

The Making Of An Axiom Award Winner

How do you write and publish an award-winning book? Does it take a wealth of knowledge and years of experience? Not necessarily...
by Jim Barnes

When judges for the Axiom Business Book Awards cracked open the bright red cover of *Achieve Brand Integrity*, we knew we were evaluating a very unique book. But not until we met author Gregg Lederman at the Axiom Awards reception did we realize just how unique his publishing experience was. Here is the true story of Gregg and his proclaimed “clueless self-publishing team”, and how -- in spite of being naive about each step in the publishing process -- they came out with a winner!

Gregg Lederman founded Rochester, N.Y. based Brand Integrity, Inc. in 2002 to help companies improve business results and employee performance. Like many successful and growing organizations, Gregg realized how valuable it would be to document and share the methodologies his team had developed in helping hundreds of companies build more profitable work cultures. It also could help current and prospective clients quickly embrace the company's philosophy and processes, and understand what it takes to truly translate strategies into the employee behaviors and experiences that bring a brand to life. So, he decided to write and publish a book. Why not?

Thus began Gregg's and his team's journey into the world of publishing, where multiple unknowns actually defined a powerful course of action:

1. Gregg had never written a book. “I had no real experience with writing, so I decided to write like I talk,” he recalls. “I hoped it would work to use a conversational tone.” He did take a very organized approach, which undoubtedly laid a firm foundation to this conversation: he spent more than a year gathering ideas and assembling several outlines before he came to terms with a strategic framework he believed would be engaging to readers. Then he began “talking.”

2. Gregg didn't know anything about the publishing process. Once the decision to produce a book had been made, Gregg began to call around to some publishers he thought might be interested in his book, and possibly publishing it. After learning about how lengthy the typical royalty publishing cycle is and that it could be up to two years before a printed book came off the press, he decided to self-publish. “My company was growing quite rapidly and I had the manuscript 90 percent completed. I suggested to my leadership team at Brand Integrity that we simply needed to get this book designed,

illustrated and published in four months or less. I spoke to a few people in the publishing industry and they felt my time line was a bit too aggressive.”

3. Gregg chose a designer who had never designed a book. When he mentioned the project to the man who had designed his logo and other marketing materials, graphic artist James Wondrack (Wondrack Design, Inc) said, “I could probably do it.” Holding up a booklet he’d designed a few years back, he said, “These are kind of like books!” From that inauspicious beginning, Wondrack dove into the project—and probably found a much deeper hole than he first expected. When he came back with a sample layout, Lederman was impressed. “He made the book look like our company.” Since the audience for the book was their clients and potential clients, the book needed to express the company brand. Having the designer who gave the company its identity also design the book made perfect sense. They were on their way...

4. Gregg asked the designer if he was an illustrator. When Gregg told his graphic artist he needed 50-75 cartoons to illustrate concepts in the book, Wondrack replied, “I’m not an illustrator, but I’ll put out some feelers.” When they next met and he showed Gregg some cartoons, Lederman loved them and asked, “Who’s the illustrator?” Wondrack admitted, “I did ‘em myself.” This non-illustrator was delivering cartoons that were perfect for the book, and saving lots of time in the process, keeping the project on track.

5. Gregg didn’t feel qualified to evaluate the creative aspects of the project. So, he began bringing the company’s Project Manager into the book meetings. You guessed it—Courtney Minnick had never worked on a book before either, but her input and assurance that the book’s layout and drawings were, indeed, excellent gave Gregg the confidence to move on. “Courtney’s project management skills were excellent, so I thought, what could be so hard about managing a book publishing project? I got a slap of reality when I showed up to a meeting a few weeks later and asked Court, ‘Who is going to print this book?’ You should have seen the look on her face!” Knowing it was time to find a way to have the book manufactured, Gregg asked James if he knew of any printers. He suggested meeting with a local print broker who he regularly used for marketing materials.

6. Do we even need mention that the print broker had no prior book experience? Keeping the project local (all parties involved to this point are located in the Rochester area) and on time was important, so when print broker Tom Barton explained he had lots of experience, but not with books, Lederman hired him on the spot. “I had given up on having any experienced team members at this point. In fact, it seemed quite obvious to me that the ticket to getting on our project team was to have no experience at all. Tom Barton (GCR Communications) did a fine job getting up the learning curve on what is

involved in printing a two-color book and getting it bound. He managed the process to near perfection (as far as I could tell) and most importantly, he got the book to the press, had it bound and delivered sample copies to us with one day to spare against our 120-day time line."

7. Finally, you can imagine what the P.R. candidate Gregg interviewed said when he described the project. "I'm not a book publicist!" She was hired immediately, of course.

The Achieve Brand Integrity book has done wonders for the firm Brand Integrity by enhancing its ability to share insights with leaders who are interested in transforming their companies' work cultures and the experiences they deliver each day to employees and to customers. To meet demand, the team is currently in the process of reprinting the book, and Gregg anticipates writing a sequel. "Using an inexperienced team worked to our advantage the first time around. I'm hoping the only 'unknown' that's left to uncover this next time will be how many copies we'll sell".

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About Brand Integrity and Gregg Lederman: Brand Integrity, Inc. is a brand strategy practice specializing in employee performance.

"While most brand agencies focus on putting brand promises in print, online or on the air, we focus on putting them into every employee's beliefs, behaviors and actions.

Our team of seasoned professionals works daily with leading companies in their fields to help them close the gap between their business strategy and the employee behaviors that will bring it to life."

Gregg Lederman, Founder and Partner: Gregg Lederman is an unforgettable expert who provides the path to creating high-performance work cultures and sustainable results. As the founder of Brand Integrity, Gregg works with many of today's leading companies to define and execute performance based strategies that drive culture transformation.

Gregg's valuable insights are documented in his published book, *Achieve Brand Integrity*, which offers practical and inspirational advice for everyone who has a stake in orchestrating strategy development and change in their company. He also shares his knowledge as a regular business columnist for Gannett Newspapers (*Democrat & Chronicle*), and as an adjunct faculty member for MBA students at the University of Rochester's William E. Simon Graduate School of Business Administration.