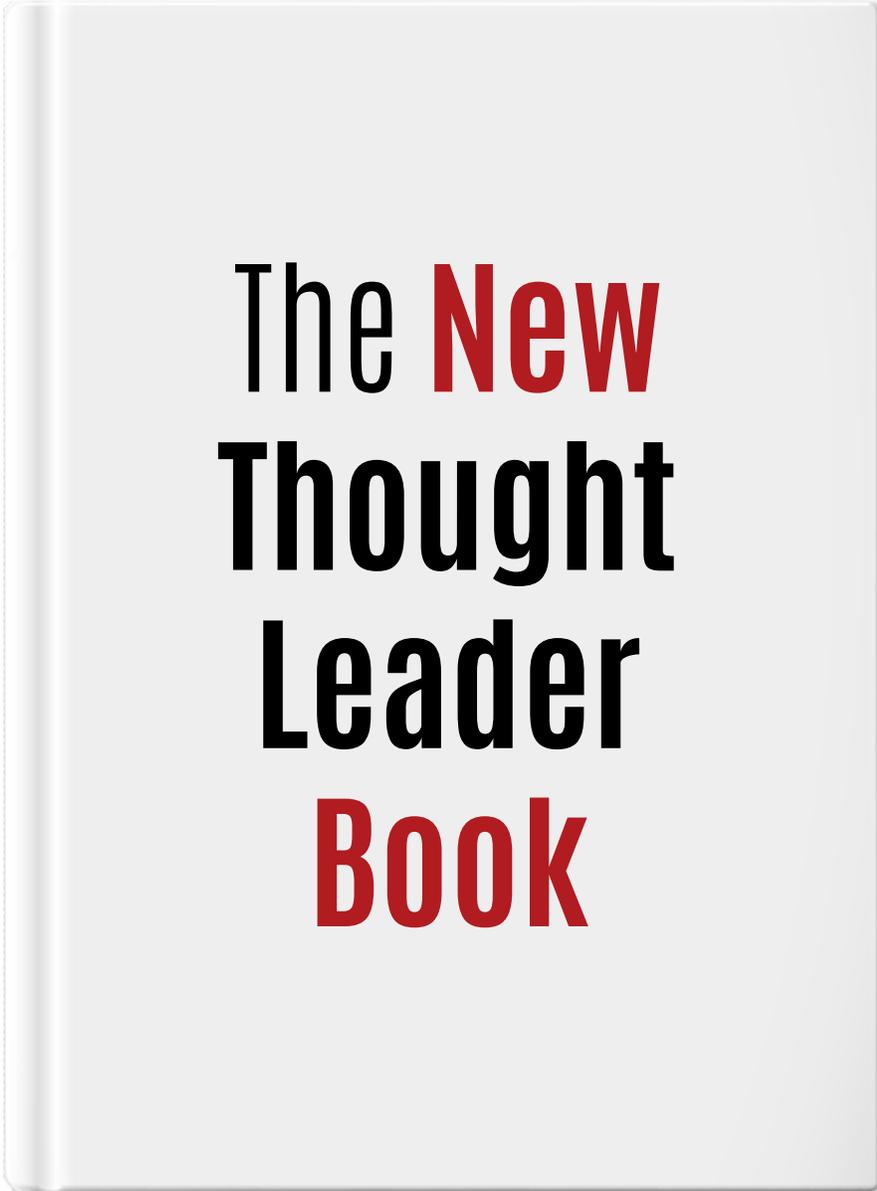


# THE BUSINESS MEMOIR:



The **New**  
Thought  
Leader  
**Book**

Melissa G Wilson  
and Becky Blanton

# THE BUSINESS MEMOIR:

The New Thought Leader Book

By Melissa G Wilson  
and Becky Blanton

# Are you a corporate leader without a social leader presence?

## YOUR EXECUTIVE SOCIAL PRESENCE MATTERS

**Y**our employees and company executives may know you're the leader, but does your industry know? Is your name known outside of your work circles? Do you network well, rarely, or not at all? Do you write and post your own tweets or LinkedIn posts, or does a team of publicity people do that for you?

Do you enjoy that distance and space between you and your customers, clients, or followers? Or would you like to close that gap and become a true influencer: an influencer with an edge, an influencer with a social presence?

