Build Your Community of Influence

Stephanie Chandler

Several years ago, I was part of a big book launch for one of the *Chicken Soup for the Soul*® books. It was held in Sacramento, and we received a ton of media coverage on the morning of the event. The local morning news show and several radio stations interviewed us and promoted the event to our community.

We arrived at Barnes and Noble just before they opened and were excited to find our table just steps inside the front door. It was prime real estate, and we were ready for the big day!

One of the book contributors was Shari Fitzpatrick, founder of Shari's Berries. She brought luscious chocolate covered strawberries for visitors to enjoy.

While the picture you see here looks like we're busy, the truth is that we weren't—at least not after all the free chocolate covered berries were gone. The shopper on the right is a friend of one of the contributors, and the shopper on the left is my mom.

Despite all that phenomenal media coverage we had, the berries were the hit of the day, not the books. Shoppers greeted us and thanked us for their treats, but the vast majority left without purchasing a single copy. After three hours, guess how many copies we sold? We sold just 11 books.

That was the day I swore I'd never do another book signing event.

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How many books do you want to sell?

Book signing events at bookstores are a popular way many authors seek to sell books. And while you can certainly schedule events at retailers across the country, there is a harsh reality you will likely face along the way. Most book signing events for unknown authors generate just a handful of book sales. They also require a ton of time and effort. (As a former bookstore owner and fellow writer, I speak from experience.)

Unless you promote your book signing event and drive people through the doors, you will likely discover that these events are a big waste of time. In fact, there's a good chance you'll spend more time helping customers find the bathroom than you will actually making sales. (Sad, but true!)

While it may sound fun and glamorous to sit in a bookstore autographing books, most authors quickly learn that's not the case. What's worse is that an event like this focuses on selling just one copy of your book at a time. And it takes a lot of effort to generate each sale.

Would you rather sell a single copy or many copies?

One of the best ways to sell more books is by cultivating a community of people who can't wait to buy your next book, and the one after that. Your community can include people who have attended your presentations, follow you on social media, read your blog, subscribe to your newsletter, listen to your podcast, or follow your YouTube channel. These are fans who will stay with you for the long haul.

So, instead of spending your Saturday driving to and from a store, sitting at a table, and hoping for a handful of book sales, *consider investing those five or more hours into cultivating your community*. Over time, your audience will grow, and you can build a lucrative, satisfying, and long-lasting author career.

Find Your Community of Influence

For an author, having a platform means that you have an audience of people who want to buy your books, as well as any related products or services that you offer. Nobody is born with a platform; it's something that you must build.

Here is some good news:
Your platform is probably bigger than you think.

The fact is that you know more people than you realize, and when you spend time digging into your contacts, you might just strike gold. Your Community of Influence starts with people you already know who can help you spread the word about your books. They can also help you build your author business in ways you haven't yet imagined.

Ways Your Community of Influence Can Help

Book Sales: Purchase copies of your book during your launch campaign.

Endorsements: Well-known authors in your genre can provide testimonials for your book cover or contribute a foreword.

Book Reviews: Post reviews on Amazon, Goodreads, BN.com, etc.

Beta Reader Support: Provide editorial feedback, reviews, and promotion support.

Industry Promotion: Recommend your book in an industry blog, newsletter, or print publication.

Guest Blog Posts: Publish guest blog posts or book excerpts that you provide.

Social Media: Share book promotion messages across social media platforms.

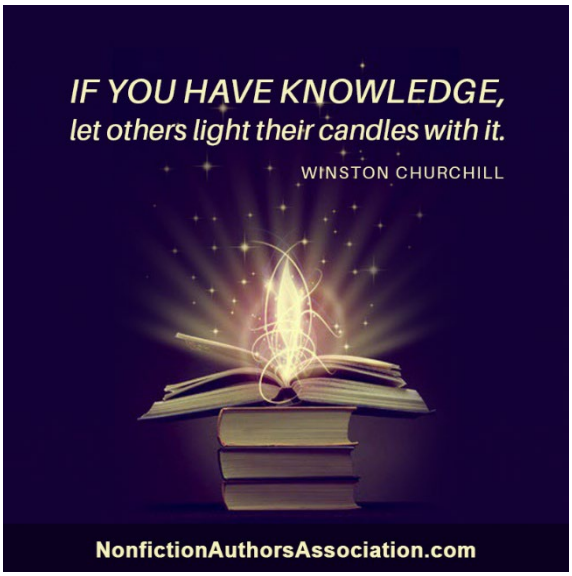
Podcast: Feature you on an industry podcast, teleseminar, or webinar event.

Speaking Opportunities: Invite you to speak at a meeting, event, or conference.

Bulk Sales: Buy copies of your book in bulk to distribute to event attendees, staff, etc.

Sponsorship: Contribute to your book tour or campaign by donating funds or in-kind items, such as printing services or banners, in exchange for promotion.

