



# THE WRITE STUFF

By:  
Lisa Printz Roday  
© All Rights Reserved

## **The Write Stuff**

**July 2019**

“Don’t give up your day job”, my husband said, tossing a few sheets of paper onto the mess on my desk. Neither of us has made the leap far enough into the digital age to completely eschew paper. We both print anything that needs substantive attention. I was glad that the short essay I had emailed to him was deemed print worthy.

“Be honest, please,” I had asked in my cover email two weeks earlier, “just don’t be brutal.”

Apparently, his interpretation of not being brutally honest was to let a few weeks go by without mentioning that he had even gotten the damn thing.

Yes, I wanted his candid assessment; the silent treatment told me everything I needed to know.

As between my husband and my two adult sons, all three of whom had received my first attempt at writing during this century, they had likely conferred in a hastily arranged conference call.

“Who’s going to tell her that it sucks?” my youngest son might have said.

“You tell her,” my oldest son would have responded, “you’re the empathetic one”.

“No, you tell her”, my youngest would have insisted.

“Dad should do it”, they both would have said in unison.

“But, don’t be an asshole about it,” my oldest son would have added.

My husband is many things; tactful is not one of them. I’m sure he thought his pithy comment was constructive and well-articulated feedback.

As it happens, I haven’t quit my “day job”. I’m still consumed by Career #5 and trying to figure out what’s next.

Not including the multiple baby-sitting, waiting tables, stocking shelves and other odd jobs I had in the years before graduating from law school, there have been five professional versions of myself in 37 years.

I had a 15+ year run as a matrimonial lawyer in New York City. Had I not been the trailing spouse, I’d likely still be in my Park Avenue office with the 8’ chestnut brown leather Chesterfield I bought for myself when my name was added to the door.

Lisa Printz Roday

© All Rights Reserved

Alas, the Chesterfield did not survive the move across the country. When we arrived in Seattle it had “fallen off the truck” somewhere along the way. With the sofa went the lawyer; in Seattle I threw myself headlong into Career #2.

Having missed nearly the entirety of their first 6 and 7 years, I assumed the role of full-time mother with a zeal I never anticipated. Being an over achiever, I greeted every day as a new opportunity to make the best pb& j sandwiches, be the coolest mom on the field trips and otherwise atone for the 70 hours weeks I worked during their early lives.

No matter what else happens in my life, nothing can ever top Career #2.

My third career was emotionally taxing and personally gratifying. I helped families in crisis to navigate the terrifying experience of the illness and occasional death of a newborn. For five years I loved that job but needed to leave it; I was mincemeat by the time I walked out of the NICU for the last time.

My fourth turn at the career wheel was as far from working with preemies and their families as I could get. I became a consultant to a hedge fund manager; the work was intellectual, and I had no emotional investment. I enjoyed the people and loved working remotely, but I felt rudderless.

One day, Career # 5 literally fell into my lap. I was sitting in my client’s office when one of his former partners called. He was looking for someone to run a distribution company for a product line that he manufactured. In a matter of weeks, the legalities behind us, I was a business owner.

That was just over four years ago. I got on the rat wheel, but I can’t find my way off.

It has become so demoralizing that I checked myself into the Betty Ford Clinic for career failures; I signed up for a four week “Career Fellowship” designed to help me unlock my true potential and find the career that’s going to make me happy for the rest of my working life.

With the help of my peers—four other career challenged people—I was asked to plumb the depths of my experiences, make life maps, take personality tests, strength tests, top qualities tests, all in the name of identifying the one true path that I was born to follow. Four weeks and hundreds of hours later I was delivered not one but three possible paths.

Apparently, I could be a philanthropist. One morning I will wake up, suddenly find myself a multi-millionaire and say to no one in particular, “Awesome, I think I’m going to be a philanthropist.”

Equally unlikely was the suggestion that I get a spot on a paid board. Let’s face it, getting on a paid board happens mostly to philanthropists—the Board outcome is about as likely!

The third suggested path—writing-- didn’t surprise me.

As a former editor of the high school, college and law school newspapers, an English Lit major with a journalism minor, a trial and appellate lawyer and the designated pitcher for the annual fundraising appeal for over 20 years, I have done my fair share of writing. I have even grasped the elusive Holy Grail of being published; not only in professional journals, but in literary ones. In the mid-70’s one of my plays was performed by real actors in an actual dinner theater. Until I was 21, writing was “it”.

My Fellowship peers were enthusiastic and supportive. I, on the other hand, was gripped by fear. I faced that bouncing cursor and suddenly thought of drawers that needed cleaning, garages that needed organizing, papers that needed filing...off I went to clean, organize and file with the same overachieving stamina I had brought to peanut butter and jelly.

When there was literally no other stall tactic that I could think of, I sat down and remembered what so many great writers say is the key to writing—just write.

In crept that quiet internal voice—what if I’m terrible? I did my best to ignore it; hammered at the keys for a few hours and triumphantly produced a T.U.R.D.—the ugly rough draft—of the essay I emailed to my most trusted advisors.

In my husband’s six syllables, Career #6 seemed doomed to fail.