

## How I Built My Book Coaching Business



# from from lost lawyer and empty-nest mom to Author and Thriving

# **Book Coach**

**Featuring Suzette Mullen** 



Hello! I'm **Jennie Nash**, the founder and CEO of Author Accelerator.

Our mission is to lead the emerging book coaching industry. We do that by training, certifying, and supporting book coaches as their build their own businesses. We've certified more than 200 coaches -and counting! They are out there doing incredible work helping writers bring their dreams to life.

We're excited to present a behind-the-scenes look at the journey of one of our certified coaches.

If you read this story and think, "This is my dream job!" we'd love to tell you more about our program.



# Author Accelerator Featured Book Coach



#### Suzette Mullen

This is Suzette's story of going from being a lost lawyer and empty-nest mom to publishing her first book and building a thriving book coaching business focused on LGBTQ+ memoir writers.

Suzette's story is about grit and determination, and finding the strength to build a career she loves.



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## **BEFORE BOOK COACHING**



Before book coaching, I was an attorney, a stay-at-home mom, a social justice advocate, a college application essay coach, a freelance editor, a community volunteer, and a new memoir writer.

I began my career as a corporate lawyer. Each day an inner voice whispered to me: *Not this, not this.* Cryptic, perhaps, but I knew what the voice meant: I had chosen the safe path of corporate law, despite knowing it wasn't for me. **Though I was only twenty-six, I felt as though it was too late to change course.** Three years later, I was battling infertility and I left the law.

Eventually, I gave birth to two sons. As a stay-at-home mom, I threw myself into various volunteer projects: fundraising, writing grants, drafting newsletters, and serving on nonprofit boards. Most of these projects used my writing, editing, and research skills. At the same time, I was writing creatively: journaling, writing vignettes, going to writing conferences, writing classes, and reading,

I was immersed in the world of language but lacked direction and a mentor. Also, I lacked the courage to commit, to just go for it, whatever it was. authoraccelerator.com



I was a fish out of water, for the most part, struggling to find my way professionally.

My close friends seemed to be stepping fully into their lives, and I felt as if I wasn't. I envied those friends and the glow on their faces when they talked about their work—and I so badly wanted that glow for myself. For decades, I felt as if I'd been wandering, searching for purpose and what I was meant to do with my life. I wondered if it was too late. I wondered if some people got to glow and some didn't.

When my nest was empty, I was determined to find out if I could live my next chapter differently, if I could find that glow for myself. I always did my best thinking with a pen in hand, and one day, I closed my bedroom door, curled up in a chair away from distractions, and opened my journal.

# What do I feel compelled to do right now and what could I give up?

# Memories flooded my mind...

My first byline, an article I had written in 1978 for my local newspaper .

My mother, an elementary school teacher, asking me to edit the narratives she wrote for her students' report cards.

The joy I'd experienced helping my friends' children find the stories they wanted to share in their college application essays.

How I couldn't rest until I'd corrected a misplaced apostrophe.

A letter my father had written me asking him if I was going to be a writer.

The three-ring binders in my closet stuffed with outlines for books I'd never written.

How my college friends had called me "God's editor."

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An inner voice, the same one that had whispered, *Not this, Not this* to me decades earlier, resurfaced, this time saying,



Of course. Why was I making this so complicated? Writing my own story and helping other people write theirs felt perfectly aligned with my gifts. This was my chance to redeem the safe choices I'd made in the past, to put my stake in the ground, to finally say yes to my deep desires. I had no idea, then, what the path would look like but at least I had a direction for the first time.

Two days after that inner voice whispered, an acquaintance emailed: "I need an editor. Do you know anyone?" I couldn't believe it, but this is what happens when you don't force things, when you simply allow yourself to listen to what is within. It almost felt too easy, but maybe that's what life is like when you are living in alignment. This was the winter of 2013. I didn't know the term "book coaching" at the time (did book coaching even exist then as a profession?) but looking back now, I realize that this was when I landed my first book coaching gig—corralling nine writers who were coauthoring a nonfiction book. I jumped in with both feet and helped turn a very messy project into a manuscript that was pitch-ready (and did get published).



