

## [Book Journeys Author Interview](#) - July 6, 2017

**Maggie McReynolds with Ken Leinbach, author of *Urban Ecology: A Natural Way to Transform Kids, Parks, Cities and the World*.**

*"I think it's important to know yourself and to set up a container that allows you to perform your best." ~Ken Leinbach*

Maggie:

Hey, everybody! Welcome to another episode of Book Journeys Radio. Every week here, on Book Journeys Radio, we talk to accomplished authors who've gone from just having an idea for a book to a finished book that's out there and making a difference in the world. Our goal, for this show, is for you to walk away inspired and motivated to write your book, whether it's your first or your third. Today's author is Ken Leinbach. He is a therapist, a life coach and executive director of the Urban Ecology Center, with several different locations in Milwaukee and Wisconsin. His book is titled *Urban Ecology: A Natural Way to Transform Kids, Parks, Cities and the World*, Hey, Ken! Great to have you on the show!

Ken:

Great to be here!

Maggie:

Awesome. To help get our listeners going at it, to you and what's going on, I usually start with the same question. Can you tell us what your book is about and who's it for?

Ken:

Sure. The - the book is really a case study of - of my life's work in - or the - my - an organization that we started here in Milwaukee called the Urban Ecology Center. And the reason we wrote the book - or, I wrote the book on behalf of the Urban Ecology Center is, there are people from cities across the globe that are reach out to us because they're interested in the impacts that our little non-profit in Milwaukee is ... having in the community, in terms of re - reduction in crime and neighborhood that we serve and academic performance going up and parks being revitalized and neighborhoods being renewed. But it's really a book - ... the focus of our non-profit and our focus of the book is the power of getting kids outside. That's - that's the gist of what we do at the Urban Ecology Center.

Maggie:

What age range do you focus on, in your work?

Ken:

It's a community center, so we - we work with everyone. We have a school-based program that starts to preschool and goes up to high school, but we have college interns and adult volunteers and - and citizen science - scientists who work with us, which are just neighborhood folks who

help with research that scientists are doing in our community, and - ... we're open six or seven days a week, depending on which branch you're in, and available to the public, in all - all of those times. So, it's a unique, one-of-a-kind community living room with a focus on the environment, placed in neighborhoods of need. And that's - that's - that's what we do.

Maggie:

That's very cool. Obviously - although you're doing great work with kids, the - the kids aren't the ones who are reading your books. Are you finding that - ... environmentalists, urban planners - who's picking up and reading your book?

Ken:

I know. It's been a - a pleasant surprise, and one of the things that the Author Incubator states is that you pick a very specific audience, down to an actual person that - in - ... you'll be surprised by how many people from many different audiences end up reading the book, and that's been the case here, for sure. It was designed for educators and community folks who are struggling with hope in - in difficult neighborhoods, and to provide an opportunity and a solution for - for that, and what's turned out is - is, we're getting readers from all walks of life. I've had millennials read the book who are sharing with me that they're sharing it with their friends because of the life lessons learned in the book and shared in the book, and I've had CEO's of top companies share with me that they're - they're using it as a leadership book, and I've had professors at universities share with me that they're planning on using it for their community development courses as a - as a textbook. So, it's - it's been across - across the board.

Maggie:

That's so interesting. Did that - did that advice feel counterintuitive to you, at first, to hone in so specifically on one reader?

Ken:

I - well, it was - ... I wouldn't say it was as much counterintuitive as just difficult. Because ....

Maggie:

Ah! So, ...?

Ken:

Well, to narrow it down. ... I - I understood the logic, and I - jumped into this with both feet, trusting the process, 'cause it made sense to me, but - but that didn't make it easy, because we are serving such a broad section of the community. How do you isolate it down to who is the most critical audience for this book? But that process proved to be ... important rigor to get to the finished product of the book, so, it's a - it's a - it's a brilliant part of the process.

Maggie:

So, I have a - I have a two-part question. Did you always know you were going to write a book? That's the first one.

