

EPISODE 118: 5 TYPES OF BAD REVIEW, AND WHAT TO DO ABOUT THEM – WITH MOLLY MCCORD

Speaker 1: Two writers. One just starting out, the other a bestseller. Join James Blatch and Mark Dawson and their amazing guests as they discuss how you can make a living telling stories. There's never been a better time to be a writer.

James Blatch: Hello and welcome to the Self-Publishing Formula podcast with Mark Dawson and James Blatch and this is a third and final episode we're recording in person at the London Book Fair, which is why you can hear a bit of hubbub in the background and if you're watching on YouTube, you can see the Amazon stand behind us.

Mark Dawson: Oh, it's me.

James Blatch: Look at that.

Mark Dawson: A big picture of me.

James Blatch: What do you think of the brushstroke effect?

Mark Dawson: I don't know. But I know Amazon mentioned that foot traffic is down since my picture is plastered on the side of the stand. So, sorry about about that, Amazon. Sorry, Jeff.

James Blatch: Who else have you got? I think Rachel Abbott is on one side of it. Rachel's stranded in Guernsey. She can't make it.

Mark Dawson: Alderney.

James Blatch: Alderney. Okay.

Mark Dawson: Rachel Abbott, she's been on the podcast before and lives in Alderney and it's been too rainy for them to land at the airstrip. So she's stuck there and Louise Ross is here and Joseph Alexander. He's also been on the podcast. He's been on the panel with me this morning and then tomorrow and the next day. So yeah. Fun.

James Blatch: So the way these fairs work, I mean, they're pretty old. I don't know how long this book fair's been going, probably since the 1930s or something.

You get the big publishing companies who will do deals while they're here, sign authors in some cases and do rights deal, although Frankfurt's more of a rights place, I think.

Up here is the more modern aspect of it, happened in the last few years. It's called Author HQ, been a bit writer-centric. So some of the sessions that take place here are practical sessions on social media advertising, marketing your book.

Mark Dawson: If only there was a course about that.

James Blatch: I don't know whether you've touched on the subject of reviews, negative reviews, how to deal with them in any of these sessions that have ever been asked.

Mark Dawson: No, no one's asked me that that I can remember, certainly not today anyway. But no, it's something that comes up.

James Blatch: It is something that comes up and it's something that every author has to deal with, right?

Mark Dawson: They do, yes. Bad reviews are part and parcel of the territory. So I thought I'd read a couple out.

James Blatch: Oh, have you got some?

Mark Dawson: Yeah, I've got loads.

So Jake, hello, Jake, if you're listening. Jake says, "Boring and very difficult for me to understand a lot." That says more about you than me, Jake, and where's another one?

"Too much gang violence. Started out strong with a compelling character. I discontinued reading it. Not for me."

So those were actually quite nice bad reviews. I don't know how many reviews I've had over the years. It's in the thousands, certainly and luckily, most of them are very nice, so fours or fives.

But I've had plenty of one star stinkers and I remember the first one I got was crushing and really knocked me for six and doubted my ability as a writer. Confidence was knocked.

But then you realize after another one comes in and another one comes in, you either look at them or you don't look at them or you compare them with the better reviews that you get and over time, it's something I can laugh about now. It isn't something that bothers me too much. It comes with the territory, as I said. You have to expect them and you mustn't let them knock you.

Just get back on the horse again and carry on.

James Blatch: Today's podcast interview is specifically about bad reviews and how to cope with them, but also with Molly McCord. She helps you categorize them so you understand what type of review they should fall into

and that will help you decide what to do about it, which might be, as Mark says, ignoring it. It might be taking on some of the advice.

There's a handout that goes with this. If you listen to the interview, you'll find out the link to go to for that. So let's hear from Molly now.

Molly, welcome to the Self-Publishing Formula podcast. It's really good to have you on. I know you're in sunny Florida. Because it's so sunny, all the curtain's are closed. But it looks dark.

You're in a nice part of a hot world.

Molly McCord: Yes. It's wonderful to have the sunshine every day and to be able to get outside, to take a break from the writing desk. I can't complain

James Blatch: And I've just found out that you live on the space coast. You're at Cape Canaveral with the rockets launching in your back garden almost and I'm very jealous.

Molly McCord: Yes, and we can see them from the back of our house, which is really amazing. So it's a pretty exciting place to be right now. There's a lot going on here.

