

Daniel Hall Presents



Episode 136

Arrange Your Life to Support Writing the Best Book Possible

With Kevin Johns

Hello! Welcome to the RealFastResults.com podcast! If you are struggling to finish your book or are having trouble arranging your life so that you can finish your book, you definitely want to tune into this episode. Today's special guest is Kevin Johns, and he is the best person to cover this topic. You see, he's a very popular thought leader in the space of writing productivity.

Kevin is also an expert when it comes to techniques pertaining to staying motivated, the writing process, time management, and independent publishing. Not only does he help other people to accomplish more, he is very productive in his own life. In addition to being the father of three young daughters, he is an author, a podcaster, and an independent entrepreneur. As a writing coach, he has helped hundreds of writers, just like you, from places all over the world, to get ideas out of their heads, onto the page, and into the hands of readers. Please welcome Kevin to the show...

Promise: How to Arrange Your Life to Write the Best Book Possible

Thank you so much for having me. I'm so thrilled to be on this show, and I think that people are going to really want to listen to this episode because we are going to talk about how they can arrange their lives in a matter that they can support writing the best book possible and following that through to conclusion. I see way too many people start a book project and fizzle out before they get to that amazing publication phase. So, we're going to talk about what people need to do to get there.

There's a myth that writing is just staring off into the distance as the sun comes up over the horizon, and then the wind whispers in your ear, and a book magically appears in your lap. Of course, writing a book, whether it's fiction or nonfiction is like any other project in life. It requires project management. It requires planning ahead and forethought, as well as identifying important milestones along the way that are going to get you from A to Z.

This also involves looking at your life and saying, "Hey, what are the things that I need to do? What do I need to rearrange about the way that I live my life that's going to support getting me to that goal?" **You can stare into those sunsets all you want, but (I hate to break it to you) that book is never just going to drop into your lap.**

Three Steps to Achieving Success

I think of this in, kind of, three big categories. The first category is habit formation. The second is actually math. I know you're thinking, "We are all writers here, so why are we talking about math?" But, there is some really simple math that you can do to help you to set up a plan and stay on track. Then, the third thing to consider is focus. In other words, once you have established a plan, how do you stay focused and stick with it?

Step #1 - Habit Formation

When it comes to that first step, the habit formation step, **I like to teach something that I call "non-negotiable writing time"**. This is time in your schedule that you put in specifically for writing. Way too many people say, "Oh, I'll get to my writing once all of my other business for the day is done," or, "I'll get to my writing once the kids are in bed, and the dishes have been washed, and the laundry has been folded." Obviously, when we put off our writing like that, we never get to it, or when we do get to it, we get to it at that point in the day when we are tired and all of our creative juices have run dry, so it's the worst possible time.

I really encourage people to get in there, into their calendar, and actually schedule in writing time. Treat it the way that you would treat a meeting with a client or the way that you would treat a doctor's appointment. It's non-negotiable, whether it's 7 am to 8 am every single morning or whether it's a one-hour session twice a week. It can be whatever works for you, your lifestyle, and your goals. The point is to stick with it. Put it in your calendar, and treat that non-negotiable writing time as holy, untouchable time.

One more thing that I want to say about putting it into the calendar is that this creates a level of transparency with the other people in your lives, like, perhaps, your children and your spouse. These are people that you really need to get on-board with your writing project. When you clearly have that written on a calendar, on the wall, everyone knows, "That's when Mom is doing her writing," or, "That's when Dad is focusing on his project." So, there's no misconception of what's going on. **You are carving out that time for yourself, but you are also communicating to those around you that this is a really important time.**

Step #2 - Math

The next step that I laid out for you earlier was that “numbers thing”. I’m a writer, and I’m probably the worst person when it comes to numbers, but there is a small equation that I really encourage people to think about. **That equation is looking at your estimated, total word count goal.** So, let’s say that you want to put together a 50,000-word manuscript, and your goal is to have your first draft written within 90 days. Well, all you have to do is divide 50,000 by 90, and that will give you a daily word count goal. You would find that you need to write 555 words a day to reach that goal. **So, now you have a really clear metric for whether you are on track to achieving the deadline you have set for yourself.**

Far too many people say that they would like to have a book written three months from now, but then they just sit down and write when they can, they don’t have a metric, and they don’t have a measure of whether they are on track or not. **When you know that you need to be putting down 555 words a day, it’s really easy to know when you are falling behind.** If you know that you are falling behind, then you can implement changes to get yourself back on track. Maybe you need to add an extra writing day, or maybe your sessions need to be longer. Maybe your sessions need to be shorter, and maybe there’s a point of diminishing returns. You don’t know any of that if you aren’t tracking these methods.

