

## Q&A with Dr. Ken Atchity, Literary Agent, Film Producer & Writer

### The Interview

WB: Describe your ideal client.

My ideal client is someone who's focused on his work, not on himself, and who will do anything to improve both its quality and marketability. Who's cautious, but not paranoid. Who's obsessed by making his own time productive, and equally respecting of ours. Who doesn't call and say 'what's going on'? Who doesn't have a lazy bone in his body, and who 'considers the source' when he hears something different from what we've been telling them. Who understands that before he can have the market follow his stories, first he must tell stories the market WANTS to hear.

WB: At AEI, are you more likely to sign an author whose work can be easily adapted to the screen? Also, what are some ways of recognizing whether a book has film potential?

Yes, our favorite client is someone whose writing works for both publishing and the screen. A book has film potential if it's written following the laws of drama—which will also make it a better, more readable book.

WB: You've mentioned that AEI receives roughly 15,000 submissions a year and accepts about 50 of them. What specifically about your selections stand out to you?

What stands out is a clearly marketable concept—'high concept' if possible—that is as well executed as it is well conceived.

WB: Some writers who I've interviewed claim that even with multiple book sales, it's difficult to make a decent living. Others tell me that they've landed extremely lucrative deals--and I know this to be true of many of your clients. What are some of the main factors that play into whether a writer is offered a lucrative deal?

The most lucrative deals go to writers whose work (a) 'stands out from the pack,' usually because of its 'high concept.' And (b) whose forceful and compelling writing serves the reader, not itself.

WB: As a writer and a manager who works with many writers, what advice would you give about dealing with the rejection every writer will inevitably face during their career?

Ignore rejection, other than to compile as many as you're going to get as quickly as you can compile them. I always say there's a big blackboard in the sky with a list of all the no's you're going to get on a given project—and the final yes. The only problem is that the blackboard is invisible. Since that's the case, obviously the only way to stay sane is to get through all those no's as quickly as you can—never wasting time trying to change a no to a yes. A yes from the wrong person is much worse than a no.

WB: What are some characteristics of a writer who will have "staying power" in the industry?

A writer with staying power is always trying to make sure his craft and skill stays at the level of his ambition and vision. For that reason he values criticism more than praise, because only through criticism can an artist learn. We always point out that even the smallest remark was, after all, a reaction to something you wrote.

WB: I always recommend that writers read *A Writer's Time* from cover to cover if they want to learn how to "harness" their time and become more productive. For the purpose of this interview, can you give us one tidbit from the book?

A huge one: Never sit down to write without knowing what you're going to write before you sit down.

WB: Does this mean that you shouldn't outline first? Or, take notes?

Many writers ask, 'How can you outline without having written?' I think an outline is most useful when you've written at least a third of your book or script, then need to make sure you 'have the rest of it' before you risk writing off in a wrong direction. The more professional you become, however, the more you'll follow the advice in *Writing Treatments That Sell: How to Create and Market Your Story Ideas to the Motion Picture and TV Industry*, writing a treatment of your book or script before you commit the time and emotional energy to the work itself.

WB: You've also said that having too much time to write is much more dangerous to getting the story out in an exciting way than having too little time to write. Please explain.

The most dramatic writing comes from pressure, and there's no better pressure than the pressure of self-imposed discipline focused on time. Limiting the time you're actually at the computer produces the strongest results. While you're NOT there writing, 'the back of your mind' will be working overtime to make that writing time more productive when it comes around again.

WB: I've heard many writers rave about your book, *How to Publish Your Novel*. After reading it myself, I now understand what an amazing resource it is for those who are looking to have their novels published. What inspired you to write it?

I was inspired by answering the same questions over and over again, and hearing my partner and staff do the same. Since nothing annoys me more than wasted time, I figured it was time to put all we know into the book—for the same reason, I wrote *A Writer's Time*, *Writing Treatments That Sell* and *How to Escape Lifetime Security and Pursue Your Impossible Dream: A Guide to Transforming Your Career*.

WB: You've worn many hats. What have you most enjoyed doing and why?

I most enjoy reading a fabulous new manuscript that I KNOW I can develop into a successful book and film.

WB: What, in your opinion, are some of the best ways for a writer to hone his skills?

Almost nothing is better than reading successful books or scripts in the same genre as you are writing in. Next is getting professional editorial guidance from a company that knows what it's doing like the *Writer's Lifeline*, Inc.

WB: What are some misconceptions you think those who aspire to write fiction full-time have about the writer's life?

That it's easy. That it's sexy. That all you do is lounge around most of the time doing nothing.

WB: Do you have a favorite quote, or words to live by?

Go for it!

## About the Author

Jennifer Minar-Jaynes is a Los Angeles-based writer and the editor-in-chief of [www.WritersBreak.com](http://www.WritersBreak.com). Subscribe to her free monthly e-newsletter to get her latest writing articles, tips/tricks of the industry, and interview transcripts with bestselling authors. Simply send an email to [subscribe@writersbreak.com](mailto:subscribe@writersbreak.com). She can be contacted at [jminar@writersbreak.com](mailto:jminar@writersbreak.com).

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