Ken:

Ah - no, although I certainly - I enjoy writing and it's been in the back of my mind, and I'd - ... there's other topics I'd thought out, but - but no, I didn't actually know, ultimately, I'd be an author. No.

Maggie:

So, once - once you knew you were going to write a book, was it challenging to arrive on this book?

Ken:

No, ... - this one was the obvious book to write, because the Urban Ecology Center, which is a ... community-based, community-grown organization here in Milwaukee, has had a - a pretty significant impact and - and is also a pretty provocative story, a little bit of a rags-to-riches story that people like to hear. So, it - it made sense that this would be the book to write. It's a - it's a message that needs to be heard and - and I'm proud to have been part of it and proud to have had the opportunity to write the book.

Maggie:

Very cool. What - what did you run into, that was - that was harder than you thought, in the process of writing?

Ken:

Well, I knew it was gonna be hard. I guess, maybe, everything was harder than I thought.

Maggie:

Clear enough.

Ken:

But - but at the same time, I - I had time to think about this and - and have the luxury of some support, to help - help the book. So, I actually took a sabbatical from my job and was offered a wonderful opportunity to be an artist-in-residence at a place called the Conserve School in northern Wisconsin, and they provided me with a cabin on a lake, and then I had access to their campus, fifteen-minute bike ride away and worked with their high school students and returned for the time that they gave me to reflect and write. So, it was a - a pretty glorious time. It was a - ... I'm very fortunate to have had that circumstance and to allow me the - the space to put this book together.

Maggie:

Yeah, man. I think I wrote my book on my living room couch with my dog trying to hold his pee in the corner.

Ken:

Yeah. Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Maggie:

... the cabin in the woods is ... every writer's dream, right?

Ken:

It is. It still requires a lot of discipline, and thankfully, the - the Author Incubator process has many deadlines, and - and if you don't make the deadline, then you don't get the book done, so I was - I was pleased with - I would never have survived without deadlines. Especially in the north woods, you'd think that you have all the time in the world, but I happen to love being out in the natural world, so it would have been easy to get distracted in - in hiking and fishing and all of that, which I did do, to some degree, but I still managed to get the book witten.

Maggie:

Is - is that - is that the - is that level of accountability with deadlines, was that ... key for you?

Ken:

I - oh, absolutely, yeah. Yeah.

Maggie:

Yeah.

Ken:

... I wouldn't have - ... the book would not be done without 'em.

Maggie:

Yeah.

Ken:

But that's the nature of me, right? ... some people can - some people are self-disciplined that way. I - I need the deadline.

Maggie:

... I used to be a daily journalist, and ... I felt we all needed the deadlines, but we may be a certain kind of creature. If there was - if there were no - if we never went to press, I can imagine we never would have written anything.

Ken:

Right. Yeah, right. Right.

Maggie:

Yeah? Yeah. So, did you find yourself - ... I know that, in the Author Incubator program, that there is a pretty - I don't wanna say "rigid" structure, but ... - it's a supportive structure in place. If you know - here's the week when you do this. Here's the week when you do that. Did - did the leaning into that feel easy, or did you find yourself wanting to ... go rogue, ...?

Ken:

I - no, I've done enough facilitation of - of - of - ... educational situations, where you - you really gotta trust the process, and i - and if I - I did enough research to feel like that's what I had to do. And I think going rogue would have just created more stress and strain. That doesn't mean I followed everything to the letter, and - and I certainly was independent in my - in the way that I did certain things, but I'd communicate that, too, so it wasn't - wasn't exactly rogue. But - no, it's - ... it - ... you gotta - ... I'd never done this before, I'm working with people who have. And that's why I joined the program, so I was - it's - yeah. So, it was - I've - I pretty much followed - follow the process.

Maggie:

Right, yeah. I ... - I understand that. So, have you - have you written anything else this length or in this format before? If not a book, ... one long form nonfiction?