I’m not saying that you have to write every single day. If you are a busy person and only have three days a week to write, then you know that 555 words a day comes out to 3,885 words a week. Well, break that 3,800 words up into three sessions, and you know what you need to do to get your work done. Again, it’s about taking writing from this mysterious, magical thing, where we just, kind of, hope that it emerges out of us on its own magical schedule and really say, “These are the steps that I need to take to achieve my goal.” As much as we might be afraid of numbers, as writers, they can be really, really helpful when it comes to staying on track, and they let you know when things are going wrong so that you can make changes.

Can This Help Me to Stay Motivated?

I’m using this as an example of how tracking your word count and having a regular habit can let you know when things are going wrong, but what I actually see more often is that this builds momentum when things are going right! There’s such a great feeling that comes along with ticking that box and saying, “Hey, I got my daily word count done today!” Or, “Oh, I got an extra 500 words done today! I’m ahead of the game!!”

So, this is great for spotting errors, but it’s even better for getting that endorphin rush of feeling productive, of knowing you are making progress, and of getting that momentum ball rolling. Once you get a streak going, and once you start seeing little successes along the way, it just makes the whole project more fun! It raises your energy levels, and it just builds on itself.

It’s like going to the gym or learning a new skill. It’s like anything else, right? Those first few days, or like, those first few sessions in the gym, are so hard! Getting the motivation to get up and put on your workout clothes, fill up the water bottle, and all of that stuff just seems so hard, but a month or two in, it’s second nature. You are just rolling. And, not only are you not struggling to get motivated, or to get

to the gym, but you are looking forward to it. You're enjoying it. Writing can be the exact same way when you keep that momentum going.

Step #3 - Focus

The final thing I was thinking about is this idea of focus. This is something else that I see people struggle with a lot. They'll have the plan, they'll have the schedule, they'll have the non-negotiable writing time, and they'll have weekly word counts, but they get distracted. Something that I often say is that life always gets in the way. I've had so many clients that have come to me and said something like, "Oh my God! The car broke down this week," or, "I got sick," or, "My kid had to be rushed to the hospital," or, "Something terrible is going on at my day job." These things always happen, so they should never be a surprise.

We need to build these sorts of distractions into our timelines. We need to give ourselves some slack. When we say to ourselves that we want to have that 50,000-word manuscript written in 90 days, we need to acknowledge that we are probably going to be sick for at least a week during that 90-day stretch. We all get sick sometimes. These things happen. So, you can't allow life happening to be an excuse to distract you and pull you away from your work. **You need to be ready for that stuff and adapt to it.**

You expect the unexpected because life is unpredictable. **If you create a plan where everything goes right, you're screwing yourself before you've even begun because nothing ever goes right.** What you want to do is create reasonable expectations for yourself, and this is another reason why just working regularly is so important. It's really tough to estimate how quickly you can write a book if you've never written a book before, or if you've never written a chapter before, but when you do these things on a regular basis, you can start to get a feel for how much writing you, individually, can get done in a session. You know, maybe your friend can write 2,000 words a session, but maybe you only write 400 words a session. It's that knowledge that you gain through the practice of actually doing the work that you can then apply to your goal setting in a way that allows you to stay nimble when life throws challenges in your way.

Another thing I want to say on this topic of having focus is that a lot of the time success in anything is about saying "no" to a majority of other things. When people think of the difficulty of writing, I think a lot of the time they think of the loneliness and isolation of being, kind of, sitting there alone at a keyboard for long periods of time. I think that they think about the difficulty of finding the right language or coming up with innovative new ideas. They think about all of those things, but for me, what I think is actually the hardest part about being a writer is simply saying "no" to all of those things that want to pull you away from your writing.

When your friends say, "Hey, we are going to see *Avengers 4*," or, "*Avengers: Endgame* will be out next week," and they are going on the night that you are doing your writing, it's really hard to say, "No, I've got to do my writing. That's my non-negotiable writing time." Those are the types of sacrifices that you have to make in order to achieve success, and anytime you compromise the goals that you have set for yourself, you are pushing things further out. That deadline, and that goal that you want to achieve, is

just that much further every time you say, “Yes, I’m going to go see *Avengers*,” and not, “No, I’m going to stay home and work on my writing.”

