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Three Tips for Successful Coauthoring

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When you and a colleague experience a similar passion for the written word, coauthoring might be the solution to the time crunch that most nurses identify as their reason for not writing (Oermann & Hays 2010). Two (or more) authors share the workload and motivate each other to successfully get their message in print more quickly, but the critical word here is "share." To make yours a true collaborative venue, well before you touch the keyboard, consider personality fit and the negotiation of workload and authorship credits.

Consider Personality Fit

As a basis to forming a coauthoring relationship, consider your own personality before choosing your partner(s). For example, knowing you are a driven, competitive, multi-tasking type-A personality, you should avoid working with laid-back procrastinators, which would create a stressful work atmosphere that would hamper collaboration. If you have a choice, select a colleague who has a similar personality and work style, for example, someone who wants to get to the point, not waste time, and keep to a timeline (Tirado 2012). However, if your Chair or supervisor "suggests" to partner with you and another colleague, identify their personality traits and how they match (or mismatch) with yours. Try to gain insight into the best ways of working with them and capitalize on their strengths while avoiding their weaknesses.

Collaboration in coauthorship, just as in healthcare, means assuming complementary roles and working together cooperatively. There needs to be a sharing of responsibility for the manuscript. It means establishing a flexible personality, being able to defer to others in their area of expertise, and working within established limits of manuscript control. Regardless of how you decide to share the workload, manifest positive personality traits such as respect, sensitivity, trust, and appreciation, which will enhance the spirit of collaboration.

Negotiate the Workload

Being a coauthor means making a substantive contribution to the written work. Some peer-reviewed journals request that coauthors sign a form attesting that they did, in fact, do so; some ask authors to identify their specific contributions. The typical activities coauthors contribute include brainstorming, researching, planning, writing, editing, and reviewing. At the outset, negotiate the workload: who does what and how much. With two authors, typically the first author generates the idea and design, and does most of the writing. The first author, who may be the better writer, can review the completed document and put it in one voice before submission. The first author may also be the corresponding author who will contact the journal's editor and assemble the manuscript for submission according to author guidelines.

Authors consider domination or over-control by other authors to be negative behavior, so managing collaborative relationships effectively means role-taking and showing tolerance and understanding (Bozeman, Street & Fiorito 1999). Decide whether your coauthorship would be facilitated better if

one author or one author at-a-time takes control of the manuscript. Multiple coauthors might decide to use writing strategies such as parallel writing in which each author works on a different section, or one author might write the draft while others complete research, create tables and figures, edit, and revise. Another option is for one author to write the manuscript based on group discussions. Regardless of one's role, make a commitment to do the work because this is at the root of success or failure in the collaborative venture.

Give Credit Where It's Due

By putting your name in the byline, you are accepting responsibility for work, that is, you are certifying the integrity of your work for which you deserve credit (Bennett & Taylor 2003). Whose name goes first is an important consideration. Many manuscripts list authors in the order of the substantive contributions they have made. Some list authors alphabetically, and journals may provide guidelines for how to acknowledge each author's contribution in a footnote, endnote, or other front matter (Howard 2009). Typically, first and then second authors respectively are considered to have contributed the most to an article, although middle authors' contributions should not be assumed as always minimal (Bennett & Taylor 2003). If you, as co-author, have a choice, decide the order of the names before you begin writing. As the project continues, you can renegotiate the order, depending on the amount of work each has contributed.

Conclusion

The importance of publishing to academic careers has made coauthored publications ubiquitous. When coauthors collaborate, they share the workload, draw on different areas of expertise, and may produce a better and more accurate text (Noel & Robert 2004). However, before entering a collaborative relationship, consider your personality fit, the workload you are willing to shoulder, and the assignment of authorship credit. It is important to come to an agreement regarding what coauthorship will mean for each particular work. Having formed a positive working relationship, you and your coauthors will celebrate and share the reward of successfully publishing and may even commit to a long-term working relationship, which will further your contribution to the advancement of knowledge and even advance your careers.

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