

# PRINT MATTERS

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KATHLEEN MCCALL

Ella Ritchie (left) with mentor Tracey Timpanaro

## The magic of mentoring

Maybe if teenagers thought of their parents as mentors, they would actually listen to their parents' advice.

Ha ha ha. As anyone who has survived a teenager knows, they aren't the most eager subjects. But thankfully, those of us with wisdom to offer do have folks who are interested in learning from our vast experience — our young colleagues.

It goes without saying that the right mentor can make a huge difference in a young professional's life. To pay tribute to these very generous men and women who offer their unique knowledge to others, we asked two freelancers to share details about how their mentors have impacted their lives. Here are their stories.

#### Keeping it real • by Flori Meeks

"How do you feel about working nights and weekends?"

That was the response I received from my friend, Pica Kahn, when I told her I was thinking of trading my full-time job as a newspaper editor for freelance writing in the late '90s. Kahn had been freelance writing for years at that point. That's how we met: I was one of the editors who gave her assignments.

In my case, working less-than-desirable hours had been part of the territory for more than a decade; it started when I became a community newspaper reporter in 1988. What I was looking for was the freedom to sneak away from the computer to share lunch with my elementary school-age sons. To go bike riding with them and read them more bedtime stories. I just wanted to be around for more of their childhood.

Kahn was the first person I sought advice from, and what she gave me was the gift of excruciatingly frank information. Yes, I'd gain flexibility. But I'd also have to learn to survive the feast-or-famine nature of freelance assignments and the ugly realities of self-employment tax. Not to mention the challenges of being my own IT and collections departments.

Kahn helped make sure I was truly ready, mentally and financially, to plunge into freelancing. I guess you could say I dipped my toe in the water before diving in: I found a part-time PR job and built up a client base before giving up employment altogether in 2000.

I'll always be grateful for Kahn's counsel. And the advice of others. There was the editor who talked about self-marketing and networking. Friends who helped me decide on writing rates. And critically important, there were the clients who were willing to take a chance on a new freelancer, and these assignments helped me master writing specialties outside of journalism.

I'm grateful for every moment with my family that freelance work made possible during the last 20-plus years, not to mention some highly rewarding opportunities to grow in my profession.

I've worked my fair share of nights and weekends, but it's been a more than fair trade.

#### I believe in you • by Ella Ritchie

The first time I met Tracey Timpanaro was in 2011.

She was a freelance writer with a successful career in corporate communications. I was a single mother with a tentative dream.

"You can do this," she said with a smile. I must have looked skeptical because she said it again. "You can do this."

She saw hope in me before I saw it myself. And she was the first person who told me I could do it. Everyone else I had spoken to said that starting a business on my own was entirely too risky.

Timpanaro offered an internship, and over the next year, she peppered me with assignments and feedback. Sometimes I nailed it; sometimes I got it wrong. She was always brutally honest.

I watched the easy way she interacted with clients and the meticulous way she tracked hours. I watched how she made possible what others said was impossible.

One year later, I started my company. I had learned from her the grit and determination it would take to succeed, so I got to work.

Early mornings were spent at networking events. Late nights were spent creating my website. Weekends were spent at business courses. Every day was spent writing and editing.

Timpanaro was there for my first big break. An international pharmaceutical company wanted a huge database of formulas proofread by an aggressive deadline. She provided the names of freelancers so that I could cobble together a team.

"And remember," she said, "you're worth your rate. Don't sell yourself short."

Working around the clock for months, the project was a success. It gave me the confidence to keep going — and to aim for bigger and better projects.

Throughout it all, Timpanaro has remained only an email away. I am thankful for the mentor who started it all.

Today, I speak to single parents who feel tentative about their futures. I see hope in them before they see it themselves.

I smile and say, "You can do this."



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## About the cover

The story of how this cover came to be is an interesting tale of networking in the social media age (at least for us old folks anyway). *Print Matters* Editor Tracey Timpanaro admired photographer Kathleen McCall's work on Instagram, and the two hit it off right away. Timpanaro needed a photographer for this shoot, and decided to give McCall a try even though she hadn't done formal work with people. McCall brought along her good friend and supermodel Krystal Graham, who has great creativity in her own right.

The photos were shot at a neat park in downtown Houston called Discovery Green. The park was hosting an event for homeless people that day, which made the shoot just a little bit more interesting.

In the end, I feel that Ella Ritchie and I held our own, but not looking like a dork is not easy! Let me say that I have a newfound respect for supermodels, because it's a lot harder than it looks.



KATHLEEN MCCALL PHOTOS