A PERSONAL WRITING COACH TO COLLEGE & BEYOND



Discover how Your Story Finder's unique "seek, shape, share" process can be customized to meet your writing needs.

#### Launching my first side hustle



Over the next few years, I did some freelance editing and honed my story-finding skills (and made some decent money) as I grew a business coaching high school students through the college application essay process. At the time, this paid work was very much a side gig.

It left me with plenty of time to focus on my own writing, which as you will see, literally changed my life.







My "you're a writer and an editor" epiphany in 2013

Applying to the Southampton Writers Conference and completing a two-week memoir workshop with Mary Karr

Hiring my first writing coach who eventually referred me to Jennie Nash, in the fall of 2014

Hiring Jennie Nash for some consulting work



Completing an early version of the Author Accelerator Blueprint

Drafting a memoir with the working title *What Do You Do?* 

Becoming Author Accelerator's first official

book coaching client in

2015

Writing a scene in March 2015, about a very vulnerable moment I experienced with a long-term female friend.

That moment became the "inciting incident" for my memoir *The Only Way Through Is Out* 





# What were your goals? (including for your own writing)

My goals were to step fully into a professional identity ... instead of sitting on the sidelines. I finally had a direction that felt right for me; editor and writer. I didn't have any concrete goals on what I wanted to accomplish on the editing side other than just leaning into that identity and seeing where it would take me. From the writer side, I knew I wanted to write and publish a memoir. Initially I thought my story was about my struggle to answer the question, "What do you do?" and the factors holding me back from finding more joy in my life.

#### What were your worries?

I was worried that I would spend my life wandering and searching for the work I was meant to do. I worried that I was wasting my life and my gifts. That I would never figure out a satisfactory answer to "What do you do?" In the early years after I listened to my inner voice about writing and editing, I felt happy and satisfied. A few years later, I was looking for something more. Coaching high school students didn't feel big enough.



#### What did you know you were good at?

I knew I was good at editing and helping people find their deeper story. I could see that from the very beginning as I worked with the nine writers and then later with high school students applying to college. This work came intuitively to me ... and it was fun!

#### What were you feeling?

When I wrote or edited other people's work, I was often in a flow state and that felt fantastic.

#### What was your income around that time?

It was nominal, "play money."

#### What were your feelings about money?

At the time, I was in my early fifties and was in a financially secure marriage. I didn't need to make money to pay the bills, although after having been away from the paid workforce for many years, it felt really good to be paid for my work—to have tangible evidence that people valued what I did.

### C H A P T E R



## **BECOMING A BOOK COACH**



## **BECOMING A BOOK COACH**

In 2017, I came out as LGBTQ+, got divorced, moved to a new city where I knew exactly one person, and began thinking of myself as an entrepreneur instead of someone with a casual side gig. Soon, I formed an LLC, landed on a name for my business, and began marketing my services for the first time.

At the time, my coaching services primarily centered around helping high school students craft compelling personal statements for their college application essays. I loved helping these young people dig deep to find the story they really wanted to share and the self-discovery that ensued as part of this process.

"Story-finding" was my gift and became the inspiration for naming my business: Your Story Finder.

This work with high school students was enjoyable—and lucrative—but I began to feel as if I was meant to work on bigger projects, specifically full-length memoirs. I was writing a memoir myself and had worked with several Author Accelerator book coaches. I thought, *I can do this too and I don't need to pay for training.* In the summer of 2019, I launched a beta version of a small group coaching program for memoir and nonfiction writers and soon discovered what skills I intuitively possessed as a book coach—and what skills I still needed to learn. That's when I decided I did need training, and invested in the Author Accelerator Book Coach Certification Program and leveled up my expertise.

In February of 2020, just weeks before the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, I had an epiphany: I wanted to go all-in professionally on two things: book coaching and my memoir, which meant letting go of the college essay consulting work. This was exciting—and scary as the essay consulting work was my primary source of earned income. But I found the courage to make this leap, much as I had found the courage years earlier when I left my safe, comfortable life for an unknown future.

#### For a New Beginning

In out-of-the-way places of the heart, Where your thoughts never think to wander. This beginning has been quietly forming, Waiting until you were ready to emerge.

For a long time it has watched your desire. Feeling the emptiness growing inside you, Noticing how you willed yourself on. Still unable to leave what you had outgrown.

