



40+ Ways to Make Your Next Book Signing an EVENT!!

Larry James

Here are some tips and suggestions that have helped me increase the number of books sold at a book signing. Many are my own, and some were suggested by other author friends. Each book store has it's own distinctive personality. While I do not attempt to do all of the suggested tips at every signing, it is important to adapt as many as you can to fit each store's personality. Believe me, doing so will increase the opportunity to sell more books.

DO - Write your own announcement for the book stores intercom. Make it short and brief. Give them several versions because they usually announce that you are there several times. Don't hesitate to remind them to make the announcement again if it's been awhile since the last announcement. They often will get busy and forget. Every half hour should do it. If you do lectures or give speeches about your book and are in town for a keynote or seminar that is open to the public, include information about that too. Let the book store choose to include it in the announcement or not.

DON'T - Don't just sit at the table they have for you. Most authors do that. Be different! Reach out and touch someone! Don't wait for them to come to you. I always tell the person booking the signing not to worry about putting a chair behind the table. This will always get their attention. Let them know you will be the store's official greeter while you are there. Walk around the store with several copies of your book and introduce yourself to everyone.

Request at least a dozen books for your table to illustrate you have plenty available. If those you introduce yourself to show the least bit of interest, hand

them a book. They will almost always take it. Tell them to look at it and bring it back to the table when they are finished. On average, I more than tripled my book sales at signings by implementing this tip!

DO - Have an attractive two color or four color book mark designed by a graphic artist and print thousands of them. You can give one to everyone who comes in the store. List a few endorsements on it as well as a brief paragraph of what the book is about. Leave your address off. Put the price and the ISBN on. Book stores often have their own book marks and are reluctant to have you give yours out if they think their customer is going to you direct.

I often will sign a book mark for someone who lingers at my table but does not buy my book. Remember your mission: "Spread good will!" Many people will come back to the store and buy your book after you have left. Send the book store several hundred book marks and suggest that they include them in the bags of people who buy books before your book signing.

BONUS TIP: I include book marks for all three of my relationship books plus a business card in every piece of correspondence that leaves my office. The utility companies send statement stuffers to you, so why not send one back? When paying bills, slip in one of your book marks with your check.

DO - Four-color postcards which feature your book covers OR the home page on your website are great give-aways.

DO - Get to know the "Community Relations Coordinator" (CRC). They are the ones who will book you again if they like you. I've been back to the same Barnes and Noble store three times in the last 9 months in the Phoenix area.

DO - Send the person who booked the signing a brief "thank you" note. I'm told that authors seldom do this. I've had several people call me to thank me for sending the note.

DO - Write a follow up commendation letter to the CRC's **manager** as a fantastic way to thank and build good relations with both the CRC, the book store and you.

DO - Remember to call at least two months in advance if you want to be included in their in-store flyer.

DO - Go to Kinko's and have your book covers enlarged in color to an 11 x 17 poster, laminate them and have them put them on a poster type board with a stand up thing on the back. Always bring them with you to the signings! Anything else you can think of to call attention to your table is also GREAT!

DO - Ask them for a media list (radio, TV, etc.). Some don't have them, but the ones who do will usually share it or tell you where to get it. It makes calling the radio and TV stations easier. If they don't have a media list, ask them which stations they would recommend that might be interested in an interview. When they know you are also doing stuff to promote the signing, usually they do more too!

DO - Ask for a community list, i.e., Chamber of Commerce, Society of the Arts, etc. Send them a news release about your book signing (and seminar or keynote, if applicable). You never know where your speaking engagements may come from. Check first with your meeting planner to get permission, then add a personal note to the news release inviting them to come and hear you speak. (You do accept speaking engagements to talk about your book topic, don't you?).

DO - Although most book stores send news releases, send your own as well. This increases the chance of getting coverage. One other thing. Always "confirm" that they DO send news releases to the media. I no longer will do book signings at stores who are not willing to send news releases about my book signing.

DO - Call the radio and TV stations no less than a month in advance and request an interview the week of the signing. Send them a news release about your book signing. Give them a special invitation to attend your book signing and if you are in town to do a keynote or seminar, invite them to attend at no charge. Remember to send them a promotional copy of your book.

DO - Put several of your books "face-out" when they aren't looking! I often will also put the books of my author friends "face-out."

DO - Send them your endorsements. Print them in an attractive large font and on a white piece of paper. They will often use them on posters, etc. Also send several book "covers." Request that they put up a special display, including poster, at least a week in advance of the signing. Most do, but it doesn't hurt to ask.