Ken:

No. I've done a lot of newsletters, a lot of articles, ... a lot of grants and things like that, but I've never read - wri - this is definitely out of my - out of my wheelhouse.

Maggie:

Yeah. So - so, did you find that the - the - the trainings, the structure, the process, was it easy to fit your vision into that?

Ken:

Uh - yeah, it was. It was. ... I know, at the beginning, you introduced me as a life coach and as a therapist. I'm actually neither of those. ....

Maggie:

Oh, my goodness! I'm so sorry.

Ken:

But - but numerous - numerous - the people in the program are, and so - so, my - my book is a little different from the norm of - of the Difference Process. But - but it's still making a big difference, and I feel fit enough to be able to make the Difference Process work for me.

Maggie:

Yeah. Yeah, I get that. So, yeah, ... as you referenced, many, many authors who go through the Author Incubator journey are coaches or therapists who are service professionals with ... a - a

client base, right? They're gonna use their book to - to reach out and - and do ongoing work. So, for you, with the - with the Urban Ecology Center, the goal is - I'm - I'm hearing - so, you correct me if I'm wrong - not so much to boost awareness of that Center in particular in Milwaukee, but to - to stand as a model for other press - ... other places around the country?

Ken:

Yeah, that's exactly right. ... to inspire people to do this work. And, interestingly enough, ... - I think anybody who's running a business or non-profit, starting from scratch, would be interested in the book, because we are - we don't really hold any punches, we pretty much tell like it is in the book, and - but, specifically, our objective is to spread the mission of what we do to other communities, because in here, in Milwaukee, and in other places that they're - they've taken our model, it's having big impact, so it's - ... it's an idea worth spreading. But interestingly enough, in our own way, this book will be generating clients for an institute that we're setting up in Milwaukee to train people how to do this kind of work, so i - it does - it does fit, and in - in - just in a slightly different angle.

Maggie:

That's very cool. What's the most unusual or surprising or far, foreign a place you're heard from, as a result of the book?

Ken:

Well, I've heard from all over the world, so ... I can say. Australia, ....

Maggie:

Really? Tell 'em, tell 'em!

Ken:

We just got back from a trip to Israel, 'cause of the - the city of Tiberias is interested in creating an urban ecology center, so they flew us over to take a look. We've got folks flying up from Atlanta next week, or in two weeks, I guess, to - because of what they've learned and they've all been reading the book. There's folks from Minnesota - not that those are far-flung, but it's pretty cool that it's actually working, ....

Maggie:

Yeah. Right.

Ken:

Yeah. It's - I think the most exciting part, for me and the book - well, ... I don't know if most, may - maybe, but getting the advanced quotes was an interesting process, and we managed to track down Jane Goodall, of chimpanzees fame.

Maggie:

Right!

Ken:

In - in - in Tanzania, and sent her an advance copy of the book and she wrote a beautiful quote for the book, 'cause we're right in line with what she thinks has to happen in the world, so that was a - that was a beautiful gift to - to have ... -

Maggie:

How cool is that!

Ken:

I know! I know. It was really, really neat. So, ... the po - the outpouring of support from folks that - of that ilk. The - Ken Salazar's title of the Department of the Interior from the Obama administration, he wrote an advance quote for the book, and i - it - it raises the stature of - of something that we believe is really important. So, it's - it was - it was great to have that process. Which is another thing out of - out of the - the - the Difference Pr - Press and the process that the Author Incubator put us through, is to give us advice in terms of how to - how to approach and how to reach people like that.

Maggie:

Yeah! I was just - I was just thinking, I'm sure that there are many paths to - to getting the word out there, but it feels like this book was ... a - ... a - outreach on steroids. Do you feel like you got to people through this book that you might not have been able to get to in - in another way?

Ken:

Oh, I - I think it's only beginning, right? ... this is just the - the soft launch of the e-book and - and we had 70,000 views of our initial Facebook page, which was one of the many ... out of the technology center and - and -

Maggie:

Wow!

