

To: [Author's Name Redacted for Privacy]
From: Sheila Ashdown (sheilaashdown@gmail.com | 503-568-0348)
Re: Magically Manifesting Your Dreams in 12 Easy Steps

Hello! First of all, thank you for the opportunity work with you. I had a lot of fun reading and thinking about your manuscript, and I can only hope my feedback gives you some clarity and inspiration.

Your writing voice is wonderful and inspiring, and this book obviously comes from a sincere place of caring, compassion, and a desire to share. You do a wonderful job of incorporating your personal experiences; it definitely made me feel (and I'm sure your future readers will agree) like I got to know you through the pages. I admire the bravery it takes to share painful stories and help others learn from them.

I'll start by discussing what I call "global" notes—meaning, my overall concerns for the manuscript as a whole. Then, I'll move into chapter-by-chapter comments, in which I discuss some of the particulars of each chapter.

Before you jump in, I just want to give you a heads-up that, if you're not accustomed to getting feedback on your writing, it can be overwhelming and even emotional at first. Don't worry! This is absolutely normal. Twelve pages is a lot to take in, and sometimes it can feel demoralizing to realize how much work is ahead of you in the revision process. Just take your time with it and read the report a few times over the course of several days or a week. That way, you can really absorb the feedback and get some clarity on how you want to move forward into the next stages of the writing process.

GLOBAL NOTES

Unique Value Proposition

You say that your book is *The Secret* meets *Heaven Is for Real*, but that begs the question: why should people read YOUR book rather than just picking up *The Secret* or *Heaven Is for Real*? What do you see is the value in combining these two philosophies? How does the combination create something that is bigger and more powerful than the sum of its parts? If you can answer this question, you can show readers the unique value of your book and how it offers something different and better than the other self-help offerings on the market.

It's extremely difficult to say anything truly "new" or "different." So keep in mind: your book has to present an idea that *feels* different. It doesn't necessarily need to be radically innovative. Take *The Power of Now* by Eckhart Tolle. (One of my favorite books!) Tolle draws on a variety of ancient spiritual traditions to give readers advice on how to be present in the moment. He's not necessarily saying anything "new," but he certainly presents "old" ideas in a way that feels fresh and relevant for contemporary readers. I think your book will be more powerful when you've done the same—i.e., when you've clarified why people need to revisit these ideas now, and why your take on them is fresh and different.

Personality is a big point of unique value. It comes through in two ways: your voice and your personal stories. If readers find you likeable and inspiring, and they find your personal stories compelling, they'll see THAT as something of a unique value. Luckily, your manuscript scores high in personality! So, you've got that going for you. But right now, it's not quite enough. In future revisions, the manuscript must clarify the unique value of its central philosophies and messages so that it doesn't come across as a rehashing of already-popular ideas.

Defining the Terms: "Manifesting" vs. "Praying"

So, there's the "law of attraction" and there's "prayer." These are two different methods for bringing desirable outcomes into one's life. But they've got some fundamental differences. One calls upon the magnetic energy of the universe, which you use to draw good things toward yourself. The other calls upon a deity, who hears the prayer and responds to it. Obviously there are some commonalities: a person wants something, and they make an effort to ask for it. But the methods of *receiving* are different. In the law of attraction, I draw good things in. In prayer, God grants me good things. Can these two outlooks live together within a person? Obviously the answer needs to be "yes" or else the book is based on a flawed premise. But, it's incumbent upon you as the writer to explore that question ("Can these outlooks coexist?") and help your readers get to "yes." That's not a small assignment, I realize. But you've ventured into deep territory here, and it's important not to skim over the philosophical underpinnings.

I've been mulling this over these past couple weeks, and I think there may be a sweet spot where "manifesting" and "prayer" meet and *can* work hand-in-hand. Manifesting requires that a person exert effort. If I want to manifest a Hawaiian vacation (for example), I have to put out some effort. I can't say a prayer and, boom—God books my air fare. But maybe if I pray AND I take proactive steps to

manifest my vacation, then those two forces come together to be more powerful than either one alone. Basically, in doing the work, you ask God to meet you halfway. Of course, I don't want to put words in your mouth, so if I've missed the mark, absolutely ignore me! I'm just spitballing here, in hopes of inspiring you to clarify the terms so that they're not used interchangeably, which would cause confusion for readers.