I think that this is one of the hardest things about not just writing but achieving anything in life. We want to have fun, we want to please people, and we want to say “yes” to every opportunity that comes our way. The reality is that if you want to do something as big, and time-consuming, and complicated as writing a book, then you are going to need to say “no” to a vast majority of opportunities and things that come your way so that you can stay focused on the goal that you’ve set for yourself. In this case, that’s writing a book and doing it in a productive and timely manner, as well as at a high level of quality.

What Kind of Word Count Should I Go For?

As with most things, this is going to be largely situationally dependent. In other words, it’s going to be dependent on your individual circumstances. The number I like to throw out there is 1,000 words an hour. I think that’s a reasonable goal to set as a median. That’s not even as an average, but as a median. I would say that half of the people out there are probably going to do less than that in an hour, and maybe half of the people will do more than that. Still, I would think about 1,000 words in an hour-long session is a reasonable goal to shoot for, and you can achieve incredible things writing 1,000 words a day. You could write a 50,000-word manuscript in two months writing 1,000 words a day.

That’s just an hour a day. You know, get up an hour earlier, before the kids get up, and write 1,000 words. You’d be amazed. You could write three or four books a year at that pace, and still work your full-time job, still spend time with your family, and all of those things.

How Much Time Does a Project Like This Take?

This is largely dependent on the amount of time you have to dedicate to a project. You know, I could very comfortably write a really good third or fourth draft of a 50,000-word book in three months, but I write professionally. I have written a dozen books, so I know this about myself because I have learned this about myself over time. A first-time author would really need to ask themselves, “How much time do I have to dedicate to this,” and set their timelines accordingly.

This may involve saying, “Hey, I only have three hours a week to work,” and then pushing out your timeline because it might just not be reasonable to have this done 90 days from now. Alternatively, you might say, “I do want to have this done 90 days from now,” which means you’re going to have to bump up the number of sessions that you can get in. That might mean you have to decide, “I’m not going to watch *Game of Thrones* anymore,” or, “I’m not going to play on the baseball team this quarter,” or whatever. In other words, it may mean that you have to adjust accordingly.

People have different goals, and people have different lives. The amount of time that you have available is going to determine how quickly you can get anything done. Of course, you are a productivity expert.

You know that productivity is all about making the most of the time that you have available to you. There are various means and methods that people use to get more writing done, many of which have been covered in this podcast in the past. Writing a book is a big project, and there's no getting around that. You've got to look for pockets of time in your life that you have available, and then adjust your plans and your approach accordingly.

Do You Have Any Tips on How to Find More Time?

It comes back to that focus issue of saying “no”. There's no secret formula that you can put into your computer, and there's no button that you can press that's going to give you two extra hours in your calendar. That doesn't work. Something that **I recommend sometimes is to spend a week doing a time journal, and jot down how you spend your time on any given day over the course of a week.** Then, do some analysis and ask, “Where are there pockets of time available that could be turned into productive time? Where is there time being wasted?”

I work with a lot of driven people. I work with a lot of Type A people that are building businesses, juggling three different jobs at once, and doing their writing on top of all of that. Quite often, it's perfectly reasonable for someone to do a time journal over the course of a week and say, “I literally have no time. I'm booked up from 7 am, when my kids get up, until 9:30 at night when I wash the last dish and fall into bed, exhausted.” If that's the case, then you look at what you could possibly cut out.

That's what we just talked about. You don't go to the movies, or you don't play the sports. Maybe you like to get drunk twice a week, so you don't get drunk twice a week. Just once, right? [Laughs] If there are no pockets of time available, then you need to say “no” to something. Something needs to drop so that you can turn that into productive time.

Connecting with Kevin

I'm at www.KevinTJohns.com. That's my home base. I have a free book there. It's my book, *Novel Advice: Motivation, Inspiration, and Creative Writing Tips for Aspiring Authors*. It's a free, full-length book. You can opt-in for that, as well as subscribe to my newsletter and find out about all my stuff. The archives for writing coach podcast are located there too. You can check out almost 100 episodes of that show. We have conversations almost like those on this show, where we talked about things that we can do to become better writers and more effective writers.

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