

Book Journeys Author Interview - May 15, 2014

Dr. Angela Lauria with Andrea Owen, author of *52 Ways to Live a Kick-Ass Life*

Just be real in everything that you write about. You should always go back to your message, of what your main message is, what you think your book might be about and communicate well with your people, and consistently. ~Andrea Owens

Angela:

Can you hear me now? Yey! Hey! Well, hello everybody and welcome to Book Journeys Radio. This is Dr. Angela Lauria. I am the founder of the Author Incubator and creator of the *Different Process for Writing a Book That Matters*. We are doing a two-part show with Andrea Owen who is the author of, ah, Andrea, tell me the name of your book again.

Andrea:

Haha! *52 Ways to Live a Kick-Ass Life*.

Angela:

52 Ways to Live a Kick-Ass Life. Her website, if you wanna check it out is yourkickasslife.com. Had a little trouble getting started today, some technical difficulties but we are here now. So, Andrea's book, *52 Ways to Live a Kick-Ass Life*, she talked about a little in last week's show and you can go ahead on blogtalkradio.com/book-journeys and hear part one of that show. But I'm gonna let Andrea take a minute and tell you what her book is about. So, tell us about *52 Ways to Live a Kick-Ass Life*.

Andrea:

It's self-help for women, the very bottom line of it and it's really just 52 short bite-sized, digestible, nuggets of wisdom to live your best life. Everything from body image to perfectionism, giving up control, all, the whole gamut of basically life lessons that I've learned over the last 7 years of a very fast self-help journey myself.

Angela:

So Andrea, you are a life coach and what else do you do? Talk about how this book ties in to your business.

Andrea:

So, yes. I'm a life coach for women and I help women who are, kind of like, done with therapy, if they went through that and they're sort of like, "Now what?" So, if you kinda have little things that are happening in their life that they need to live, kind of what I say, their own kick-ass life. So, that's exactly what I do.

Angela:

That's awesome. So, last week, we talked about how for you, getting a publisher that can really help with distribution, was part of the key for what you wanted to do. And so we talked about

finding an agent, writing a proposal, finding help, so you actually had some pretty important mentors along the way. You used Danielle LaPorte's *Big Beautiful Book Plan* and then, you actually hired someone to help you with your book proposal that helped you get a pretty kick-ass agent, which is exciting. And you've got a deal with a publisher who was able to help you take your book to places where if you self-published, you probably wouldn't have been able to get through, certainly not as easily.

Andrea:
Right.

Angela:
And uhm, so that's bookstores and other distribution channels. But I know that you talked also about the importance of having a platform. So, today, so in the first episode, we talked really about the publisher's platform, how the publisher was gonna help you reach people. Let's talk about your platform, how you've built a platform and really what it is and why it matters for an author.

Andrea:
Uhuh. Yeah, it used to be the other way around in traditional publishing. You would get a book deal and then, your platform would come out after that. But since the birth self-publishing, and things have changed so, what authors, sorry, what publishers are really looking for is for you to have an established platform already and have that platform be around, obviously people that are gonna be interested in your book, 'cause they kinda want a guaranteed audience that are already gonna be interested in purchasing the book. So, did you want me to talk about, like, how I built it or what it looks like exactly in terms of numbers?

Angela:
Yeah. So, we used, you know, especially as publishers, we throw around this term platform but I think for a lot of authors, they don't even really know what a platform is. And, you know, they might have maybe a mailing list or something like that. I know when you started you had 3000 subscribers to your newsletter, you had 15,000 social media followers. For a lot of people, they're not there yet. You know maybe they've got a couple 100 people on their mailing list, so let's talk about what you think an author needs to have to get an agent interested.

Andrea:
Yeah, well, it's still suggestive because I'd had actually a former client of mine who did not have quite as large of a platform that I did and she got a book deal with a smaller Christian publisher. And then, another friend of mine who has great writing credentials, she's a freelancer for parenting.com and you know, magazines and things like that. She got a book deal as well, 'cause she doesn't have like an email us at all but she had already had an established kind of resume, if you will, of writing credentials. So, I mean I don't want anyone out there to think like, "Oh, because I don't have 3000 people on my email list, there's no way I'll get an agent or a publisher." It could happen. It's just it's a lot easier I think for you to have that established platform. And my agent suggested that I, at one point she suggested that I take 6 months to a

year to work my ass off, solve my platform even more to focus more on that in order to get a better deal. And in the end, we decided not to do that but that was discussed. So I...