Another thing: I did some internet research, and it seems there's plenty of discussion as to whether *The Secret* is anti-Christian. Obviously you don't agree with that, but the existence of controversy points to a few things that need to happen: (a) the book needs to acknowledge that it might cause readers discomfort in bringing these two methodologies together. And (b) it needs to assure them that the two methods can work together in a way that doesn't displease God.

Premise & Focus of the Book

As presented in the Introduction (and in your general description of the book), the premise of the book is that each of these twelve steps will guide a reader toward manifesting their dreams. I'd like to take a minute to talk about the concept of "dreams," as it's a very broad term and means something different to everybody. It's possible that the manuscript stretches too far by speaking about dreams in general, and it could benefit from clarifying and honing in more specifically. If you're promising readers something too broad, it can actually be kind of paralyzing. I know this is a silly example, but it's like how when someone asks "What do you want for dinner tonight?" and your mind goes a total blank because there are too many options. 😊

So, what kind of dreams could you hone in on more specifically? How about "financial dreams"? Many of the anecdotes that you share have to do with material items. You talk about manifesting things like cars and jewelry, etc.; you talk about the importance of cleaning and de-cluttering to show your gratitude for those things you've acquired. So, maybe this is a book about manifesting "financial dreams" rather than just "dreams" in general. There's most definitely a market for that! (In fact, I just Googled "manifesting financial abundance" and came back with 2.2 million hits. So...there's a market for it, but you've got competition!)

But here's an interesting twist: Though lots of people talk about manifesting abundance, some Christians hold limiting beliefs about wealth. While I was growing up in a Catholic family, my dad always reminded me that "it's easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to get into heaven." The message I took from that was "rich people can't be good and good people can't be

rich.” (Which is crazy, right? What if I had a billion dollars and donated it to a humanitarian organization?) And then there’s the example you gave of the woman who was judging you for putting material items on your prayer board, to which you responded that you ask God for help in ALL things, material or otherwise. Anyway, my point is, there’s probably a fairly large segment of the Christian population that needs to be inspired to think rich! And maybe this is the book that helps them manifest that richness in a way that also honors God’s role in it. But, that requires you to narrow your focus from “dreams” in general to “financial dreams” in particular.

Another important point about the premise is that each and every chapter, every bit of content, needs to support the premise. Here’s how I think of it. Your premise is the hot air balloon, and your readers are riding along in the basket; each chapter is a rope that keeps the basket secured to the balloon. The chapters need to connect directly and securely or else the balloon and riders will get separated. That’s no good! My point is, there are chapters here that aren’t tied tightly enough to the premise. Rather, they offer more generalized advice—stuff that’s good to think about, but not necessarily tied to the message of “manifesting your dreams.” I’ll talk more about this in the chapter-by-chapter notes, but I want to reinforce the point here, as it’s important to make sure that the content of each chapter is framed in such a way that it relates explicitly to the central premise.

Organizing Principle

I’m not sure that “steps” are the best way to present the material in this book. Typically, steps need to be completed one before the other (e.g., the steps in a recipe; driving directions, etc.) or else the outcome cannot be achieved. The ideas in this book, however, can be acted upon at the same time, so they’re not “steps” in the traditional sense. Are you very invested in presenting your ideas as “steps”? If so, that would require some refashioning of content to clarify why a reader would benefit from moving through the advice in sequence. Otherwise, if you’re open to re-envisioning the premise, you can delete out the references to “steps” and brainstorm a new organizing principle. (Of course, that would require changing the title of the book.)

Authority & Sources

When readers are deciding whether to read your book, one of the things they ask themselves is, “Who is this author? Do they know what they’re talking about?” Basically, you need to establish yourself as a credible source of information. In some cases, it’s easy. If you’re a cardiologist and you write a book

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about heart health, well, people presume you know what you're talking about. If your book is independent from your primary career, as yours is, then you have to work a little harder to prove your authority with readers. The best way to do that is to integrate outside sources—books, movies, television programs, etc., that are written/produced by well-respected people in the field. In the case of this book, that could include religious figures, self-help authors, psychologists, scholars, etc. By including their voices in your book, it shows that you're well-learned in the field, even if you're not quite an "expert" in the traditional sense.

The manuscript does already include mentions of some books, movies, and television programs (i.e., "sources"). It's a great start, and I would encourage you to take it a lot further. For instance, it's great that you mention two of Catherine Ponder's books, but it's not enough just to reference them. If your reader hasn't already read Ponder's book, then they'll have no idea how it relates to your book. So the reference could go over their head and be lost on them. Instead, it's more compelling to quote short, relevant passages from those sources, and show how those quotations amplify your own ideas. As one of my wonderful former students put it, "sources are a megaphone that make my own ideas louder." Of course, when quoting sources, it's important to stay within the boundaries of fair use: You have to use quotation marks if you're taking a passage directly; you can't take too much word-for-word (otherwise you have to request permission from the author); and you must be diligent in using footnotes (or endnotes).

