

On writing: Bonnie Friedman is an advocate

I met Bonnie Friedman at an industry networking event several years ago. We've stayed in touch, and a couple of years ago Bonnie told me she was starting to write a book about advocating for someone who is ill and in the hospital. The book was published earlier this year, which prompted me to reach out to Bonnie to ask her about her writing.



Bonnie Friedman

Bonnie Friedman is a seasoned communications and marketing professional with more than 40 years of experience in the Washington, DC, area, with her own consultancy Bonnie Friedman Strategic Communications, LLC. She worked for several federal agencies before starting her own consulting business. Her new book, *Hospital Warrior: How to Get the Best Care for Your Loved One*, combines her passion for health care advocacy with her love of writing.

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1. What role does writing play in your work and how important a skill is it?

Writing is the heart of what I do, whether working in government, as a consultant or now as an author. Even as a teenager, I loved to write. For me, it is the most effective way to express thoughts, share information or convey emotion. Of all the things I do professionally, writing is by far the most important skill in my wheelhouse.

2. Does writing well still matter in a digital/text/emoji world?

Yes, I believe it does matter. Whether you want to convey thoughts, information or emotion, you want to do so effectively. Sloppy or inexact language detracts from the message and makes the writer appear lazy or facile. For me, it is extremely satisfying to create a strong, well-crafted statement or document that precisely reflects my point of view.

3. What's the best advice you've received or would give on how to improve writing skills?

When I first started my career, I was told to write the first draft, warts and all, off the top of my head, then go back and improve upon it later. When I feel stuck now, I still follow that advice. It helps me express my initial thoughts and move forward with my work. There is a freedom in that type of writing that frequently breathes life and light into my work, even if I later edit or revise it.

4. What are your top three writing resources or references (digital or paper-based)?

Depending on what I am writing, the top three are the

Associated Press Stylebook, William Strunk's The Elements of Style and Roget's Thesaurus. Even though I frequently use online resources for quick references, these three are still my all-time favorites.

5. Do you follow a style guide, and if so, which one?

I don't follow a specific style guide as a matter of course. However, if I am writing for the media, I use the AP Stylebook; if writing for a government client, I may use the Government Printing Office Style Manual. When I wrote my book, I did not use one particular style guide but referred to various resources when I needed guidance, particularly on how best to convey complicated medical information for lay readers.

6. What's your top writing/grammar/usage pet peeve?

I really dislike the use of "impact" as a verb. It grates on me. As far as I'm concerned, the word "impact" should remain a noun. When used as a verb, it strikes me as affected and pretentious. That said, I recognize that language must be fluid and supple. If it weren't, we might still be speaking Elizabethan English today.

7. What's your favorite word and what's your least favorite?

There are so many great words; it is hard to choose. One that I like a lot is onomatopoeia; it is wonderfully descriptive and rolls around in the mouth quite deliciously. Likewise, there are several words I dislike viscerally, but none are acceptably repeated in a family-friendly interview. All are mean-spirited, hateful references to individuals or groups. Some are four letters; others are longer. You get the idea.



Hospital Warrior Launch

Given that her book launched this year, I asked Bonnie to share her thoughts about the process of writing a book.

Describe your book:

Hospital Warrior: How to Get the Best Care for Your Loved One is a how-to guide on advocating effectively when someone you love is ill. It is filled with advice, tips and ideas based on my own experience as well interviews with a wide range of medical and legal professionals. It is also a story of love, family and thriving. The website is www.hospitalwarrior.com.

What inspired you to write the book and how long did it take you to write it?

Hospital Warrior draws on my 24 years of advocating for my husband through 14 separate hospitalizations—some routine and some life-threatening. He is now doing well, and I felt I had learned so much over the years that I wanted to share with others. Giving back is an important value in my life. In Judaism, we call it *Tikkun Olam*. This is my way of giving back. The book took about two years to write.

What were your main challenges in writing and publishing a book? How did it compare to the previous writing you have done?

There are many challenges in writing and publishing a book. To

start, as an author, you must be clear in your own mind about your audience, your message and your market. While you need to remain flexible about options and opportunities, you can't lose sight of your primary goals. Publishing in today's market is very difficult, especially for new authors. I feel fortunate to have a small, indie publisher who invests in his authors' success.

In some ways, writing this book was similar to other forms of non-fiction. It required research, interviews, fact-checking and discipline. But it required all those things in massive doses—more than I had ever done before. Also important were organizational skills, tenacity and belief in what I was doing. It might have been easy to give up or change course, especially when finding the right publisher proved difficult. But I was determined, and that paid off for me.

What tips do you have for others thinking of writing a book?

Be clear about your purpose. Know your market. Stay open-minded and creative. At the same time, bring discipline to your work and apply it to your writing. If you are a new author, find a mentor for guidance and support. I have a wonderful friend who is the author of seven books; she shared advice generously when I needed it. Also be sure to have at least a few readers—people whose opinions you respect and who will provide solid, constructive feedback on your work. Then be willing to listen to them!

Like Bonnie says, writing a book is just like writing for marketing and PR, except taken to a “massive” degree. It's a great achievement, and in Bonnie's case, one that will provide people with needed information to successfully help loved ones who are ill and in the hospital.

For more writing insight from a communications professional, check back here on Thursday, October 27 for the next On Writing interview.

