



## BROADKILL WRITERS RESORT

UPGRADE YOUR WRITING

# 25 Red Flags to Watch For in the Publishing Industry

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Ethical Publishing Community



There's a reason most people in the publishing industry won't give you a chance until you've been in the business at least two years – especially as a publisher.

A lot of people launch publishing careers with big talk, rapidly get themselves in over their heads and then, if they haven't already crashed and burned, resort to questionable behavior to get by. This process usually takes less than 24 months, but sometimes even established professionals go down this path.

The resources provided in our checklist will arm you against some of the more toxic tactics typically deployed in publishing.

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☐ **You can only submit through some form of extortion...**paying for editing services, agreeing to pay for print/promo/other costs, publishing agreements that forego any royalties, etc.

☐ **The pitch process is basically them spending as much time as necessary to wear you down so you'll agree to anything.** Sales numbers you had previously are never high enough, your previous books look terrible, your promo sucks. Despite this, they eventually offer to sign you, just with complete control over your name, image, what you're going to write, and how much you'll be paid. And they expect you to be grateful. This is your relationship with them from now on.

☐ **Nothing is negotiable.** They haven't sent a contract, it's a declaration.

☐ **They try to lock you into multi-book deals where monies earned are tied to recovering expenses from previous releases.** In practice, this looks like books 2-7 never earning any money because the publisher keeps unearthing expenses from book 1 and/or they expend a wild amount of resources on book 1, making you feel "big," only to use it as an excuse to never earn royalties.

☐ **The staff is in constant rotation.** Somebody new is always coming on board and the people who know how operations work there are always leaving, making things a confused mess.

☐ **Constantly establishing new accounts.** They can't keep business partners because they skip paying bills for printing, promo materials, publicity, etc.

☐ **Correspondence is a one-way street.** Your publisher expects prompt replies, but never, even under cordial circumstances, will answer even the simplest question during an exchange.

☐ **People at the company have no idea who you are.**

☐ **Financial transparency and planning don't exist, or are hidden.** While you want a business partner who is discrete with financial information it should still be clear they have official business banking accounts. If you hear about personal funds mixing with business money, missed taxes, lack of royalty statements, sales numbers never add up or remain a complete mystery even years after the fact...ask questions, and take appropriate action.

☐ **They want to change the terms of your deal after the fact, or don't honor your agreement.**

- ☐ **The agent's main source of income seems to be speaking at writers' conferences and/or selling their book on how to get an agent.**
- ☐ **Nothing positive is being said about them...**in fact, not much is being said about them at all because nobody wants to speak out.
- ☐ **They have a massive roster of clients, but few actual book deals.**
- ☐ **They hit you with fees.** This could be for anything from supplies, entry to conferences or travel, or other up front costs instead of making money by closing deals.
- ☐ **They "somehow" never seem to sell the dream project you poured everything into, which got their attention in the first place.** Instead, they always pressure you to write things outside your expertise or interests – and these things just happen to mirror what they've sold previously. Meanwhile, new manuscripts of your own design continue to pile up and collect dust.
- ☐ **They're never available to talk or take meetings because of all their leisure activities.**
- ☐ **They "accidentally" sell rights not available because you've previously sold them elsewhere.** Such as foreign translations, audio rights, etc. Then they pressure you into moving administration of those subrights, from all your literary properties, over to the division of their agency specializing in that area.
- ☐ **Gifts for you sent care of your agent are kept by them and used by them.** Aka drinking the bottle of wine from a thankful community relations manager after your successful in-store event.
- ☐ **A deal comes your way through a well-established connection.** Great! You notify your agent, who you expect to step in and seal the deal since it's easy money for them. Instead, they put an end to it because they need you to depend on them alone, at all costs.

☐ **They hit on you and/or make abnormal comments about your personal appearance.** Failure to reciprocate results in negative consequences. That isn't how business gets done, and certainly isn't for establishing healthy long-term business relationships.

☐ **Love bombing:** they are overly complimentary when trying to get something from you, then you never hear another good word again.

☐ **Always plays up to established names in the industry...but.** While publicly boasting about being connected to them privately divulges all their personal business, insults them, rages about any perceived sleight...yet continues making a big show of how well-connected they are to the people they're slamming.

☐ **They want you to make them your career.** Any other professional or personal connection has to remain a distant second or be abandoned altogether.

☐ **Really likes problematic people in the scene.** Stands up for people accused of misbehavior, trashes anyone making accusations of misbehavior, continues working with people known to cause harm no matter what. If something bad happens to you they'll attack you as well...in fact, they might even be the one who harms you to begin with.

☐ **Maintains harassment campaigns, and tries to rope you into participating.**

☐ **Bonus tip: notwithstanding.** In contracts, the word "notwithstanding" means everything prior to that within this particular clause is now going out the window under the following circumstances. Sometimes it's totally benign and commonsense, other times it's a tricky way to slip something past you. Think beyond just agents and publishers; this could apply to contracts with retailers, film executives, a writing partner agreement, anything.

☐ You yourself are already a resource. In the space below list 5 red flags you were aware of before today and would warn others about.

☐ Red flag #1:

☐ Red flag #2:

☐ Red flag #3:

☐ Red flag #4:

☐ Red flag #5:

☐ Now please join us over at our Ethical Publishing Community to share these tips and compare notes with others who can use your help. Our web address is on the next page under "Resources." Thank you!

- ☐ **Ethical Publishing Community:** a space for frank idea exchanges away from prying eyes on social media.  
<https://expertise.tv/organizations/ethical-publishing-community/>
- ☐ **Writer Beware:** an extensive archive of documentation on literary agents, independent editors, vanity publishers, self-publishing services, small presses, and others that engage in questionable practices.  
<https://www.sfw.org/other-resources/for-authors/writer-beware/>
- ☐ **Better Business Bureau:** Better Business Bureau helps United States, Canada, and Mexico consumers find businesses and charities they can trust.  
<https://www.bbb.org/>
- ☐ **10 Best Writers Organizations:** a list compiled by *Every Writer*.  
<https://www.everywritersresource.com/10-best-organizations-for-writers/>
- ☐ **Diverse Writers and Artists of Speculative Fiction:** a support group for promoting a level playing field in the speculative fiction genres.  
<http://dwasf.org/>
- ☐ **Plagiarism Today:** a site dedicated to all issues surrounding plagiarism.  
<https://www.plagiarismtoday.com/>
- ☐ **Broadkill Writers Resort:** sponsor of this download, and host to writing retreats on Delaware Bay. Join myself and other industry professionals for workshops, writing marathons, and more.

John Edward Lawson, founder  
Ethical Publishing Community

# Want to Grow Your Publishing Career?

If so, I would love to have you join us so we can all map a strategy to grow our careers ethically. Just click the button below for direct access to the Ethical Publishing Community.

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Attract<sup>+</sup>

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