

[What Lawyers Can Learn from Writers](#)

By [Cordell Parvin](#) on May 6th, 2014

What can lawyers learn from writers? I think there are many things, I want to go over just a few.

This past weekend, Friday, Saturday and Sunday, I went to the [DFW Writers Conference](#). The actual conference was Saturday and Sunday, but I went to the pre-conference workshops because I wanted to learn as much as was made available. Here is a description of one of the two pre-conference workshops I attended:

Donald Maass: Writing 21st Century Fiction

Based on his popular book of the same name (September 2012, Writer's Digest) , New York agent Donald Maass will teach participants the techniques that give multi-year best selling novels their high impact, resulting in both strong stories and beautiful beautiful writing regardless of category. This is an intensive, hands-on workshop for advanced fiction writers.

I was struck by several things that I doubt I would see if I attended something similar for lawyers.



1. The place was jam packed. People were incredibly interested in learning. Each workshop had standing room only, and most, if not everyone attending paid to be there out of their own pocket. There was a buzz in the hallways between sessions, as participants shared with each other what they had learned. Lawyers rarely invest out of their own pockets to learn and become a better lawyer. I have never seen the buzz in the hallways at a Bar Meeting. Law firms put on workshop training programs for free and include lunch and struggle to get their lawyers to participate.

2. How do writers learn their craft? They primarily learn by actually writing and presenting and getting feedback. I rarely see lawyers practice presentations in front of a group, or share an article or blog post with a group and get feedback. It seems that lawyers have thinner skin about constructive feedback than writers and they must believe their first draft is good enough for prime-time.
3. Writers generously donate their time to help other writers, especially the next generation (not necessarily in age) writers. That is the way it used to be in law firms, but not so much now.
4. Writers go to great pains to get into the head of their characters. What was Thelma feeling when she decided to go on a road trip with Louise and not tell her husband? Lawyers could be more effective advisors and advocates if they spent more time understanding what motivated their clients to do a particular thing. Trial lawyer, Gerry Spence wrote a very helpful piece on this idea: [Discovering the Story](#).

If you want to become a better lawyer, find a writers conference, pay out of your own pocket and when attending programs, figure out how you can apply what you are learning as a writer to your law practice.

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