LIFE & REFLECTION

# Five Things I Know About Writing Your First Book:

## *Getting It Out There*

**B. Kim Barnes**
THE INFLUENCE GURU

Have you always had a book in you? Practical advice on time, feedback, editing, topic, and form from an author of six books.

Have you always had a book in you? Here are a few tips to get it out there!

1. **Get away from your regular life if you can.** Send the kids to camp, hand off your day-to-day projects to someone who can learn something from doing them, turn off your phone for several hours a day. Go away – if possible, someplace in a different time zone or at least far enough away that you won't be tempted to rush in to handle any mini-crises that may arise. (OK, the local coffee shop on a weekend will serve the purpose).
2. **Join or create a writing group.** Make sure the people in it are willing to give tough feedback. When you get it, respond with curiosity rather than defensiveness. You may cringe, but you'll grow as a writer. Reading and commenting on others' work is a great way to experience writing from the reader's point of view – this will become an asset for improving your own work.
3. **Hire a great editor.** You can't really edit your own work. The eye does not see itself. Yes, I know you don't do typos, but if you can manage to find an affordable line editor, he or she will spot inconsistencies, errors, dull or repetitive passages, and many other areas ripe for improvement. Oh, and if you do OCCASIONALLY make other errors, a good copy editor is also an asset. Usually, they are not the same person. Yes, a traditional publisher will do that for you, but they generally aren't going to be interested in badly written manuscripts – so pre-emptive editing can increase your chances of getting to the right desk.
4. **Write about what you know and what others would like to know and can't easily find elsewhere.** Reflect on the positive feedback you've received from clients, colleagues, and bosses over the years. What do people ask you to demonstrate or explain? What have others suggested you write about? What do you hear people wish there were a magic formula for? (I've given up on the rule, "never end a sentence with a proposition.) If there are already a lot of books on that topic, move on to something else, even though you think you know a better way. A first book needs to grab attention and the umptieth book on managing large-scale change won't do that.

5. **Experiment with form and venue.** Begin with an article for a professional journal. Or a short, self-published e-book. Consider starting or contributing to a blog. Maybe you can use a metaphor (cheese, anyone?) or use a fictional form to express your ideas. (Poetry is certainly an underutilized form for a business book – maybe I'll try that myself.) Consider co-authoring with someone who has a different skill-set from yours – try an article first before you commit to anything longer.

I wish you the best of success and invite you to ask questions or contribute ideas – there are so many of us in this community who have something to say that others will find valuable. And reading one good business book tends to make us hungry for more, so it's a collaborative practice! You may not be able to make your living from book sales, but you'll get to know interesting people (and they'll learn about you), and you'll satisfy that urge to contribute to your profession, your clients, and your readers. Check out my latest business mystery book starring an internal organization development consultant.

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## B. Kim Barnes

Founder of **The Influence Guru**, Kim Barnes is a coach, facilitator, and author with more than forty years of experience in leadership, influence, and organization development. She was a founder and, for many years, CEO of Barnes & Conti Associates, and developed or co-developed programs including *Exercising Influence*, *Inspirational Leadership*, *Intelligent Risk-Taking*, *Consulting on the Inside*, and *Managing Innovation*. She is the author of six books, including *Exercising Influence* (Wiley) and *Building Better Ideas* (Berrett-Koehler). She works with enterprise companies, government agencies, small businesses, and individuals from the San Francisco Bay Area.

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