

Case Studies: Don't Edit Out Your Voice

by Cindy Barrilleaux

A writer recently asked me to review his proposal for a nonfiction book. He had already gotten help from an editor and friend who was published.

I asked what he wanted to accomplish with the book, and then agreed to read his proposal.

Knowing how passionate he was about his subject, I was surprised that his writing was flat and lifeless. Full of generalities and clichés.

A few paragraphs jumped out, full of energy and boldness, so I knew he could write. And I knew what the problem was. I was sure he wouldn't like hearing it.

When we talked next, I was honest. I said that my sense was that he was playing it safe, avoiding expressing his expertise and power. The result was that his writing was boring.

To my surprise, he agreed. "It's not written in my voice at all anymore." He sounded sad as he spoke. "I'm so bored with it now I just want to get rid of it!"

By the time we finished talking, he was excited about his book again, and we had a plan for getting his voice back into the proposal so his expertise would shine.

The moral of this story: Do not let well-meaning friends or professional editors take you out of your writing. Get feedback on your writing--absolutely. Dilute your passion, absolutely not.

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