Table of Contents

The table of contents (TOC) can be condensed. I recommend including only the chapter titles and deleting out the subsections. Usually, when a prospective reader is browsing a book, they'll scan the TOC to see whether the chapters appeal to them. By having a TOC that is short and sweet, you facilitate this scanning. Plus, you show the reader right from the get-go that you value their time and attention and will present material in a way that is well-organized and straightforward, which readers appreciate.

In terms of formatting, when you revise the TOC, be sure that it's formatted in a simple, consistent fashion. As-is, there a confusing mix of spacing, uppercase/lowercase, numbered lists, and lettered lists.

Also, be sure to reconcile the TOC with the body of the manuscript to make sure that you've use the same chapter title in both places.

Chapter Organization

I recommend using more subsections/subheaders to break up the content into smaller chunks that will be more readily digestible for the reader. For instance, let's look at chapter 1 as an example. This chapter has a title (Step One: Create the Big Picture...) but no subsections. However, the chapter content covers a few distinct (but related) topics: "Are you living your dream life?"; "Dream big"; "Creating a visual prayer"; "the Ford Explorer"; and "Don't let other people judge your desires."

I highly recommend going through each chapter and identifying those spots where you transition from one main point to the next. Use subheaders to separate that content. (Don't get carried away, though; if you use *too* many subheaders, that creates its own problems!)

Tips & Exercises

It's fun to have little sidebars in a book. (A sidebar is a small section that is separate from the main text, and is usually set with a different typeface and/or layout.) They add variety to the content, and you (or the book designer, rather) can format these sidebars in such a way as to present visual variety for the reader. However, if you want to include such a thing, it needs to be done consistently (i.e., a certain number of tips in each and every chapter) and the information offered needs to be on-point with the rest of the content. I like the idea of having tips sidebars, but I think it's important to decide on what a tip is—a little bit of helpful information, right? However, some of the "tips" in this manuscript are really more like "exercises," which ask a reader to go through a process or perform an activity (e.g., "Ask yourself a question then ask it again from a different perspective. ...").

If you want to have exercises in the book (which is a good idea—most self-help books include exercises), then those need to be teased apart from the tips, and they need to be presented in a fairly standardized way across the manuscript. If you've got some self-help books on your shelf, open up a few and see if they've got exercises, and, if so, what kind of content they include and how they're formatted. This will give you a better sense of what I mean.

A separate issue is that some of the tips fall into a category of "generally good advice, but maybe not wholly relevant to the scope of the book" (e.g., "Take pictures of the drawer contents. ... You now have proof of what was in your drawers for insurance purposes."). I recommend going through each and every tip and making sure that it really, truly speaks to the book's main messages.

CHAPTER-BY-CHAPTER NOTES

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In this section, I speak briefly to each chapter. These notes aren't comprehensive, but I touch on what I see as the biggest concerns for each chapter.

Introduction

The Introduction focuses on your personal history, which is very compelling. My only concern is that it packs too much information into a relatively short chapter, which ends up giving the impression of skimming over a lot of important stuff. Rather than fitting it all into the Introduction, I recommend focusing on the near-death experience and how it connects to your lovely relationship with your grandmother, who likewise experienced something similar.

It may be that some of the personal story is trimmed out altogether, while other bits are moved to later points in the book. I recommend moving the story of your mother over to Step 3. Given the anecdote about the ring and all the baggage associated with it, that seems like a good spot to pause and give some backstory as to why your relationship with your mother was so strained.

The Introduction also needs to include a section on "What This Book Will Do for You." This will help create a bridge between your personal experience and how you hope readers will benefit from the insights you've gained. Remember, in the self-help genre, the readers are looking to help themselves—so you have to be quite explicit in telling them what you have to offer.

Step 1: Create the Big Picture

The introductory paragraphs here are very strong. I think, as you revise the manuscript, you should try to do something similar in each chapter; in other words, **identify a problem** that you will discuss (and hopefully help them solve) right from the get-go, so the reader has a clear sense of purpose for each chapter.