Ken:

So, it was - ... literally, people reach out from all over the world, so whe - I think when the print copy comes out and we do the launch and Morgan James and all that, I think it's just the beginning, but yeah, it's - it's been pretty exciting.

Maggie:

So, did you have a - did you go into this process with the Author Incubator, with - with that specific vision? With ... "Wow, I'm gonna attract the at - we're gonna attract attention from communities and educators all around the world"? Or was it looser than that in your head?

Ken:

No, it was definitely - ... the purpose of the book was pretty clear, from the outset. ... from the outset of getting into the program, it took a while. We actually had someone - some - ... someone contributed some funds to the Center unsolicited and said, "You guys need to get this story down on paper and write a book." And - that was a couple of years ago, and then, we had to figure out, "Okay, how does - how does - how do you write a book?" So, it was - so - so it was a little bit of a nudge that helped us - helped us to get to the point where we were, and then, when I stumbled on the Author Incubator, it was ... "Whoa, this is - this is a really great process, I'd like to - I'd like to use it," 'cause I knew I'd have a hard time just doing it on my own.

Maggie:

Yeah. Yeah. And - and many of us, including those of us who call ourselves "professional writers" feel the same.

Ken:

Yeah. One thing that says - I feel a little humbled be the author of this book, because it's really a community process and there's a lot of other people who are involved that could've told their story and their version of - of the book, so it's - I'm - I'm - it was an honor to be supporting the Urban Ecology Center and - and I really wa - ... the owner of the book is not me, it's the Urban Ecology Center, I'm writing it for them.

Maggie:

Got it.

Ken:

For us, however you look at it.

Maggie:

What was - I'm sure there were a lot of the things that were different, either about the process of writing the book or the active ... launching the book as an e-book. What was different than you expected? What - what surprised you?

Ken:

Well, the launch process was really powerful, and - and that - that was something I knew nothing about, and learned quickly the value of - I would almost call it "gaming the system," but ... working with Amazon to advance your book beyond just a typical launch, and - and so, I'm grateful for the Author Incubator and for Angela, for supporting us and educating us through that process and - and that was all brand new. I think the concept of writing a love letter to your ideal reader and that the book is basically a love letter, I shared that with a lot of people, and since I've written this book, a lot of people have come to me, who wanna write their own books, and they're asking for advice, and I'm always - I'm always sharing that - that to the - ... a lot, it's a great process.



Maggie:

Well, there's still question that I think all of us, whether we're writers or in publishing or not, are aware that there are beautiful books, potentially with powerful messages, out there that no one knows about and may never know about, and may never read and ... may never even come up on their Kindle First ... whatever, to even think to download.

Ken:

Right.

Maggie:

So, it's - it's cool that - that you were able to ... rise - I don't wanna say, "your book," 'cause ... but that you were able to differentiate your book and stand out from - I don't even have stats on how many books self-publish a day on Amazon, but I'm guessing it's a lot.

Ken:

Yeah. ... it was - it was wild, just the experience of - of quickly jumping into the bestseller status in four different categories in six different countries and jumping in the e-book daily and getting - getting hits from all over the place. It was - it was a little overwhelming, actually. It ....

Maggie:

Like that! What - what - what were the countries in which you went and - do you remember, in which you went #1 at first?

Ken:

I - I know - United States, Canada, Chile, oddly enough. I think Switzerland - I actually don't know them all. I have - I have it written down ....

Maggie:

Too many to remember. That's pretty cool.

Ken:

Yeah, right. ....

Maggie:

... fame. The ... of fame.

Ken:

Yeah. Well, the funny thing is that I don't actually know what it all means. I just - ... it doesn't necessarily - well, we'll see. We'll see what happens when the print book comes out and where - where it goes from there.

Maggie:

Right! Is that this year or 2018?

Ken:

That'll be in 2018, and - in April 10th, 2018, before Earth Day, we'll be launching in bookstores, at any rate. Yeah.

