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THE NEWSLETTER OF THE INDEPENDENT WRITERS OF CHICAGO

JANUARY MEETING

Get the Scoop on the State of Today's Print Journalism from BusinessWeek Insider

BY LAURA STIGLER

It's just good business to come to the next IWOC meeting on Tuesday, January 8th. For the third installment of the organization's year-long program series, "Get Hired!", BusinessWeek's Chief of Correspondents, Joe Webber, will be giving freelance writers the inside scoop on what one of the nation's largest weekly business magazines requires content-wise.

Since joining BusinessWeek in 1987, the multi-award-winning Webber has managed news coverage from Dallas to Chicago to Toronto, making him one of the

definitive experts on news, ideas and trends affecting print media today. What are those latest ideas and trends? How is print faring in the face of the Internet Age? Will print circulation continue to decline? These and a myriad of other hot topics sure to be on the minds of writers—and all news junkies—will be addressed, with plenty of time for your cogent questions. So bring those questions and of course, your business cards.

The IWOC meeting will take place on Tuesday, January 8th at National-Louis University, Room

5008, 122 S. Michigan Ave., Chicago. (This is a new room on the 5th floor. Please make a note of it; it will be our permanent room.) Networking begins at 5 p.m. The main program is at 6 p.m. Admission is free to IWOC members, \$15 to nonmembers. Following the meeting, attendees are invited to go to a nearby restaurant for a buy-your-own dinner to further discuss writing-related topics or to continue networking. For more information, call 847-855-6670 or visit www.iwoc.org.

New IWOC Online Discussion List is Up and Running

BY RUTH E. THALER-CARTER

So you have a question about freelancing that just can't wait until the next IWOC meeting. Where you gonna go? To IWOCers Online, the new IWOC discussion list!

I'm active on discussion lists for several of my professional memberships, as well as a few that are independent of an organization, and I've found them to be invaluable sources of advice, information, colleagues, new clients and even good friends. I thought IWOCers might like to try the concept, so I proposed it to the board, got the go-ahead, and now IWOCers Online is ready to go. For the moment at least, I'll serve as moderator. Since IWOC is a relatively small group, we may not need a discussion list as much as larger groups that are national in scope, but it should be fun to see if such a connection will be of interest and value to members. And you never know; the list might help IWOC generate new memberships.

At least for now, the list is only open to IWOC members. Appropriate topics are anything relevant to freelancing: finding and keeping work, coping with difficult clients, resources, advice, work styles, etc. Rates and fees may be discussed but only in the context of advice; neither the list nor IWOC itself is intended for setting rates collectively in any way. Feel free to

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Want to Write for Crain's? Be Prepared.

BY RUTH E. THALER-CARTER

If IWOC members want to write for Laurie Cunningham of the prestigious *Crain's Chicago Business*, their stories should be specific and detailed — and they can't write for the Chicago edition of *BusinessWeek*.

Cunningham spoke at IWOC's November 2007 meeting, as part of the current



Laurie Cunningham

program-year focus, "Get Hired!" She supervises major feature sections and trav-

els constantly on her own stories: When asked if she wanted to be editor, she was in middle of a special feature section on Brazil.

"My favorite thing about writing is that it's a craft, so you can always get better," Cunningham said. Because she believes in continual improvement, "I'm always referring to my 'bibles:' William Zinsser's *On Writing Well*, James Stewart's *Follow the Story*, and William Blundell's *Art and Craft of Feature Writing*." Those works are so important to her that she brought copies to show IWOC members.

Pet peeves

To write for Cunningham and *Crain's Chicago Business*, IWOCers should avoid her pet peeves:

- **lack of specifics:** "He likes to play board games. Which ones? Give examples."

- **jargon:** "My job is to be the guardian of the reader, and jargon tells me the writer is lazy or afraid to say 'what do you mean' (to an interview subject). My rule of thumb is, if I don't know what it means, our readers won't. Editors get annoyed (when writers over-use jargon) because you're making (us) work too hard. I use myself as a barometer and try to make stories as clear as possible; they should be easy to understand, (but) don't talk down. When a source can't talk without jargon, you have to move on (to someone else)." She did acknowledge that "there is a time for jargon — there is good jargon; for instance, when it's colorful."

- **clichés:** "Don't use 'skill set' or 'at the end of the day.' Clichés are crutches. We all have our own (clichéd) ways of structuring stories, such as ending on a quote. End in your own voice."

- **over-quoting:** "Quoting can become a ping-pong match. Get to know (your sources), paraphrase, and then quote."

- **wastefulness in writing:** "Use economy. 'He says he likes' should be 'He likes.'"

- **fillers:** "Write lean," Cunningham said. "In my own and others' work, I prune and prune and prune. Don't say someone earns 'about so much' or did something 'around two years ago.' Be exact. Don't say the subject 'heads up' an organization; use 'heads.' Don't be redundant ('absolute

disaster') or contradictory ('minor catastrophe.')

Making it better

Cunningham offered several tips for improving one's writing, starting with reading the works noted above.

"Print out your stories and read them out loud," she suggested. "If you stumble over a sentence, your readers will, too. We read with our ears."

She also stressed the importance of structure. Citing what her boss tells her, she said that "writing is thinking; if you aren't clear, writing

won't help you figure it out. Put the point of the story in

one sentence. Once you have all your material, read through it and find the core themes."

While indexing is "torture for journalists," she also recommended creating headings and sections, and then putting relevant notes into each.

To Cunningham, "it's really important to trust your instincts (about what's important to include). Details are really important to a story, but not just details for details' sake." She likes anecdotes and scene-setting when those techniques are done well.