In this chapter and in the manuscript in general, I highly recommend expanding on the "hows." For example, in paragraph two, you ask yourself if you're living your dream life, and you give yourself a grade of 75 percent. You mention that you came to this conclusion after you "dug deep into your soul." However, I think this grade would be much more meaningful if you expanded on how you came to this conclusion. What exactly was your process? What questions did you ask yourself? Did you meditate on them? Journal? Talk to friends or a counselor? A major feature of the self-help genre is a focus on the

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how. This is crucial because, generally, people know what they should do (“I should eat better”; “I should follow my dreams”; “I should have better self-esteem”), but the problem is that they don’t know HOW. That’s why they buy self-help books. 😊 Consider including an exercise that will help readers “grade” their life.

Step 2: Show Gratitude

I recommend separating the concepts of “love” and “gratitude.” For one, they’re both biggies, and they likely deserve to have their own chapters. But also, I think it does a disservice to readers to refer to “love” and “gratitude” interchangeably. It gets things muddled, especially since it’s possible to feel grateful for something that you don’t love. For instance, “It was emotionally and financially stressful to get laid off from my job, but I’m grateful it happened because it lit a fire under me to change careers for the better.” So, I recommend teasing those two ideas apart and treating them more explicitly as separate but related.

It’s not clear how the “daily deeds” discussion is wholly relevant to this particular discussion of love and gratitude. I recommend either drawing the connection more clearly, or possibly moving the “daily deeds” content to a later chapter—possibly Step 11, where you talk about making plans; that seems like a relevant spot.

Step 3: Release the Past and Give Freely

I like this chapter a lot—really nice work here. As I mentioned above, this would be a great spot to move the backstory on your relationship with your mom. It’ll help contextualize the situation with the ring.

Step 4: Take Inventory

This chapter feels a bit scattered. I think “taking inventory” is an important idea for the book, but there are some parts of this chapter that seem off-topic. For example, on the second page the chapter, there’s a paragraph that starts “Get ready for anything,” and you relate the story about your grandmother getting a job during the great depression. It’s a great story, but “get ready for anything” is a different point than “take inventory.” There are also sections on “respecting yourself” and “admiring yourself,” which again, seem to make a fundamentally different point than “take inventory.” If this really is a

chapter about taking inventory, then I recommend trimming out the segments that don't serve that main point.

Can you clarify the opening anecdote? It's unclear why a workshop participant would approach you and ask you to tell her who she is. What an odd situation! 😊

The chapter content on taking inventory could (or maybe even "should") be presented earlier. After all, it seems like taking inventory would be an important step early on when a reader is trying to evaluate where their life is at and whether they're living their dreams. I think taking inventory is an important part of gaining clarity; i.e., "Where am I at?" vs. "Where do I want to be?" So, I recommend brainstorming ways to incorporate this content earlier.

The "celebrate you" elements might be off-putting to readers; it could be perceived as a bit too pat or "rah-rah," especially to those folks with deep-seated problems with low self-esteem. Maybe trim some of that out?

The parable of the talents works GREAT here—really nice inclusion.

While I don't think the "get ready for anything" message works in this particular chapter, I do think it's good stuff—maybe it deserves its own chapter? It dovetails perfectly with the parable of the virgins; maybe you need to consolidate those two and turn them into their own chapter. I love the idea of being ready, because it allows people to be more open to what's out there.

Step 5: Investigate Patterns

This is my favorite chapter in the book. I think it's the most successful in terms of keeping a tight focus and being clearly tied to the greater message of the book. Great work here! As you revise the book, keep Step 5 in mind as an example. My one suggestion: Can you clarify what holotropic breath work is and how it works? If possible, cite a qualified source and include a footnote.

Step 6: Change The Dialogue You Have with Yourself

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This is one of the chapters I was thinking of earlier in my metaphor about the hot air balloon. My concern here is that the content is not tied explicitly enough to the premise of the book. The points made here—e.g., set a better tone with self talk; “witness protection program”; keeping the agreements you make with yourself; self-dialogue about the past—are good advice in general, but are not yet explicitly tied to the premise of manifesting your dreams through the law of attraction and prayer. The basic ideas can stay, but I recommend revising to link them to manifestation/prayer.

I worry that the sections on self-talk about the past might be perceived as glib or clichéd by the readers, especially those who’ve had a traumatic past. It’s very easy to say things like “the past is over” and “God doesn’t make mistakes,” but it could be seen as oversimplification to those folks who’ve experienced serious trauma. I recommend softening the message—maybe instead of saying things like “the painful emotion can be deleted” (which, if a reader *cannot* do that, might make them feel like a failure), instead recommend some ways that readers can give themselves a break and use kinder self-talk to reframe the past.

