

## [Book Journeys](#) Interview - June 26, 2014

**Dr. Angela Lauria with Neal Whitten, author of *The Gift of Wisdom: Lessons for a Lifetime*.**

*"I don't care what book they're writing, what the topic is. There are going to be literally hundreds, if not thousands of people out there who actually will care about that book. It will help them in some way, whether it's the novel that they get an entertainment value out of it, whether it's a self-help book that improves their life in some way." ~Neal Whitten*

Angela:

Well, hello everybody! This Dr. Angela Lauria. Welcome to Book Journeys Radio. Every week on Book Journeys, we talk to an author about their experience writing, publishing, and promoting their first book. Today, we're talking to author Neal Whitten. Neal is a life balance coach, a project management consultant and, most importantly, for this session today, he is the author of a really interesting book, it's called *The Gift of Wisdom: Lessons for a Lifetime*. Neal, thank you so much for being here today. Tell us about your book.

Neal:

Well, thank you. I'm honored to be here. The book is about, here's what I did. I interviewed twenty-five senior Americans from across the US that represent roughly the demographics of America. And it's my view that we don't acknowledge and treasure the wisdom of our elders as much as we should. So, my job that I went after was to do my very best to capture that wisdom and then put it in a book for the rest of us.

Angela:

That's fantastic. So, you actually interviewed twenty-five people for this book. Can you tell us about that process? How did you find these people to interview and how did the interviews go? Were they in person, over the phone? Kinda walk us through that part of the process.

Neal:

Ok. Well, first of all, I did not know most of the people when I started. So I went to the US Census Department and if I'm gonna interview twenty-five people, I knew each person had to represent roughly four percent of the US population and therefore, I could figure out the ethnic race, the religion, that sort of thing, the spread. And I want it to be from across the US. Obviously, I wanted somebody from New York, and California, and Texas, as being major states. And I put together twenty-five base questions for these people. Very personal questions about life, about relationships, about *if you could live your life over, what would you do different*, care-giving, hardships, you name it. And, how I met them is I know them all within three degrees of separation. So, when I was doing a gig as a project management consultant, I might run into somebody and have a discussion and they know somebody who might be really great for the book. And one thing led to the other. Now, as far as I interviewed in person or not, I interviewed about half of them in person and it got very expensive and the rest, I did over the telephone. And I recorded everything they said to me, hours of conversation. I would

ask them those twenty-five base questions. They had them ahead of time where they could study them. And depending on their answers, I went off in different directions so each person ultimately was asked literally hundreds of questions.

Angela:

Wow. How did you come up with the questions?

Neal:

Well, you know what, they're really just about life. They're the kind of questions that I'm interested in myself like, uhm, "What's the philosophy that drove you throughout your life?", "Let's talk about family", ah, spirituality, I put that in there, education, health, finances, vocation, stress. I mean it covers a wide gamut. It covers life's period.

Angela:

So, for you, why, I know you talked about the fact that you think that we as a culture maybe don't value the wisdom that seniors have as much. But why a book? I mean there's lots of opinions people have that they don't go around writing books about. Why and how did you decide to become an author and turn this into a book?

Neal:

A book because it was more permanent. It was something that people could walk away with and reference over and over again. For example, something I did not expect the book to be used for but I've had hundreds of people come back to me and tell me they do this. They will reserve time, a certain night or nights a week and sit down with their children, and actually go through passages in the book because they're all about life's lessons. The book is, it's a positive, good feeling kind of book. It's not a book that is controversial. It's intended for us to be united as Americans, not divided. It's not political-based so writing a book to me was something people could touch and put on their nightstand and refer to it when they needed some comfort.

Angela:

Ok. Let me ask that question from this angle too 'coz that was a great answer. But what I wanna know is like, there is, writing a book is a big accomplishment and it's a big undertaking and then, when you add to that, even doing twenty-five, extremely detailed interviews that are almost like ethnographies. I mean this is almost like an academic project at this point. Why or how, for you, what was happening for you that you wanted to make this a book? Was this something that was important for you to leave as, as a legacy? Is this related to the consulting work you do like why make this investment?