James Blatch: We will try and catch a launch next time we're in Florida.

First of all, why don't you tell us a little bit about you and your writing before we move onto the main topic of our conversation.

Molly McCord: I think I have a story that many authors can relate to in terms of the starts and stops of a career.

I started my first book in 2008 and at that time, there, of course, was nothing online in terms of Kindle, platforms or anywhere to go and so I was going through the typical process of trying to find an agent and I had

rejection and rejection and rejection and that paused what I was doing because I thought, "Is this really gonna happen?"

I actually took some time off from writing and lo and behold, eventually the Kindle platform came available years later and I finally had the ability to take it forward on my own and to really put it out there, which is exciting and scary.

But I thought, "I can finally really do this," and so it wasn't until 2013 that I published my first book and I launched it. It was called *The Art of Trapeze*. It's a travel memoir and I had been writing other books in the meantime.

I had started all these other books and just thought, "Well, somehow the road is going to be clear. Somehow, I'll know what to do with all these," and so I published and I ended up launching that first book three times and I was doing a lot of research to figure out how do people get out there?

How do you get a book out there these days? Because, especially back in 2013, what were the options? What were you supposed to do?

I researched it and I found all the various ways to advertise online and eventually, I found BookBub.

It was actually really crazy how this happened. But I had not been watching my sales and I saw that my book had risen up in the charts and was right behind *12 Years a Slave* in memoir section and somehow it was appalling to me because I thought, "I haven't been marketing."

So word of mouth helped get this first book out there and then from there, I was able to secure a BookBub ad and then that just helped bolster a lot of things.

The game is different these days. It's not 2013. But we all know how influential BookBub can be and we all know that there's a lot that goes into being an author, including the importance of reviews.

I have since published 12 books. They're all nonfiction titles, memoir, travel, inspiration, self help and I've learned a lot and so I hope that this topic today on bad reviews can just help people understand more about how to categorize it or deal with this part of our professional world.

Because being an author is one of the few professions where you really are required to get reviews to be valid and to be successful, I guess. I couldn't think of any other professions, James. I don't know if maybe you can, where you have to have these reviews to demonstrate that you're legit.

James Blatch: Yeah, no, no. That is a tough one. I mean, there are reviews around. But famously, some actors, notices they call them, I think, in the acting industry.

Famously, some of the older actors just never read their notices. They don't need them. They don't want them. They can upset them. They find it emotionally difficult and they can do without them.

But that's not the case with authors. As you say, your reviews are a part and parcel of your marketing and the validation, that you know that your potential readers are going to check them. So you've got to be aware of them as well.

There's no real avoiding them, is there?

Molly McCord: There isn't and there's an expectation of reviews. I, as a reader, expect to see reviews. You expect to have that community

feedback and so it's a really interesting world that we're in as authors because we need them and yet, they can be really difficult at times. So I guess I'd like to help other authors kind of feel more confident with those bad reviews as they pop up.

James Blatch: We'll get into some of that in a moment, the psychology. I'm also interested in the fact that you're making a career out of nonfiction because we do talk to lots of fiction authors and the nonfiction authors are fewer, not not there.

But they're fewer and it's a question Mark gets asked a lot as a fiction author and we talk. He gives out a lot of advice and help and people often say, "I'm writing nonfiction. Is the sort of thing you're talking about, does that work for nonfiction as well."

So perhaps we could have a quick bite from you on that subject, the whole sort of Facebook advertising and the BookBub you talked about, all of this works for nonfiction?

Molly McCord: Nonfiction is different and I work in a lot of smaller genres that don't have the same robust marketing behind them, such as fiction authors, of course Mark, all this work with the series, the different series. I don't have that in my arsenal.

I have to do very specific advertising on Facebook, for example. I have to really cultivate relationships with my readers, who I know are advocates of what I'm sharing or saying and asking for their word of mouth. I can't even advertise some of my books through the typical email newsletters, for example because there isn't that defined audience out there.

Now I do believe that audience is actually out there. But it's not the same. You don't go through the same process to find them as you do for fiction.

So nonfiction's very ... I actually think of it as very exciting because it has a lot of potential. But you have to work to find it. I use AMS, Amazon Marketing Services. That has really been the best for nonfiction in my experience.