If you're not personally or professionally active on social media, don't worry. You're not alone.

In a 2016 Forbes article, writer Daniel Newman shared, "Less than half of Fortune 500 CEOs are active on a major social

network and not a single Fortune 500 CEO maintains a presence on all six major social networks."

There are a lot of pros and cons to having a social media presence. Most of the cons involve a major time and technical commitment. The potential to dilute your brand, or the potential for long-lasting negative reactions to a poorly worded or positioned tweet also keep most executives off of social media.

So, without a strong, personal social media presence, how does a corporate leader demonstrate their personality, leadership skills, insights and presence? Writing a business book is one way to get the attention of some. But how do you convey your uniqueness, your talents, your hard won business skills in an authentic, approachable and deeply connective way?

Ask Phil Knight, CEO of NIKE. In 2016, Knight released a business memoir called *Shoe Dog*, about his long and incredibly difficult climb to the success NIKE experiences today.

Bill Gates called *Shoe Dog* one of his five favorite books a few years ago, sharing that it is, “an amazing tale, a refreshingly honest reminder of what the path to business success really looks like. It’s a messy, perilous, and chaotic journey, riddled with mistakes, endless struggles, and sacrifice.

“Phil Knight opens up in ways few CEOs are willing to do.”

That comment alone shows the power of the business memoir to move moguls. Until he wrote *Shoe Dog*, Knight had pretty much been a man who kept to himself.

According to his author’s page on Amazon:

“Fresh out of business school, Phil Knight borrowed fifty dollars from his father and launched a company with one simple mission: import high-quality, low-cost running shoes from Japan. Selling the shoes from the trunk of his car in 1963, Knight grossed eight thousand dollars that first year. Today, Nike’s annual sales top \$30 billion. In this age of start-ups, Knight’s Nike is the gold standard, and its swoosh is one of the few icons instantly recognized in every corner of the world.

“...At twenty-four, Knight decides that rather than work for a big corporation, he will create something all his own, new, dynamic, different. He details the many risks he encountered, the crushing setbacks, the ruthless competitors and hostile bankers—as well as his many thrilling triumphs.

Above all, he recalls the relationships that formed the heart and soul of Nike, with his former track coach, the irascible and charismatic Bill Bowerman, and with his first employees, a ragtag group of misfits and savants who quickly became a band of swoosh-crazed brothers.

Together, harnessing the electrifying power of a bold vision and a shared belief in the transformative power of sports, they created a brand—and a culture—that changed everything.”

*“Memoir isn’t the summary of a life; it’s a window into a life, very much like a photograph in its selective composition. It may look like a casual and even random calling up of bygone events. It’s not; it’s a deliberate construction.*

*~ William Zinsser*

## WHAT IS A MEMOIR?

A memoir usually revolves around a theme, a memory, even a series of memories. It is rarely an entire, life-encompassing account. Rather, it’s about one significant (to you) event that changed the course of your life, your business, your awareness. The theme is critical - and should

be obvious to you, and the reader. For this to happen that means you limit your memoir to that one subject and the point of it.

Just as you wouldn't tell someone a story in conversation without a point, you don't write a memoir without a moral, or lesson, or insight to offer the reader. "The lesson learned" is the most common theme for memoirs. You don't have to be famous, brilliant, talented, rich, or successful to write a memoir. A memoir can be about a very ordinary existence told with profound insight.

Memoirs are a snapshot, a poignant picture of a theme in your business or professional life. An autobiography is a history or timeline of events in your life, as in, "I got this job and then this happened, and then this happened, and then this happened." While memoirs limit themselves to one subject or theme, autobiographies juggle multiple themes.

Autobiographies, while interesting, are often predictable, and rarely exciting. Readers reach for an autobiography of someone when they want to understand the big picture, or place events on a timeline for whatever reason.

Readers embrace memoirs when they want to learn something not everyone knows, or they want to discover the person behind the company, or business. Memoirs are intimate narratives that share the emotions, thoughts, feelings, fears, joys, and authenticity of a person rather than just the cold hard facts or truth of a thing.