Send your picture (color is best) to join the book cover on the poster. Sometimes they use it, some times they don't. At least it gives them an option. Offer to send any additional information they may need.

DO - Talk to people. Many people think because you wrote a book, you are unapproachable. Prove them wrong. It builds relationships. Be exceedingly FRIENDLY! Booksignings are no place to be shy.

DO - Ask the manager how many books they would like for you to sign before you leave so they will have some on hand. NOTE: Generally speaking, they cannot return any books you sign, so always ask! If the signing went well or even if it didn't, and you impressed the manager, they will usually have you sign a bunch before you leave.

DO - Bring a camera and have your picture taken with the manager or Community Relations Specialist and other key people in the store. If you want to call attention to yourself, pay attention to other people. Most people don't do this. You may want to use several of the photos in publicity in the future.

To take this idea a step further. . . **make sure your book is in the picture!** Next, buy an inexpensive frame, and mail the photo in the frame along with a handwritten, personal note suggesting they hang the picture in a conspicuous place in the store. You might also suggest that they start an "Authors Photo Wall (or Hall) of Fame." The Community Relations Specialist will be more than happy to have their picture with you hanging in the store and you and your book will get more frequent recognition.

DO - Have a Polaroid camera handy at your table. When someone buys your book say, "Let's have our picture taken together!" Have someone from the store take a picture of you and your new customer. Give it to them and sign and date the back of the picture. Suggest they use it for a book mark. This increases the odds that your book AND the picture will become more of a conversation piece.

Someone suggested taking a picture with a digital camera, getting their e-mail address and asking permission to send them the picture by e-mail. This will also help build your e-mailing list for future book announcements or for your eZINE.

DO - To help call attention to my book "Red Hot LoveNotes for Lovers," I put a crystal bowl on the table and fill it with small, individually wrapped packages of "Red Hots." Dove chocolates are another favorite. People will stop and

read the book poster (while they are unwrapping the candy) and look over your book marks and books. Ask them if you can take the wrapper. . . Contact!

DO - Design a sign-up sheet (name, address, e-mail and phone number) for those who may be interested in being on your e-mailing list. Don't have an e-mailing list? Start one! You'll be glad you did. Consider sending an "opt-in" eZINE on a monthly basis to your e-mailing list.

DO - If you are in town for a keynote or seminar, bring some seminar flyers to hand out. It doesn't have to be fancy, just who, how, what, when and where will do! Invite the Community Relations person to attend your seminar for free. Many won't take the time to come, but it's a nice touch!

DO - Have copies of reader's reviews available at your table. Hand them to anyone who shows the least bit of interest in your book and say, "Here's what other people who have read my books have to say." Make extra copies for give-aways. One of my books is called, "LoveNotes for Lovers," so I say, "Here are some LoveNotes from some of the people who have read my books." When someone begins to read the reviews, remain quiet. Amazon.com is a good source when people post impartial reviews of your book. Most people hold Amazon.com in high regard. If no reviews are posted, send the link to your book to your friends and encourage them to post reviews.

DO - Call the local newspaper and request that someone come and take pictures for the "feature article" you will also request. Suggest that they interview the book store manager or community relations person. If they like you, they will almost always say great things about you and your book.

I did this at a signing in Topeka, KS (my former hometown) and even though the article came out after I left, it was great PR, the store loved it, and follow-up sales were great. Remember to send them a promotional copy of your book.

DO - Get there no less than 15 to 20 minutes early and if you can, stay late. At a signing in Tucson, I sold more books in the extra 30 minutes after the signing than in the previous two hours.

DON'T - Don't complain if you don't sell lots of books. You must realize that signings and book readings or presentations will rarely exceed your expectations and hardly ever meet your highest goals. Signings make those

who bought your book feel good, but they generally don't sell lots of books while you are there, UNLESS you create a presence WHILE YOU ARE THERE!

I've sold as few as "none" to as many as 56 in a two hour period. According to book store managers, on average, book sales for a non-celebrity author will range from about 4 to 7. If you sell more, you're doing great!

DON'T - Don't show your disappointment if you don't sell very many books. It only creates bad will. The Community Relations Coordinator (CRC) will often be apologetic if the response wasn't good. This is your chance to thank them for the opportunity and ask for another book signing in the near future. Nuff said!

