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Finding the Right Agent

by Dan Poynter

Your mission is not to find an agent, it is to find the *right* agent. Do you want an advocate or a gatekeeper?

Some literary agents have a passion and a track record for certain kinds of books: cooking, travel, children's, business, parenting and so on. To find the right agent for your manuscript, simply match the Work to the agent.

Look on that shelf in the bookstore where your book will be. Check the Acknowledgement pages of similar books; some authors mention their agent. Locate and call authors of works similar to yours. Ask who their agent is.

Agent Patti Breitman, (John Gray, *Men are from Mars* and Richard Carlson, *Don't Sweat the Small Stuff*), is a confirmed and renowned vegetarian. When she was new to the business, she attended many vegetarian conferences and let people know she was looking for manuscripts. After she sold a few, the word spread in vegetarian circles. Now, Patti represents the founder of People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals, Ingrid Newkirk (*You Can Save The Animals*); the founder of Physicians' Committee for Responsible Medicine, Neal Barnard, M.D. (*Foods That Fight Pain* and *Food for Life*), the 4th generation cattle rancher turned vegetarian who got Oprah sued, Howard Lyman (*Mad Cowboy*) and several others.

Today, Patti receives several queries and proposals for vegetarian books. As she is not taking on many new clients, Patti must sometimes decline the chance to work with even the best vegetarian authors. Then she will suggest other agents and encourage the writers to persevere, as she shares their passion.

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"It's harder for a new writer to get an agent than a publisher." — Roger Straus, president, Farrar, Straus & Giroux.

At writers' conferences, try this non-threatening way of approaching agents: Do not ask an agent to read your manuscript. Place them in a more objective position by saying, "You are an agent and know most of the other agents. I realize agents have a track record in certain types of work. Which agents would you recommend for this manuscript?" You will be astonished at the positive reaction you get.

Good agents specialize. Successful authors know where to look for agents.

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