Neal:

Ok. Let me see if I can say that in a few words. I'm in the project management profession and, uhm, I have written books, business technical books related to software development, IT, project management, that sort of thing. I love the craft, I love the field, I travel an awful lot

doing this. However, I have, there's a side of me and I have a degree in electrical engineering. Ah, but there's a side of me that is really people-oriented. I love people, I believe in people and I want as I age, as I get older, by the way, I'll just tell you, I'm sixty-seven years old and I don't feel it. I feel a lot younger but nevertheless, I want to be, the older that I get, I wanna be able to walk into a room with people that came to hear me help them and get instant credibility. And the older I get, the more credibility I get talking about things related to life and life balance. So, this book is a potential transition for me as I, at some point, transition my career from the more technical arena to the life-balance type arena. So, that was a big motivator for me.

Angela:

Love that answer, love that answer. And I love too how this is so different from what you do in your day job. And what a great experience, even if it's not related to any sort of career transition. What a great experience to be able to connect with these, not just the twenty-five seniors that you interviewed, but your two or three degrees of separation. I'm sure you had some interesting experiences actually connecting with the people you wanted to connect with, right?

Neal:

Yes, I will tell you Angela, I fell in love with every single one of these people. Ah, they let me in their homes. They let me in their hearts. I asked them as I said very personal questions and they didn't hold back. They probably were hesitant in the very beginning. I mean, one guy I interviewed in his basement in a town that I don't really remember out in the middle of nowhere in Wisconsin. And he was somebody that, somebody I know that pointed me to. And he didn't know me from Adam other than we both had this one individual in common. But it was, uhm, these people were just great. You know, when people open up to you, that one guy I interviewed in a hotel in Orlando, the first interview was three hours. He was eighty years old. He went back to his wife that evening and he said, "You know honey," he said, "I had more fun today than I've had in years because somebody actually gave a, ah, actually cared about what I think because here's a guy who's eighty, he's got three children, a whole bunch of grandchildren, a whole bunch of great-grandchildren and they view that he is irrelevant at his age. But this guy is very bright, he has a lot to offer and he made a lot of great contributions.

Angela:

That's awesome. So, usually, I ask this near the end of the interview, but I'm really curious with your experience, can you give us some kind of before-and-after scenarios, before you became an author, before you wrote this book and after? What are some of the best things to come out of having written your book or some of the experiences that you think wouldn't have happened if you didn't write this book?

Neal:

Alright. Well, let me first say this isn't my first book, but this is my first self-published book. And the other books that I've written are more technical and business, and this is more of ,ah, a self-help type of book. But this book is my favorite book. Of the seven books that I've written, this is my favorite book, the only one I've self-published and it gives me a different sense of gratitude because, again as I say, it's all about life. All of us are experts in life. We might be struggling, but we have great advice to give other people. We may not take it well for ourselves, but we're all experts. And when I walk into, I just gave a seminar on this, uhm, ah just last week and there were fifty people in the room and everybody gets a copy of the book and it's a four-hour seminar. And I will tell you, people tear up when I talk about the advice that was given to us by these twenty-five people: what would you do when you've lost a loved one, or you run into a hardship, you discovered you have cancer, or you just lost your job, you lost your house, and so forth. I mean, these people feel like, ah, the people who either purchased the book or go to the seminar, they feel like they've been helped by somebody they don't personally know but now, they feel they actually know them. And I have a one-page bio on the back of the book of each of these individuals.

Angela:

Wow. So tell us more about that workshop. Was that something you were teaching before you wrote the book or is...?

Neal:

No.

Angela:

Ok. So, let's talk about that because there are things that come out of writing a book that you may or may not have planned. I don't know if you've planned to do workshops around the book, uhm, but how do you think having a book has influenced the book's workshops in terms of, you know, helping you fill the room or providing content that you use or credibility. How does the book help with that effort?

Neal:

You know, it helps an awful lot because, ah, when I wrote this book, I didn't expect to get rich out of it. It's definitely not a bestseller. We can talk about sales if you like to but I wrote it to help other people and when I see people walk into a room and I see that they get help from this... Oh, but as far as the workshop goes, I was hoping I could develop a workshop from it. Once the book was done, uhm, I did put together, as you can see a workshop and tried to figure out, should it be, you know, four hours or one day or two days or whatever. Now, I settled on a four hours, seems to be about the best. But when you, but when you have a book, it's a calling card and my intent in writing the book was to be able to go into a company and give them a relatively inexpensive seminar that they can give to all their employees to help them improve their life balance. So, that's the track that I'm trying to make unfold. I've done a reasonably good job with it so far. I'm not ready to give up my day job, so to speak,

but I have given about, probably about thirty or forty of these seminars so far since the book's been written.

