

GET YOUR  
**BOOK**  
DONE NOW

AND REINVENT YOURSELF  
IN THE PROCESS

**DEBBIE**  
**WEIL**

# TABLE *of* CONTENTS

PAGE 3

**Introduction**

PAGE 7

**PART 1: How to Start**

PAGE 16

**PART 2: How to Break Through Your Blocks**

PAGE 24

**PART 3: How to Finish**

PAGE 31

**About Debbie**

PAGE 34

**Contact**



# 3 PROVEN WAYS

TO START, BREAK THROUGH BLOCKS,  
AND FINISH WRITING YOUR BOOK

## Dear Fellow Writer,

Every time I sit down to write, terror strikes. *It won't be good enough. I don't have enough to say. I'll never finish.*

If those sound like the thoughts of a drama queen, you are right. I tend to beat myself up when it comes to writing. My snarky inner editor insists on perfection. She can make things very difficult. And in turn I make things much harder than they need to be.

“Perfectionism... is the main obstacle between you and a shitty first draft.”

ANNE LAMOTT, *BIRD BY BIRD*

What about you? What is holding you back from getting the book inside your head onto the page? Are you wondering when and how to start? Are you lugging around an idea that you don't know how to clarify? Are you hearing negative voices too?

Whatever is blocking you, I want you to take a deep breath. Realize that, without writing a single word, you've already joined an elite club. If you're feeling doubts, confusion, or fears you've got the makings of a real writer!

“A writer is someone for whom writing is more difficult than it is for other people.”

THOMAS MANN

But you're in luck! There *is* another way – and I use it myself all the time. I use specific tools and tricks to get myself to write, even when the negative voices threaten to push me off the cliff into despair or into a trough of procrastination.

In this handy guide you'll find very specific strategies to jumpstart **your** writing project and get past your obstacles, whatever they may be.

I am going to give you three proven steps that I personally use that mirror the three stages of book writing: *starting*, *breaking through blocks*, and *finishing*. You can't skip any one of these if you're serious about getting your book out of your head and onto the page.

**PART 1**

**Starting is BOTH easy – and hard.**

It means sitting down to write with a very specific mindset and with *a process for writing*. I will tell you exactly how to do this.

**PART 2**

**Breaking through blocks means having a grab bag of tricks handy for when you need them.**

Not sure how to organize your book? Can't remember your "Why"? What about the *granddaddy of obstacles*, *writer's block*? I have put together the most essential tactics to move past these barriers and keep going.

**PART 3**

**Finishing your book involves a secret that may surprise you.**

*Don't try to do it alone*. You need an editor and beta readers to get across the finish line. I tell you exactly who to get help from and how to direct them for the most useful feedback.

I will reveal the most important things you need to know if you want to write a book. These are the secrets derived from my decades of writing and editing, from coaching dozens of private clients to write a book – and from helping thousands more online.

As a working journalist, I've been through the wringer of deadlines. I've stared at the page with writer's block. And when I set out to write a 218-page business book, I wondered whether I would ever finish. But in the end I did. I published **The Corporate Blogging Book** with a major New York publisher, **Penguin Portfolio**.

Whatever your goal is—to get published traditionally or to finally get that book out of your head and onto the page—I know you will find this guide useful.

### **What About Reinvention?**

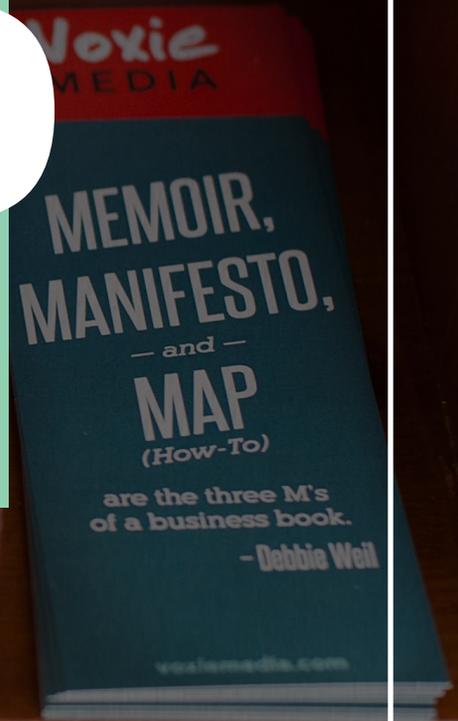
And as for reinventing yourself, how does that fit in? I firmly believe that writing a book is a journey of discovery. If you sit down to write with intention, you will find out things about yourself that you never realized. What are your values about life, family and work?