It watched you play with the seduction of safety And the gray promises that sameness whispered, Heard the waves of turmoil rise and relent. Wondered would you always live like this.

Then the delight, when your courage kindled. And out you stopped onto new ground. Your eyes young again with energy and dream. A path of plenitude opening before you.

Though your destination is not yet clear You can trust the promise of this opening: Unfurt yourself into the grace of beginning That is at one with your life's desire.

Awaken your spirit to adventure; Hold nothing back, learn to find ease in risk; Soon you will be home in a new rhythm. For your soul senses the world that awaits you.

- John O'Donohue





Suzette Mullen is the founder of YOUR STORY FINDER LLC, which provides book coaching to women who want to write books that transform people's lives. Suzette's superpower is helping women dig deep to discover what matters to them and then helping them effectively communicate their stories.

Suzette is a founding board member of The Lancaster LGBTO+ Coalition and lives in Lancaster City with her partner. Wendy, and their rescue pup. Lucy.





A CANCEL STATE



Suzette Mullen, Your Story Finder

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A couple of weeks after I closed my essay consulting business and threw myself into the Author Accelerator course and practicums, the world shut down because of COVID. A big part of me was like: *What have I done? How can I possibly start a new business NOW*?

Soon, the universe responded in a way that let me know I was on the right path. One of my practicum clients hired me to help polish her sample chapters. Soon thereafter, she got an agent, and later a book deal for her memoir, *Life Next Door to the Unabomber*.

A business coach referred a memoir writer to me, who referred another memoir writer to me.

My story-finding skills sparkled in this new context. *I'm damn good at this,* I realized. *Not everyone can do this.* 

Seeing story and helping shape story came naturally to me. And seeing this in action with these first few clients made me realize that I had finally found the work that I was born to do.

Does this sound like you? Learn more about becoming a book coach



Shortly after I was certified by Author Accelerator, I received three referrals for nonfiction book projects and began working with those clients. They each purchased a \$6000 blueprint + proposal or drafting package. Two writers ultimately self-published, and the other got an agent, with that agent stating that my writer's proposal was among the best he'd ever read. That felt so good!



One of my first book coaching clients



### C H A P T E R



### LEVELING UP MY BUSINESS



Suzette (bottom middle), Jennie Nash (top middle), and memoir writers

At the end of 2021, I was looking for a way to distinguish my book coaching business from all the other memoir and nonfiction coaches out there. An obvious answer was screaming at me: focus on serving LGBTQ+ memoir writers!—but I was reluctant to narrow my niche and bombarded with doubts . . .

What about all the straight writers I love to serve? What about the prescriptive nonfiction writers I had had so much success with? What if no one hires me? What if I'm called out as an imposter because I'm relatively new to the queer community? What if ...? What if ...?

At the Author Accelerator Coaches Goal Setting Retreat in November 2021, with the support of Jennie Nash and my fellow coaches, I once again found the courage to make a big leap. I niched down to focus on serving LGBTQ+ memoir writers.

The result?

Much greater clarity and ease in my marketing and a 2022 income that was nearly \$50,000, 2x the income from the previous year!

# How I leveled up my business

I began putting processes and systems in place and hired help



I invested in 17 Hats, a Customer **Relationship Manager** software



I hired a bookkeeper

I hired a queer graphic designer to refresh my logo and create other branding materials to reflect my focus on LGBTO+ writers

I hired a queer parttime VA





I invited a small group of writers to become founding members of Write Yourself Out

Linvested in more

business coaching

I planned a 2023 memoir retreat with

two Author

Accelerator coaches

I led two 6-week

courses for LGBTO+ memoir and nonfiction writers

I participated as a coach in the Author Accelerator Nonfiction Incubator and discovered that I LOVED the small group collaboration and partnering with other coaches



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At the same time that I was building my business, I queried my memoir manuscript (again!), got a book deal with the University of Wisconsin Press, and revised my manuscript ONE MORE TIME. I delivered the final draft to them in December of 2022.

# Whew. 2022 WAS a big year.

My creative and writing life aligned beautifully with my coaching work.