Angela:

Yeah, and I think if you're working on a book, if you're working on a book, if you know you're gonna work on a book in the future, if you know you wanna have a book, having a platform is gonna be a key conversation you're gonna have with people. So, what goes into building a platform? What are some of the things you've done to build your list to your followers?

Andrea:

Definitely, a no. 1 is having a website and having a website that speaks directly to your message. And if you're sure that you're gonna write a book on a certain topic, make sure your website says that. I mean, if you're talking to stay-at-home moms and then you later wanna write a book like about how women can learn how to fix cars, it doesn't make any sense. So, make sure that everything is in alignment, your message, your website, the coffee on your website, communicating regularly with these people and especially if you're gonna be an author, start blogging. Create blog posts on a consistent basis, try your best to be, I hate to use this word, but extraordinary at it and give people a lot of really amazing value book content. We're inundated these days, the internet and email and everything, so just keep the juicy, juicy stuff 'cause you wanna make sure that you're ... are good, you wanna make sure that you're building that list, like people are signing up because they want to hear from you. So, that's one of the things and people often ask me like, "What's more important? Social media, should I focus on that or should I focus on an email list?" I always say email list. Those are direct people that signed up that want to hear from you. They want your stuff in their email box so, if can only focus on one, if you don't have the time, focus on that. And social media is important too. Everybody's on Facebook. It's like over 1 billion people are on Facebook now. It's like a ... of humanity. It's incredible. Hahaha! So, just be real in everything that you write about. You should always go back to your message, of what your main message is, what you think your book might be about and communicate well with your people and consistently.

Angela:

Okay, so, we're gonna break this down for people. There are three main pillars of building a platform. One is your email list, two is social media, and then, three is just visitors to your website who may also follow you on social media or may also be on your newsletter list. But there are three different metrics and wherever you are right now, one of the first I would say is figure out where you are. If your newsletter is 0, that's fine. You could double ...

Andrea:

Everybody goes there.

Angela:

Right. So, the first thing is your newsletter. See where you are. The second thing is social media. Get up, lay the land there and see where you are. Third thing is your website visitors or could be building a website. So, let's take them one at a time. You said you think newsletter is

the most important or your email list is the most important. So, let's talk about your newsletter. What platform do you use for your email service and how did you get the people to join your newsletter?

Andrea:

I use MailChimp. I always have. And the best way that I have gotten people to sign up is from blogging and having it often. So in other words, if you don't know what that is, it's basically when people land on your website and you have a compelling reason for them to give you their email address, whether it's like a free e-course that you offer, uhm, a free e-book, that's kind of the norm, quote-unquote, but it can be a few different things and it works not a ton of work for you. But and be really clear with people when they sign up, like, "This is how often you're gonna hear from me. I might be selling you some stuff." You know, use better language than that. Hahaha! You know what I mean and uhm...

Angela:

I'm gonna sell you some stuff, you're gonna love it!

Andrea:

You are gonna be amazed at how awesome my things are exactly.

Angela:

But I mean automatically, I start seeing how these three different components of a platform are tied together because, for you, building a newsletter required having a website, where you had some opt-in content and then driving people to that website came from blog posts. So, when you talk about having 9,000 unique monthly visitors to your website, how are those people getting there? What are they hearing about? What are you blogging about?

Andrea:

It's, what has worked for me and I'm not saying this is going to work for everyone. But being in the self-help industry, and I'm sure a lot of your listeners are in this industry, it can, you know, it gets kinda typecast if you will. Like, we have a reputation of being "woowoo" and things like that. So I, and this comes, I never would want someone to do that. It will just come naturally to them. I'm just telling you my personal experience has been writing about self-help and sometimes if you can, be provocative about it. Maybe not provocative but have an opinion and stand by it wholeheartedly. If you are the type of person that gets up on her ... box and becomes an evangelical preacher about it, write like that. After people like and not like ask people to pinch hit because again, we're so inundated like we wanna read something that's going to make us think critically or that's going to ruffle our feathers, or that we're going to have either the same, like, amen opinion or we're gonna have the opposite opinion. That is the kind of stuff that has worked really well for me. I wanna just give you one really quick tip too, that I learned later on, which I wished, this is like one regret I wish I would have done sooner, the plugin Optin Skin. I can give you the link. I'm an affiliate so, hahaha! I love them. It's basically a plugin. It's a plugin that goes, you can click at the bottom, you can put it anywhere on your website but where I use it most is at the bottom of every blog post. Because if people are reading your entire blog post and they

get to the end of that and they have to go and look for where they can get your update, that's a huge mistake. Or they have to go back to your homepage or even scroll back to the top, if someone is that interested and they get through an entire blog post and they're interested, then they, you want them, right then and there, "Here's where you sign up for your updates - name, email, ..." So, and you can track it. So, that's another thing I wish I would have done sooner. I wished that I would have tracked what blog posts were working 'cause before I would just look at my whole numbers on MailChimp and say, like, "Oh I had a great month!" "This one wasn't so good!" I wish that I would have been able to look and say, "This is the reason I did really well." "This is the reason I did not do well." That way you can keep doing more of what worked. So, again, it comes down to just ...