These shift into focus as you reflect deeply. What is your purpose? What comes next if you're at the height of your career and thinking about another act? These are questions you will find yourself asking – and answering – in the process of writing a book based on your knowledge and expertise.

**– DEBBIE**

PART 1

# How to Start



# THE THREE ESSENTIAL STEPS

to starting a book are simple.

**1**

**Adopt the  
right mindset**

**2**

**Create a  
writing process  
before you start**

**3**

**Put your butt  
in the chair**

**IT'S THAT SIMPLE. AND THAT HARD.**

# 1 How to Adopt the Right Mindset

**W**riting a book is a mind game - maybe the most difficult game you'll ever play. Your evil inner editor makes the rules and the more you write, the stronger she can get. That's why I still experience the terror of the blank page when I sit down to write.

But if you can think and talk, you can write. It's not writing per se that's the obstacle. It's getting overwhelmed by a big project.

So we're about to change the rules of the game and make you the mastermind of your inner editor. The secret is this: you have to understand that writing a book is a long and messy process. You will progress in fits and starts. There will be numerous roadblocks along the way. You must absolutely believe this fact. In fact, go one step further and take comfort in it.

“I love having written.  
I hate writing.”

DOROTHY PARKER

Virtually every other published author has experienced your frustrations and fears. Some of the best writers (Ernest Hemingway, John Steinbeck, Virginia Woolf and so many more) labored for years writing and revising their manuscripts.

It may not take you that long. But knowing what to expect can help you hang in there. Writing a book is supposed to be hard. If it weren't, then every single one of the 81 percent of Americans who say they have a book in them would start... and finish. But they don't. Most people just talk, and never get around to it.

“

**Writing is like driving at night in the fog. You can only see as far as your headlights, but you can make the whole trip that way.**

”

**E.L. DOCTOROW**

## 2

# Create a Writing Process Before You Start

**Y**ou are different. Otherwise you wouldn't be reading this guide and sharpening your pencils, eager to get started.

By now you know that writing a book consists of many steps, not all of which you can visualize in advance. So what are the first steps you should take? You need a methodology in order to approach your writing sessions with clarity and purpose.

Most writing coaches and published authors will tell you that your first goal is to write a shitty first draft (SFD).

*Here is the process to write your SFD:*

### 1. SCHEDULE WRITING BLOCKS

Block out at least three two-hour periods for your writing each week. Schedule them into your calendar.

It takes me a while to get going in the morning so I schedule 9:30 AM – 11:30 AM on Tuesdays, Wednesdays, and Thursdays when I'm working on a big writing project. Whatever time frames you decide on, don't mess with them. Don't let anyone else mess with them. Schedule other stuff (exercise, phone calls, meetings, school pick-ups) around them.

*Your writing blocks are key.*

“Shitty first drafts... all good writers write them. This is how they end up with good second drafts and terrific third drafts.”

ANNE LAMOTT



**Consistency compels progress. Unless you are sprinting to the final deadline on a book, you are unlikely to be productive if you face a 6 or 8-hour day of writing. Instead, *schedule three 2-hour blocks a week* into your calendar.**

## **2. HAVE A PLAN FOR EXACTLY WHAT TO DO WHEN YOU SIT DOWN TO WRITE**

Start by free writing for 10 to 20 minutes. Some people call this journaling. One of the most revered writing coaches, Julia Cameron, calls it “Morning Pages.” This is a proven way to get the dreck out.