I have a travel book on Paris and seeing the best in Paris and AMS has worked well for that. But I have to find these sub-target markets. It requires more work. So it's definitely a lot more to it, I think, to be a nonfiction author these days.

James Blatch: I think that's true. When I'm typing out my replies to people who often ask us, particularly in relation to the courses that we produce, do they work for nonfiction?

I often find myself pointing out that one thing that all fiction authors have in common is that their market are readers. They're people who read books.

But that, funny enough, weird as it sounds, is not the case with nonfiction.

Your market is people who have problems and they are looking to solve a problem or answer a question and that's a different type of marketing and a different type of person and a different audience from fiction.

Molly McCord: Absolutely because you could say that fiction readers are looking for an escapism, if you will, whereas nonfiction readers are looking for a reality check or something to help them right here and now.

The way to monetize that, I have found, is to really be developing more services for those people that find your book so that you can make money off of, say, another online program or class or one on one coaching and that, I think, is really the best model these days.

That's how I actually make a living is more of the one on one than the book sales are the starting point. So there's ways to be creative with this and you just have to have different expectations because it is a different genre to be working with right now.

James Blatch: That's good to have that little snippet and maybe when I have you on again, specifically we'll talk about nonfiction and how to address that and I think that would be a really useful episode, actually.

Perhaps I'll talk to Mark. We did a nonfiction series some time ago, when the podcast was a baby podcast. But it could be time to revisit that.

Anyway, let's move on to this psychological thing that is the review and everybody loves it when you read a five star review.

And there's nobody on earth, whatever they say to you, who's completely unmoved by reading a hurtful one star review, right?

Molly McCord: Right. It can be that punch in the gut. It can be blindsiding. It's typically emotional and you find yourself maybe, I can only speak for myself, you find the emotional stuff coming up and then you maybe want to squash it with an intellectual understand and reasoning.

It's hard and I think the other part of these bad reviews is that they're public and you think, "Well, if I had a job and I was speaking to my supervisor at my 9:00 to 5:00, this would be private and it would be between the two of us."

But this is public and, frankly, that can be one of the hardest things, psychologically, to deal with is the public bad review and so I feel that as authors, again, we're in this unique role of, well, we have to be detached and of course, we know everyone's entitled to their opinion. How many times have we heard that? But there's also this sense of, but this is my work or this is my passion.

This is my contribution to the world and it's hurtful when you get that feedback and I think it's important to deal with it at that human level too.

James Blatch: In other words, it's inevitable that people are going to take it personally because it's a bit of you.

This is a creative endeavor, right?

Molly McCord: Absolutely and I think especially those first bad reviews and so we could even break this up into saying, "Well, if you're a new author versus if you have a few books under your belt, it has a different effect."

But that first book and that first bad review, it gets to you and I remember my first one. I actually was in a restaurant with my husband and I was scrolling on my page, my book page, just to see if anything was happening and I remember reading this bad review and I thought ... and I was just so blindsided and perhaps as my own being naïve, but of course, the bad review would show up. But it really got me and I felt so caught off guard and I've been in many author groups where authors say the same thing. They were blindsided.

They didn't realize it and I think that it's okay when you have that experience to just sit with it because part of being a professional author is understanding your own experiences of this whole journal and it's the stuff that comes up along the way that's private and that you deal with that helps you get stronger and we all have our own unique process with that.

But it's also a good idea to be a part of these author groups to get the good feedback. I mean, there's many author groups out there right now that when you have a bad review, the authors are going to come forward and they'll be able to commiserate. They will help lift you up.

You don't have to be in it alone and so I think that's important too for the support of it.

James Blatch: That's a great thing about this community and we can't say it enough, really, how that supportive nature of the self-publishing community, it's a lifesaver for some people and we've experienced it here.

I mentioned on a podcast a few podcasts back that we had a fairly vitriolic attack on the way that I do my interviews and so on and we always banter a bit, me and Mark at the beginning as well. I mentioned it. But probably subconsciously mentioned it because I knew that I'd get some support from people and I did.

People wrote to me and emailed and said, "I just want to tell you you do a great job." I'm not asking for this again. But it meant a lot to me at the time and I, whether deliberately or semi-subconsciously, reached out to the community to get a bit of a bolster at a time when you've taken a bit of a kicking and that's just my personal experience.

For our Facebook groups, our communities, that is there for you.