Angela:

So, if you go to yourkickasslife.com and you click on Andrea's blog, any of her blog posts, at the bottom of them, it says, "Like this post, sign up for updates." And it's a really bright pink box which is one of, you know, the kind of key branding colors that Andrea uses and keeping that consistent is also a helpful way to get subscribers 'cause it makes people ... you more.

Andrea:

Easy to check. Mhmm.

Angela:

Yup. And so, she's got this nice bright pink color. It's really big. If I've gotten to the end of her blog post, all I have to do is give her my first name and my email address. So, I love that. You're not asking for my address, my phone number, it's really simple. First name and email address, click the "Go" button and she's added you to her list.

Andrea:

Yeah, so another thing that will work...

Angela:

So how do you, how do people...

Andrea:

Can I just say one more thing that really worked?

Angela:

Yeah, yup.

Andrea:

Okay, and you guys may have heard this before, but it's very cliché, but it's right post. People love to read bulleted lists or numbered lists. For instance, a post that I wrote, maybe a month or so ago, called, "11 Things Happy Women Do," the last time I checked has been shared more than 8,000 times. 8,000 times you guys because it's simple, because a lot of times, we think, as life coaches, we think that like everybody knows this stuff. But we are not our ideal client, we are

not our ideal reader. So, I don't mean like dumb it down, but just like, "Keep it simple, sister." Simple stuff. People love it and that gets shared like wildfire on social media.

Angela:

Wow. That's amazing. So uhm...

Andrea:

I know, like I, hahaha.

Angela:

So, what are your successful topics? What are the things that people come back for to read the most?

Andrea:

I think, personally, people love that I have a very noble shared approach on things and I don't sugarcoat and I'm sort of like the self-help for people that might be embarrassed in the self-help aisle. I'm sort of like the, your bff that's going to call you out on your shit and tell you the hard truth and that's the feedback that I've got that people love about me. So, that's what I've tried to write.

Angela:

I love that. So, I talk about the 10 Steps to Writing a Book that Makes a Difference. And step no. 1 is really all about defining your ideal reader and we talked a little bit about that with your platform that if you wanna help people fix cars, make your blog about that. If you wanna help stay-at-home moms feel more fulfilled, write about that but try not to be everything to everyone. Whatever your book is about, make your website about it as well. And then, step no. 2 is about identifying your voice and there's not a right answer here. The wrong answer is not doing this. So, when Andrea's throwing around 4-letter words pretty liberally and she's describing herself as your best friend and sort of the anti-self help, make-your-life-better-in-a-not-necessarily woowoo way but in a little bit of a saucier, spicier way, that's her voice. I know it when I see it. I'm, like, Oh! It's very ah, in fact somebody on a forum I was on was like, "Hey, can I use kick-ass on my website? I wanna be kick-ass." I was like, yeah, that's Andrea Owen's thing. Like, so knowing your voice is another really important step that it's not just knowing who you're writing for but knowing what you want your relationship to be with them. So I love when you, I love when you describe it as like their best friend or something. You're not necessarily writing as a coach or like you have everything figured out.

Andrea:

Right. And you know I've seen a lot... Well, yes. I see a lot, Angela and I don't know if you see it too but, because I work with brand new coaches that are just starting out and this was, I did the exact same thing. So, I knew who I was with my friends and in my personal life, and with my husband, ... and then when it came to my business, all of a sudden I got really serious. And I found myself censoring my writing a lot because I wanted to, I mean this is my own stuff, like I wanted everybody to like me, I didn't want to piss anybody off and it just didn't sound like me.

And it happened in the book too. I had to go back and edit chapters where I just was trying to be a little bit too “vanilla” if you will. So, that’s what I encourage people to do, just, like how often is it, how blessed are we that we are in a business, we are entrepreneurs where we can be who we are, exactly who we are. I mean that’s what we’re teaching as coaches. So, why are we gonna be different with that and with our businesses? So, I invite people to check yourself. Like if you find yourself doing that then, go back and edit. And a lot of what I wrote is I write things with nobody in mind, and ... for a second. So, in other words, if I get caught up in the, “Who’s gonna read this? Who is this gonna make ...”, and like I’ll write a completely crappy piece of writing. So, a lot of times, I use the exercise of someone who’s just emailed me something, a question, and I’m hitting reply and emailing one person back. Would that be the same blog post or chapter in a book as if you, or if you knew 15,000 people were gonna write it? So, I’m actually not gonna coach. That was my next exercise, hahaha. And it changed everything.