Type without stopping, write whatever comes into your head: complaining, nonsense, preliminary ideas, anguish, your “To Do” list. Anything you write counts. Get it out. The point is to get your pen and fingers moving, to start writing. The only thing that doesn’t count is if you don’t write.



**Here’s a secret: whine during your free writing session. Frustrated? Confused? Resistant? Name it to tame it. Then a miracle happens. You will get bored with your complaining and you will start writing about your book. I call this “writing your way into your book”.**

# 3

## Put Your Butt in the Chair

Now you've got a process (scheduled writing blocks and free writing to get your pen moving). Put your butt in the chair and write.



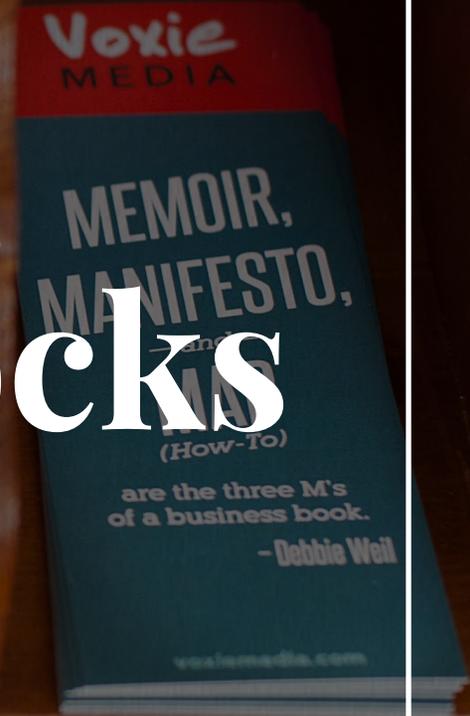
**Clients often ask me, “When is the right time to start writing a book?”  
MY answer: there is no right time. You will always be too busy, too distracted, too overwhelmed with the rest of life. Sit down and start right now. That is the right time.**

THERE IS NO RIGHT WAY  
OR RIGHT TIME TO START  
WRITING A BOOK.

DEBBIE  
WEIL

PART 2

# How to break through your blocks



# 1

## Create a Mind Map to Organize Your Book

**Mind maps are little miracles.** Like free writing, there is no right or wrong way to do them. They generate new ideas and themes as well as organize what you have already written. They give you a framework for your shitty first draft.

Grab a marker and find an enormous white board. Scribble the **Big Idea** of your book in the middle of the board. Draw a circle around it. Now, jot down a word or phrase for each of the topics you've been writing about – and new ones that occur to you as you are standing at the white board.

