

Doing the Work

By Holly Lisle

All of the above assumes you're able to produce books that sell.

Here's what you do to keep yourself in business.

- **Write every day even before you quit.**

If you aren't able to make yourself write regularly before you quit your day job, the odds are that you aren't going to be able to make yourself do it after you quit. Writing is a business for self-starters. It's hard.

If you don't know beforehand that you can sit down and make yourself produce pages in spite of weariness, boredom, lack of inspiration, or over-abundance of distractions, don't kid yourself that writing full-time will magically cure this. The weariness, boredom, lack of inspiration and plethora of distractions will still be there once you quit, and along with them will be the pressure of knowing that at least one person in the world is now counting on you to put words on paper—and make them good enough to sell—no matter what.

Do not let yourself forget that once writing is your job, it is exactly that. A job.

You have to sit down and do it when you don't want to, when you do want to, when you feel crappy, when you feel great, when the sun is shining outside and you can hear a mockingbird in the tree and you know that the fish are biting down at that shady spot in the river.

You will, as a successful writer, work harder for

yourself than you ever did for anyone else. You'll work longer hours. You won't be able to do a half-assed job on the days when you really don't want to be there, because if you do, the only person you'll be hurting is yourself.

Yes, you get to take days off whenever you want, but remember that they aren't paid vacation days anymore. The person who pays for your days off is you, so don't take too many.

- **Get used to giving yourself a page quota.**

Mine varies from book to book and from deadline to deadline. It's been as few as five pages per day and as many as twenty. I'm comfortable at ten, I'm tired at fifteen, I thought I was going to die the time I had to produce twenty finished pages every day. Five, which is the page quota for my current book, is wonderful, and I find myself going over it some days just because I can do it without feeling strained.

- **Act like you're in business.** Make a habit of meeting deadlines. Get a reputation for being pleasant and easy to work with. Take reasonable suggestions, and deal with suggestions that don't work for you in a calm and reasonable way. For God's sake don't become a pain-in-the-ass artiste.

If you do, you may find yourself first against the wall come the revolution. And revolutions go through the publishing business about once every two or three years, where editors and publishers all leap up and race madly to grab some other chair, and writers are orphaned and culled and forgotten.

Never forget, publishers, editors, and agents will not die without you, but you will certainly find your life unpleasant without them.

Okay. This is only true for commercial publishing. In fact, if you're publishing yourself, you won't lose a second's sleep over whether your editor is getting ready to jump to a new house and leave you behind, or whether you're the bottom client on your agent's list.

When you're your own publisher, you have all the responsibility, but you also own your own career.

- **Spend time developing new ideas even when you're working on a book.**

Keep notebooks, doodle out concepts, create characters you don't need and don't have any place for yet, write down lists of titles that sound cool, draw maps to nowhere, develop lists of names. Keep plowing the field of your mind, so that when this book is finished, stories will already be growing in it and you will be hungry to write the next one. And the next. And the next. The writer's work is never done. (But if you set yourself sensible page limits each day, you at least get some guilt-free free time.)

- **Remember to have fun.**

Like what you write, create projects for yourself that you enjoy working on, don't get cynical about the process, which is tough, and can be grueling, and sometimes heartbreaking. Remember to love the writing, and to find pleasure every day in the fertile imaginings of your mind. Make yourself laugh sometimes. Don't give up.

- And with that in mind, we come to...

Handing in the resignation >>