

Follow-up is Crucial

Lawrence Darmani, editor of Step magazine in Ghana, describes how one can coax writers to practice their craft.

Workshops are essential for identifying and training beginning writers. But to develop skill in any discipline, one must practice, then practice some more. Follow-up is indispensable for leading writers to maturity. Follow-up must whet a trainee's appetite for practice.

Provide practical help

Following are some ways you can help your writers practice and develop skill in their work:

1. Arrange follow-up workshops. Many of the writer training programs sponsored by Step Publishers follow-up previous events. Seminars for follow-up include: discussion of questions and concerns, sharing of published works, and reviews of works in progress since the group last met. Our trainers emphasize that an hour of practice writing is worth more than many hours of lectures.

2. Give writing assignments. Skill development requires practice, so one should assign trainees practical work to do. We have published several assigned articles in our magazines, but one does not always have to publish such work. Our cities are full of publishing opportunities: newspapers, magazines, book publishers, journals. Follow-up involves helping the trainee to get published. Seeing their work in print motivates writers more than a thousand lectures.

3. Press for re-writing. Show a writer that there is no good writing; there is only good re-writing. If you have reviewed a writer's story, point

out the positive things about the story, and suggest ways to strengthen the weak areas.

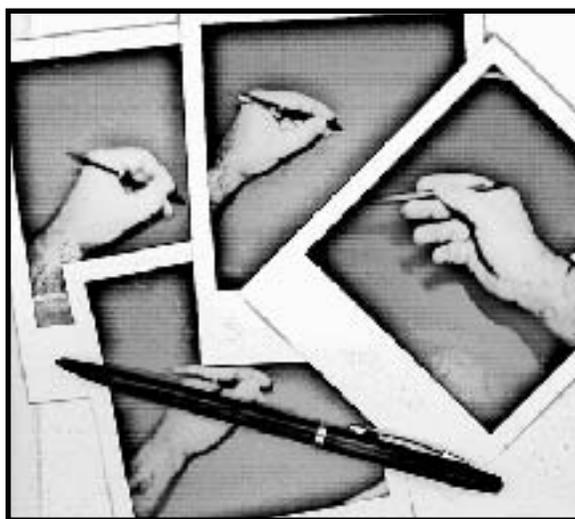
4. Provide reading material. I have always benefited from handouts, reference books, or articles on writing sent to me by my mentors. Once, I sent copies of *Writers' Digest* to a young writer. He said the magazine kept him working at his craft.

5. Write letters. The Bible is full of letters that offer heart-felt instruction as a follow-up to the church planting work Paul had accomplished. You also can offer encouragement through e-mail, letters and short notes. Recently a friend asked me, "Have you had some time to work on your novel?" That simple question in a letter revived my enthusiasm to work on my novel.

6. Nurture by role-modeling. "Action speaks louder than words" in our desire to nurture writers. My writings may encourage another to persevere. I have often met people who say to me, "I read your column in the newspaper," or "I read your book," or "I read your article." A mentor or role-model will seize the opportunity to ask the reader about his or her own writing efforts.

Motivate your writers

All the practical steps outlined above are not enough. You must also remind, enthuse, encourage, and urge your writers.



1. Remind writers about the key issues taught at the workshop or training programs or activities they attended. Preoccupation with other activities often brings forgetfulness. A trainee who wanted to write a book might forget that he even had it as a goal.

2. Enthuse the trainees about the goals and the aspirations that brought them to the training (for example, a clear sense of calling). Perhaps the trainee lacks enthusiasm to write that article or book. Lack of enthusiasm comes with time and procrastination. Your role is to build their excitement again by getting them to talk about their writing. Point out all the great things about the project. A mentor once said to me, "I'm eager to read your story—please get back to it."

3. Encourage writers not to abandon their goals and aspirations. Too often, discouragement comes with failure or mounting problems. Your writer started the manuscript, but

could not complete it because he is stuck on character development, or maybe he needs more ideas. Your writer may be discouraged because of rejection slips.

At one of our workshops, I met a writer who would not submit any articles because of the repeated rejections she had experienced. I encouraged her not to take rejection slips personally, since she lost nothing if an article is rejected. I described how she could break into the secular newspaper market by submitting articles with a Christian slant. After our talk, her very first submission was accepted.

4. Urge writers to persevere. Reminding, enthusing, and encouraging are all coaxing. Urging is like pushing the writer a little bit. Once I sent paper, a pen, and a file to an aspiring writer and said, "Here is paper, pen, and a file to hold them. Now get to work and write!" She has published three small books since then. Urge your writers to pursue their writing goals.

Follow-up is time-consuming

Nurturing writers is hard work. Follow-up requires you take time to read their work and make comments, time to talk and offer encouragement, time to look out for opportunities. However, your investment in nurturing a writer can yield exciting rewards for your publishing house, for the writer, and for your readers.❖



Filipino writers at work during a 1998 "Write for God" follow-up training.

The Association of Christian Writers (ACW) started 28 years ago with a Christian writing competition. The prize was attendance to a small writer training conference. After the conference, Andrew Quickie, a Christian ghost-writer, invited ten people to meet in his central London flat. They shared what is now ACW's vision: a desire "to see quality writing in every area of the media, either overtly Christian or shaped by a Christian perspective, reaching the widest range of people across the United Kingdom and beyond."

ACW now has 1000 members. Most members have started in Write for God (W4G) training sessions, one of three ACW annual programs sponsored every March by the Institute for Contemporary Christianity (ICC)-London. Many of ACW's new writers meet publishers in the United Kingdom during the "Writers' Day" and "Writers' Weekend," two other major ACW programs. Juliet Hughes, ACW Chair, notes a number of members have received contracts at the ACW events.

New (starting) non-commercial as well as advanced (intermediate, published and established) authors attend small groups after each W4G course. ACW coordinates an estimated 30 area groups meeting regularly throughout the United Kingdom. Since ACW introduced its website—<http://dSPACE.dialpIPeX.com/christian-writers>—it has received inquiries from Christians wishing to start similar organizations in their own countries. The March 1999 W4G training included people from Belgium, Canada, England, France, Jamaica, Malta, Morocco, Netherlands, Nigeria, the Philippines, Scotland, and Wales. After contact with ACW, members formed writers' groups in Africa and in Slovakia. Many international W4G participants retain direct contact with individuals who continue to act as mentors.

ACW provides support groups, specialized training, a quarterly magazine titled *Candle & Keyboard*, writing competitions, prayer, and networking. The Association raises the profile of Christian writers within churches, publishers, and the media. Its members feel called to help expand the kingdom of God in a pluralistic society. All who join must sign a statement affirming they share ACW's vision, and must affirm the central truths of the Christian faith as revealed in the Bible.

Leonard states ACW members and trainees are teachable and determined—crucial factors for success. She believes groups like ACW benefit publishers because they enable writers to produce better manuscripts. ACW also helps publishers find promising contacts through its register, which includes data on intermediate and established writers, their specialties and accomplishments. ACW encourages the development of a more diverse pool of writers that can offer a greater variety to readers. And, since Christian writers are also readers, they expand publishers' markets through networking.

Writer training will continue in 2000. Vice-Chair Leonard affirms, "We have to train people to write excellent material to reach beyond the Christian ghetto, plus persuade Christians to read. There are more opportunities now for writing for radio, TV, and electronic media. We plan to train writers for the world wide web. We seek to be an influence for good and for God in this generation."

— Maria Chona V. Jomilla