Connections and Introductions: In addition to asking your community for the above support, you can also ask them, *"Who do you know who can help?"* Perhaps a former client has a great connection with a trade association, nonprofit, or an event planner for an upcoming conference. You will never know unless you ask!



Author Success Story

Occasionally, I get the opportunity to meet one of our members out in the wild, which is always a joy. I recently met up with Susie Kundrat, a member of the Nonfiction Authors Association for over three years and a past student in several of our courses. A year ago, Susie launched her book *Eat, Move Groove: Unlock the Simple Steps to Lifelong Nutrition, Fitness, and Wellness*, and has already sold over 2,000 copies.

A registered dietician and college professor, Susie has been touring the country in a camper van, delivering free and paid speaking engagements and working with several corporate sponsors. When she sat down to identify her COI, she realized she had a large list of connections she could reach out to and ask to support her book promotion efforts.

The following are some of the results she has achieved as a result of connecting with her Community of Influence.

- **Delivered dozens of speaking engagements and group training programs**, both free and paid. She has ten more events scheduled in the next three months alone. By reaching out to those she knows, she has been able to schedule events in cities across the United States.

- **Generated several bulk sales of 100+ books.** In one instance, she was asked to speak at an event that didn't have a budget to pay the speaker. She asked if they would instead purchase 100 copies of her book to give to attendees, and the organization gladly complied. (Often times books and learning materials come from a different budget so be sure to ask!)

- **Landed a $10k corporate sponsorship in** exchange for talking about the organization at her events and helping them build brand awareness as a good food option for wellness.

- **Captured dozens of photos and videos at events**, giving her plenty of content to help grow her social media following and email list.

- **Has 15 interns (!!!) helping with marketing efforts.** Most are getting school credit while also getting work experience.

- **Hosts a monthly Zoom happy hour** featuring a guest speaker and keeping her audience engaged in the process.

Susie is also donating 22% of the book sales proceeds to local nutrition organizations and food banks in each of the communities she visits, which adds up to over $5,000 so far. The percentage is based on her unique "2211 Plan," which encourages readers to exercise for at least 33 minutes per day with 22 minutes of cardio and 11 minutes of strength building.

Susie's results are largely due to identifying and connecting with her Community of Influence. Consider how your own COI can help you reach your goals.

Identify Your Community of Influence

When I consult with new nonfiction authors, one of the first homework tasks I assign is to identify their Community of Influence. This is important whether you already have a platform or not, because you might be surprised by how many people you know who can help support your book and your overall author-career goals.

Consider the following people:

Friends and family – These shouldn't be your main review sources because you want your book reviews to come from objective readers. However, your closest family and friends may be able to connect you with people who can help you accomplish your goals.

Fellow authors – Authors in your industry who have a large platform can have a big impact on book sales simply by recommending your book to their community via social media or their own email lists.

Influencers in your target industry – This includes bloggers, podcast hosts, YouTubers, and social media stars.

Trade association leaders and members – Trade associations that reach your target audience can be a powerful place to build your community. Do you know someone who can recommend you as a speaker at an annual conference or a monthly meeting? Or help you contribute guest content to the association blog or newsletter?

Online groups – If you participate in groups that reach your target readers, ask the group owner if you can share book announcements or invite beta readers from the group. Facebook and LinkedIn groups that focus on your niche can be a fantastic place to build your readership.

Current and past coworkers – Perhaps you worked with someone ten years ago who now organizes big corporate events or is a leader in your industry.

Current and past clients – If someone has already enjoyed working with you in some way, they will likely be glad to support your new book launch.

Past readers – Readers who liked your previous book(s), they will certainly be interested in your next one!

Social media followers – This is one of the many reasons why authors should build a social media following. Think of this as a way to cultivate your author Community and build relationships with raving fans.

Email list subscribers – If you're not yet building an email list, you should be. This is one of the best marketing tools you can have. Social media is passive, time-based, and takes place on rented real estate (it's not a property you own and your account can go away at any time). Email is engaging and has a far greater success rate for selling books and other products.

Corporate and nonprofit contacts – Who do you know at corporations or nonprofits that could connect you with speaking opportunities, consulting opportunities, or bulk book sales?

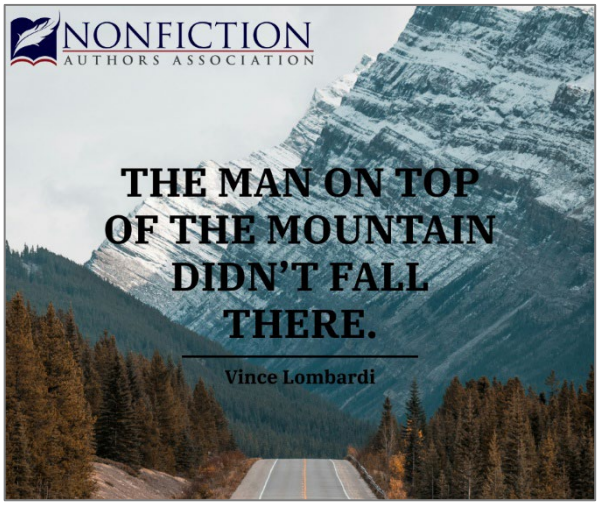
Media pros – This includes journalists, reporters, editors, and producers on a local or national level, and those who cover topics related to your book.