Autobiographies inform. Memoirs take the reader for a ride. They excite, thrill, disappoint, surprise, and create a bond with the reader over commonalities they may not realize they share. There is a time and a place for every kind of writing. If you want to make a strong social impact, a business memoir is the way to go. Why? Because a strong social media presence is critical to showing your customers, clients, and followers that you're a leader.

Just being the CEO, or the founder, leader, or person in charge doesn't necessarily make people see or respect you as a leader. You have to earn or prove yourself. The best, fastest, most powerful way to do that? By being authentic. It's a word a lot of people toss around, but few can actually claim.

## WON'T A MEMOIR ANGER THOSE PEOPLE I WRITE ABOUT?

**Y**ou own everything that happened to you. Tell your stories.

*"If people wanted you to write warmly about them, they should have behaved better."*

*~Anne Lamott*

One of the things both of us (Melissa and Becky) hear from almost every client writing a memoir: "Should I write about my

## Writing the past is never a neutral act.

family, or tell the truth about what happened, or risk my friends and family suing me if I'm honest? What if no one will talk to me again?" It's a real concern and one not to be taken lightly. This is such a common concern a television series was made around the theme.

In 2007, there was a television series called *October Road*, about a writer who became famous for a book in which he wrote about the people of his hometown -- often in less than flattering ways. He returns home to face the people he wrote about -- and to deal with their anger. The show ran for two seasons, and addresses this fear perfectly.

The fact is, telling the truth will "set you free," or "destroy all you thought you had." Either way, you become a better person for it. You don't have to be vindictive, angry or vengeful (we strongly advise against that). But telling your truth about an event can often be very freeing for all involved.

Take, for example, Lisa Brennan-Jobs, Steve Jobs' daughter. Although Jobs denied he was her father until her mother sued him for child-support payments, eventually the two did have a relationship of sorts before he died. In her memoir *Small Fry*, Brennan-Jobs doesn't hold back on stories of his sexually inappropriate comments, or narciss-

sism.

Jobs, she writes, ignored her and kicked her out of family portraits. While she admires his brilliance and accomplishments, her writing holds little sympathy for him as a person or a father. After the book came out, Laurene Powell Jobs, his widow, and Mona Simpson, his sister, denied Lisa's account of her father.

They even went so far as to release an official statement saying, "...her portrayal of Steve is not the husband and father we knew."

While no family, even that of Steve Jobs, is immune to drama, hurt feelings, and poor decisions, ultimately, we tell clients, "It's up to you. It's your story. You can tell it. Not tell it. Tell parts of it, or lay it all out for the world to see and do what they want with." Whatever you decide, it will change you.

Many clients decide to write their "truth," and then not publish it - only to find that the catharsis they experienced in writing it suddenly frees them to share it. Others refuse to even think about it, let alone write about it. Again, writing a memoir is hard because it's so intimate. But that's also why it's so powerful.

We encourage our authors to write the truth for the personal experience and catharsis, and then decide whether to publish. If they do decide to publish their truth, their options are to change the names and any identifying characteristics so the person(s)

aren't recognizable, although that may not be enough. No matter the topic, the impact etc. and the comfort level of the author, it's important to consult an attorney for clarification and your options should you decide to "tell all."

Abby Wambach, a World Cup champion and two-time Olympic gold medalist on the U.S. women's soccer team, garnered unwelcome attention when she "outed" teammates' sexualities in her book *Forward: A Memoir*. Erik Hall, a reporter at The Roanoke Times, a Virginia newspaper, raised the issue in an article in 2016.

It just goes to show that the characters, events, and places in your book don't have to offend the real people. There will always be other sources, people, and media who may express concern. Having an editor or publisher who can help you navigate those concerns is very helpful.

## WHY ME?

**W**hy NOT you? One of the things people learn from writing or reading a memoir is how much we all have in common - whether it's a business failure, a difficult childhood, serial failures, poverty, or homelessness.

It's so common for us to think we're the "only one" who experienced abuse, divorce, bankruptcy, betrayal, addiction, or loss. On top of the shame we may feel about

our shortcomings or outright failures is an even more devastating belief - that whatever it was makes us less of a person.

Stop for a minute. Think about what inspires us most - in movies, books, speeches. It's almost always a story about how someone overcame, persevered, or conquered some hardship, loss, tragedy or life challenge. What causes us to hide and want to die is often the thing that when shared, inspires others to want to live.

