





Put It in Writing

Writing is a strategy to grow your career
and become a thought leader.

BY CATHY FYOCK



She was committed to lifelong learning and pursued several professional development experiences that deepened her understanding of her field, but she felt frustrated that she wasn't able to use that newfound knowledge or share it with others.

Chris has hit a plateau in her professional development, and she's wondering if she should consider a new employer who may value her contributions. However, she loves her current work environment and would prefer to deepen in her knowledge and become challenged within her current environment.

Sound familiar?

If you have become frustrated in your current role, are looking for broader opportunities and challenges, or are interested in better sharing your experience and knowledge to prove your value, then perhaps consider writing as a thought leadership strategy.

By writing blogs, articles, whitepapers, or even books, you will be able to deepen your knowledge about the aspects of your work that you are most passionate about and receive recognition for your commitment to your profession. You'll also benefit from helping others by sharing what you've learned along the way.

Becoming a thought leader

What would it take for you to explore the path to thought leadership? Consider these questions:

- Are you passionate about your topic or area of expertise?
- Do you have a deep understanding or experience with your topic?

Chris had been working as a training professional for several years and had earned regular promotions, but in recent years it seemed that her progress had slowed. She wasn't getting senior leaders' attention like she had initially, and it almost seemed as if her leadership team was taking her for granted.

- Do you acknowledge other thought leaders and expand their ideas with your own experience and knowledge?
- Do you offer a unique framework, creative lens, or new perspective for solving problems?
- Do you create new models, processes, or systems for a unique approach to an issue?
- Do you use your own terminology and coin new terms to define new concepts and become quotable?
- Do you create a tribe or community with other thought leaders and followers?
- Do you brand your ideas and concepts?
- Do you explore divergent ideas and show similarities and connections?
- Do you write and speak about your ideas so that others both understand and follow? Have you written a book?

For each "yes" you answered, you're that much further along the journey to becoming a thought leader.

The business case for writing

When I first spoke with Adam Calli, principal consultant for Arc Human Capital, about writing as a thought leadership strategy, his response was similar to what you may be thinking: "Are you kidding? I'm not a writer."

He shared: "Sure, the idea of having the authorship of, at least a portion of, an honest-to-goodness published book to add to my bio sounded appealing. And yes, I knew it would give me an added sense of legiti-

macy to set myself apart from the competition in the crowded market of the Washington, DC, metro area. I even knew it'd make my mom, grandma, and kids very proud. But really? Me? An author?"

Yet Adam went on to write a chapter in an anthology, *Cultivating Culture*. And since then, he's given his book to students in classes he's taught, as well as to prospects, current clients, and business partners. He even donated one to his local library. "If you want to write to grow your business, build your thought leadership, and gain visibility, nothing is as powerful as writing," Adam notes.

Another example comes from HR metrics guru and author Jac Fitz-enz:

"When I started Saratoga Institute, I had no money for advertising and I was pushing a new concept. So, I started writing articles for various HR and business journals. It worked. The market gradually was attracted to me and I could draw people to workshops and conferences. Over the next 30 years, I wrote constantly, gradually writing books. When I finally sold SI, I was acknowledged as the market leader in metrics. Writing is the best return on investment that any business person can do."

What to write about

So, you're now sold on the benefits of writing to position your career. How do you begin?

Identify your passion and expertise. What do you love to do? What intrigues you that you would love to learn more about? What do your colleagues call on you for as an expert?

Several years ago, I was intrigued with the intersection of workplace management and spirituality and decided to explore the topic. I read widely on it and then formed my own ideas about how it applies to today's workplace.

Consider where you want to go. Are you interested in forming your own training company? Do you want to explore consulting? Are you fascinated with HR management and its role in talent development? Consider career paths and topics that interest you and offer opportunities beyond your current role.

Focus on your viewpoint. After identifying a topic, determine what your position is. For example, years ago when attempting to find solutions to the labor market shortages, my employer wanted someone to explore strategies for tapping into new labor markets. I was interested in exploring the possibilities of employing older workers, and I soon realized that there were numerous myths about what older workers could and couldn't do. Thus, the focus for my early articles and subsequently my first book was on the benefits of attracting and retaining an aging workforce and how employers could do so.

Now it's time to identify what and where to write. Your options range from blog posts and magazine articles to a book chapter or entire book.

Where to get published

Start small to build your writing skills and your confidence. If you've never written before (other than notes in your journal or emails to your colleagues), begin by

Case Study: The Value of Writing

Vivian Blade, author of *Resilience Ready: The Leader's Guide to Thriving Through Unrelenting Crises and Influence in Talent Development* (ATD Press), can attest to the value of writing. "Even though I'd been working in the leadership space, I needed to pivot my content and make it relevant for my clients who were now dealing with COVID and other business changes and crises," she says. "Writing my books, workbook, blogs, social media posts, and other resources helped me to add greater value for my clients."

Creating thought leadership through her books gave Blade the ability to position her business, gain additional visibility in a crowded marketplace, and offer her information in a way that was attractive to those who value learning in written form.

She also found that the books permitted her to offer additional training and development opportunities for her clients—including one-hour lunch & learn sessions, skill-building workshops, and multi-day intensives—by codifying her books' intellectual property.

Her advice to talent development professionals who want to write is to "Begin where you are. Write short pieces for your ATD chapter, for LinkedIn, or for local papers. Write regularly on your expertise, and you'll find that your confidence will grow along with your writing skills."

writing a blog post, which are short pieces (350–800 words) with a singular point of view. You can post them on your website or social media pages; LinkedIn has easy options to do so. Alternatively, look for a blogger who posts content in your area and offer to write a guest post.