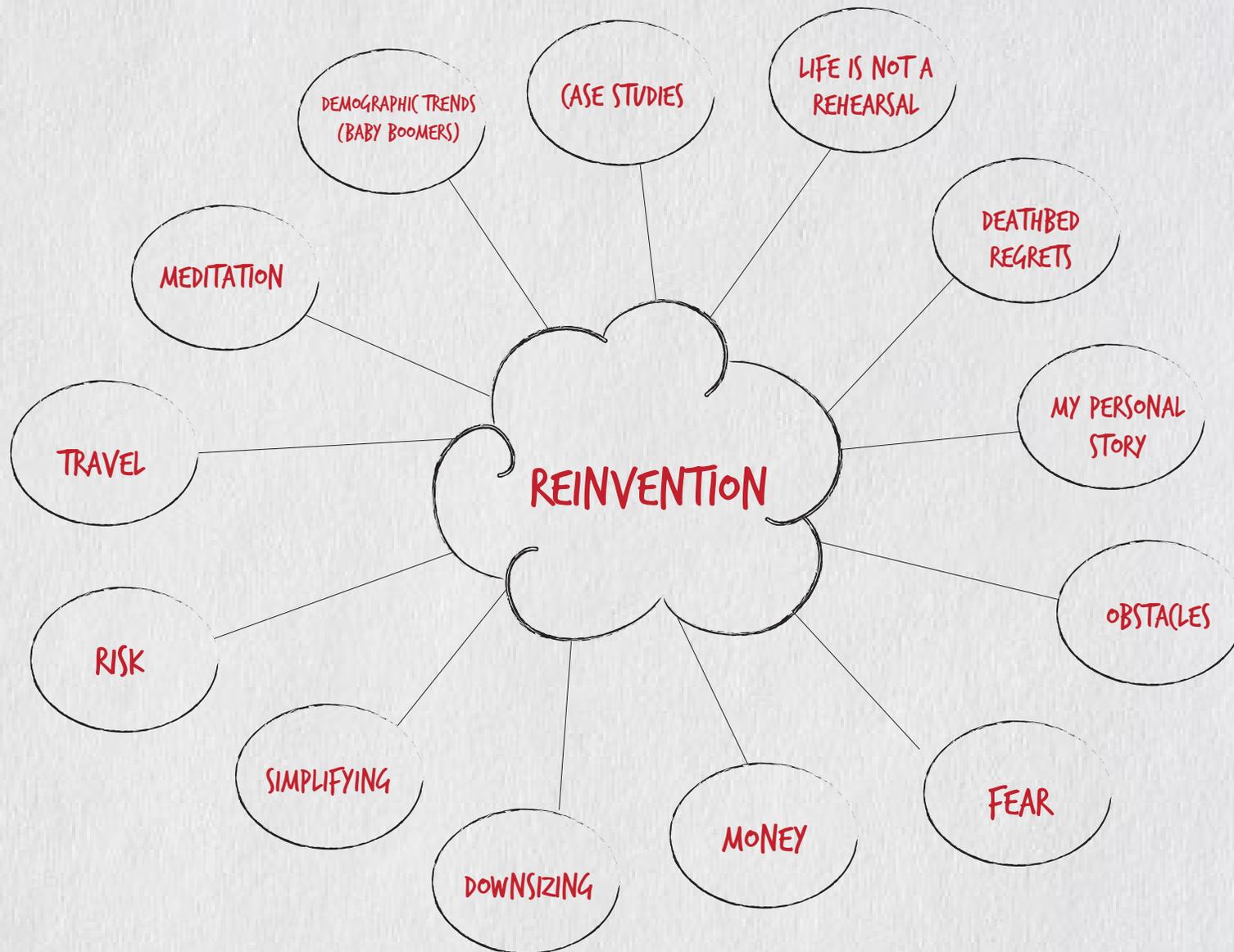
Working out from Big Idea, draw a bubble around each word or phrase and connect it with a line to your central theme. Keep going, quickly and without judgment, adding topics and subtopics to the bubbles, branching out from your Big Idea in the middle.

When I tried this method for the book I am writing (on how to reinvent your life and work at any age), I scribbled the word **Reinvention** in the middle of the board and circled it. As I stood before the board, out popped my topics and subtopics.



**Take breaks, stand up from your computer, move around, take a walk outside. You will think more clearly when you sit down to write again.**

Here are the bubbles I drew on the board:



*From the mind map, I created these buckets of content.*

### **Why Reinvention**

After success: is this all?  
deathbed regrets.

### **My Personal Story**

Taking a “gap year after sixty”  
with my husband, Sam.

### **Demographic Trends**

Baby boomers; “encore”  
careers; the new freelance  
economy.

### **Obstacles**

Fear; money; scarcity vs.  
abundance: what are you  
giving up, what will you gain.

### **How**

Start with a timeout or gap  
year, travel, change spending  
habits, change spending hab-  
its, less is more.



**It's easier to create a useful mind map if you do the exercise with a book coach or editor. Your goal is to create buckets of related content to organize your material. This becomes a preliminary outline of your book.**

## 2

# Pen a Letter to a Friend If You Can't Remember the “Why” of Your Book

**A**s you get further into writing your book, after weeks or months, it's all too easy to run into a block of confusion or self-doubt or procrastination. Why have you undertaken this project? You are busy. You have a life. You are tired of your scheduled writing blocks cutting into your work / exercise / TV / sleep / socializing time.

### ***Go back to square one.***

Write a letter to a friend that re-articulates the “Why” of your book. You have two Why's: **1. Why for you** and **2. Why for your reader**. Talk about both.