All the lessons I was learning as a writer—the emotional ups and downs, the struggles to get clear on what my story was REALLY about and how to ultimately structure that story, and the pitching process—were there for me to share with MY writers. To let them know I had been in their shoes. To let them know that I had done this thing that they wanted to do ... and that I would show them how to do it too. Of course, it was difficult to find the time to do it all. And how to find this balance was also something I shared with my writers.

The power of deadlines. The power of accountability. What it takes to put your butt in the chair and write vs. doomscroll on social media.

Suddenly everything I was experiencing as a writer was content to share with my clients and prospective clients. **Suddenly, my writing life and my coaching life felt perfectly aligned.** 

#### C H A P T E R



## FRUSTRATIONS AND ROADBLOCKS



The hardest part of making the shift from writer/freelancer to book coach/entrepreneur was the learning curve.

I had never run a business before and didn't consider myself "a numbers person." In fact, I hated numbers and math ... isn't that why I became a writer? I had always been the "A student," the person who excelled at whatever they did, and I absolutely did not feel like I was excelling at business.

I hated feeling like a beginner. I hated feeling like I didn't know what I was doing. Later, I came to see that this was perfectionism at work and that perfectionism had played a major role in keeping me playing small in my past professional life instead of playing big.



Story-finding came easily to me, but running a business did not. There were times—many times—that I got hung up on comparisons with other coaches. EVERYONE else seemed to be making more money, getting more clients, and having more client successes than me.

However, I never seriously considered throwing in the towel that had been my M.O. in my previous life—quitting when things got too hard.

In my new life, I have learned that I am capable of doing hard things. When things got tough or I needed counsel, I turned to my trusted colleagues in the Author Accelerator community where I learned that EVERYONE experienced some of the same struggles I was experiencing. I bounced ideas off of colleagues. I felt supported and connected. So I invested in business coaching through Author Accelerator.

Just like no one writes a book alone, no one runs a successful business alone.



Leading a writing retreat

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I did my best to do the next right thing for my own business and stop comparing my coaching journey to others' journeys.

#### C H A P T E R



## FINDING MY ZONE OF GENIUS

# WHAT IS THE ZONE OF GENIUS?

Jennie Nash describes the Book Coaching Zone of Genius like this: **"You are working in your Zone of Genius when you are doing work that lights you up, that you know is solving a problem for your clients, and that they value highly enough to pay you well enough that you can keep doing it.**" This is her depiction of it:



### **MY ZONE OF GENIUS**

Once I decided to focus on LGBTQ+ memoir writers, I needed to decide how best to serve them.

I recognized that in addition to my story-finding skills, my zone of genius included building and nurturing a writing community. The Author Accelerator Goal Setting Retreats in 2021 and 2022 helped me clarify my Zone of Genius.

My mission is to amplify LGBTQ+ voices and bring more LGBTQ+ stories into the world.

## **Creating LGBTQ+ Courses**

In 2022, I ran two short-term courses for LGBTQ+ writers (one under my own brand and one for an LGBTQ+ non-profit), and I also participated as a coach in the Author Accelerator nonfiction proposal incubator.

I absolutely loved the collaborative aspect of the group work and the synergy that occurred inside the group. I'd leave every coaching call totally energized. I wanted to do more of this ... and what that meant was doing less 1:1 coaching and charging more for the 1:1 clients I did work with.

I got the word out about my niche by updating my website. By changing my intake form. By directing my marketing efforts to reach this community. By networking with other coaches and people in the LGBTQ+ space. By writing guest blogs and pitching essays. By being a guest on podcasts.





I first felt the power of working in my Zone of Genius when I ran the two short-term courses in 2022: **Write Yourself Out** Foundations (under my brand) and OUTWrite Authors (in partnership with the Pride and Joy Foundation). What I felt was this: THIS is what I want to spend my time doing. THIS is the best use of my gifts and is the most aligned with my mission. The next step was to figure out how I could continue to serve these writers in a longer-term capacity and at an accessible price point.



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Once I had clarity about my Zone of Genius and the writers I wanted to serve, it became easier to say no to clients who fell outside that Venn diagram. I set up an intake form that made it clear who I served and who I didn't ... and also the price points for my services. Note these two questions:





If you are interested in 1:1 coaching or group coaching, have you seen the coaching fees linked to the "Work with Suzette" page on yourstoryfinder.com?