When you're ready to further expand on your topic in the form of an article, consider submitting content to magazines and journals that you read. Access or request the editorial guidelines for those publications including their editorial calendar showing themed issues.

What are the considerations to review as you begin?

Adhere to the publication's recommendations.

How does it want to receive submissions—does the editorial team prefer authors pitch an idea before writing an article, or would it prefer to see the completed article for consideration? Also note the publication's voice and style. For example, is the tone scholarly or more conversational? Are the articles practitioner-oriented with how-to content, or do they offer more case studies and interviews?

Reflect real-world approaches. Do not take an academic or rhetorical approach unless you are writing for that kind of publication. When I first began writing, I was concerned that my writing wasn't formal or academic enough, but my editors quickly reassured me that most publications, and therefore most readers, want real-world approaches in conversational language.

Provide success stories, examples, and cases. Use your experiences to illuminate key points, and provide enough detail to make the story come alive for readers. A longer success story or case example may be appropriate as a sidebar.

Write to your audience's pain points. What are the concerns and issues that cause your readers pain? Outline areas that may be alarming or painful to your readers, and provide ideas and recommendations for addressing their concerns.

Mind the formatting. I've found that my articles stand a better chance of getting published if I organize the article well and present information in manageable, bite-size pieces. Editors tend to like headings, key points, bullets, and numbered points to break up the article, making it appealing to busy readers. Pay attention to the publication's formatting to determine how it typically presents articles.

Anticipate feedback. If your article gets accepted for publication, you'll likely get suggestions and recommendations from the editorial team about making your article stronger and more appealing to the readership. Be ready to accept feedback as an opportunity for learning.

You're published—now what?

Once your article publishes, don't sit back on your laurels and wait for the phone to ring. Savvy professionals will leverage their article publication to build thought leadership.

Additional Strategies to Become a Thought Leader

If you're looking for other ways to promote your thought leadership, consider these tactics.

- Instead of simply repackaging other thought leaders' knowledge, build upon their ideas. Read extensively from a variety of business and professional journals and listen to TED Talks. Know how your ideas are similar to others' and how and why you offer a unique view.
- Share with your followers your passion about your topic. Explain why you are passionate about your work.
- Create your own model, process, or system by using powerful analogies and metaphors to define your process and concepts that are part of your brand.
- Develop your own unique terminology to define your processes, systems, and concepts. Don't merely use the acronyms others use.
- Rather than quoting others, quote yourself. Create sound bites that will become sticky.
- Make opportunities for conversation and connection with other thought leaders and individuals in your field. Ask questions on social media, invite dialogue, attend conferences where your network is attending, and build your network.
- Speak about your expertise. Submit proposals to speak at your industry and professional conferences.

Before sharing your article with colleagues, confirm the publisher's guidelines for distribution. Be sure to ask permission from the publisher before reprinting the article; some publications allow you to order reprints. Following the guidelines, mail a reprinted article to colleagues with a note or provide reprints as part of your handouts for keynotes, training sessions, and presentations. Publishers may have additional guidelines for sharing your article via social media, such as including an attribution line and providing a specific link.

Another idea is to write a version of your article for a different industry. For example, if you write an article about recruiting for the hospitality industry, consider revising it, using key industry examples for the retail or healthcare industry. However, check with the original publisher about any restrictions or guidelines it may have about doing so.

Not all publishers follow the same rules, so it is your responsibility to gain an understanding of the rights you grant to each publication. For instance, you may grant one-time publication rights (which enables you to repurpose the article in other publications), first rights (the publication is the first to publish the content, but you can otherwise publish it in other places afterward), or exclusive rights (in which case you may not use the content for another publication).

Some publishers require that you notify them of your plans to repurpose your article. For others, however, you may need to obtain their permission before repurposing an article as well as include a specific attribution statement.

Also note that many periodicals will require original content that has not been previously published, so it's not just a matter of checking the original publisher's guidelines but also those of potential future publishers.

After your article publishes, you can opt to write companion articles that you could put together in a special report, which you can provide as a marketing tool or sell as a product offering. Or the companion articles could become book chapters. In my experience, that is one of the most painless methods of writing a book.

A book offers added visibility beyond articles and blog posts and makes you the expert that quite literally wrote the book on your topic. If you've been writing for several years, consider grouping your content to create a book.

Move your career forward

If you like the idea of creating your own professional development path and using writing to grow as a talent development professional, use these activities to challenge yourself: First, create a blog calendar that

plans content for three or so months. One strategy is to schedule a range of topics to demonstrate your breadth of knowledge; another option is to coordinate your individual blogs so they build on each other, showing the depth of your thought leadership. Either way, your goal should be to write and publish a blog or article about your area of expertise each month.

Next, after you've published several blogs or articles, take the time to evaluate your content as a whole. Do you see any common themes? If so, consider how you can combine them. Are some of your ideas distinctive and innovative? If so, think about developing your own model or terminology scheme.

Going back to Chris from the beginning of the article, she decided to advance her own professional development through writing but was unsure how to start, so she contacted an established, published author to help her craft her first article for an industry newsletter. Since then, Chris has published on her own on LinkedIn and is considering writing a regular blog. She

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has gained her company leadership team's attention and has developed stronger professional relationships within the L&D community. Ultimately, Chris has found that she has the power to move her career forward by sharing her expertise in written form.

You too can take control of your own professional development and grow into thought leadership through writing.

Cathy Fyock, "the business book strategist," works with thought leaders and professionals who want to write a book as a growth strategy. Her most recent workbook is *My New Book: The Upcoming Message That Will Change the World*; cathy@cathyfyock.com.



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