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Author Profile – J.T. Kirk: *Confessions of a Hiring Manager*

Q: Why did you decide to write this book?

J.T. Kirk: Back in the late 1990s, I wrote an article that addressed what hiring managers wanted to see in cover letters and résumés from job applicants. I was frustrated with seeing so many ill-prepared candidates over the years applying for positions for which they were qualified, but who failed to understand how to “pitch” themselves in their cover letters, résumés, and interviews to the needs of the hiring manager—so many candidates were making the pitches all about them and not what they could do for me, my team, and my company.

Shortly after that article was published, a technical professional society asked me to present a workshop at its national conference on the subject of getting hired. After presenting workshops at local, regional and national meetings, I decided the best way to disseminate this information was to write a book based on my experience in hiring manager positions in several industries and across technical, marketing, and communication disciplines.

Q: Do you have any secret writing tips you’d like to share?

J.T. Kirk: I think one of the best writing suggestions I can offer other aspiring authors is to become an avid reader in a wide variety of subject matter: fiction, non-fiction—it doesn’t matter. My upstairs home office is loaded with non-fiction books while our library downstairs contains about an 80/20 split between non-fiction and fiction, respectively. Both my wife and I are and have always been avid readers, and it’s rare when one of us isn’t carrying around a book we are reading.

Besides rounding out your knowledge, reading exposes you to different types and levels of vocabulary that eventually makes its way into your own writing style, and contributing to the development of your own unique writing voice.

Every Christmas, I make it easy for people wanting to get me something—an Amazon.com or Barnes & Noble gift certificate always makes me happy. In fact, I joke that if I ever won the Powerball Lottery, I would use the money to take it as far as I could to clear my shopping cart of the books that are in there...

Q: Tell us a quirky or funny story about you!

J.T. Kirk: Obviously with a name like “J.T. Kirk” I’d have to be a *Star Trek* fan. Many years ago when I was in college, my mother asked me “why do you fill your head with such useless trivia about a TV show?” She never knew it would pay off for her one day.

About 15 years later, I was out with friends after work, and the club where we were at was holding a trivia contest. Whenever the occasional *Star Trek* trivia question was asked, I had all the answers to the arcane questions, and won the prizes. The grand prize for the evening was an expensive Wilson tennis racket (I played tennis at the time) and \$200 cash. The final trivia question for the grand prize happened to be a very obscure *Star Trek* question, but I did answer it correctly and won the grand prize.

I kept the tennis racket and sent the money to my father with the instruction to “take Mom out to dinner and tell her it was on Captain James. T. Kirk of the Starship Enterprise...”

Q: Have you ever battled writer’s block? How do you deal with it?

J.T. Kirk: Actually, no; writer’s block has never been a problem. Mine is just the opposite: too much information wanting to jump out of my head and onto the computer screen. For me, writing is sometimes like herding cats. It takes a disciplined effort—and sometimes a supportive wife to tell you to “focus, focus”—to stay the course and stick with the current project at hand rather than want to try to keep more than one book project moving forward at a time. I can handle ancillary writing projects, such as article syndication, blogs, web site updates, and so on, but driving one major writing project at a time is the only way for me to ensure it gets finished on schedule.

Q: What’s your favorite quote?

A: It’s hard for me to pin down one favorite quote, as I think most people have one for different situations. Here are my favorites:

“Come! Come! Why, they couldn’t hit an elephant from that dist....”

Last words of Union General John Sedwick (1813-1864), peering over the parapet at the battle of Spotsylvania after being warned of Confederate snipers

“Hard work must have killed someone...” (on a plaque in my office)

“Bring me a bowl of coffee before I turn into a goat.” J.S. Bach (which indicates the role coffee has in my life—and had in his!)

“The happiest people are not those who have the best of everything but those who make the best of everything they have.” (Unknown)

Q: Who inspires you the most?

J.T. Kirk: As a group, teachers. The responsibilities many of them assume go so far beyond the classroom. They selflessly touch the lives of children in different ways oftentimes because parents have abdicated their authority, concern, and love for their own children to teachers.

Secondarily, any person who quietly and without fanfare makes personal sacrifices in order to care for the health, education, and welfare of others less fortunate anywhere in the world. From the small country church minister tending his flock to the aid worker in a third-world country trying to recover from some disaster; truly, the noblest of callings.

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