

Ranting Around

Hating the Term "Self-Promotion"

By Carolyn Howard-Johnson

I've about had it. That term, "Self-Promotion" -- often uttered with a lip skewed to the side or a stink-eye as punctuation --has to go or it has to be used correctly. And by "correctly," I mean without the sneer.

If we use "self-promotion" to mean a do-it-yourself approach to promotion (be it promoting one's book or anything else) the process is certainly nothing to be sneered at. It's a time-honored tradition in our culture (going way back to the Puritans) that frugality is a trait to be revered. "Waste not, want not," and all that.

If "self-promotion" means to promote yourself rather than a product, the sneer is only half-earned. It is true that when promoting a book (and many products) the individual behind the commercial goods being promoted is very important. Perhaps more so than the product itself. Witness Newman's Best. These food products started with just Paul out there pumping his gorgeous self from the labels of his salad dressings. Now his daughter is in on the act. Good for them. Using their images and names is a great way to give their product credibility. They also tie their efforts into that important concept of benefiting the customer. Heck, since its inception as a respectable (and profitable) profession, publicity has aimed at putting forth the benefits of whatever is being promoted. The Newmans also tie their product to a charity and haven't I always said that this is a darn good idea. You can substitute "good of the community" for charity and do almost as well. **Cynthia Brian (Be the Star You Are!)** and **Terry Doherty** (The Reading Tub) have long done that and so have dozens of other subscribers to this newsletter.

The downside of promoting yourself is that it can be misinterpreted. Thus, authors will want to use one of the methods above to mitigate that. The other way is to let it be known that you are promoting yourself out of passion for your work. We are all fervent about our subjects. We know our writing will help others at some level. It will entertain them. Teach them something. We all are sharing our core with others when we write. So let your audience know what you want them to know and then tell them -- passionately - - why are you letting them know!

The other thing about this self-promotion thing is that even if we hire someone else to do it for us like a marketing king or a PR person it is still self-promotion. Come on! We're spending our hard-earned dollars to have someone else do it. Who are we trying to fool?

Ditto if we are lucky enough to have a publisher assign us a publicist who does it for us! One way to view that is that the author is paying for that publicist out of royalties he or she might be earning but isn't because the publisher doesn't have those funds available because he is paying the publicist. That this concept goes in a circle doesn't make it less true!

Then there's the idea that, in order for said assigned or hired publicist to do his or her job well, the author must be a partner in the process. The author must be able to spot a new tie-in to his or her book. The author must be willing to do the footwork. The author should be happy to do a whole lot more promotion than either of those publicists would even think of doing, no matter how much they were paid.

Here's what I'd like to see happen. Forget getting rid of the sneer. I'd like to see the term "self-promotion" abolished because it isn't accurate! Promotion is promotion. Marketing is marketing. It is never something someone does in a vacuum. Everyone does it. You do it when match your shoes to the outfit you're wearing that day (you do consider

"brown or black, formal or informal", don't you?) The President does it. Bush has Dr. Frank Luntz, author of *Words that Work*, and a press secretary (they're still using the old-fashioned word "press" rather than "media" in spite of all their expertise). And frankly, it looks as if they could do a better job if The Pres himself would jump in and make it easier on those who are getting paid very good taxpayer dollars to do it for him.

So, if you write to me with a question on promotion, please don't use the term "self-promotion." You might end up with a lecture instead of an answer.

Carolyn Howard-Johnson's first novel, *This Is the Place*, won eight awards. Her second book, *Harkening: A Collection of Stories Remembered*, creative nonfiction, won three. Her chapbook of poetry *Tracings*, was named to the Compulsive Reader's Ten Best Reads list and was given the Military Writers' Society of America's Silver Award of Excellence. An instructor for UCLA Extension's world-renown Writers' Program, her book *The Frugal Book Promoter: How to Do What Your Publisher Won't* is recommended reading for her classes, and was named USA Book News' "Best Professional Book 2004." It is also an Irwin Award winner. Her second book in the *How To Do It Frugally* series is *The Frugal Editor: Put Your Best Book Forward to Avoid Humiliation and Ensure Success* is also a USA Book News award-winner as well as the winner of the Reader View's Literary Award in the publishing category. She is the recipient of both the California Legislature's Woman of the Year in Arts and Entertainment Award and the Glendale American Business Women's Association's Woman of the Year award. Her community's Character and Ethics Committee honored her for promoting tolerance with her writing. She was also named to Pasadena Weekly's list of 14 "San Gabriel Valley women who make life happen." She is a popular speaker and actor. Her website is www.HowToDoltFrugally.com.