

Welcome to the Write Publish Market podcast. If you're an entrepreneur considering writing a book to serve your business, you're in the right place. Or maybe you've already decided — that's even better. I'm your host, Jodi Brandon, book publishing partner for entrepreneurs and 20-year veteran of the book publishing industry. On the Write Publish Market podcast, in addition to learning from me, you'll meet entrepreneurs just like you and hear about their experiences as we explore all facets of writing, publishing, and marketing a book that will help your business grow in ways you might not even have dreamed up yet.

Our guest today, Dr. Jen O'Ryan, is a diversity, inclusion, and equity strategist focused on helping people build authentically inclusive and welcoming companies. She brings a unique perspective to organizational change, combining a PhD and human behavior with over 20 years of experience. Jen understands the challenges leaders face in developing a culture of inclusiveness and guides organizations from good intentions to effective implementation. Jen is the author of *Inclusive AF: A Field Guide for Accidental Diversity Experts*, which explains how to cultivate a more welcoming workspace. Outside of work, Jen is a travel enthusiast and avid runner with a strange affinity for bad 80s music, getting lost in new cities, and scary movies.

JODI: Welcome, Jen. I'm so happy to talk to you today.

JEN: Thank you so much for having me. I'm excited to be here.

JODI: I was just mentioning before we hit the record button that I've been so looking forward to this because obviously the topic we're going to be talking about diversity is hugely important, but also you're sort of backing up what I'm always saying about how important a book to serve your business can be and how you can use it as a tool in that way. You're the perfect combination guest. So I'm so excited to talk to you.

JEN: Awesome. Thank you.

JODI: Let's talk first, if we can, about your book — just sort of how did it come to be? How did you decide a book would be beneficial for your business?

JEN: Yes. So I started working on it a couple years ago, because I realized that not everybody wants to work with a consultant. Not everybody has resources to work directly with a consultant. So I wanted to put something out into the world that people could pick up and make changes. If it's in their company or their organization or their community as a volunteer, they could actually have a practical, actionable roadmap to really influence change in the world. So that started me down the path. And it took a couple of different twists. But yeah, it was an amazing journey. And one of the things I'm sure you've heard before, is I really am glad I didn't know how difficult it was going to be because it probably wouldn't have done it.

JODI: I have heard that a time or two or 100. Did you ever take on any kind of writing project like this, or was it more you just jumped in blind first, and then figure it out?

JEN: No. I've always liked writing shorter articles; they're more off the cuff. It's more like I feel like it's very conversational. It would be almost as if we were sitting across at a coffee shop and just talking. That's how my writing style is. And so I've done articles and things like that, and I've done a lot of writing for academic audiences. But this is the first time I actually was able to use my voice and just create something that was meaningful to me, and then share it out with the world.

JODI: I love that. I think you totally hit the nail on the head too, with the tone you're talking about. Especially over the last 18 months-ish, I've done a lot more reading about this topic than I have before, and you definitely have struck that conversational — I don't want to say friendly, because it's not too casual, but it's definitely not the academic — tone that that some of the books I've read have had for sure. So you use [the book] as a tool in your business in that it's a lower price point than your one-on-one consulting. Do you do speaking or anything like that and accompany the book with it?

JEN: Yeah, I do. One of my favorite things to do is join book clubs, who read the book. I have so many questions and then just getting deep into what that group is trying to solve. But I also do a lot of webinars and smaller group sessions where we talk and then apply the principles of inclusion, equity, diversity, and implementing change, but to that organization or specific industry, because there's a phenomenal amount of reuse across industries. There's always specific nuances if you're talking about wealth management, or health care or academic spaces. There's a lot of nuance. I like going deep with smaller groups, and we just have a good time talking about it, but it's also very serious work. And so it's finding that balance. A lot of a lot of speaking opportunities and a lot of just getting in front of people and hearing what they're struggling with, and then helping them get to where they want to be.