Angela:

That's amazing! So people can find out about this, by the way, if they go to [thegiftofwisdom.com](http://thegiftofwisdom.com). If you click on the seminar link, you can actually read about this and if people are interested in doing one of these seminars, they can coordinate with you to help kind of co-host one, is that how it works?

Neal:

That is how it works. And I actually charge less than I do in my normal day job because I'm more interested in getting it into America and helping people. The pay job is paying the bills but this is ah, this is more fun if I can put it that way.

Angela:

Labor of love. I love it. That's awesome. So, let's talk about book sales. One of the things a lot of people don't realize is direct sales of your book is really only a percentage of the revenue that comes out of the book. There might be a value to, let's say workshops or seminars like the ones you're doing. There may be coaching and consulting work that comes out of your book and there's also the value of the media, of the brand building, of, uhm, the credibility that you get for having your book. So, let's talk about book sales. How is selling your book working or not working? What's working best? What have you learned? And if you were giving your younger self advice, if you were giving yourself advice before you wrote the book, what would you tell that person about sales?

Neal:

Ok, uhm, well, let me tell you what I did. The first, ah, I've only ordered the book once from the printer so far and I ordered five thousand copies. And that shows how optimistic I am as an author, every author's this way, they just know their book's gonna do really well. But I ordered that many so I could get a very low price on it. The book sells for \$19.95. It's four hundred and eighty pages. I didn't want the book to be expensive. I want it to be within reach of people and so, sales through the seminar, when you come to the seminar then when you purchase getting a seminar, it includes the price of the book. And I've sold around two thousand books that way but I've only sold, uhm, less than a thousand books through Amazon, through Kindle and other online ebooks and through my website. So, less than a thousand books and that's in about a-three-year period. So, I would say that's pretty bad.

Angela:

It's actually pretty good, to tell you the truth! That's the most books will sell in their lifetime. I think you should be proud of yourself for that. That's an accomplishment.

Neal:

Well, thank you. But by now, I was hoping I was reordering several times. But again, you know, I'm optimistic as almost all of the people who listen to you right now. They're hopeful just knowing that their book is gonna hit the sweet spot. By the way, I just knew when I wrote the book, somebody buys it and they'll turn around and tell two of their friends and each of them will buy it and those people will tell two of their friends and they'll buy it. I know people listening to this are saying, "Yup, yup, that's how I felt," and it didn't work that way. It didn't keep going so easy. So, what I would have done...

Angela:

So, what's the advice you would give your younger self? Is it order fewer copies or is there something more, you'd say?

Neal:

No, I wouldn't have ordered fewer copies because I got a really good price on it and I'm gonna sell these copies eventually. It may be another year or two before I sell the remaining two thousand but I'll sell them. I don't have any great advice, Angela. I have tried so many things that I would swear to you were creative like on my website, you can sell the book and I can give you a percentage of it by bringing you to the website with a code. I've done a number of things that I thought were creative and, you know, special book sales, uhm, and going to magazines and whatever. I just haven't hit the sweet spot. If I had to do it over again, I still don't know how to do this but I wished I had had an agent. Somebody who already had it in. I don't want somebody just tell me, "Well, go put this press release out and do that, do this. I want somebody to do it for me. I wanna pay them based on the sales and the success of the sales rather than I just give them a lump sum and they walk away. But I just am not good at selling. I'm good at my classes and speaking and articulating what things are about. But when it comes to publishing books and marketing, I'm just not very good at that.

Angela:

And what are the things, what are some of the things you have done, uhm, from a marketing perspective? Obviously, you're doing this interview, so I'm gonna guess you've done a bit of PR in media. What are some of, and I love the idea of selling the book as part of your seminar. That's a fantastically creative idea. What are some of the other things you've done that either have worked or have totally bombed that you would tell people don't try that. That's a waste of time.

Neal:

Well, things that have worked, they're not great things, but I have a newsletter that goes out to several thousand people. And I have promoted the book in the newsletter. It's not a life balance newsletter but I've thrown a book in there and I've got a fair number of sales from that. If I weren't in any other business, I would, and I do have a website dedicated just to the book but uhm, I would create...

Angela:

And we did mention that, it's the [giftofwisdom.com](http://giftofwisdom.com) if you wanna see that website.

Neal:

Thank you. Uhm, but I would get people to, uhm, and I'm losing my train of thought. I apologize for that.

Angela:

I'm sorry, I interrupted you with your website but, uhm, you were...

Neal:

No. I'm just so honored to be talking.

Angela:

You were talking about things that worked. You said a newsletter worked a little bit.