There are people who know where you are, how you're feeling and want to do their bit to raise you up again.

Molly McCord: Because you could feel vulnerable. You can feel hurt. You can feel pissed. I mean, everything can come up.

But just know that you're not the first person and you need to hear that feedback because it will help you move through it faster.

I think the other thing that comes up is that you start to hear from authors how they deal with it and that helps you figure out how you're going to deal with it too and there's also another sense here that, well, congratulations. You've arrived. You're officially valid once you have had

someone publicly or privately even give you this kind of feedback. There is a sense of, you've made it because now you're real. You have another side of the coin to consider with your writing or what you're putting out there.

James Blatch: We should differentiate, I suppose, constructive feedback, which can obviously be an important part of being an author and you need to be able to take that kind of critique, if you like and I guess that can come from readers.

Mark has mentioned that some people have said to him sometimes it's technical, slightly scary comments, like, "That's not how the Glock 9 millimeter works," and he goes, "Oh, okay. You're right. It isn't. I have to change that."

Sometimes, it's a kind of dismissive, "Nobody would act like that," and I think Mark's sanguine enough to think, "Maybe there's a point there."

There is a differentiator here between the kind of person who just says something negative and the person who gives something that could be useful to you.

Molly McCord: Absolutely and something that I created is five different types of bad review to help myself categorize it and we could just go through those now if you wanted.

But I feel like right away, there is something that I've just called it's a valid bad review, which means that your target market, your target reader, they like your work.

But there's something about maybe this book that they had something off for them or they want to actually help you improve going forward. Perhaps their word choice isn't the best. But there's something that they're giving you that's meant to be constructive criticism and that kind of a "bad review"

can be, say a one star or a two star or maybe it's a three star and I don't think a three star is actually a bad review. That could be a neutral review.

But they're giving you something useful to consider and maybe it doesn't feel that way right away. But after you digest it and think about it, you say, "Oh, sure. Well, that makes sense and I didn't think about that. Okay. Got it. Moving on."

I think that kind of a bad review is what you're talking about too, James, is that sense of, "Well, there's something good in here. It just is coming out as a negative review."

James Blatch: You get taught in your first couple of hours of any kind of management school of how to deliver negative feedback and there's a clever way of doing it. But there's a reason there's a clever way of doing it is because we're humans, all right?

If you just bluster into somebody and tell them everything that's gone wrong and walk out the room, what are they going to think?

But if you say to them, "I loved everything you did yesterday, really loved the way you're moving forward, got a couple of things for you just to ..." Suddenly, it's a lot more palatable. But the guy or girl who's writing on the Amazon review may not necessarily want to sugarcoat it. So we should be aware of that.

Molly McCord: Right. Yes, I think that's a brilliant point because. Maybe they don't even realize what exactly they're saying or how it's coming across.

I mean, there's the whole spectrum of human communication styles to take into consideration. The other thing that I think is important to is that my philosophy at least and I just offer out there, is I believe the author has the

full book to say what they need to say and that reviews are really for readers and so, yes. You'll read your reviews.

But it's okay to have a playground for reader to say what they need to say and to have that just be something you can step back from.

We've heard the stories about authors who have responded to bad reviews and that never goes well and there's also stories out there of authors who respond to good reviews and that can also work against you because a reader might not want you to respond or might not expect that.

I feel like there's something to be said about the fact that if you could just allow reviews to be for readers and to give yourself some space from that, just feel okay that there's nothing for you to say or do to massage it, if you will.

James Blatch: There's a slight tangent. We should also acknowledge that this is quite a modern phenomenon because of the internet.

Authors got letters on the odd occasion from somebody who went to the effort to tell them that they didn't like their book. But they would have been few and far between.

Today, it's easy and my kids are 14 and 12. So they're growing up in an age where somebody got something critical to say about you, it's on your phone in a moment.

Maybe they'll be better equipped to deal with this than our generation who are suddenly being exposed to it.

Molly McCord: And you look too at how everything has progressed online for readers and authors and it's more commonplace now to write a review and to submit a review, whereas when it was first a novel thing, it was just a different experience. You can say, "Oh, I can say anything I want."

I feel like maybe we've become a little bit more sophisticated in, "Well, I'm only going to say certain things online," or, "I don't want that to come back to work against me."