Action Challenge: Build Your Community List

Brainstorm your lists of people you can contact and ask for support. You don't have to know everyone on your list yet. Your list can include people you'd *like to know*, such as influential authors in your industry or event planners for a big conference where you would like to speak.

You can download a pre-formatted spreadsheet to help you organize your contacts here.

Review Copy Recipients and Beta Readers



- Industry influencers
- Mailing list subscribers
- Past readers
- Clients, peers, family, and friends
- Members of online groups
- Members of trade associations
- Media professionals
- Book reviewers
- Book review sites
- Trade association staff
- Any person or company mentioned in your book

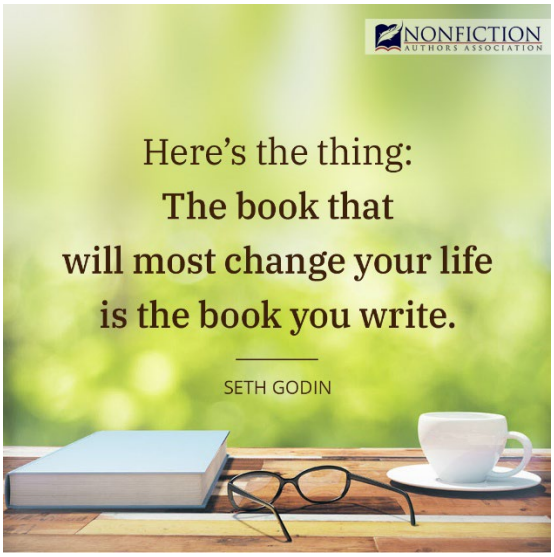
Book Endorsements

- Authors in your genre, including competitors
- Celebrities
- Corporate executives and other top professionals in your industry

Industry Influencers Who Reach Your Target Audience

- Bloggers

- Podcasters
- Fellow authors
- YouTubers
- Association executives
- Social media stars



Media Pros

- Reporters
- Editors
- Producers
- Hosts
- Local and national media outlets
- Industry-specific media outlets (trade publications)

Groups Where Your Target Readers Spend Time

- Trade associations
- Alumni groups
- Meetup groups
- Online groups (Facebook, LinkedIn, other forums)
- Nonprofits
- Sports organizations
- Religious/spiritual organizations

Connections to Speaking Engagement Opportunities

- Association executives
- Association board members or volunteers
- Event planners
- Corporate contacts
- Trade show organizers

- Fellow speakers who can make introductions

Potential sponsors and bulk buyers

- Corporations
- Nonprofits
- Trade associations
- Past clients
- Current clients
- Schools
- Spiritual organizations

Once you populate your lists, your next step is to begin reaching out. Some people on your list should be contacted individually, while others can be contacted in groups. For example, you could reach out to members of an online forum you belong to and ask them to join your beta reader team. Or, you could reach out to a past client who works for a local nonprofit and ask for help getting booked as a speaker at their next meeting.

Remember this: People you know WANT to support you. Sometimes all you need to do is ask.

Reach your goals faster with Nonfiction Authors Association membership!

Membership benefits include:

- **Exclusive weekly email** with **curated media leads** and **templates, checklists, and reports** from our members-only content database.
- **Author Brainstorm Exchange,** monthly gatherings held with Zoom breakout rooms where members share ideas, challenges, and solutions.
- **Group Round Table Meetings,** Zoom-based events held monthly, where members can connect with each other and get their questions answered by publishing industry experts.
- Popular members-only **Facebook group** for authors and industry pros.
- **Meet-the-Members program,** where you can share your book announcement with our email list, blog, and social media community.
- **Discounts** on our **year-round** **Nonfiction Book Awards** program and the **Nonfiction Writers Conference**, held entirely online since 2010.
- **Discounts on our exclusive courses,** including the Book Publishing Master Course and Book Marketing Master Course, both with **optional professional certification**.
- **Discounts** with **NFAA partners,** including Lulu, Office Depot, VoicesByInAudio, Clarion Book Reviews, exclusive insurance programs for authors and publishers, and more.

Premium Membership Options

- **Special benefits for VIP and Thought Leader members,** including FREE admission to the Nonfiction Writers Conference and all downloadable Author Toolkits.
- **Thought Leader members get an all-access pass to ALL live courses,** plus immediate access to the Book Publishing and Marketing master courses (self-study), a FREE entry in the Nonfiction Book Awards, and a FREE featured listing on NonfictionBookClub.com. Total added value: $6,000+.

Ready to reach your publishing goals?

Join our thriving community!

NonfictionAuthorsAssociation.com/join