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How to Survive Your Own Jealousy

By Dr. Kathleen Begley, Book Author and Professional Speaker

Note to Readers: Here's another offbeat e-update on business communication and current events from Write Company Plus, a corporate training firm located outside Philadelphia. In respect for your busy schedule, writers and editors have arranged seven at-a-glance ideas at the end of this article. Skip directly there if you lack the time to read the entire document.

I hate Marley. And everything that stupid dog stands for. If you read books, watch television, scan magazines, go to the movies, or pay the faintest attention to popular culture, you undoubtedly realize that Marley is the yellow Labrador retriever immortalized in the book "Marley and Me."

The movie version, featuring megastars Jennifer Aniston and Owen Wilson, came out on Christmas Day. The whole thing sucks. If you knew what a big dog lover I am, you might be shocked by my extreme hostility for Marley. If the truth be known, it's not the dog. It's the author: John Grogan.

Gently put, he stole my idea.

Back in the 1980s, while living in Tampa, Fla., I got my first dog. I found him wandering pathetically in a field in late winter, apparently abandoned by snowbird owners who decided to return to their homes in Michigan, Ohio or Pennsylvania without him. His hair was so matted and dirty that it took an hour-long bath to uncover a pure white coat. Although I had never had a pet before, it took me all of five seconds to bond irrevocably with Max. He had me the moment he put his head in my lap and directed his eyes soulfully at mine.

A few years later, I was so besotted with the one-time stray that I wrote a proposal for a book about our relationship. I called it "Me and Max," and sent it to a dozen publishers in New York. I received rejection after rejection after rejection saying a book about a dog had too limited an audience and, therefore, was unmarketable. No way, I was told, would the public be interested in a sappy tale about one individual's pathetic codependence on an animal. Several editors implied that I should get therapy or, at least, a real life. Having had an earlier book published by Putnam in New York and named as one of the best books of the year in its category by the American Library Association, I was devastated.

Fast forward several decades and Grogan submitted my "Me and Max" idea to publishers. Thinking I was a complete idiot, he barely disguised my title except to change the dog's name and flip the pronoun. And now he's a stunningly successful author. And I'm not. Obviously, the success of "Marley and Me" has caused me unbelievable angst. So far, despite recommendations from numerous friends, I have refused to read the book or see the movie. Why rub my own nose in the Alpo?

Have I mentioned yet that Grogan and I both worked at one time for the Philadelphia Inquirer? Or that I named Max's younger brother Marley before the celebrity version was even born? Or that Grogan and I share strict Catholic upbringings, which he has now immortalized in a second book named "The Longest Trip Home." Please, please, please, dear God, don't let that one be made into a movie, too. I splutter with envy even as I type.

Although my someone-else-succeeded-where-I-failed tale of woe is extreme, I suspect the basic experience is fairly common. Have you ever, for instance, felt frustrated when a business colleague got credit for a suggestion that you made a month earlier? Or a neighbor managed to



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sell her home at full value two weeks after you cut your asking price by 35 percent? Or a college classmate landed a job at a company five days following your receipt of a rejection letter saying there were no openings?

I hope you answered “yes” to at least one question – or maybe I really should sign up for therapy. Anyway, here are some rock-solid ideas for handling such slaps in the face. Obviously, I have had years of simmering and stewing over “Marley and Me” to put this list together:

Listen to yourself. In my younger years, I repeatedly squelched my own ideas in response to negativity from perfect strangers. Is that insane or what? Had I persisted with “Me and Max,” maybe actress Meryl Streep would have spent last year playing me instead of that over-the-top mother-of-the-bride in “Mamma Mia” or that wacko lip-pursing nun in “Doubt.”

Understand timing. If you’re creative, you’re often going to find yourself out of sync with popular thinking. To be frank, you may be so ahead of the curve at some points in life that no one understands you. My advice: shove most of your ideas into a drawer to be reviewed 10 years later once they have become popular.

Believe your cheerleaders. Throughout my communications career, I’ve had the fortune to know a handful of people who continually affirmed my talents and ideas. Unfortunately, I tended to turn down the volume on their comments, and increase it on the nay sayers. As far as I know, some of the editors who rejected “Me and Max” may now be in insane asylums. Or so I can hope.

Acknowledge the luck factor. Psychologists increasingly say that success hinges as much on random fortune than on anything else. To some degree, you need to hope that when your ship finally comes into the harbor, you will not be waiting at the bus station.

Keep trying. Continuing your quest for a better job, a happier life, a nicer house in no way guarantees a positive outcome. But stopping definitely ends any chance to see your dreams come true. The only value of giving up is that you’ll be 100 percent correct in predicting your own failure.

Look for the humor. I’m hoping you realize that I really bear no ill will to author Grogan, whom I’ve never met despite our commonalities. My falsely accusing him of plagiarism is my way of trying to debunk my stark raving jealousy – which is unconnected to him, even if the frequently stabbed voodoo doll I named in his honor may tell a different story.

Un-demonize your victim. As I was finishing this column, I happened to notice a USA Today story about Grogan and his new dog Woodson. A gift from the movie producers, the Marley-lookalike was diagnosed with severe congenital hip and leg problems several months after wagging his way into his new home. When the film guys learned about the near-crippling ailments, they proposed to take the dog back and provide a replacement. Suspecting Woodson would be euthanized after the exchange, Grogan graciously but adamantly refused the offer. He said dogs were not disposable commodities. John, I take it all back.

Dr. Kathleen Begley owns and operates Write Company Plus communications training. She has written seven books and gives corporate seminars on topics such as writing persuasively, presenting confidently, and managing positively. You can call her at 610-429-1562 or e-mail her at KBegley@writecompanyplus.com. She responds to everybody. If you feel you’ve become too busy to ever read this free, opt-in e-update, please tell us to remove you from our mailing list. We’ll cheerfully delete you.