Angela:

Yeah, I love that. And the thing is, so often, you know, we hear somebody like a Danielle La Porte or a Tim Ferriss and we wanna be like them, so we’re trying to copy their voice but there’s not, there’s not like a right or a wrong way. It’s about you being who you authentically are. Somehow people can just see through that if you’re trying to write like someone else or write like you think a coach should write, or write like you think somebody with 50,000 followers should write. People see through that and they wanna hear you write like you, like you would, you know, reply to an email for one person.

Andrea:

Exactly. Ahuh.

Angela:

Ok. So, with the newsletter, you talked about you write blog posts at the bottom, have a way for people to opt-in. Maybe in the post, give away something that people, like an e-course or something that people would wanna give you their email addresses for. Let’s talk about social media. What platforms are you on? How do you get followers and how do you engage with them?

Andrea:

I’m on pretty much all of them except for Tumblr. So, basically, I’m on Facebook. I have a personal and a business page. I’m on Instagram, Twitter, Pinterest and YouTube. The ones I use the most are Facebook, I would say Facebook and Instagram. Uhm, I’m not active on Twitter like I always respond to people and I post sometimes and I always like follow people back but I don’t, I would say primarily Facebook and Instagram are my primary uses of social media. I’m sorry, what was the thing about your question?

Angela:

And how do you, how do you use it? How does it work? Do you schedule a time? Do you schedule posts or do you dedicate time? ‘Cause social media is something that can really expand ... time. So, how do you, you want your platform to grow so people are interested,

publishers, agents are interested in your number of followers. How do you get those followers and how do you not have social media take over your whole life?

Andrea:

I did schedule for a while and it's something that I wanna get back into. I just, I haven't, you know settled that out 'cause it takes time to settle, set it all up. But, uhm, I just kind of like when the mood strikes me. Hahaha. I try to post everyday on my Facebook business page. I typically post on Instagram actually and it automatically feeds. I get to pick whether I want it to feed into my personal Facebook page or my business Facebook page. So, for me, if it's like pictures of my kids and stuff like that, it will go to my personal page. But if it's uhm, strategic business stuff, if I'm like trying to be inspirational, then it goes to my Facebook page. Ah, here's what I found like probably the number one thing I like to say about social media. Social media is just that, it's about being social. It's not about selling. And I'm not surprised at all that Facebook has made it really hard for us to reach people and we have to pay because people don't come to Facebook to be sold to. They don't come to Twitter to be sold to or Instagram. It's about building relationships and that is the basis of everything. That's the basis of building your business. That's the basis of building your list. It's about creating that "know, like, and trust" factor, I mean that's Marketing 101. And in order to do that, don't sell all the time. I have rules out there like, you know, the 90, 10% of sharing and then, uhm, selling but I just have found that people just like you more when, hahaha! Use your email list to do both, to build your relationship and sell to. And then, you can, when you do build the numbers on social media, turn them into subscribers. Turn them into, to get people on your list and there are ways to do that, you know, I can talk to you about that if you want. But basically, social media is about being social.

Angela:

So, how have you gotten followers? Is it by following other people, by engaging in conversation, providing good content?

Andrea:

You mean on social media?

Angela:

Yeah.

Andrea:

Uhm, honestly, if I am gonna be totally honest, I think a lot of the, uhm, the trajectory of growth for my quote-unquote, likes and followers has been because of the name of my business. I think it's a novelty. I think it's clever.

Angela:

That's awesome. That is fantastic.

Andrea:

Do I think I would have 31,000 Facebook likes if my business name was Coaching with Andrea Owen? No, I don't. Do I think a lot of people like my page just 'cause they like the name? Yes. So, I'm thankful for that. I really am thankful for that and I know it's hard these days to come up with a name that hasn't already been used or trademarked. And by the way, if you have a great business name, trademark it. Hahaha! That's another, that's another project but uhm...

Angela:

That's really good advice. Yeah.

Andrea:

But uhm, but yeah. I think that a lot of it is, it really ... the name and then, after that, it's about being consistent, it's about posting things that are shareable because that has helped me spread like wildfire and I may hate to say it, but it's just like being nice, hahaha, or kind but being really clear with your message too. And don't dilute your message and 'cause it confuses people. And, yeah, all of that's important.