Neal:

Yes, thank you. I would create a newsletter for just the book. I haven't done that yet. I don't feel like I've had the time to do that because that's a big commitment. But I do think that would help. I have tried Facebook. That hasn't worked really well for me. I've tried Twitter. That hasn't worked really well. Uhm, again, you know, friends help but that newsletter that I have, several thousand people, that has helped a lot because they're spread all over the world. And because the book is now available, uhm, through an e-book, it's only \$2.99. People can buy it around the world. I get a lot of great feedback on the book but here again, I haven't had it mentioned in a major magazine. It hasn't been mentioned in a major newspaper, it's been in newspapers but not a major one. It hasn't been in a major venue for people to hear about it. And by the way, I would tell you that I think if people knew about it, they would buy it. But, you know, most authors would say that. So, I'm no different than most authors.

Angela:

You're very realistic.

Neal:

Hahaha! Well, I guess that I am. I would actually, and this is not something I would say a year ago but I would be interested if a publisher approached me and say, "You know Neal, we'd like to publish that book ourselves. Would you be willing to give us the ability to do that even though your cut won't be the same?" And I'd probably say yes if that would make a difference to getting it out there to more people. I would actually do that. But I didn't wanna do that in the beginning because I don't want to give up the moneys that I make from it and the freedom that I have to make choices with it.

Angela:

Right. So, let's, ah, let's talk about that. So, what are some of the reasons, and you decided to self-publish and you obviously with your, uhm, I was gonna say professional, but what would you call it, your more technical books, you worked with a publisher. So, why did you decide to self-publish? What were some of your pros and cons there to make that decision?

Neal:

Okay. Here's what happened. A publisher of two of my books knew that I was writing this book and they were not really interested in this subject but they had contacts with agents. And so they sent a manuscript to two of those agents and asked if they have an interest. And the both agents said no. We wouldn't have an interest. This would have been a great book had it been published five years earlier, but nowadays, people are not interested in that kind of book and blah blah blah blah. And when I got that back, that feedback, I thought, "You know what? I'm not gonna go there." Because, the first, I published, I had a book published the first twenty-three, ah, publishers I went to, rejected it. And when I heard these two agents rejected it right out of the box, I said, "You know what? I'm not gonna even go that path. I'm just gonna publish it myself. This is the Internet age, anybody can do it. It's not necessarily easy but that's what I'm going to do." So, that was the motivator immediately for me to just take control and do it. And by the way, the publisher, ah, what's nice about publishing your own book, you can do it any way you want and the publisher, ah the publisher of two books that I had published, ah, they were willing. I asked them if they'd be interested in doing this. They were willing to, quote, go through all the publishing work for me. I pay them for it. They don't want any part of the book but I already knew they were a quality publisher and that's what I did. So, it's a little different than what a lot of people listening have done but I wrote the whole book. They edited it. You know, I came up with a cover of it but they have printers and I'm using their printer and by the way they gave me advice...

Angela:

And so, who was this vendor?

Neal:

Say that again?

Angela:

Who was the vendor if people wanted to look it up?

Neal:

The publisher?

Angela:

Yeah.

Neal:



The publisher's name is Management Concept Press. Now, I didn't ask them if it's okay that I've mention that they did this but I don't think so, they don't.

Angela:

Well, you're saying nice things so I guess they won't mind.

Neal:

Oh, they're great people. But I tell you, for example, they suggested that a chapter be dedicated to each person and I declined to do that. If they were really publishing the book themselves that's probably what we have to do. But I did, instead, each chapter is based on a different question that I asked. And then people have told me it's a lot easier to read, each passage is about a paragraph or two and there's over a thousand passages in the book as I said, it's four hundred and eighty pages. Angela, I actually took out two hundred pages of this book and as an author, you know, it's hard to take out anything. I had so much material. I did not want a book that was over five hundred pages large and as I say, I sell it for \$19.95. So, I didn't want to be greedy, I didn't want to, it wasn't about the money; it was about helping people but of course, obviously, I don't mind paying my bills with it. So, it was a great experience but I like being in control. I just wish I had a better marketing arm.

Angela:

Mmm. Yes. And have you taken any classes or hired any professionals in the book marketing/ PR realm? Anything that you would either recommend people, you know, avoid or head toward?

Neal:

Well, I have talked to a number of people, didn't give any money to anybody because I just wasn't convinced they were gonna do me a whole lot of good. I have a hard time parting with my money when I'm not sure what I'm...

Angela:

It's like I'm not gonna lie.