I feel like even the world of reviews these days, fingers crossed, is a little bit more sophisticated and moving in that direction so that when people do post certain reviews, they have an idea for what is really beneficial to the readers and the authors and what is just mean and nasty.

James Blatch: You mentioned you've categorized reviews into the five categories. I don't know because one option here for you, and I'm speaking on the fly in the middle of the interview, is if you had the opportunity to put, perhaps, a PDF together with these five, would that be something you could do for our audience? That would be superb because I think people would love to have a little handy guide of how to categorize them and maybe a line of how to deal with each one.

Molly McCord: Absolutely. Yes, I can do that. No problem.

James Blatch: That would be super, Molly.

Should we have a quick look at them then now?

Molly McCord: Yes, let's go.

Number one being that valid bad review that your target reader, target market and they have feedback for you and it is what it is.

The **second** kind of review is highly opinionated and this is the person who either they love it or they hate it and when they hate it, they just really hate it and that's how they are in the world or that's how they are in anything they experience.

Maybe it's emotional charge or passion and they have a lot to say on the topic. Perhaps you're writing about something that they're an expert on or a topic that they just really couldn't get into.

The highly opinionated ones are those one star reviews that really go into long paragraphs of information and I think that's just understanding, well, this is a person with a lot to say and that's who they are. So I think highly opinionated is a key one to understand.

A **third** one is I think the hardest ones to take are the personal attacks and the personal attack is where it's not even about the book. It's about you. It's something who either perhaps knew you when or knows you now or they have a score to settle with you.

The personal attack is something that's very real for authors and I've heard many stories in author groups about the personal attacks they've experienced. These are the ones that hurt the most.

But these are the ones too that aren't even about the book and so one thing I want to call out here is to understand that Amazon has their community guidelines and you should look at what their community guidelines are because these are the requirements for reviews and you can review it to say, "Well, does this book review even match what Amazon is requiring in a review process?"

I know just recently you and Mark did a show on the reviews and it's important to know that Amazon has, and I'm speaking specifically about Amazon, but they have two customers here. They have the reader and the author.

It's in their best interest to ensure that both sets of customers are happy and so what you can do is simply call out in an email if there's a violation of their community guidelines and just say, "This review is actually more about dada da and it's not about the book."

You have to include what the review is, perhaps the date and the title of the review and then send it to Amazon's community group without expectation because we can't expect bad reviews to be removed. But this has worked.

It is something that's worked for some authors where this isn't even about the book and Amazon can see that and they see that it's disparaging or harassing or they have a list of things that they require.

I want to offer that to authors as something to just see if you have a review that's not about your work at all. This might be one way to have that review removed.

James Blatch: That's a good differentiator between the opinionated review, number two, your category, which is somebody, who, perhaps doesn't even consider the author as a person or feelings, is looking at the body of work, which is probably fair enough, even if they go into excruciating detail of why they disagree with everything and number three, which is and often is this person doesn't know what they're talking about.

It's something dressed up as a review of the book, but feels more personal and you can tell from the use of the language that it really is aimed at the author, rather than explaining what they felt about the book.

Molly McCord: And this can show up, I think, especially in nonfiction categories because you could be dealing with a topic that maybe it's volatile for some people or there's something that they really are unhappy with you.

I've actually seen on my newsfeed someone, a connection of a connection, this woman was really proud of the one star review she wrote that was scathing to the author and I was just appalled that she was so proud of it.

But she was really proud of the fact that she could personally attack somebody publicly.

Unfortunately, those personalities are out there and I think that you as an author have to understand your rights with it. I also think that it's important to know that Amazon has, of course, guidelines for a reason and things they have to follow. But they're also savvy and so are readers.

Readers are intelligent. Reader actually understand when these reviews are ridiculous and hurtful. Readers know. So understand that too that if it's clear to you, it's probably clear to other people too that it's a different kind of review.

James Blatch: It could ultimately start affecting your work if you do struggle to take an objective look about this or a contextual look at some of this stuff.

I've known, my time as a BBC reporter, I've got to know a couple of politicians and I know there are some politicians who are not as good professional politicians as they could be because they couldn't cope with the criticism from the newspapers, which goes with the territory in that job.

But it was very difficult for me to say to them, "Do you know this is tomorrow's chip paper," we call it in the UK because they use newspapers to serve chips in. Tomorrow's chip paper and the people reading it, the good point you just made is it's not like everyone sits there reading this review, a bad review and agrees with every word of it in the same way that they don't agree with the tittle tattle in the newspaper. But that's not always how it feels to you, of course.