Angela:

Yeah, I think that's all important. And I think that these three pillars of your platform--your subscribers, your social media followers, and then your website, they really are very integrated. So if you were just gonna, let's say focus on newsletter subscribers, you still have to find a way to get people to your website and you have to have a website and you have to have content on your website 'cause that's normally how we attract people to sign up for our newsletter. So, uhm, you know, all of the different aspects of building a platform really feed into each other. When you were talking with your agent about waiting 6 months to grow your platform to see if you could get a better deal, did you have targets for how much you'd wanna grow your platform? Were there, you know, numbers that she suggested?

Andrea:

No, there weren't. And at that time, I think it's the time I have to pull out my book for ... But I think it's the time I had about 9 or 10,000 Facebook likes and then, I had 3,000 newsletter subscribers. I believe I had about 3,000 Twitter followers. I don't even think I had joined Instagram yet at that point and I had about a thousand followers on Pinterest. So, you know it's like, she was saying, it's not impossible for you to get a deal but you could get a better one if your platform was bigger. So, it was kind of up to me and again, like we were saying last week, it was like, "... do you wanna take the deal?" And I took the deal!

Angela:

Yeah, haha! You had a little bit of a gun to your head there.

Andrea:

The book has helped my platform for sure. My newsletter 'til now, okay so my book came out in December and now we're in May. That's only been about 6 months or so. My newsletter subscribers, my list now is at 5400. So it's grown!

Angela:
Wow.

Andrea:
Well. It's actually more time because I don't know remember exactly where I was when this book came out. So, it was slowly growing between, because that was like a year between the proposal and the book actually coming out. Uhm, but yeah. It was, it was a big, oh my God, look how the people are signing up. And I gave away chapters of the book, I had ... which before I would never do.

Angela:
Well, that I mean you did, you did say and I think this is exactly right. It used to be that you had to really have a platform in order to have a book. Now, people use a book to grow their platform and that's a really great example of how that happens.

Andrea:
Mhm. Yeah, it works. It helped a lot.

Angela:
So, in these kind of two interviews, we've talked about how they get a traditional deal, why you might want to. There's been some, you know, a little bit of pros and cons there 'cause there's reasons for both, how to help you get that deal by growing your platform. We've got a couple of minutes left and before we can finish our little series here, I wanna hear advice for you if somebody, and you talked about the fact that you wanted to write a book from the time you were 8 years old. And I've heard that over and over from my clients. They've known that they'd had a book in them and for some reason, they can't get out of their own way and get it done. So, what advice would you give to somebody about getting their book done if they're struggling that they feel like you did, like they're supposed to write a book?

Andrea:
Yeah, it depends on how people are motivated. I think a lot of coaches, and a lot of people are motivated with accountability because if it's just you, for me, like left to my own devices, it's not gonna happen. So, I talked about this too last week that for me, it's a huge accountability with announcing to the world that I was gonna do it. I told all of my blog readers that I was gonna write a book, like I declared it and then also, I would post it on social media and agonized over it, things like that. But if that's not your thing, then either enlist a friend or a partner or hire a coach who will light a fire under your butt and get you to write. And make, you know, make goals, and just "Okay, I'm gonna write," yeah just like that, National November like where you, National Write a Novel or whatever, I don't know what it is but they want you to write like a thousand words ... like that.

Angela:
Yup. NaNoWriMo.

Andrea:

Yeah that's, I don't love that. My life is too crazy to be able to write every single day but I could tell you how much I could write in a week. And so you have to figure out whatever works for you and just, just, you know what works for me too Angela was like, just having that thought in my mind. I know Martha Beck's called it a shitty first draft and I love that because I got so caught up in, like, this first draft, people were gonna read it and this was gonna be it. And this must be ridiculous! Hahaha! And it keeps me paralyzed so just right with no, with the end in mind not being that people are gonna read it. Write it for you. Just, you know, act like you're writing a letter to a friend, like whatever works for you. And...

Angela:

Andrea Owen is the author of *52 Ways to Live a Kick-Ass Life*. Andrea, you've been so generous with your time these last two weeks. Please go to yourkickasslife.com. She's got a great blog post called, How I Got a Traditional Book Deal where she talked about what we've covered in the last two episodes of this show, uhm, and please go buy her book. It's on Amazon and in bookstores near you. Thanks again, Andrea!

Andrea:

Thank you so much everybody!

Angela:

Good luck with the book!

Andrea:

Bye!

Angela:

And we'll be back next week on Book Journeys Radio. Changing the world one book at a time.