Because Cunningham also believes in the value of research and knows that freelancers may not have the funds for their own Lexis/Nexis or Factiva accounts, she gives her reporters access to her Factiva account.

Getting in the door

Approaching Cunningham

is easy: Send her an e-mail message with a résumé and five clips (copies of published work) attached, preferably representing journalism or newspaper work. "We'll start slow — a 'first date' — one story," she said. "If I really like you, I will use you and pay you well. I assign a whole section to one reporter, and the reporters we like get about a month to write (their sections)."

It's worth making that approach, because working for Cunningham can be "very lucrative," she said. "About \$1 a word, but we

Those who meet the challenge are well rewarded. A section—a typical assignment—pays up to \$8000.

pay by the project, which is about \$7,000–\$8,000 for the whole section."


Cunningham does accept pitches (story ideas), although "I've found that pitches don't work out." Writers are better off referring to Crain's editorial calendar, which is available online. "The model I like is to come up with a grand idea and tell a reporter to go out and find the story, sources, etc.," she said. She maintains folders on various topics, so she can provide leads and background material.

Be forewarned: Freelancers interested in writing for Cunningham can write for other business journals, but not — ironically, given IWOC's January speaker — for *BusinessWeek*. Whether *BusinessWeek* sees it the same way remains to be seen at the January IWOC meeting. ♡

January's Question of the Month: What are your work goals for 2008, and how do you hope to achieve them?

BY KAREN SCHWARTZ

Chuck Coffin: In 2008, I would like to at least double my income from 2007. That's really a very modest goal, since I am retired and only freelancing part-time.

 During much of 2007, I was dealing with family issues that kept me from accepting several assignments, and for the same reason, for much of the year I did not actively seek work. Generally speaking, I have had good results from using the IWOC job line, and I have also been contacted by clients who got my name from the IWOC website. In 2008, things should be a little different: I should have time to seek work, and I should not have to decline any opportunities, so I expect to have a much better year.

Ruth E. Thaler-Carter: My main goals for the new year are to get published in at least one new national magazine and to get assign-

ments from at least one former client or publication for which I haven't worked in a while. The only way I know of to accomplish this is to brainstorm story ideas with myself and then get off my duff to do the necessary query letters and follow-up.

 That's going to be my main focus in January, 2008.

I also aim to be more efficient at filing. That's just a function of discipline in moving things from the pile on the floor into file folders. I have no idea how to accomplish this goal; it might take hypnosis to get me to put away receipts and research notes as I go along.

I plan to devote more energy toward building my secondary business, Communication Central. My partner and I have hosted two successful, but small, national conferences. We would like to build the busi-

ness by offering more programs throughout the year that could give the annual conference more visibility. We've come up with several topics and just have to get off the dime and DO IT!


I also hope to do more public speaking, which I really enjoy. Specifically, I've been trying to organize a Chicago offering on my "Getting Started" workshop for the past couple years. I'll try to achieve that goal by working with IWOC to see if we can pull that together in conjunction with what should be an annual November trip to the Windy City for another organization in which I'm active.

Another goal for 2008 is to overcome procrastination. I meet my deadlines, but I often futz around until the last minute to get started and then feel stressed over finishing something on time.

Chris Benevich: In 2008, I plan to complete my first

novel. I'm currently exploring publishing, distribution and promotional options. If anyone in IWOC can introduce me to a NYC agent looking for metaphysical thrillers, I would be most grateful and happy to return the favour.

Dave Epstein: My key goal for the coming year is to develop ongoing working relationships with three to five small to medium-sized business clients and to enjoy

 a variety of projects and relationships. Right now, I'm setting up my web "storefront," spreading the word about my services to existing and new contacts, and doing a focused search for companies and organizations that can use a communicator with a broad business background who can understand their messages and help them reach their target audiences. 🐣

IWOC Online Discussion List (continued from page 1)

announce recent triumphs—new clients, awards, etc.—and upcoming activities of interest to colleagues, but please keep these short. Direct listmates to further details and sign-up info through links.

This is a YahooGroups list, which means that members can opt to receive it as individual messages or batches called digests. If you opt for the message mode, you should be able to respond to a message simply by clicking your Reply button. If you opt for digest, you may have to open a new e-mail window, enter the digest address (see below), copy and paste the Subject line of the message to which you're responding or type in a new Subject, and hit Send once you've written your message.

To join the IWOC list, send a message with SUBSCRIBE in the Subject line to: IWOCers-subscribe@yahoogroups.com. Once you subscribe, you can post messages to the list using: IWOCers@yahoogroups.com. (Copy to your e-mail address book also.) There are a few guidelines for proper etiquette. They are simple, but please do follow them so the list will be as useful as possible:

- Set your e-mail program to Plain Text. Do not send messages in HTML, MIME or any format other than Plain Text.
- Include a Subject line for every message. If responding to a previous message, please use the same Subject line.
- When responding to someone else's message, please "snip" (cut the original message down to what's essential for others to make sense of your response.) Don't "reprint" an entire, lengthy message unnecessarily and never reprint an entire digest.
- Do not send attachments to the list. If you want to share an article from somewhere else with listmates, copy and paste it. If it's a lengthy article that is available online, provide the title, first sentence or paragraph, and a link to the original.
- Do not include entire sign-up/registration materials for conferences, etc. Just provide a link, even if it's your own e-ddress.
- Do not flame (insult) other listmates or colleagues.
- Do not report viruses or hoaxes to the list.

If you have any questions, feel free to contact me, Ruth Thaler-Carter, at Ruth@writerruth.com. 🐣