



The Importance of Pleasing Ourselves in Our Writing

Sometimes it pays to think of yourself before others. Many of us grew up with the Golden Rule etched into our psyche. And most of us would probably like to think we follow that rule as often as possible. But when it comes to writing, the Golden Rule isn't of much use. In fact, it can be downright dangerous to our careers, because if we're trying to please others in our writing, then we're probably in grave danger of snuffing, or at least damping, our creative spark.

I once mentioned the necessity of "writing for ourselves" to a fellow writer.

"You can't write what other people want," I insisted. "You can't let yourself be pressured into meeting the standards and expectations of others. You have to write what *you* want."

She looked at me slightly askance. "What happened to pleasing others before yourself?"

I understand the quandary. People like to please people—not only for altruistic reasons, but for the simple fact that when we give others what they want, they give us what we want—respect, adulation, and warm fuzzies. Pleasing people is usually way more fun than not pleasing them. But it's also a speed bump on the road of creative vision.

Back in the days when no one read my work, it was a simple matter to write a story. I'd plop down in my desk chair and simply start putting words to the pictures and voices in my head. No muss, no fuss. I just wrote the story the way I expected it to be, because I didn't have to worry about meeting the expectations of others. But as soon as people actually started *reading* what I

wrote, the fun backyard ball game suddenly morphed into an intense chess match.

Even scarier, people (some people, anyway) *liked* what I wrote. And I liked that they liked it. So, naturally, I wanted them to keep on liking it. Instead of writing with an audience of one (or, maybe I should say, an audience of one and One) in mind, I started trying to see my works-in-progress through the filter of what I thought were other people's expectations. How would So-and-So perceive this scene? Would he get the humor? Would he appreciate the drama? Maybe Such-and-Such likes genre fiction too much to appreciate this literary section? Maybe Mr. Doe likes literary fiction too much to even bother reading this rip-roaring adventure sequence?

Ultimately, it's a useless and destructive habit. I can't please everyone, no matter how much I try. And if that's my sole focus, then I'm definitely not going to be pleasing myself—which pretty much sucks the joy and the passion right out of my work anyway, leaving both me and my readers with an anemic, sluggish piece of writing that isn't worth the time of their reading or my writing.

This goes for revisions too. I'm a firm believer in constructive criticism, and I seek it whenever possible from qualified readers. But even the most qualified of criticism isn't always right. Ultimately, the author is the only person who can compare his artistic vision with the project itself and decide how they match up and what needs to be done to perfect it. It's easy, in our desire both to please others and to better ourselves, to give in to every whim of every critiquer. I admit I sometimes feel guilty for ignoring people's advice. But if their opinions don't match up with the vision *I* have for my story, then I have every right to ignore it.

I'm sure my gut feelings aren't always right. Undoubtedly, certain stories would have been better off if I hadn't rejected the advice of others. But I also have no doubt that if I ever surrender my stories, against my own wishes, to the direction of another, then whatever the result—be it good or bad—won't be *mine*. And if isn't mine, then it probably wasn't worth writing.



About the Author: K.M. Weiland grew up chasing Billy the Kid and Jesse James on horseback through the sand hills of western Nebraska, where she still lives. A lifelong fan of history and the power of the written word, she enjoys sharing both through her many fictional stories and her novel, *A Man Called Outlaw*. Visit her blog "Wordplay" to read her take on the writing life.

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