The *Why* for your reader must address the “Why should I care?” question. What problem does your book solve for the reader? What will compel them to pick up your book at Barnes & Noble, or click and

download it from Amazon? What is your reader's *burning need* and how does your book answer it?

The *Why* for you, the author, is often a combination of things. Writing a book is high on your bucket list. You have a strong desire to share a message with the world. On a practical level you are thinking ahead. You want to open up new possibilities for yourself professionally. Perhaps you want to become a public speaker on your topic. Or give workshops. Or rebrand yourself as an expert in a specific area before moving out of a corporate job and becoming a consultant and entrepreneur.

Whatever your reasons, spell them out in as much detail as you can to your friend.

You will feel refreshed and refocused. Now put your butt back in the chair and keep writing.

# 3

## When You've Got Writer's Block

**T**his happens to every good writer. It's part of the process. You will have good writing days and bad. Remember the "mindset" you promised to adopt when you started your book. You've acknowledged that this is a long journey with twists and turns.

Here's an exercise that will sidestep writer's block. If you can't even write in complete sentences, *then don't write in complete sentences.*

**Instead, set a timer for five minutes. Jot down 10 ideas related to your book.** Anything counts. Write in bullet points.

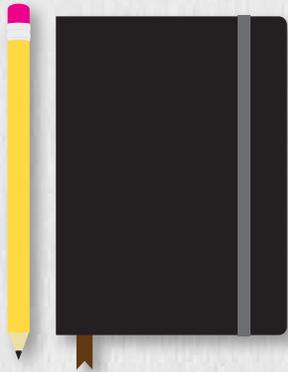
### Your "notes to self" list might look like this:

- I WANT TO HAVE A RESOURCES SECTION AT THE END
- INCLUDE A "TRY THIS AT HOME" TAKEAWAY AT THE END OF EVERY CHAPTER
- USE THE STORY OF WHAT HAPPENED IN 2ND GRADE WHEN THE TEACHER MADE FUN OF ME
- FIND STATISTICS ON THE GROWTH OF FREE-LANCING IN THE U.S OVER THE PAST 20 YEARS
- INTERVIEW THREE EXPERTS ON MY TOPIC

Now, pick two or three of these. Write a paragraph on each of them. For example:

- **The types of resources you want to include.**
- **An example of a “takeaway” for a section you’ve already written.**
- **Take a first pass at the scene you remember from 2nd grade.**

Scribble a mini memo to yourself on how you will track down and ask the experts for an interview.

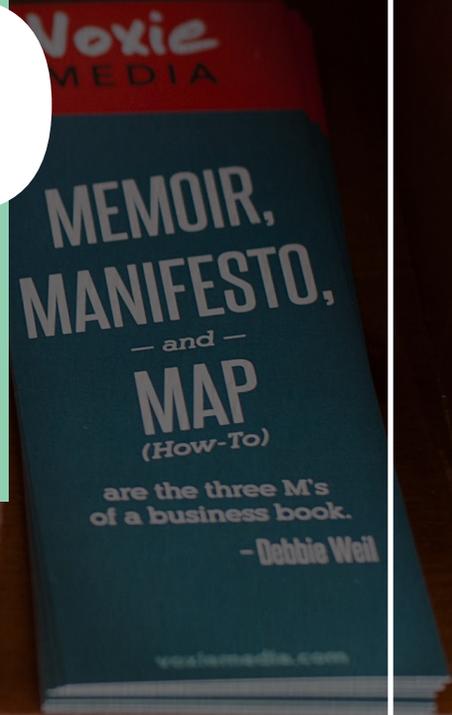


**Carry a dedicated notebook with you everywhere you go. It should be small enough to slide into your pocket or purse. Jot down every tidbit or idea you stumble on that might be useful. Ideas for chapters, conversations you overhear, experts you want to interview, personal stories that pop to mind. You are creating your treasure trove to dip into when you sit down to write.**

PART 3

# How to Finish

You are approaching the finish line.  
What are best practices to get across it?



