transcribed – now I've got my writing.

It depends on where you are in your journey or in the process. Early on, it was the creative juices were just flowing. I was getting thought after thought after thought. It was like water to a dry sponge. I just had to get it out there. It wasn't perfect. There are people like you in this world that will make it perfect. That's why we love you. But to me I just had to get the inventory. I guess we can talk about the great sense of accomplishment when you dump it all into Word and you can just click on it and get your word count. "It's like YEAH! I have 20,000 words!" 5,000 of them might be crap but I've got 20,000 words.

To answer your question specifically... I get up each day and I might physically write on a notepad or something like that. If I can get it done uninterrupted before the day actually begins. Or, I knew that I was talking about going to elaborate more on boot camp, I'm leaving upstate NY and I'm a small town kid from a small village and town and going to boot camp and there may be some things I forgot in there, and I would write that outline and that was so much easier for me to do than start populating the four paragraphs in the



outline. I think it just helped me take a little bit of the self-induced pressure off (no publisher was saying “I’m grading you today and you get an F if you didn’t do it in the proper sequence).

On Sundays, I would spend my time just devoted to the Academy and what I can learn from that. It was roughly about an hour, maybe an hour and a half if I drifted, or squirrel factor, or whatever. Then I would kind of plan the week, professional calendar, my personal calendar. Just because I’m writing a book, doesn’t mean I have to make life boring for everyone else around me. I realized I needed those breaks too. And so I wanted to make sure I incorporated (Wednesday night was date night for us), just those little things. Then on Sunday I would have a draft schedule of what to look for. Was it perfect? No. Did it always go exactly how I wanted it to? Heck no. But at least when I look back on Saturday, I could say “Hey, I did about 75% of that. That was pretty good.” Where, if I didn’t have anything, it’s one of those when everybody wants to call a meeting and then it’s “who called this meeting?” “what are we doing here?”

Jenn: The crux of what you’re saying is on a weekly basis, so it’s week to week where you’re on Sunday looking to week ahead – where am I going to fit my writing time in my week this week in particular? Not thinking three months ahead.

Mark: It was definitely the first. Here’s why. Early on in the Academy, I think it’s week one, is the contract with yourself. That sounds kind of easy, or it sounds cheesy, I don’t know. I took that to the 10<sup>th</sup> degree.

Jenn: Of course you did!

Mark: [laughing] That was a huge, huge event for me. I think you realize I’m an all-in kind of guy and I wanted to know what did that really mean. For me, it had to be week by week because my goal and the commitment to myself was from week one to fourteen, I wanted to cross the finish line on week fourteen with my manuscript. I could do it in those really nice neat compartments of the week.

I included Mr. Wonderful, I included my friends and family, so they were aware that I might be a little bit absent, might not be out at the parties or dinners or something like that, but then again, what I was doing, is I built in a support system. They became (whether they realized it or not – I wasn’t trying to do psychological operations on them) my cheerleaders. They would see something on Facebook. My neighbor, she would chime in... “Go Mark, go! I’m so proud of you. I can’t wait to read the book.” It’s those little tiny things, the ups and downs, the ebbs and flows of the emotional roller coaster



ride. I needed a constant. I needed to use the Academy as the fourteen week road map. You as the tour guide. And me just continually fueling the vehicle to take on that journey.

18: 30 – Commercials

Jenn: How did you come up with how many words you were going to write? And how exactly you were going to fit those words in that fourteen week period of time?

Mark: That's a really good question because I didn't have a clue. Let's just be honest, that's why I reached out to you. I knew that I had a burning desire to write this book And I knew why I wanted to write this book, because of other people that might be in my situation. And I could help. My way of giving back. But then the mechanics of it, no clue.

There's one week in the Academy, I am so glad you didn't see me rolling my eyes on Sunday – "Really? Do I really care what an 8 x 6 book, paperback, 300 pages...buh buh buh" And then you get to the end of that and it tells you, "How ya like that book?" Well, that's about 50,000 words right there. How do you like this one? That's about 75,000 words right there. So, it helps you. Okay, now it's getting real. Now we're putting some numbers. Now we're actually filling in some of these X factors in the formula. It wasn't a real formula or system until after I had realized that my goal should be somewhere in the 50- 60,000 word category.