Writing a memoir gives you a new perspective about what happened to you, and how you dealt with it. Looking back at that time, event, or circumstances can be very eye-opening and very cathartic. Even if no one buys or reads your book, completing a memoir will be one of the major accomplishments of your life.

Instead of asking, "Why me?" ask yourself, "Why not me?" If your life, work, business, schooling, failing, succeeding etc. have resulted in insights, lessons, or tips others could benefit from by reading your story - then share it.

## HOW TO WRITE A BUSINESS MEMOIR

**N**on-fiction writing is difficult. Writing a memoir is even harder. People can and have written books, even memoirs,

on their own. If you want to write your own memoir, here are some tips:

**Don't begin at the beginning.** That's too predictable. Begin in the middle, or at the end, or wherever it is that makes your heart beat hardest when you start thinking about what you want to say. Think about any movie you've seen that grabbed you from the opening seconds. Those seconds were most likely action, intrigue, or something that captured your attention - even if you didn't know what was happening.

**Don't write chronologically.** This isn't a biography, a resume, a history lesson. This is you. When you meet someone you want to get to know at a party or event, you don't give them a history of you. You share the things you think are most likely to capture and keep their attention. Your memoir should do the same. Share something that has impacted you, changed your direction, launched your company. Follow up with supporting lessons or insights.

**Know your intended audience.** People who enjoy a good story enjoy a good memoir, no matter who wrote it, or what industry you're in. But it helps to know who your intended audience is. Maybe it's people in your industry, or it's other business people. It may be focused on things entrepreneurs would find helpful.

**Write thematically.** You can only write one autobiography. But you can write hundreds of memoirs.

To start, think of at least six of your life's most significant moments. They can be anything. YOU are the one who determines what those moments are, why they are significant, what you learned from the experience, or how it was part of who you are and what you know now.

There really aren't any limits to the key point you'll be trying to make. It just has to come from the heart and attempt to capture all of the essential elements that turn a memory into a story. There's no pretense in the words that a memoir is life itself. The theme binds the memories together.

You need to find that binder. For some it might be a childhood experience, or a college professor, joining or leaving the military, getting married, having a child, losing your first pet, being bullied, starting your first company, making your first dollar, losing everything, winning. For some it's a spiritual or emotional awareness - looking up at the stars and realizing how big the universe really is.

The "theme" of a memoir is something you can sum up in one sentence, like an elevator speech about your life. What will the reader learn from your memoir? What's the "big idea"? What will the reader walk away from reading your book with? What will they learn? The answer to that will help you understand the theme. It might be:

"My memoir is about betrayal and learning to trust again, after my first business part-

**The Truth ambushes us  
in our memoirs in ways that  
forever change us, if we  
let it.**

ner conspired to take my idea and business away from me.” Or, “My memoir is about:

- Accepting change.
- Entrepreneurship.
- Adjusting to a new life or position.
- Becoming a CEO or leader.
- Bullying.
- Betrayal.
- Love in the corporate world.
- Racism.
- Sexism.
- Changing careers.
- Coming of age in the business world.
- Competition.
- Determination.
- Discrimination.
- Greed.”

**Don't Rush it.** Some people take years to write one chapter of their memoir. Others pump one out in a month. Don't worry about time.

In fact, it's better to take your time when you start writing. Finding the right pace gives you time to write, revisit, and think about what you've learned. In many ways writing a memoir is similar to psychotherapy.

You bring up the facts, memories, emotions and share them (writing). Then you deal with the emotions, fears, panic, and other thoughts that come along with addressing the memories. Depending on the event and how you've dealt with it since it happened, this process can take hours, or months.

**Tell the truth.** You don't need to embellish or lie. It's your story and there is no

test or quiz anyone is going to take.

You're the only one who needs to “approve” it. How well you tell the truth will determine how authentic the story happens to be. That's why honesty will always be the main element of a memoir.

The moment a writer starts embellishing the facts is the moment trouble begins to happen. Not only does it ruin the credibility of the story and the author, but it destroys the writer at the same time.

A reader who discovers deliberate or crafted lies in a memoir will not trust that person any longer. That said, the fact is, we don't always remember everything in exact detail, especially if several years have passed since the event.