Maggie:

Oh, nice! Nice. Nice. So, the very act of getting the book, not just written, but ... finished, ... across the finish line, out there in the world. Would you credit that solely to - to the fact that you had a deadline? It's ..., "Okay, this is it." You gotta get it done by this date or not gonna happen.

Ken:

I would credit a lot to deadlines, for sure. ... the deadlines I'm paying for, right?

Maggie:

Right. ....

Ken:

So - so, ... there's deadlines that are real and there's deadlines that are not real, and this - I don't wanna waste the money that's been contributed to this project, so - so, the deadlines felt very real to me. I think it crosses the - ... there's a lot of people involved. I'm - I'm one prong, one piece of the book. So, there's - there's the folks on my team that we're helping and supporting with, the folks at the Author Incubator that are helping and supporting, there's the ... all the various editors, so it's - it's a - it's a definitive team effort, and I felt - I felt wonderfully supported.

Maggie:

Do you think that - well, I - this is a ... question. So, you ... came to the Author Incubator with a natural idea for your book, because of your position at the Urban Ecology Center, right?

Ken:

Correct. Correct. Yup.

Maggie:

So - so, I'm wondering - I'm wondering how common it is - and you may not know the answer, but my ... you could conjecture - for people to just really feel called to sha - to spread a message to better the world in some way to - ... I - I usually put it personally, as leaving the world - my corner of the world a little bit better for having been here, who might not even necessarily know what they wanna write about. Do you think that someone could come into this program with that vague an idea and still come out of it with an effective finished book?

Ken:

I do, but it's harder for sure, 'cause you're - you're - you're - you are under a time ... where you can't dilly-dally too long or you get behind than - then - then the stress becomes too much. But I

do know - I do know fellow authors in my cohort who came in thinking ... they're gonna write one book and they end up writing another book. So - so, there's definitely room in - room for that and - and - and - and transition for that, but I think the - the clearer you are, probably the easier it is to some degree, to some degree. I think sometimes - the other thing is - I know - I actually write this in the book, but I talk about creative process, and there's a - there's a - if you don't have a pressure point, it's easy ... to not get something done. So, the procrastination is actually part of the important process of the creative process for many people. And so - so, I think, if you have an idea - if you're not quite sure and suddenly you have a deadline, you're gonna become sure. From that perspective, maybe I'm switching my answer and saying, "Yeah, yeah, ... it probably helps."

Maggie:

Oh, no, I get that. ... it's - it's - it's, in some ways, similar to ... - even if we haven't published a book, we may have had a term paper due, or a ... research paper due in college, and ... yeah, it could be open ended or ... it could be "Pick one of these seven topics and write about them," and ... once that deadline starts looming, you get pretty clear pretty fast.

Ken:

Yeah. Yeah, yeah. Hey, one thing I wanna share is, I - I - I interviewed a bunch of authors going into that and I was surprised how many people really don't enjoy the process of writing. They like having written, but they don't necessarily like the - the pressure and the - of - of the writing. It's often - and I went into this knowing that possibility and - and wanting a mental model that was different from that, so I really thought about, "How am I going to enjoy this process?" Because I wanted the love of - and joy of the experience to come out in the book as almost energetically, if that makes sense. And - and so, I focused really on how I wanted to write, and knowing that I'm a - a ... a little bit of a hyperactive guy, came up with four stations in which to do my writing. I ... in a tent, a kayak and a cabin. And what I was doing - actually, in the thick of the writing process, every day, I'd rotate. I'd write for an hour and a half, then bicycle quarter mile to the next station to get some of my energy changed and then write for an hour and a half and then bike a quarter of a mile to the next station. It was - it was a marvelous process, and it made the whole writing flow and - and - and a memory that I'll cherish for a long, long time. So, it's this - I only share that, 'cause I think there's a lot of ways to do it. I think it's important to know yourself and to set up a container that allows you to do - to perform your best.

