

## July Meeting Notes: D'Anne Avner on "Itching to Pitch"

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One of the most important things a writer needs to learn is how to pitch a book and sell it with enthusiastic pride. At the July meeting of Los Angeles Romance Authors, D'Anne Avner gave attendees the tools they need to do just that. By the end of the rousing, information-packed session, she had many in the audience "Itching to Pitch."

Avner boasts an impressive success rate—in 11 pitches, she has had requests for 10 full manuscripts and 7 partials. The key to success in pitching is not the quality of your writing, but your ability to sell yourself. "You can have the most innovative story ever written," she explains, "but if you can't look the person across from you in the eye and pitch your story with confidence, your chances of getting a request will drop."

Nerves are part of the game, according to Avner, but you must accept your nervousness and push through it in order to succeed. "Take a deep breath and accept it and power forward." Keep in mind that editors and agents are there because they *want* to like you and your book. They want you to "wow" them. (And they are just people, after all; they put their pants on one leg at a time like the rest of us!)

Avner's pitching tips include several common-sense suggestions: turn off your cell phone; dress professionally; walk in with confidence (head high, shoulders back); smile; give a firm handshake; and speak up. If

you're a shrinking violet in everyday life, become someone else—someone with a take-charge attitude and killer confidence—for just 10 minutes.

Practice your pitch in a mirror. Begin by stating your writing credentials, including professional affiliations and contest wins, if applicable. Keep this preamble brief—you want to get quickly to the pitch.

Avner strongly advocates the use of index cards during the pitch. "I've always used them, and I always will."



*D'Anne Avner gets positively precise about pitching professionally.*

With only six to eight minutes for a typical pitch, authors need to stay on track and be concise. Agents and editors would rather see you refer to your index cards than to watch you stumble through without a guideline. Don't read directly from the cards, however. Use them as a guide to keep you focused.

Avner uses a five-card system, which she called an expanded version of author Deb Dixon's four-card system:

•**Card 1: Basics and Theme.** The nuts and bolts of your book: title, target line (e.g. Harlequin Intrigue, Desire, etc.), genre, setting, ap-

proximate word count, and theme. The theme is one core issue at the heart of your story (e.g. "finding the courage to risk"). Try to keep this card to one sentence, but include enough information to hook an agent or editor.

•**Card 2: Heroine.** Choose an adjective and noun to describe your heroine (e.g. unhappy teen, cunning lawyer). State her goal, motivation, and external conflict.

•**Card 3: Hero.** Repeat the process for the hero card, describing your hero and stating his goal, motivation, and external conflict.

•**Card 4: Internal Conflict.** Describe the obstacles keeping the hero and heroine apart.

•**Card 5: Turning Point and Resolution.** Reveal how the hero and heroine overcome those obstacles. How do they compromise?

Don't let the cards give you a false sense of security, Avner warns. Be prepared to answer questions. Such interruptions shouldn't throw you off your game. Most importantly, know your book, love your book, and don't apologize for your book. Your enthusiasm and confidence will be contagious.

After the pitch, listen carefully to everything the agent or editor requests. Find out when you can expect to hear back from them, and when you should follow up. When your time is up, say a sincere thank you, give another firm handshake, and walk away with confidence. Don't linger at the door. You've done what you came to do; now it's someone else's turn.

Lastly, be sure to follow up. After all, the only person who can sell your book is you!

Visit D'Anne's website at [www.danneavner.com](http://www.danneavner.com).