We tend to forget a lot of the bad, or give it more power than it actually had. There are flashes and glimpses of what happened, as well as the final outcomes that have affected us. It's better to put in as many real details as possible and fill in the gaps with some additional research rather than try to make things up along the way.

**Tell the Story in Your Voice.** Every writer has a voice. Even bad writers have a voice.

It is this unique way in which they convey thoughts to readers. A “voice” means the words you use, your sentence structure, grammatical use, and other language elements. Once you’ve read several works from the same writer, you can identify future works by that writer whenever you encounter them. This is the voice that must be discovered in a memoir. It isn’t “right” or “wrong,” but it must be yours.

There is no right or wrong writer’s voice to use. There’s also no real way to develop a personal writing voice until you actually sit down and begin to write. Once that happens, you’ll discover sentence rhythms which make you comfortable. You’ll see certain language quirks begin to show up. Even specific images or parables will be used on a fairly repetitive manner.

**Write in first person.** Most memoirs are written in the first person. First person means saying, “I remember this,” or “I did \_\_\_\_.” It’s a story told from your point of view. This means there are going to be a lot of singular pronouns that are going to be used.

What makes writing in first person a little tricky is that it can come off as feeling a bit preachy if it isn’t done correctly. It naturally creates a separation between the reader and the author when there is a clash of ethics, morality, or even wills. This is where having a memoir writing coach, developmental editor, or other professional can be extremely helpful. Not only can they help you find and develop your voice, but they can keep your

writing sounding inviting and humble rather than arrogant and preachy.

### **Invite the reader into the memory.**

The goal of your memoir is to share the experience or memory you have so that the reader learns, or at least understands what you’re sharing. This is where memoirs are so difficult. By sharing a significant memory you often open yourself up to criticism from readers that often feels profoundly personal. While there will be people who attack and criticize you, there will be more who are deeply grateful for your courage.

**Have something worth saying.** While you don’t have to be famous, rich, or even an expert, you do need something that makes your memoir stand out from all of the other memoirs out there today. Did you take a trip, experience something most of us never will experience?

Simply being lost in the woods for a week or month or longer can be the foundation for an excellent memoir - something you were thrust into. Do you have expertise that others do not have? Were the experiences in your life something that could teach everyone something new?

The goal of a memoir is ultimately to make sure everything is all about the writer’s memories, and the point they’re trying to share as a result. It’s what they remember, what they thought, and what they learned. If the author can make it important to the reader and their growth or experience, then the

reader will see it as being important as well.

**Outline your memories.** Since memoirs are about your memories, you'll want to keep track of each memory as best you can - preferably before you start writing. Make a list of the significant memories you want to write about.

Think about each memory, each moment, and what it meant to you. Why was that moment perfect? Was there a mistake made? What would you do differently? These little snippets will become the backbone of each moment your memoir offers.

The elements of a memoir will always include these key points. This is what connects writers to readers when discussing the moments of life that are important. Include them and you'll be able to begin creating something memorable.

This is only the tip of the iceberg when it comes to writing a memoir. If you want to learn more, contact us. Memoir writing is challenging. Business memoirs, are especially hard to craft.

Because your business memoir is about you, and your brand, your authenticity, and the connection readers will make with you, it's important to walk through your book with an expert - people who understand not only the writing process, but the branding, marketing, and launch process. That's what we do, and we'd like to help you with your book.

## How To Craft the Business Memoir for Optimal Impact

**A Powerful Corporate + Social Presence = Optimal Impact**

YOU have a memoir in you, one that tells people you're a thought leader with the experience, lessons, and insights of a leader. Isn't it time you shared what you know with people, companies, and corporations who will appreciate it?

### Optimal Impact Leader Package

**Ask us about our \$3,500 comprehensive Optimal-Impact Package that contains:**

- A positioned professional eBook
- A strategically designed LinkedIn Profile that showcases your book and provides you with author status.
- A search-engine optimized lead magnet for your book that will help you gain new prospects who can turn into clients.

[Get this three-part package](#) that showcases you as the authentic, transparent, leader that you are today. Note that we are limited to three packages per month due to the time it takes to produce these deliverables. Contact us today for a no-obligation conversation where we will help you determine if this unique package is right for you.