JODI: Book clubs. That's a brilliant idea, especially for your type of book and coupled with your background, of course, that's a fantastic idea. I do want to dig into something in your book that I thought was so interesting. I volunteer in the summer with high school students and we talk a lot with them just about the different generations in the workplace, in general, so I was intrigued when I was reading in your book about the differences in attitudes about diversity and inclusion and equity among the generations. It's so true. In general, the different attitudes about a lot of things in the workplace — or in society, really. But if we could dive into that a little bit, I think that would be super helpful. It's interesting to talk about, for sure, but also, for my audience of business owners writing a book, thinking about the different age groups that are going to be reading the book.

JEN: It was so fascinating. One of the studies that I mentioned in the book talks about exactly that. It's like why people from different generational cohorts think that their employer is focusing on inclusion and diversity. And just it's so different. But it makes sense, when you think about it. They all grew up in a very different world and were told about different priorities, right? I'm not retirement age yet, but I'm older than many of my counterparts. And it is interesting to talk about what it was like back in the old-timey days in the '80s, when we had jobs and how different it was, and how badly the expectations were so different. And then today, it's just more about

being an actual human, and showing up as yourself and being authentic and not having to conform to this model. And that really hugely influences what the expectation is and what people's threshold for interpreting bias and interpreting stereotypes.

JODI: You're right. It's so hard to kind of even wrap your head around. I'm in my early 40s as I volunteer each summer with these 16, and 17 year olds. I started 19 years ago, so I was much closer to them in age. And now it's the further and further away I get. There are people 20 years older than me still in the workplace also. It's just hard to wrap your head around just how different how big those differences can be. It's hard to generalize, I'm sure, but what's your advice for people in the workplace in dealing with those differences? It's hard for the younger people — and this, of course, is a wild generalization — to even grasp why the older generations don't think this stuff is a big deal. To them it's just second nature. So what's that sort of meeting point in the middle?

JEN: It has to do with one, making sure that everybody is on a level playing field. Because if you have somebody who is young, and this is a generalization, somebody who's a little bit younger, might be a little bit more entry level in their career, and somebody who's a little bit older, who is a little bit more established, maybe has a little higher up in the hierarchy, we need to make sure that they are having these conversations in a place where it is a level playing field — where people can challenge each other's assumptions. Otherwise, it's just “Oh, you kids today, you don't listen.” And then, you know, nothing changes. But it really is coming at it from a curiosity perspective. As human beings we are, we're drawn to storytellers, and sharing our stories, and that's what we connect with. And so if we take it out of this “Well, we have to work nine to five, because it's a function of nature,” and really explore why is it nine to five? And telling different stories about how people interpret the world differently, and looking at what is really in the best interest of the group of the company, as a whole, as a collective, rather than “This is just a structure that we have to follow.”

JODI: I love that: the elements of curiosity and storytelling. Of course, I'm going to be drawn to them, given my love of language books and all that, but aside from that, the best interest — that's really what it does boil down to. So much is shaped by the words that we use, right?

JEN: I am a huge not fan — that's not the right word — but I'm very drawn to the words that people use from different parts of the world, the different parts of the country. And it really shapes our perception. If we take a step back, and we're [ask], “Well, is that really what I'm trying to say?” As human beings, we have a huge capacity for vocabulary, but we're also really lazy. So we tend to stick with the same words that worked for us and never really move on from them. And so if we really are precise about what I'm trying to say and what assumption I'm trying to convey and listening to the other person before understanding, then that's where we really get to the good stuff.

JODI: That's a fantastic point. A lot of times authors will use — and this is, again, a generational thing — language, that they have a hard time even understanding when I point out that maybe this isn't the best kind of language to use here or maybe this isn't the best term we use here.

Maybe we find something a little more inclusive. Some people, as soon as you mention it, they think, “Oh my gosh, I didn’t even realize. Yes, absolutely let’s change that,” or is there going to be more resistance to it? I find that to be a really interesting human exercise also, finding out what comes up for people.