Jenn: Here's what I'm thinking. There's so many different ways to slice and dice what we're talking about. I want anyone listening or watching to say "I can do this." I know that I tend to make things sound more overwhelming and daunting. It is somewhat intentional because I want people to know what they're getting into. Even in what you were just saying, at 50-60,000 words, a lot of non-fiction books are 30,000 words. Yours is memoir so memoirs typically tend to be a little bit longer. I just think of one of my books, is about 30,000 words. If you can sit down and produce 1,000 words in a session of sitting and writing, that might be an hour or two hours, depending on an individual's speed of writing. I do that 3 times a week, it's only going to take me 10 weeks to get those 30,000 words on paper.

I think explaining that simple math behind how to make this a reality is so important.

What happens is that you open Word, it is blank, that curser looks like the devil popping out at you. It's daunting. It's scary. I even think of the last book that I wrote, so I (as we talked about in one of the previous episodes; I feel like I'm a sprinter when it comes to it. It just hit me.) so I went into my calendar and I put in every morning, from 8 – 9 (because



my kids are generally on the bus by 8ish) so from 8-9 I blocked out that's my writing time. Because if I wait until later in the day, my mind is just not sharp enough to actually get really concisely what I want, out. So, I would do the five days a week from 8-9. But there would be plenty of days where I was in the groove. If every day could have been like that, I would have fifty books out. But it's not how it works. It's like one out of every ten times that you're totally on fire. There would be those times where I'm just going to move what I have going on today and keep going.

I had a couple, during the last writing sprint for my last book, it was maybe two or three times, where I had a four or five hour writing session. Where I hammered it out. I think that that is what to do... going back to giving yourself permission. Thinking of this... I'm saying I'm going to try five days a week for one hour a day. I can get 500-1000 words done in an hour. I don't really know what my rate is at this particular time. But 500-1000 is a really good number. For someone else it could only be 300. That's fine. Everybody is different. To some degree you want to put quality on paper. You don't want to write out complete non-sense that you don't think you're going to use. You want to be somewhat strategic. When I have those moments of being on fire, I am rolling with this. I don't care what is on my calendar today, I'm moving it.

Those were victories. You already feel victorious when you actually accomplish like "I wrote on Monday from 8-9. I'm a rock star. I got my writing done." And then you can go on with the rest of your day. But when you get to those four hour blocks you feel like the queen of the Universe, completely victorious. "I just saved myself four separate days basically." I think setting those expectations of yourself is so important.

If I set the expectation that I was going to prolifically write four hours a day, five days a week. (A) it wouldn't fit in my business schedule, it wouldn't fit in my personal life and it's not realistic in any way. It's better off having those moments of triumph where you really were in the groove and were able to go longer. Or even if you went to an hour and a half and your goal was an hour, all of those things go back to little wins and giving yourself that gold star, that we referenced a few times.

It's all about being sustainable and actually getting you to your end goal. If you start writing and you're doing a thousand words per session and then something happens and you're feeling a little foggy, just off, something's going on in your personal life, and you see that that drops back to five hundred words, you have that data that you could rearrange your life to say "Ok, you know what, my goal was September, but now I'm going to have to push it back to November because I'm writing a little bit slower right



now. And then if speed back up, you adjust it again. So, I think being flexible and also giving yourself permission.

Mark: That and, one of the other things that was so powerful, and I don't know if I'm a good student, bad student or what, but here's what I know about going all into the Academy, I tried not to have any pre-judgments. I tried not to have a bias or anything. Or just question anything. I basically believed anything that was in the curriculum. It says if you sit here and do this and follow this formula, it's going to work, because it HAD to. I committed to this fourteen week process. No pressure on you right? I had to come to the finish line with the manuscript.

The other thing I thought was so powerful. Really minor, but really cool for me, was the time blocking. You went over that, a very quick, quick lesson, and one of the strategies, one of the tools that you use, I said I was going to be all in – I'm going to try this. And son-of-a-gun, it worked! I'm going to do it again. I'm going to set the timer. It was one of these ridiculous timers on line because it was obnoxious. Done. So how much time do I have? Boom. It goes off. It was almost like a bit of a game.

