

# Successful Book Signings

by Linda Rohrbough

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I heard about several authors who do a superb job at book signings. One in particular drives from Houston each month for a signing at Barnes & Noble in Denton. All the store does is get a small calendar item about the author in the local paper, yet author George Arnold sells about twenty-four of his books each visit.

This caught my interest. I've been at book signings where I had so many attendees, I couldn't see the faces of the people in the back. And at others where I wiggled on a wooden chair for two hours while potential customers made a wide circle around me.

So what's the secret?

Hand selling. And some authors are masters at it.

Here's how it works.

These authors start by promoting their own book signings. They send a short (one page or less) press release to local publications a month to two months in advance. They prepare for a call from the publication for an article, but they expect, and usually get, a calendar item. And they develop e-mail fan lists and send a blind e-mail when a signing is coming up in their area.

Once in the store, these writers put up material that speaks for them. Sarah Jordan, ([www.SarahClarkJordan.com](http://www.SarahClarkJordan.com)) a best-selling children's book author, has large reviews on foam board standing on her table. Since she's selling a children's book about dogs, she

offers free dog biscuits. George Arnold has a three foot tall stand-up poster of himself holding his latest book. These tools keep working when the author gets pulled away to talk to the customers.

And speaking of George Arnold, when I interviewed him in July, he'd done 36 signings in 2006 selling 958 copies, or just over 26 per signing. Bookstores consider twenty books a day by one author a huge success. George's goal is to beat the odds so his books get reordered in that chain's region and he's invited back. His success prompted Borders suggestion he write a book about his techniques that they promoted with him exclusively for the first year by doing free seminars for authors (that George still does, by-the-way). The book is *Best Seller: Must-Read Authors Guide to Successfully Selling Your Book* (Eakin Press, January 2003).

With an advertising background, George offers seven points for personal (or hand selling) listed in the sidebar. He has other, unconventional advice, such as avoid a two-hour book signing. He often does eight or even ten. "It took me a year to get over the fear I wouldn't sell but three books all day. But I'm not going home until I sell more than twenty books. My average is three and a half books an hour, so if I'm in a store eight hours, I'm going to sell thirty books."

He tells authors don't bring book marks, post cards or candy to signings. These give a potential reader the excuse to walk away saying, "I'll think about it." You want them to know this is a one-time opportunity to get their book signed by the author.

George advises frequent breaks. When he leaves the table, he puts one of his books on a stand with a "Back in ten minutes" sign sticking out of the top. Often, he'll

come back to a group of people waiting. A break is also an excuse to politely get away from someone who wants to monopolize you.

And know who your book is aimed at. While this may sound obvious, George says, “There’s no point in wasting time talking to people who are obviously not prospects. I’m careful not to be rude, but I don’t talk to everyone who might want to talk to me. I’ll even say, ‘You won’t like this book.’”

He says his techniques work due to organization, discipline and perseverance. I see learning to talk about your book to people you don’t know as a form of pitching, one best-selling authors have developed to an art, and a career-long skill for the successful writer.

## **Recap:**

### The Seven Point Guideline to Personal Selling for Authors

from *Best Seller* by George Arnold.

1. Be positioned to intercept. Politely decline any location but one at the entrance where you can catch people both entering and leaving.
2. Be conspicuous in an interesting and tasteful way. If it’s appropriate, a costume can not only attract attention, but give confidence too, as people often feel bolder when disguised.
3. Learn to read prospects. Know your market and target those people.

4. Make contact. Ask a question or start with a charming comment. (If a prospect walks in, you could say, “Hey, I was expecting you at one and now its three thirty. Is everything OK?”)
5. Engage the customer. Ask questions. Put the book in their hands.
6. Listen. Listen. Listen. Listen. Let them tell you a reason they’d be interested in your book. They will if you let them.
7. Until you hear no, the answer is always yes. Ask, “Who should I autograph this book to?” If you get a name, the sale is made.

*Linda’s Biography:*

*Linda Rohrbough has been writing professionally since 1989 and has more than 5,000 articles and seven books to her credit. She’s received awards in both fiction and nonfiction, including three national awards. Her book, Weight Loss Surgery with the Adjustable Gastric Band, co-authored with Robert Sewell, M.D., was published by Da Capo Lifelong books in March 2008. Visit her website: [www.LindaRohrbough.com](http://www.LindaRohrbough.com).*