Someone's put it out there and I think that's what people are thinking.

Molly McCord: And that's a great point and I think the other side of the coin here is that sometimes these highly opinionated reviews or the bad reviews

or the personal attacks, it actually helps qualify your target reader and they'll say, "Oh, everything they didn't like about this book, I think I might like," and I've had readers tell me that too.

So it doesn't just work against you. The one star review, the two star reviews not only demonstrate validity that many different types of people are reading your work or in your book. But it shows that, oh, well everything that this person doesn't like, I love about books. So it can work for you too. So be sure and see the other side of the coin as well.

James Blatch: Shall we move onto number four?

Molly McCord: Yes, let's do it.

This one is what I call a spam review, which is simply that it doesn't make sense and there's been an increase in these lately, especially for really popular books.

Spam reviews have nothing to say. They're just ridiculous and you're like, "How does this review even get posted?" I actually saw a review on one of my books recently that was only emojis. There were no words. I was like, "I left them wordless." They just left emojis.

And that's because people are looking on their phone.

James Blatch: Do you speak emoji? I'd have to ask my daughter to decipher it, I think.

Molly McCord: Well, this one was pretty clear. I mean, it wasn't even a bad review. But it seems spammy because it was only emojis and I thought, well, this is the territory we're moving into when everyone's on their mobile phones and we're used to texting.

You can just leave a silly spam review. So be aware of those and I know those affect your overall book ranking. So you're aware of those.

You don't want spam reviews and so that's another kind to be aware of and perhaps you can reach out to Amazon's community to see what they do around those review and these can also be the trolls. These are the people that just write ridiculous reviews and you're just like, "What is this? This has nothing of context or content to offer." So spam reviews are prevalent these days.

James Blatch: The sort of review that says more about the person reviewing than it does anything else.

Molly McCord: Yes. Yes, it does.

James Blatch: Okay, so that's number four, good old spam.

Molly McCord: And then the **fifth** and final one is I'm just going to call it what it is and I'm going to call it an idiot review and this is the person who writes something that is so borderline hilarious that it doesn't even make sense and you're just thinking, "Why did they even write this?"

It's actually kind of entertaining or funny. But it's still a low ranking review and I've seen these too where you're like, "What is this person talking about?" Or they'll even start the review by saying, "I didn't even read this book. But I could tell by the title that I disagree, dada, dada," and you're like, "Who are you?"

So these reviews are out there. The idiot reviews are out there and I think that it is worth seeing, again, what Amazon might do or what their guidelines are for these kinds of reviews.

James Blatch: Yes, that's the classic one. We used to get that in the BBC occasionally, a letter saying, "I haven't seen the program myself. But I think it should be banned." At least watch it. There are all sorts out there, right?

That's the other thing that brings us about to that point about the internet is we are now exposed to a very wide range of personality types.

Molly McCord: Oh, it's so true and it's people that you would never come in contact with. But they have access to the internet and they have access to a computer and they can say what they want to say.

I have heard how Goodreads can be a really hard place for reviews because they don't have the same initial requirements as Amazon, meaning now Amazon has imposed a minimum of a \$50 purchase before you can write a review. But some platforms don't have any requirement.

People can create fake accounts and say anything they want to say, which could affect the book's reviews in Goodreads. So there's all these different platforms out there and I find that as I've written more books that I actually don't pay attention to my reviews as much. I don't feel that it always is worth my time. I do check on them, of course.

But it isn't something I give a ton of attention to for each book and that has helped set me free I think as an author to return to what am I writing for and what is this really about and how is it truly benefiting or connecting with readers.

Because that's where I write from and that's what I want and I think that's what a lot of authors want too is that this is your creative process and so come back to that as a point of strength for yourself and remember why you're doing it for you and to not stay too focused on the bad reviews because they do come with this territory and this profession.

James Blatch: **Is that an experience thing, Molly, just over time?** You've got more work, more reviews and you've had the experience, been there and done it that you don't feel that you need to pay such attention to and I'm thinking of people listening to the podcast.

You may be in there first, one or two books, getting the first one or two reviews. It doesn't feel possible for them at that stage, perhaps, to ignore them or not pay that much attention.