JEN: Yeah, when you start asking those questions, typically the ego likes to protect itself. So we weren’t immediately digging our heels and saying, “Well, this is what I meant” or “This is where I came from. This is why I put it out there.” It’s like, yes, and also look at how this might be for somebody else. And really it’s, if people look at inclusion and diversity around, including that aspect in their writing, what they’re doing is opening up their work to a much broader audience. They’re making it more accessible. It’s not about political correctness, or “You can’t say anything, everybody’s too sensitive.” It’s not about that at all. It’s about being respectful and opening it up to a larger body of people who’ll be able to consume your story and relate to it and benefit from it.

JODI: Right. That’s such a great point. And when you explain something like that to someone, how on earth could anybody then say, “No, I think I’m still gonna use that language?” when we want our work to be accessible. We want people who read our work to feel respected and that we are including them. Love that. So now talking about book writing. I feel like this is maybe a little bit easier with fiction, because you can include characters and settings that are diverse, and you can layer in some of those elements within your story — versus a nonfiction book. The common thing I see is people using examples and case studies and client stories with people of varying genders and backgrounds and all of that, but what else would you say to a business owner writing a book, if they were sitting across from you having coffee and saying, “How can I make my book more inclusive?”

JEN: I would love that they’re even asking that question. Yes, that’s great they’re like, “I am not the capital T truth of this information.” What I tell them to do — and one of the reasons why is the crux of diversity; we’re talking about diverse world perspectives and experiences that we’ll see things that we don’t, right? — is have somebody else read your book. Have somebody else who doesn’t have the same life experience or who doesn’t look like you read your book, and give feedback. When we talk about having inclusivity reads, it’s making sure that something being misstated, or even a small poor choice of words, can undo all their good work, because that person could get to that turn of phrase or that generalization or if you’re citing sources only from a specific segment of the population, then they’ll roll their eyes and say, “Well, your biased, and I don’t see myself here, and I’m just gonna move on with life.”

JODI: That citing sources is one that I haven’t had that come up, and that’s a really interesting one. And the inclusivity read is a great, great suggestion. I work with people all the time getting feedback, during the revision stages of the books, but at what point do you think is a good time to do that? Is it with the traditional beta reading, in between drafts? Or how early in the process would you suggest someone do that?

JEN: I like to look at work when it's more of a rough cut, right? It's not structured exactly the way that the book is going to be structured, it's just to get a sense of where are they going and making sure that, like I said, if it's an academic book or something where they're citing sources, that they have a broad representation of information. So I would actually do it a couple times. I like to do it when it's still kind of an initial rough cut, and then also before it goes out as a final, because there's also, as you know, so many different changes between your rough cut and your finished (air quotes). So often the story will change and your examples will change and your cohesion will change. And so it's good to have a couple of layers in there, and honestly it's good to have more than one person review it through that lens.

JODI: Absolutely. I was going to actually raise that question with you. I love that idea of doing the various stages, because like you said, not only is it usually but it *should* be different from one draft to another draft. Otherwise, you're not probably making the changes and improvements you need to be making. That's a great point. Also, this is probably getting pretty granular, but I hope you don't mind. Let's talk about the singular they, because I feel like, as a copy editor by trade, I feel like I'm one of the only ones out there who's like, "Let's do this. This is fantastic." And there's just so many, like within the publishing community that are still like, "Oh, but it doesn't sound right to my ears" and "No, it's not in subject verb agreement." I feel like this is such a simple thing we can all do. Just get on board.

JEN: Yeah, I was really fortunate when I was doing a lot of my writing for academic audiences that the APA had just officially approved *they* for use as a singular, gender-nonspecific pronoun. And so that saved me countless arguments and rewrites with my editor. That's the thing about language, though, as it evolves. And yes, at the end of the day is it better to be subjected to these grammar rules that have been beaten into us for lack of a better word, or respect to the human? For me, it's a respectful human thing. One of the things I coach people on is, if the gender is unknowable or immaterial — we put gender everywhere that it doesn't really need to be — and if the individual's gender is immaterial to the conversation, just use *they*, because that prevents our brains from creating this persona, this profile, and attributing all these characteristics and traits to somebody that we don't even know. Right?