# 1

## Self-Edit Your First Complete Draft

**W**hen you've got 90 to 95 percent of your SFD down, print it out and go one step further. Turn it into version 1.0 of your book. Put together all your draft chapters, in order, and save them as a PDF. Take the file to your nearest Kinko's or copy shop and ask them to print and bind the pages for you. Be sure to include a cover page with your placeholder title and the author's name (aka you!).

Now you've got a solid chunk of pages you can carry with you. Leave your computer behind. Go to your favorite park bench or café. Whip out a new Sharpie pen. Read through your draft as you circle, slash, and draw arrows on what to delete or add. You will be surprised at how effectively you can evaluate what you've written, and edit it.



Print your draft in a *distinctive font*, one you don't normally use. Use double or triple line spacing. You'll feel like you're reading something that someone else has written which makes it easier to self-edit.

## 2

# Review Your Writing Process

**A**re your writing blocks as productive as you'd like them to be? If you're checking email or going online to research that niggling fact or date, then the answer is NO.

Online temptations are a siren's call to me. I am addicted to the Internet, to email, to Facebook, to

reading blogs and news sites. So I've installed Internet blocking software on both my laptop and my iPhone. I use a program called **Freedom**. When I sit down to write, I turn on a "Freedom" session for two to three hours. The only thing I can do is write.

# 3

## Get Outside Help; Don't Write in Isolation

**This last bit of advice is easy to ignore.**

Writing a book can feel like pushing a giant boulder uphill – all by yourself. (Remember Sisyphus?) But it doesn't need to be that way. **Don't write alone. Professional writers don't do it. Why should you?**

Banging your head alone on your keyboard is the easiest trap to fall into. It can be hard to ask for help. Sometimes it's hard to tell people you're taking time out to write because you're afraid they might judge you ("What, you, a writer?!"). You worry they might think you're self indulgent in some way. Ignore those people! Build in accountability and get help.

### **ENLIST BETA READERS TO GET USEFUL FEEDBACK**

**Get feedback on your draft from a small number of beta readers.** I use the word beta to emphasize that they are not reading the final, polished version of your book and because they should be a carefully selected group.

Your spouse or partner is not the best choice. Nor is your best friend. You are looking for readers who know how to evaluate a piece of writing and who will take the time to answer a few specific questions that you will pose.

## Here are questions to ask selected beta readers:

- TELL ME WHAT IS MISSING. WHERE ARE THE HOLES? WHERE ARE THERE LAPSES IN THE FLOW OF LOGIC OR NARRATIVE?
- CAN YOU ARTICULATE WHAT MY BIG IDEA IS?
- DOES MY WRITING MOVE YOU OR SURPRISE YOU? DOES IT CHANGE THE WAY YOU THINK ABOUT THE TOPIC?
- IF YOU COULD MAKE ONE SUGGESTION FOR IMPROVEMENT WHAT WOULD IT BE?

Caution your beta readers not to delve into the sentence level. You are not looking for feedback on grammar or spelling.

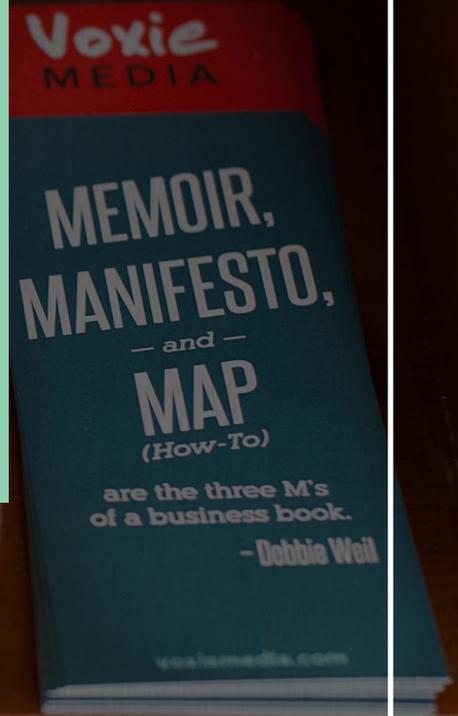
## HIRE AN EDITOR AND/OR BOOK COACH

I simply can't recommend this enough. Hire a book coach/editor to help you get across the finish line. If you're serious about publishing a good book, you can't do it on your own. I know this from my own writing experience. And I know it from working with every one of my clients.

