

Why the Hell Do People Read Celebrity Self-Help Books?

Recently, media outlets announced that Lindsay Lohan is writing a book about how to overcome obstacles. The impulse for the book seems to confuse cause and effect; it's as if Hillary Clinton wrote a book on how to handle classified information properly. It wouldn't quite be accurate to describe Lohan as a (soon to be) first-time author, though; she is the author of the many misfortunes she now claims to have overcome. In case the memory grows hazy, let's review: She has been [arrested](#) for drunken driving, reckless driving, and shoplifting, and has done stints [behind bars on at least four occasions](#).

Perhaps Lohan's book will be one page long, or even one sentence: "My advice is not to do anything I did." But it doesn't sound that way. Instead, she told *Vanity Fair* that her newfound maturity (it was just a year ago that her last probation ended after seven years of run-ins with the law) comes from "[allowing myself to accept my faults](#)." Surely contrition would be a wiser response.

Evidently people will never tire of listening to what celebrities have to say, but celebrities, who live in a world of paid and unpaid sycophants (in many cases since childhood), tend to produce advice that betrays this insular environment. Is former *Cheers* star Kirstie Alley, for instance, really the best person to advise us all on "How to Lose Your Ass and Regain Your Life?" After writing the book, Alley [gained eighty three pounds](#), blaming vegetarianism.

Tyra Banks is beautiful outside, but in her 1998 book *Beauty Inside and Out*, the extent of her advice to readers was to love themselves. No matter what? Some people aren't so pretty on the inside, and judging by the work of celebrity reporters, she might be one of them. Staffers on her chat fest "The Tyra Banks Show" called her "[extremely brutal](#)." A contestant on "America's Next Top Model," which Banks hosted, sued Banks and the CW network for \$3 million in a dispute over being booted off the show, saying that [being on the program was "like prison."](#)

At least those books are unlikely to have killed anyone. Other celebrities have ventured into more dangerous ground. In her [book](#), *Knockout: Interviews with Doctors Who Are Curing Cancer—and*

How to Prevent Getting It in the First Place, actress Suzanne Somers advised her millions of fans to reject conventional cancer treatments, (which were based on science), causing the chief medical officer for the American Cancer Society to take to CNN to inform people that “[her medical advice may even cause death.](#)” Somers also [publicly blamed actor Patrick Swayze’s death](#) on chemotherapy, rather than the pancreatic cancer from which he suffered.

And then there’s the now-disgraced icon Bill Cosby. Among many humorously exhortative books that Bill Cosby published was 1990’s [Love and Marriage](#) (nineteen weeks on *The New York Times* bestseller list!), in which he laments his sex-deprived adolescence and goes on to tell us of his successful dating life and how his marriage to Camille Hanks provided him with lasting comfort. “Women simply do not trust people of a foreign sex,” Cosby wrote, and “throughout all the years of my marriage, my love for Camille, like my stomach, has steadily grown.” Dozens of women now say Cosby [sexually assaulted or raped them](#). He is facing several civil suits and a criminal trial in Philadelphia.

Cosby is as much an authority on preserving healthy relationships as the rap artist 50 Cent is about preserving wealth; Curtis “Fitty” Jackson [filed for personal bankruptcy](#) after his debts outstripped his ability to pay. And yet, in 2009 he published [The 50th Law](#), billed as a bible for success in life. In the book, Jackson approvingly quotes Machiavelli: “In my view . . . it is better to be impetuous than cautious, because fortune is a woman, and if you wish to dominate her you must beat her and batter her. It is clear that she will let herself be won by men who are impetuous rather than by those who step cautiously.” Machiavelli, however, did not live in an era when being impetuous meant posting online [the sex tape of an ex-girlfriend](#) and mocking her on social media. This misguided decision led to a \$7 million jury ruling against Jackson.

Self-help books continue to be a multi-billion-dollar industry, and there is vast untapped potential for celebrity entrants out there. Perhaps Alec Baldwin will soon favor us with a book on his favorite anger management techniques. Or maybe Donald Trump will extol the virtues of humility, and Justin Bieber will tell us all how to achieve maturity. Why attend to your local pastor, priest or rabbi when such wise instruction is so widely available?

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