JODI: I feel like we are making headway as a publishing writing community in that direction, but I feel like it's going to be one of those things that just takes so much longer than most of us want it to, to get everybody on board.

JEN: It does. And actually I found that, once you get the habit of it, it's actually easier.

JODI: 100%. I totally, totally agree with that. Jen, the thread that I keep hearing that I want to pull on is this just respect for people as humans. I think that a lot of times, especially right now in society, and I will just speak for myself as a white, hetero female, everybody's sort of walking on eggshells a little bit. Everybody wants to make sure they're doing the right things, and saying the right things, and reading the right things, and all of that. But I think it all just comes back to that thread that you have mentioned throughout this conversation: respect for others as humans. I actually wrote down when I read your book — I wrote down on a post-it note, and I've had it on

my computer ever since just because I think it was it was so simple, but so profound: You wrote, “Exclusionary behaviors do not need to rise to a level of abuse in order to be harmful.” A couple of my nieces were here when I was reading your book. They were seven and four at the time. They're eight and five now. And I just thought, “It really comes down to just being nice.” Like, just be nice and think of other people.

JEN: Yeah, exactly. Human beings.

JODI: Of course, there are all of these complex layers, and it's not that simple. But at it's most basic level, it *is* that simple.

JEN: Yes. That's where we have to take a step back and examine: Why is it so important to me that I categorize a human into one or two categories? But why is that so important to me?

JODI: Yes, exactly. And like you said, a lot of times, it just doesn't have anything to do with what we're talking about, writing about, teaching about, or any of those things.

JEN: Exactly. And that's where this this whole culture of busy really gets in the way and really impedes our ability as basic humans. Because it's like, “I'm so busy. I don't have time. I can't take on one more thing that I need to think about and change.” And you do though. You do have to.

JODI: You're right. Obviously we're going to link your book in the show notes, and I encourage everyone to to read the book. I learned a ton from reading your book. Like you said before, the tone is great. You're taking a very serious topic and making it seem like something that just makes sense and is easy for all of us to do and slowly start to build into or increase in our day to day lives — just to be better humans. This was such a great conversation, Jen, and like I said, everyone, please, please, please read Jen's book. It's so good. I don't let anyone, Jen, leave the podcast without giving me a book recommendation — something that you are reading now and that you love or that you recently read in love.

JEN: I just finished the audio version of two fantastic books. And this is not just because we have an affinity for Scottishness. I am blanking on the person's name. I believe their first name is Gary. The book title is *Unf*ck Yourself*. And the follow-up book is *Do the Work*. And it was such an amazing book. So basically the author's goal is to help people go out of their way to help people get out of their own way and stop overthinking it and go out and figure out what actually you want to accomplish in life and break it down in such a way that it's very attainable. And it was just a personable, vulnerable, very authentic writing style that I just fell in love with it. I listened to both of the books on it on a road trip recently. And they're just phenomenal.

JODI: Awesome. Did the author do the recording?

JEN: Yes, the author does the recording. They're very Scottish and open about that. I think that really helps a connection. It's such an authentic conversation.

JODI: Oh, that's a good recommendation. I'm unfamiliar with that book, so I love that too. I love when somebody brings something I've heard of yet or haven't read. That is fantastic. Well, Jen, thank you so much for being my guest today. This was a hugely educational but fun conversation, and obviously a very important one in the book world but in society in general. So thank you very much.

JEN: Thank you so much for having me. Oh, and the author's name is Gary John Bishop. I want to give credit where credit is to you. Fantastic series. And thank you so much for having me.

JODI: Oh, this was fantastic. Thanks again, Jen.

Thanks for listening to today's episode of the Write Publish Market podcast. I know just how busy your schedule is as a business owner, so I'm grateful you've taken some time out of yours to journey into the world of book publishing with me today. If you are looking for even more book writing, marketing, and publishing information and support, check out my mentorship/membership, The Author-Entrepreneurs Lab, where each month we take a deep dive into one element of the book world with education, a Q+A session with me, your book publishing expert, resources, cowriting times, and so much more. You can learn more at the link in the show notes. I hope to see you inside the Lab!