The only answer that can be checked is "Yes" and if you don't check yes, you can't complete the form. Those questions are specifically designed to weed out writers who either are not aligned with my values and/or not aware of my fee structure.
I still gave myself permission to work with non-LGBTQ+ writers whose story or mission aligned with my values: Case in point, Sarah Wells, CEO and founder of a multi-million dollar company that makes products supporting breastfeeding parents.

I took Sarah from idea to Blueprint to proposal to pitch plan to agent to book deal to finishing the manuscript for, *Go Ask Your Mothers: One Simple Step for Managers to Support Working Moms for Team Success*, Coming August '24 (Matt Holt Books). She was a dream client and the type of client I would like to continue to work with.

I was able to work with clients like Sarah AND build an LGBTQ+ group coaching and mentorship program that includes four robust online courses because I said no to other clients who were not a perfect fit.

In the past year, I've not only said no to some prospective clients, I have transitioned several existing clients over to other Author Accelerator coaches when we've reached a logical stopping point in our coaching relationship. Truth be told, that's felt hard at times ... but I've done my best to make positive new coaching matches for these writers. I've done this because I know that I have to create more space in my schedule to serve the best-fit clients I currently have and those who will come my way in the future.

Opening space in my schedule also allowed me to work in my Zone of Genius as one of three coaches for Mainely Memoir, a unique, high-touch coaching intensive and retreat for women memoir writers, this past fall, which was a huge success! Plans are already underway for Mainely Memoir 2024.



Presenting at a conference



# Write Yourself Out

I raised my 1:1 coaching prices when I opened the **Write Yourself Out** group coaching and mentorship program in Spring 2023 and raised them again this fall. I raised my prices because it felt aligned with my mission and values to have a lower-priced alternative for writers with my group coaching program, and to reach my income goals, I knew I had to raise my 1:1 prices because I'd be working with fewer 1:1 clients. I have limited space for my Clarity Intensives, which are VIP Blueprint experiences, and even more limited space for ongoing Strategy & Accountability packages and manuscript evaluations. In a perfect world, I'd have 30–50 writers inside my Write Yourself Out group coaching and mentorship community and work with no more than two 1:1 writers at a time.

My income in 2023 is on track to be similar to 2022's income, which is not surprising because 2023 turned out to be a year of transition and building a new thing. With the launch of my memoir, *The Only Way Through Is Out,* in February 2024, and a year of **Write Yourself Out**, my group coaching program, under my belt, I expect my income to increase substantially in 2024. The splashy big wins are awesome, like my client Sarah getting a book deal for her business leadership book or pulling off an incredible retreat for nine memoir writers. And the quieter, everyday wins are huge too. The LGBTQ+ emerging writer who almost quits because her family wants to silence her voice but instead reaches out for support and finds the strength to continue. The memoirist who is tempted to give up but instead finds the courage to revisit her manuscript when she hears crickets while querying. The new writer who wonders if they have a story worth writing ... and who is willing to do the work to find out. The bonds that are growing day by day inside **Write Yourself Out** as writers learn to trust and support each other.

I'm overflowing with gratitude that this is the way I get to spend my days.

#### C H A P T E R



# MY CURRENT BOOK COACHING ECOSYSTEM

# MY IDEAL CLIENT

My ideal client is a member of the LGBTQ+ community who wants to raise their voice to be heard and understood, to inform and educate, and also to offer support, hope, and understanding to others who are navigating similar challenges as a queer person living in this world.

#### Their pain points are:



They don't have time or don't know how to make the time to write

They really want to write their story, but they're also afraid of judgment and of hurting other people. It's scary and hard to be so vulnerable

They feel overwhelmed by the task in front of them. They've never written a book before, at least, not like this! They don't know what's involved.



They've been waiting for the "right time" to start their book—and the right time never seems to come.



They've received conflicting advice and don't understand publishing



They've patched together free resources but have no process to support them for the long haul



#### MY SIGNATURE PROGRAM

In **Write Yourself Ou**t, my signature program, my clients say hello to accountability, long-term professional support in a judgment-free zone, and a step-by-step process designed especially for queer memoir and nonfiction writers to go from idea to publication.