Every single one has experienced the magic of accountability and has gotten an essential boost of feedback, inspiration and direction from me as they've made the journey over the mountain from book idea to words on the page.

You need help on your book writing journey. And in fact, you're approaching your book project the smartest way possible if you create a team from the outset: yourself and your dedicated book coach and editor. It doesn't matter whether you are self-publishing, indie publishing or going with a traditional house.

# Wrap up



**I**f you've read this far, you've made a great start **on getting your book done now.** You understand that writing a book is a journey with unexpected discoveries around each turn. You understand that there is a process for what to do when you sit down to write. You've now got tools like mind mapping and free writing to help you get organized and to overcome writer's block or confusion.

**You also understand that getting help from a book coach is not lazy, it's the smart way to approach writing your book – especially if you are serious about *Getting It Done*.**

And you know that, if you *get it done*, writing a book is a way to reinvent yourself. I hope you'll take the plunge and take the first step. Remember, the journey is the book.



# ABOUT DEBBIE

**A**s a published author, I've experienced all the bumps and bruises of writing a book. I know what it takes to successfully unravel your ideas and get them onto the page. I've experienced writer's block and black despair and I've moved beyond them. In doing so, I have developed a system of simplicity to guide you over the mountain from **Big Idea** to completed book. **I know how to make this system work for you!**

I'm an author, the original corporate blogging guru and founder of **Voxie Media**, a small publishing company for nonfiction authors. I'm married to a physician writer; I'm a mother of three and a grandmother of five. I am a **Master of Re-invention**, with at least three careers under my belt: journalist, blogging guru, and book coach.





**A**fter three decades in Washington D.C., my husband Sam and I reinvented ourselves several years ago. We now live a yin yang life, dividing our time between a remote village on the coast of Maine and Brooklyn, NY.

I am a writer and editor with a commitment to the highest editorial standards. (My undergraduate degree in English is from Harvard.)

I have the courage to tell you what I really think but I do it in the kindest, most constructive way possible – and with a sense of humor. You need that kind of honest feedback when you're writing a book.

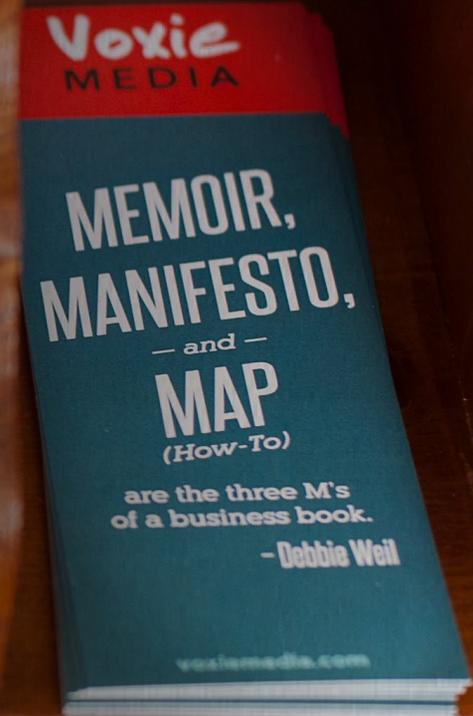
**When I see potential in you, I won't stop until I've tapped every bit of it. It's how I change the world.**

A great nonfiction book starts with the three  
M's and I show you how to put them together:

**YOUR MEMOIR**  
OR PERSONAL STORY

**YOUR MANIFESTO**  
(YOUR VALUES AND POINT OF VIEW)

**YOUR MAP**  
OR PLAYBOOK FOR YOUR READERS





# Get in Touch

**I'D LOVE TO HEAR FROM YOU.**

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“Keep typing until it  
turns into writing.”

DAVID CARR, THE NEW YORK TIMES

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