Molly McCord: I think it is part of the process. But it's actually something that I started to require of myself as a professional, as a professional who knows that the writing is good and it's going to keep getting better.

I look back on my first works and, well, there's some things I would change. But I feel it's a part of our professional duty to stay strong in ourselves and so if it makes you feel weak, then you have to come back to center or come back to the fact that, first of all it happens for every author.

It's just part of the territory. It's part of what our reality is. But where can you remain strong in yourself and understand that this is an amazing time to be an author.

Just think of everything we're doing as indie authors. Just think of all the options and possibilities and understand that it's self-management. That's part of what this turns into and so if something is taking you down a dark spiral or is just too hard, well then, you have to manage that for yourself.

James Blatch: One difficult area might be for a new author who is finding his or her way with their writing and gets a few fairly consistent critical reviews that do, perhaps need taking onboard and aren't sugarcoated because you can't always dismiss everything, which brings us back on to your earlier point.

There's got to be an ability at some point to deal with what might feel like a crisis.

Molly McCord: Yeah, and that's very real and so I guess I'm not saying don't ignore this feedback. But let it make you better. Let it improve you.

I think what you need to do is two things. You go to someone you trust to say, "Hey, can you look at these reviews and tell me, do they have valid points?"

You need an objective person to kind of tell you, "Well, they might be onto something and that's worth exploring," or, "No, this is just temporary nonsense." You need to have that objective person you trust.

And the second thing is the community groups for authors, to get the author support and feedback because you'll hear stories from other authors who said, "Well, that happened to me and this is what I did about it." So it goes back to knowing you're not alone either.

But I think the other part of being an indie author is that sometimes, we do need to understand that we can improve and there are things that we do need other people to give us feedback on.

Like we were talking about earlier, James, there's people who will deliver that information in a very kind and respectful way and then those reviewers who don't really care about your feeling necessarily.

What I'm saying is that the new authors, you do need to understand that the feedback and the criticism comes with this territory. But go to someone you trust and whose opinions you really value who are going to give you the real gold nuggets here to take forward.

James Blatch: That brings us back to the importance of the self publishing community or the author community. You don't have to be self published.

The author community, who generally, within that, find your soulmates and I now know because we've got our own SPF community.

I speak to so many people who found somebody who they are now very close with and professionally close with. They found them through our community and they'll be those people out there for you. Very important to deal with that and, yeah, and just to underline a point you made in that answer there is that there's no complete insulation from this.

This is not the career to choose if you feel you cannot cope in any way, shape, or form with criticism.

Molly McCord: Exactly and I think that is something that we each have to move through individually that you yourself have to figure out.

It's kind of that giving yourself your own pep talk and your own sense of, "Well, I'm going to improve and I'm going to make sure that I take what's important and I leave the rest."

I feel that so many authors build their own muscles through this profession. You get stronger. You become a better writer. You can allow all this stuff to make you better, to improve you and even if it takes you back or takes you off course for a little bit, it's still your choice to get back in the game or come back and be better and be stronger.

You're never alone with that and I know the SPF community is awesome about providing moral support because there's something universal about the reviews and how it affects you as a writer, but also what you then choose to do going forward with it.

James Blatch: Molly, you've written quite a few nonfiction books I guessing in this area. You've written quite a few actually, I think overall. So is there somewhere somebody can go for a bit more info on the subject. You're kindly going to do a Pdf for us.

Where do they go to get your inside line on this?

Molly McCord: You can find me at mollymccord.online and that's where I share more help and guidance for authors and I really try to remind people that there's such an exciting time to be an author and I hope that's where you feel inspired to continue with your work and your books.

There's so much good stuff out there these days that there is a way forward. Even if you're stuck, even if you're not sure what to do next, there is a way forward because there are those of us who have been doing it for long enough who can help guide you and move you forward.

So just know that you're never alone. I'm honored and I love this program too. I learn so much from you and Mark and I appreciate what you do.

James Blatch: That's very kind of you, Molly, and they're good notes to round out the interview on that it's never been a better time to be a writer and you're never alone.

Molly McCord: Yes, yes.

James Blatch: Have you found any more bad reviews?

Mark Dawson: Yes, I have. Too American Coffee lover.

James Blatch: It's from Salisbury.

Mark Dawson: Ghetto culture rubbish. Dreadful book. I'd give it zero stars if I could. Really, anyway let's leave that.