Maggie:

Well - and that leads me to an interesting question. So, obviously, the Author Incubator program is - to extent has established processes and structures. That said, do you think that there's room for every author to - to find their own pace, their own style, their own ... stations that works for them?

Ken:

Well, I think - I think it's imperative, actually. I don't know - I think you have to find your own style, pace and all of that, and me - you could even miss deadlines, as long as you're aware that

you're gonna have to catch up somewhere along the line, so it's - it's - and - and then, you get further in the process, you get more - well, at least, it's my experience, I can only speak to my experience, but the - the further I got into the process, the more I felt free to - it became my book as opposed to a formulaic book of the Author Incubator, and that's by design. They have - that's - that's not - that's part of the process. But it worked for me.

Maggie:

Well, it's one thing to have structure at the beginning so you can work from an outline or some sort of ... whatever your process is for organization, and ultimately, of course, it comes down to the writer and the screen, or the writer and the page, right?

Ken:

Yeah, yeah, yeah. Yeah. And a good example of that, in the beginning I was really concerned about word count for each chapter and - and I was really .... By the end, I just didn't - I just - I just let it flow. I didn't - I didn't even look at word count.

Maggie:

Yeah, and I ... - it's interesting. So, a lot of questions that I get from either a - would-be authors or - or ... authors are ... technical questions like that. There's a lot of worries that they're not doing it, quote unquote, right, ....

Ken:

Right. Right. Right.

Maggie:

"Oh, no, this chapter is 5,000 words, but the last one was 15,000, so, oh, no!" ....

Ken:

Yeah! Right. Right. Right.

Maggie:

Yes. So, I think that what's - ... what I liked about the program, when I went through it, is that there's - there is structure, but within that structure, there's a lot of room and, as you say, an imperative to - to find your own - your own process within the larger structure.

Ken:

Right. Right. Right. Yeah.

Maggie:

So, what advice would you - would you give someone who's listening, who wants to write a book. They - they - they may know what it is, they may not know what it is, they may have made aborted attempts that ... have trailed off after Chapter 3, they may have a list of bullet points

somewhere in their pad. What would you - what would you tell them? How can they get it out of themselves and actually out there in the world?

Ken:

Yeah. Well, I guess - ... I don't mean to be overly zealot, but I would certainly read ... the Difference Press books that talk about how to do this process. It's not to say that it's the only process and it's not to say it's not without struggle, but it's - but the book is easy to read, so that's a good start to get you going, .... If you have the resources, it's not cheap to go through this process. If you have the resources, I'd say, "Do it," ... with - with the Author Incubator. But without that, you can still take advantage of all the - ... it's all in the book, so you don't actually need the Author Incubator, you just gotta read it. The - the - the struggle, or I think the deadlines and making sure there's some accountability and - and I think everybody has to figure that out on their own, but it's possible to set that kind of structure up yourself without having to pay lots of money for it perhaps, so it'd be another - another thing is to set up some kind of - ... you gotta - you - a lot of books that have started, very few get finished, so ....

Maggie:

Right. Right.

Ken:

So, that's - that's - that's the trick.

Maggie:

I think the cliché of the - the person with the half finished book in their desk ... no longer exists in a digital world, but I think a number of us have half-finished or even ... quarter-finished manuscripts on our desktops.

Ken:

Yeah. Yeah. And I think it's important - ... it's just like painting a room. You think about the color and the paint, that's only about ten percent, maybe twenty percent of the job. The rest of it's getting the - the room prepared for that painting, and - and I think the writing of the book is the same way. We focus on the writing and - I think the starting and writing can be a mistake. I think you gotta look at the whole - the whole process, start to finish, and ....

Maggie:

Awesome. Ken, thanks for being here.

Ken:

Yeah, you bet.

Maggie:

Ken Leinbach, author of *Urban Ecology*. It's out on Amazon and will be in bookstores in 2018. Thanks for being here, Ken!

Ken:

You bet! Thanks for having me!



