



Breakthrough Gregory E. Lang

62 rejections, then a bestseller

AFTER YEARS OF WORKING for start-up companies, I couldn't help but approach the quest for publication like a business. After extensive planning, I set out to become a best-selling author.

Breakthrough

My daughter lives with me part time. Over the years we have filled what we call the "Meagan Box"—a cardboard box overstuffed with photographs, mementos of places we've been, her artwork, notes we've written to each other. In that box resides the reassuring evidence of our close relationship.

During the periods when she is not with me, I go to that box for comfort. For a long time I wanted to capture its memories and put them together in some form to reassure my daughter that when we are not together, I think of her. That desire became the driving force behind my first book, *Why a Daughter Needs a Dad: 100 Reasons*.

In the fall of 1998, I began sending out queries. I knew that the rejection rate for unpublished, unrepresented authors was more than 95 percent, so I was prepared for the many denials that would surely come. And come they did: Over the next three years, my book was rejected 62 times.

Having spent so much time in sales, I had developed thick skin and a belief that "no" often meant "not now." So I kept sending more queries. Finally, Cumberland House Publishing in Nashville, Tenn., wanted to see the book.

A year later Cumberland published it, and just 10 weeks after the title hit

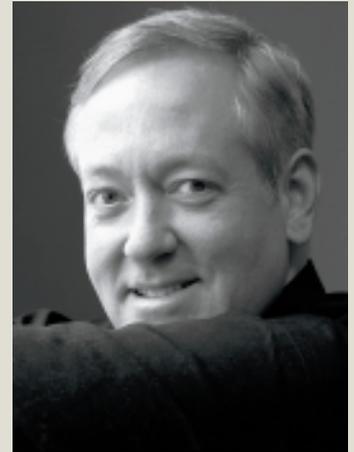
the bookstores, it appeared on *The New York Times* bestseller list. The success of the first book led to nine more books about family relationships. The series has sold more than 1.5 million copies and made five appearances on the *Times* list.

What I learned

Persistence really works and so does a business approach to writing. For example, there are many family relationships I could have written about in my first book—e.g., father-son, mother-daughter, grandparent-grandchild, etc. Yet I knew that in a business, you must focus your effort on something you know or do well. So I did. My initial outing was on a subject that I knew a lot about, father-daughter relationships.

The success of the first book allowed me to write another one, and then another one. This is analogous to product-line extension. We had a product that worked and went about replicating it in different yet similar forms. When we finished the 10th book, we decided to end the series even though sales remain very strong. This is because imitations were beginning to show up, and we saw a need to do something new to distinguish ourselves again—thus, a new series about life enrichment and relationships, but with a different spin. In business, that's called staying ahead of your competition.

Notice I switched from using the pronoun "I" to "we." That is because there are two people behind these books—my publisher, Ron Pitkin, and me. At the risk of overusing the business analogy, he is like my venture-



After 22 years in the health-care industry, Gregory E. Lang of suburban Atlanta switched from being a frequent flyer to a frequent writer. His 11th book hit bookstore shelves in September.

capital partner. He is putting his money into my idea and together we are enjoying success. I respect his advice, and we confer with one another often on new concepts.

Advice

First, write when it is the right time for you. Sometimes I write eight hours a day, and other times I won't write for days. Your gut will tell you when you are supposed to be at your desk. Second, don't be discouraged by rejection. I know this is tired advice, but look what happened for me. Third, partner with your publisher and, for that matter, your editor. They have probably been at it longer than you and know a few things you don't. Finally, promote yourself, not only for the books you have written but for the books you want to write. My success has opened other doors for me: I now have an agent, and my first novel is under review by several major houses in New York.

