

My Job: Author Lets You Take All the Credit

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Name: Leslie Lang

Job: Ghostwriter

Start: Lang has been freelancing full time since 1998, both for magazines and companies. Ten years ago, “a business client asked me if I could blog under his name,” she says. She’s been a ghostwriter ever since, penning articles, op-eds, letters, blog posts, books and even speeches for clients.

Skills: Strong writing skills are a must – Lang has a background in journalism. Clients often hand her a stack of emails, articles and other materials, and she has to digest the mishmash and tease out a coherent message. Above all, she says, she has to be a good listener. “The more you work with someone, the easier it is to get their voice,” she says.

Misconceptions: She’s had clients do double takes when they’ve heard what she charges to write a book or memoir. “It’s an investment of quite a bit of time and expertise to write a whole book,” she says. “If it was just putting their thoughts down on paper, they would do it themselves.”

Clients: Lang has developed close relationships with some clients, including one regular who invited her to a company party. “My client was asked to say a few words. He looked at me, and I could tell he was caught off guard. I walked over and said politely, ‘Just welcome them, thank them for coming’ I kind of ghostwrote his little speech.”

Best days: When a piece of writing comes together and she’s successfully focused a client’s thoughts, presented the point clearly and captured the person’s voice, Lang can feel it. “I just feel so good when I do work the client is really happy with. Everybody has their niche. There’s one little thing that I know how to do, and I’ve found it.”

Pay: Ghostwriting a book can earn a writer anywhere from a few thousand dollars to \$50,000 or more, depending on the type of book, length, research needed and other details, such as whether it’s a celebrity memoir. Ghostwriting other materials, such as articles and white papers, can run at \$1 to \$2 a word, and go up from there, depending on experience and expertise.

This interview was edited for conciseness.