

# Nurse Author & Editor

## Volume 18 - December 2008, Issue 4

### Partnerships: How to make writing collaborations pleasurable and productive

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Have you ever leapt into a writing collaboration with your assumptions flying as high as your hopes? Only to be disappointed when your relationship unraveled on the sharp edge of misunderstandings. There is another way. If you want to keep writing relationships as pleasurable as they are productive, make your collaborator a colleague-friend and your partnership mutually beneficial (Heinrich, 2008a).

What does this mean? In contrast to friends who tend to each other's personal lives, colleague-friends tend to each other's work lives (Heinrich, under review). Partnerships are professional collaborations that benefit both partners. In mutually beneficial partnerships, colleague-friends support and sustain each other's professional development through triumphs as well as troubles.

Using the example of a real life partnership, this article is written for nurses who want to keep collaborations with peer editors and co-authors in tune, on track and results oriented. Keep a pen or pencil handy so you can practice the 3 "Ts" ~ Truth-telling, Transparency, Tending the relationship (Heinrich in Caputi, 2009) ~ that form the basis for trusting partnerships.

#### **Background**

After almost 20 years of preparing nurses to publish, I know that many feel like impostors when it comes to writing. In addition to boosting their self-confidence and know-how, nurse authors need to surround themselves with supporters (Heinrich, 2008a). Establishing trusting writing collaborations with colleague-friends takes telling the truth, being transparent and tending to relationships (Heinrich in Caputi, 2009). Prospective partners tell the truth when they make lists of their wishes and fears and concerns; their agreement becomes transparent when they write up a contract and they tend to relationships by forming a covenant.

Whenever nurses initiate a scholarly collaboration around a research project, a presentation or a publication, I encourage them to ask if their potential partner is open to negotiating a mutually beneficial partnership. If they agree, the would-be collaborators arrange a meeting time. Prior to that meeting each composes a list of wishes and fears/concerns about entering into this partnership. During their meeting, they share their lists. If they determine that theirs is a partnership with potential, they negotiate an agreement about the "what" ~ what they intend to do together ~ which is called the contract and the "how" ~ how they will treat one another ~ which is called the covenant (Heinrich, Clark & Luparell in Heinrich, 2008)

#### **Act On An Attraction**

As in any human relationship, the magic of mutual attraction is often the catalyst for a writing collaboration. I was drafting a manuscript adapted from a keynote address I'd just given (Heinrich, 2008b) when Dr. Pam Stetina emailed to say that my presentation inspired her to review the literature on academic incivility. Feeling drawn to Pam's sincerity, I emailed her back about peer editing my manuscript. The minute I pressed the send button, I had second thoughts about asking someone I'd never met to be my peer editor. What if Pam said yes and her feedback was so polite and cautious, it did me no good? Or even worse, what if she didn't like anything about it and she

recommended that I rewrite the entire thing? If I was having doubts, I figured that Pam might be having some too. So when she agreed to be my peer editor, I responded with this request:

To be clear on our expectations re. this adventure, how would you feel about sharing our wish list/fears and concerns so we can contract and covenant our peer editing relationship?

If you're up for it, I'll send you my wish list/fears and concerns to get us going. It shouldn't take long. We can do the whole thing by email or with a brief phone call. This would give you practice in establishing mutually beneficial, scholarly partnerships using this model.

Thankfully, Pam said yes. The next three sections describe how we used the three Ts to establish a trusting peer editing partnership.

### **Truth-telling**

Telling the truth when establishing a writing partnership requires both a self-inventory and a sharing of wishes as well as fears and concerns.

**Wish List.** Wish lists combine what attracted you to your potential partner in the first place and what you want from this partnership. My wish list read, "To ensure that my manuscript speaks to a nurse educator readership by getting Pam's peer editing feedback." Pam's list of wishes included:

- Collaborate with expert in boosting zest in workplace.
- Learn more about increasing joy in workplace setting and become more attuned to joy stealing.
- Provide value to the project.

Once you overcome any inhibitions or fears you have about asking for what you want, wish lists are actually fun to write. Try it for yourself by listing your wishes below:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

**Fears and Concerns.** While most colleagues share wishes, it's rare to address fears and concerns when entering into a writing collaboration. My two fears about a partnership with Pam were polar opposites, "That you'll feel like you have to be polite so you won't tell me what you truly think/feel about the manuscript or you'll not find one thing right with it." Pam's list of fears and concerns read:

- You'll think I am being too harsh or not harsh enough.
- I'll look like an idiot if I don't understand the process.

Although we each wrote our lists in private, Pam noticed that our fears and concerns about her feedback were similar. Overlaps are a good prognostic indicator that partners are on the same wavelength. The second item on Pam's wish list speaks to the vulnerability that can come with admitting to fears and concerns. The extent to which possible partners appreciate each other's vulnerabilities says a lot about their potential for forging a partnership that sustains their scholarly endeavors through thick and thin.

Now that you've read our lists, it's time to list your fears and concerns about your partnership:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

After each composes a list of wishes and fears and concerns prior to meeting, prospective partners get together to share their lists. When you work/live close enough to meet in person, schedule a face-to-face meeting. As Pam and I live 2000 miles away from one another, we arranged for a phone session.

### **Transparent Be**

Contractual agreements bring transparency to writing collaborations. Contracts honor partners' wish

lists by describing what will be accomplished, by whom and when. Since our collaboration centers on a peer editing partnership, our contract reads:

- Pam will edit Kathy's manuscript from a nurse educator's perspective.
- Kathy will acknowledge Pam's contribution in the published article.
- Kathy and Pam will negotiate mutually agreeable time frames for sending manuscripts and returning feedback.

As part of our exchange, Pam has a virtual coupon redeemable at any time for a peer mentoring session or for my peer editing a manuscript of hers. Having read our contract, write items that relate to the what, when and by whom for your partnership:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

### **Tend the Relationship**

An agreement about how partners will treat one another, covenants allow partners to tend to their relationships. While contracts honor wishes, covenants protect the vulnerabilities that come with wishes and fears. For example, I missed my first, scheduled phone session with Pam. When, during our next phone call, I suggested we include a line in our contract about my getting the time right for our sessions, Pam was reassured that I would honor her time. When Pam said she preferred to give verbal feedback to avoid misunderstandings, my fears melted into an appreciation for Pam's sensitivity as a peer editor. Our covenant reads:

- Kathy will take responsibility for getting the time right for our sessions.
- Pam will walk Kathy through her written feedback by phone and, if necessary, send her an attachment with editorial changes.
- Pam will start feedback with positives and then share critiques.

In contrast to contractual conditions that are procedural, covenant items are relational. What relational conditions do you want included in your covenant?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Once there's a conceptual agreement, one of the partners agrees to write up and circulate a draft. With partners' input, the contract is finalized, dated and an addendum added that reads, "This document is a work-in-progress to be renegotiated PRN." After the document is signed, all partners get a final copy. This dated contract/covenant serves as a reference point should questions arise about the original agreement (Heinrich, Clark & Luparell in Heinrich, 2008) and allows for changes as needed.

### **Summary and Conclusion**

The best way to keep writing partnerships collaborative is to make them conscious, committed and contracted. Partners tell the truth by sharing lists of wishes and fears/concerns; stay transparent by writing up a contract that specifies who does what when; and tend to their relationship by developing a covenant that describes how they will treat one another. If your experience is like ours, you'll find that your writing collaborations are so vibrant that you and your partners will be on the look out for future opportunities to work together.

**Acknowledgements:** To Dr. Pam Stetina, an associate professor at Texas A & M University-Corpus Christi, for ensuring that this manuscript stayed true to our partnership experience.

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