Neal:

Well, that's right and I'm not sure what is gonna come out of it. I mean, for example, I got advice, "Well, you gotta be on Facebook. You gotta be on Twitter." Well, it's one thing to say that but I don't believe that works for a lot of people. It may work for somebody like you, Angela, because you're already reasonably popular or famous and if you've already got a bestselling book out there, that sort of thing. But if you're a relatively unknown name, I haven't gotten any traction out of it. So, I just am not, I'm just not willing to give my money to somebody else unless they're willing to say, "Well, say what, Neal. I believe in what I do so much. You give me a percentage of your sales." And then I would say, "Let's do it." Now, you're motivated. "Let's do it." But nobody's been willing to do that.

Angela:

And so in terms of your distribution, I know that you bought print copies from your publisher but how, I know your book is available on Amazon, how have you managed getting it on Amazon? Does somebody manage that relationship for you?

Neal:

No, I did do that all myself. My wife and I did that. She did a lot of that work. I did a little bit of the work but to get the e-book on Barnes and Noble, and to Kindle, and to Amazon and so forth, I did all that myself and it wasn't real hard. I know that your listeners who have done that know it's not real hard. It's a little tedious at times but it's not a big deal.

Angela:

Got it. And so, for you, would you, if you were giving to somebody and you've probably, you know, run into this, I know this happens a lot for authors that, you know, barbecues or networking events, where people say, "Oh, you wrote a book. I've always wanted to write a book." So, for you, if you were giving the advice to somebody who has always wanted to write a book but they haven't been able to finish, you've actually written, you know, seven or eight books with this point. What's the advice that you would give to people who wanted to write a book but haven't been able to finish?

Neal:

Well, uhm, when I start something, I know I'm gonna finish it. So, I know that's different than some people but people would be so proud of themselves, you know this, Angela, if they would finish something like this because I don't care what book they're writing, what the topic is. There are going to be literally hundreds, if not thousands of people out there who actually will care about that book. It will help them in some way, whether it's the novel that they get an entertainment value out of it, whether it's a self-help book that improves their life in some way. Everybody has something to say that somebody else has an interest in. And it's so important when you start something to finish it like this and they'll be so proud of it. When that first book comes in the mail and it's fully published and it's got a nice cover on it, you're just gonna be so proud of what you've done. But that's just the beginning because now, you're out there helping people, you're making a few bucks from it. Now, one thing that I haven't done yet that I'm thinking of doing it is going to a university. And ah, it's just telling them, let's say the university's got a ten thousand students. I would like to go and talk to all the seniors, I'd give them a really special rate, probably almost free. But that will be another way to get the book out there. Uhm, and my kind of book is something that will help people for the rest of their life. So if I can get people before they graduate from college, plant these seeds, give them a copy of the book to tuck it under their arm and go on about their life, I think that might be a good way to market the book overall as well.

Angela:

Yeah. So, so much of it for you is about the feeling and the satisfaction and really making a difference in people's lives. Was that a vision when you started and is that, has there been anything that's been different than what you expected it to be?

Neal:

You nailed it. It really is about that now. I'm not gonna lie. I'd like to make money on it. And I'd like it to be a best seller and I like to live life just a little easier but regardless, my prime motivation for this book was helping other people.

Angela:

And that's what this book is doing. The book is called *The Gift of Wisdom: Lessons for a Lifetime*. It is on Amazon. It's by Neal Whitten and you can learn more about Neal, his seminars, the book, all at the [giftofwisdom.com](http://giftofwisdom.com). Neal, thank you so much for being our guest today.

Neal:

I am honored to be your guest and thank you for what you do for the rest of us.

Angela:

Perfect. Well, that was another episode of Book Journeys Radio. We are here every week. We talk to authors about their book journey. And the thing I like to share with everyone is just how unique everyone's book journey is. There is no right or wrong way to write a book and there's no prescription for how long it takes people. For some people, writing is a struggle, for some people, marketing is a struggle. There is no right or wrong answer but when you set out to write a book that makes a difference, when you are committed to writing a book that makes a difference, there is no limit to the impact that you can have on people's lives, on the world, on your friends and family and being able to be brave and put yourself out there and to take the risks that every published author has had to take to say in writing, "These are my words, this is my message and be prepared for whatever reaction that brings. That courage pays off. I think Neal's story today was a great example of that. I encourage you to pick up his book and as always, we will be back here on Books Journeys Radio next Thursday at 3:00, changing the world one book at a time.