To your point, some days were better than others. And once you get in that groove, you know. Especially if you're writing about something that's really emotional or hard for you to go back and re-visit. Wasn't much fun the first go around, certainly is not going to be fun for you to go back and re-address it. Those maybe slowed me down a little bit. But it's okay because you've planned the plan and you're working the plan and you have that goal in mind. I absolutely had to break it out in chunks in those fourteen week segments. The fourteen planning sessions. I must say I was really organized at work too because I knew what I had to get done today. I had to get out of here and get home. It's been great.

Jenn: Do you have any additional things around your ritual that you find to be helpful? Let me give you an example. For me, I am in my office and I cannot write sitting here. I don't know what it is, but I just cannot do it. There is a super cute local coffee shop that I wrote two of my books, the entirety of them, sitting in that coffee shop. And mind you, there's the loud grinding in the background, there's jazz music playing, there's people talking, but for whatever reason, that atmosphere made me have to pound it out. And also, I didn't connect to Wi-Fi when I was there so I eliminated all of my distractions. I turned my phone over, I made sure that anyone who works with or I work with, I'm just not available. And doing it like 8-9, sometimes, closer to 10, but still early enough in the day that not too many people are bothering you yet. If you wait until the afternoons, the distractions are exponentially higher.



Now, my last book I did in a sitting room that we have downstairs. For whatever reason, no one in my house uses but me. And so, I created this whole ritual of my own where I had a certain blanket, I had my tea, I have a very small reading light. I would have my laptop, not connected to the internet, but I would have to do it when my children were not awake or they were at school. It was still during that 8-9 hour. I knew when I was sitting on that couch, it was time to write. Do you have anything like that?

Mark: Yeah, I do. It was a lot different and leads up to frame of mind. I had to take a look at a day in the life of Mark. And all of the things that I want to do, all the things I have to do. I wanted to put those all down on paper. It was kind of like a mind map but not that organized. I had all of that. Then I had to try to fit all of those individual pieces and parts into the calendar and schedule.

The biggest thing, I don't know if I'm just attracted to the word, or my local gym, I had to fit it in because it was Blast. The name of the gym was Blast. And you're going to blast your attitude. You're going to blast your altitude. It's just Blast. I love the word. It's a one hour dedicated time of full body workout. It's a block away. I have no excuse, other than laziness to not get there. I paid for it at the beginning of the month. I dedicated in the commitment, in the contract with myself, that I would do blast on a routine basis. I know that if this is clear and if I am ready and prepping the battle space in me physically, that I will feel better. This is going to be tiresome. I don't want to do it today, I just don't want to do it today. That was kind of getting me in the frame of mind. Maybe getting to the coffee shop was your frame of mind because then you knew – between those parameters. That was helping me get set.

Then there was just, I keep saying I cheat the system, whenever I can fit it in to do the voice recorder. The iPhone has the one piece with the microphone. I had to have that with me if I was on the train. Everyone was looking at the crazy person talking to himself. But it was the multi-tasking. The dedicated time slots. Driving. I don't do a lot of driving because I live in mid-town Atlanta. If I was driving to our home in Savannah... that was a four hour time slot that I could really dedicate and knock out a bunch of stuff. OR, I would spend the first hour and catch up with my friends. Casual conversation. I wish I had those more concrete formulas. But then I guess it matters how you are and how you make it work.

Jenn: That's exactly it. I feel like this has been such an awesome episode because we're providing really good tactics on how to get it done. Our styles, I feel like we are very similar in a lot of ways, but our styles are very different when it comes to the writing process and I think that's really important to illustrate. My rigid way of doing things and



your flexible way of doing things. Neither is right, neither is wrong. Everyone falls on a spectrum or a continuum of where they fall. It's a matter of finding what works for you and having that accountability.

Mark: Absolutely. And getting it done.

Jenn: That's what it's all about. I am thrilled I am so happy that we were able to get together today and bring another episode to our viewers and listeners. I think we will close for now. But of course, we'll be back as we continue on in your journey as being an author.

Mark: Awesome. See you next time.

Jenn: Bye.

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