Step 7: Change Your Labels

The opening example about Tyler Perry’s upbringing is very moving. Otherwise, though, I’m wondering if the content in this chapter could be cut. There’s some repetition. For instance, there’s more discussion about letting go of the past, which was addressed in Step 6. And there’s more talk about knowing who you are, which was addressed in Step 4. Then, the example of your divorce speaks to the message about letting go, which is addressed in Step 3. So, to avoid redundancy, I recommend cutting chapter 7. Of course, if you want to keep some of the material and move them into a relevant step, go for it. I just don’t think this chapter is different enough to stand alone.

Step 8: Letting Go/Forgiving

Similar to Step 7, Step 8 revisits some material that was touched on earlier; in this case, in Step 3. Possibly condense?

The discussion on boundaries isn’t explicitly tied to the premise of the book. Gotta keep connecting the basket to the hot air balloon! It may be the case that this content fall into the category of “good general

advice” rather than fitting in with this book. If you can’t make the connection clear, then I recommend cutting it.

Step 9: Pay Attention to Reflections and Absorptions

The metaphor of the “protective bubble” is great (actually, all the metaphors in this manuscript are great; you have a gift for illustrating through metaphor). The discussions about energy, light, and reflection are well-done, and I think the example and metaphor in this chapter will be a great benefit to readers in helping them understand your key points. My only concern: The content here could definitely be better connected to the premise of “manifesting your dreams.”

Step 10: Never, Ever Be Afraid to Follow Your Intuition

Love the metaphor about the “God GPS.” ☺ I also like that this chapter comes back around to more discussion about the role of God, which was not present in most of Steps 5 through 9.

It’s absolutely fabulous that the conversation comes around to intuition. My only concern here is that some of the examples seem less about intuition and more about...being willing to put yourself out there in order to help someone. This seems especially true in the hospital. When I think “intuition,” I think about... a quiet knowing inside, or a gut response that seems independent of the circumstances. That doesn’t seem to define the situation at the hospital with the two patients. Sure, it took courage to speak up, and it took persuasion to get both patients to see the sense of what you were saying. But I don’t think “intuition” is the word that would leap to most people’s minds. I think perhaps it’s just that these two examples at the hospital are not the best examples for the book—especially given that they aren’t tied to the idea of manifesting one’s dreams. Perhaps switch out for another example? (For example, there’s a great example earlier in the book that speaks to the role of intuition in our lives; it’s when your daughter wanted to sit on one side of the car rather than the other, and you didn’t argue with her about. I think there was some intuition involved there, by both you and your daughter.)

Step 11: Create a Step-by-Step Plan

I like that this chapter gets the reader firmly back on the ground of manifesting of their dreams. This chapter is definitely tied to the premise of the book. However, some of the recommendations are too obvious. I sure hope you don’t have to tell your readers to use the library, bookstores, or the internet! Otherwise they likely won’t have found your book in the first place. ☺ Readers may actually be offended

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if you offer them advice that is *too* basic or common-sense, so I recommend culling the list down to the recommendations that are more unique.

Is there a reason why most of the recommendations in this chapter are career-focused? It seems off-kilter with the rest of the book, which isn't really about careers at all. It could be that you've got the right idea (i.e., practical advice), but that the focus is a bit off.

Step 12: Be Open to Let Go of Your Dreams

This chapter is fantastic. I'm still giggling about "My cultural training was that 'feet' in your soup was 'bad.'" Ha! 😊

Conclusion?

Typically, you don't want the final chapter to introduce new material (which, Step 12 does). So I highly recommend adding a short conclusion, something that reminds readers of the major takeaways from the book, wraps it all up in a bow, and sends them on their way with a message of inspiration.

Okay, we're done! Whew. Take a deep breath. That was a lot, but we made it!

So, what's next?

As I said in my introduction, it's perfectly natural to get to the end an in-depth piece of feedback like this and feel...stuff—good or bad! But my hope is that when you have a chance to absorb it, these notes will give you some inspiration to tackle your revision. Ultimately, you are the author, so you are 100 percent entitled to take any of these ideas that suit you, and let go of the ones that don't. Only you truly know what your intentions are for your book.

If you'd like to work with me further on figuring out how to implement any or all of the revisions I recommend here, I would be absolutely delighted! And if you just want to give me an email or a phone call to ask questions or get clarification, that's okay too. Don't hesitate to reach out.