This program includes the following:

Total cost of \$4,000

1:1 strategy session

12 months with options to continue

Available payment plans

# Write Yourself Out

Fills in gaps in their knowledge Creates sustainable community

Teaches time management skills Encourages exploration in a judgment-free zone

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## **MY PRICING**

I've done my best to make the program accessible by keeping the price point where it is and also by offering payment plans. I've been tempted to lower the time commitment from 12 months to 6 months but I know it takes more than 6 months to make meaningful progress on a memoir.

#### **MY FUNNEL**

When writers sign up for my free Write Out Loud newsletter, they get access to an exclusive 5-step Memoir Roadmap that shows them how to face their fears, manage their time, and beat overwhelm.



#### MY DEBUT MEMOIR



I wrote *The Only Way Through Is Out* for every human who is longing to live out loud—including LGBTQ+ folx crushed by oppressive religious institutions; women at midlife who have deferred their own dreams; empty nesters who have stayed in unhappy marriages "for the kids"—every person who longs to live more authentically but is afraid of the cost.

#### **LEARN MORE**

#### **MY IDEAL READER**

#### Women Coming Out Later in Life/LGBTQ+

LGBTQ+ readers—young and old, out and closeted—are hungry for more stories by and about people who have struggled with the decision—and the subsequent cost of living authentically.

#### Women at Midlife/Empty Nesters

Many of my ideal readers are women at midlife who have long put the needs of partners and children ahead of their own desires, thinking it was selfish to put themselves first. This ideal reader has both the space and privilege to step back and examine her life. She is willing to ask the big questions: who am I now and what am I meant to do with the time I have left? A subset of women at midlife are contemplating

divorce. The numbers of over-50, so-called "silver" or gray," divorces have doubled since 1990. With women initiating seventy percent of all divorces, the data suggests that more and more women are not settling for the status quo.

**Readers Who Are Spiritual, Not Necessarily Religious** My readers largely identify as spiritual, but not necessarily religious, a growing segment of the population. Some of my readers have been burned by conservative fundamentalism, particularly those readers who identify as LGBTQ+, and some are unchurched. What they do have in common is a belief in something bigger than themselves and a longing to live more authentically. In short, my ideal readers long to live bigger, more authentic lives but they are afraid of the unknown and the potential cost of authenticity.

My story will give them hope, inspiration, and encouragement that it's never too late to live authentically.

It's never too late to say yes to your life. It's never too late to live out loud. It's never too late for a new beginning. It's never too late to write a new story for yourself.

#### C H A P T E R



## WHAT COMES NEXT

## **MY GOALS**

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Stories can change hearts and minds. Many of the queer writers I work with have been traumatized in the name of religion, shunned by family members, subjected to conversion therapy, and more. Their stories need to be told and heard. I hope to help flood the world with stories like these to inspire people to see all human beings as worthy of love and respect.

The future I envision for myself and my business is spacious and purposeful—and not consumed by hustle.



I want to inspire a storytelling movement that leads to a world where every human is loved just as they are.



In concrete terms, I'm hoping for a successful launch of my memoir and increased visibility because of it. I'd love to write and publish at least one more book. I've already begun Blueprinting\* my next memoir tentatively titled *After the Leap.* 

I'd love to grow **Write Yourself Out** into a thriving community of 30–50 LGBTQ+ writers who are raising their voices, writing their stories, and becoming published authors. And I'd love to serve a select number of 1:1 clients and lead retreats for LGBTQ+ writers in addition to continuing to co-host the Mainely Memoir writing retreat for women memoir writers.

I'm so grateful for my third act—a life of book coaching and writing—and I can't wait to see what the next few years will hold!



#### LEARN MORE ABOUT ME

Thank you for reading. I hope you were inspired and encouraged by my book coaching journey. You can learn more about me, my services, and my book at <u>www.yourstoryfinder.com</u> and follow me on Instagram @urstoryfinder.

-Suzette Mullen

Suzette's Book

Suzette's Instagram



If you are inspired to start your journey to becoming a book coach, I encourage you to learn more about Author Accelerator's Book Coach Certification Program and book coaching community.





## **Author Accelerator**