James Blatch: My favorite review is the one that you occasionally see somebody leave saying, "Three stars because I haven't actually read this book yet."

Mark Dawson: I've seen some reviews where they'll say, "Five stars. Excellent delivery. Thank you, Amazon." You've gotta roll with these punches. You can take the good with the bad. You're gonna get back reviews. It's something you just have to accept.

James Blatch: Molly is a bit of an authorpreneur. Can we say that? Do you like that word? Authorpreneur?

Mark Dawson: I hate it.

James Blatch: You hate it. You hate any kind of cliché word. But she's published a lot of nonfiction. So a bit of a guru, actually in nonfiction books as well. I thought that's really good practical advice.

Just a reminder that you can get that tip sheet to help you deal with negative reviews, to categorize them and deal with them if you go to selfpublishingformula.com/badreviews.

Mark Dawson: Speaking of reviews.

James Blatch: Yeah, speaking of reviews.

Mark Dawson: This a kind of a tenuous link. If you'd like to leave a review for the Self Publishing Formula podcast, it would be very gratefully received. We've got plenty.

But you can go to your favorite podcast service, Itunes being a good one, and leave a review. That would be very kind and bad reviews are also accepted if you think James and I are dreadful.

James Blatch: Too American. Too much gangster violence.

Mark Dawson: Ghetto culture rubbish. Yeah, anyway. Dope.

James Blatch: That's my gang sign. Dope.

Mark Dawson: It was very good.

James Blatch: When I was a kid, dope was the glue you used to put FX models together.

Mark Dawson: When I was a kid, dope ... Anyway. Let's move on from that.

James Blatch: Let's leave that alone.

Have you enjoyed your time at London Book Fair?

Mark Dawson: I have, yeah. It's always fun. I've had people wanting to take selfies with me. Again, which I still think is totally weird.

James Blatch: It's a bit weird and I am actually gonna do it.

Mark Dawson: So yes, there you go, podcast listeners. James is now taking a selfie with us.

James Blatch: There you go. We'll put that up. You've got a dinner tonight with Amazon.

Mark Dawson: I have. I've got a dinner with Amazon, so quite a few Amazonians are here tonight. So it's always fun.

Tomorrow night, I've got a Thomas & Mercer Publishing lunch. Sorry, not lunch, drinks and then we'll be having SPF drinks.

James Blatch: SPF drinks tomorrow. There's no point in me telling about the venue because we'll be gone by the time this happens.

James Sumner, who's a member of the SPF community is a big Manchester fan. So he and I are going to find a pub tonight and watch Manchester lose to Liverpool and that's my evening planned.

Thank you so much indeed for joining us for these three episodes from the London Book Fair. We are traveling the world this year. So if you want to come and meet Mark in person, he'll say hello to either of us.

You can do so at Thriller Fest in New York in July. So that's something like July the 10th, 11th, 12th, around there if you look it up. I think probably on the Wednesday night of that week, we will host a drinks somewhere, probably in the Grand Hyatt or very close to Grand Central Station in New York. If you're within spitting distance of New York, you can get along. We will buy you ... I was gonna say a pint, but whatever. We'll buy you a draft beer in America.

We're also going to be in Florida in September, the end of September at NINC and Mark is going to be at the Romance Writers Association of America. Romance Writers of America Conference in Denver, Colorado. Do you know what dates that is?

Mark Dawson: It's shortly after Thriller Fest. So the 20th, something like that. Google is your friend. I'll be there for three days.

James Blatch: I think New York is a good place for us to ... We'll do that in Florida, definitely. We'll talk about that nearer the time in September. But coming up in July, if you can get along to see us in New York, it'll be great fun to meet you.

Mark, you can hand out some pins because everyone's really excited about getting an SPF pin tomorrow night when they come along because we told you in the podcast that if you come to the SPF drinks, you're gonna get a pin. So you'll bring the pins.

Mark Dawson: I'll bring the pins or maybe I'll forget them.

James Blatch: He's forgotten the pins. You can explain that. I'm just going to tell people you're bringing the pins later. Thank you indeed for watching this week.

I don't know what we're doing next week. We've done three in a row. So I can't remember it's going to be brilliant, I'm sure.

Mark Dawson: Always brilliant. Yes. So thanks for listening or watching and see you next week.

James Blatch: Goodbye.

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