DO - Talk about other authors books; authors you know. I have a story in A 2nd Helping of Chicken Soup For the Soul and always ask the manager to put those books on the table too. I sign on page 18 under my name. I know my friends Mark Victor Hansen and Jack Canfield, the "Chicken Soup" guys, don't need my help, but the customers love it! My dear friend, Greg Godek's book, 1001 Ways to Be Romantic often shows up on my table. He mentions one of my books in several of his books.

DO - If you would like to start a mailing (or e-mailing) list of your fans, plan to give away something. Have them sign a "guest book" or "free drawing" card with their name, and complete mailing address (e-mail address, too) to qualify. Announce the winner at the end of your book signing. People love the idea of a chance to win something free, and it often causes them to linger in the store longer.

DO - Come bearing gifts! Give the community relations person (or the person who booked the signing) a rose, small bunch of flowers or a tiny box of chocolates. They will not forget YOU!

DO - If you are coming from out of town, always call to let them know you have arrived.

DO - Talk to the community relations person and request a brief meeting with their employees prior to the signing to very quickly give an overview of your book so they can be aware and help sell it when people ask for that kind of book.

DO - I am a professional speaker as well as an author. If there is a book publishing association or National Speakers Association chapter or similar organization in the city of the signing, let them know you will be in town. Attend their meeting. If you know enough ahead of time, request to be on the program.

DO - When people stop by your autograph table, as you are introducing yourself, hand them a copy of your book. Many people will not pick up your book, but most will take it if you hand it to them. If they begin to read it, that's your cue to keep quiet. My book sales at the back of the room and at book signings have increased significantly since using this tip.

DO - If you have a laptop computer, make arrangements with the book store for a phone line to the book signing table. Often a 25 foot phone extension wire from Radio Shack will work. (I bring my own). Display your computer in a prominent area and invite customers to interact with your website while you sign their book. ALWAYS hand them something with your URL printed on it. This is a sure-fire attention getter!

DO - Communicate with the bookstore by writing on postcards that show your book cover OR have numerous extra book covers printed and use the front part of the cover as an oversized postcard. While they do require extra postage, they keep your book in front of them as a constant reminder!

DO - Ever have a signing and there is no poster telling the store's customers you were going to be there, or no publicity in the newspaper, or the store didn't remember you were coming, or they forget to order extra books? Whatever you request the CRC to do, very tactfully print an itemized list for them to follow. Print a checklist for yourself containing these items so you can follow-up with your contact and make sure each item is accomplished prior to the book signing.

I have saved several book signings from disaster by always having an extra box of books in the trunk of my car in case their book order didn't arrive in time or they forgot to order. In one case, the CRC was so embarrassed that she let "me" sell the books I brought and keep all the profit.

DO - MOST IMPORTANT: **Have FUN!** Let people know you are there to have fun, even if you don't sell any books. The manager of the store often feels worse than you do, because they are afraid you won't come back. Have fun! Create attention!

Some final words: It is important for you to understand that the purpose of book signings is not necessarily to sell books, but to make the book store customers AWARE of your books.

Another important point to understand is that books DO NOT sell themselves! **People SELL books!** It's equally important to spend some of your time at your signing to smooze with the people who take the money from the customers who buy your books. Get to know the staff at the book store. THEY can help you continue to sell your books LONG AFTER you have gone!

Book signings are an opportunity to build relationships with the book sellers. I consider book signings as an opportunity to SELL the book sellers on recommending MY books when someone asks for a good relationship book!

On several occasions, after handing the booksellers my 4-color book marks and telling them a little about myself and my books, the booksellers have actually bought signed copies of my books. If I happen to sell and sign a few books to their customers while I am there. . . I am grateful! I consider that a BONUS!

DO - Make arrangements to have the book displayed at the cash register. Most book stores have plastic book stands for this. Hand the manager a book and ask "How about displaying this one on the counter by the cash register to remind buyers that the author is here?" You might want to print up a small bookmark type sign that says, "Buy this book between 2 p.m. and 4 p.m. today and have author Larry James personally sign it for you. Ask for details."

Several more things. . . as an author you should **ALWAYS** sign your books. Some people are too shy to ask for your autograph. Sign it anyway! Simply ask, "Here, let me sign that for you. Whose name would you like in it?" Always ask.

Never assume the book is for them. In the beginning, I wasted several books by assuming that the book was for them. I also always ask for the correct spelling. Even John can be spelled, "Jon;" "Kelly: Keli, Kellie, Kelley, etc." If you sell your book by mail order be sure to include a blank on your order form for the person's name to whom the book should be signed. Remind them to PRINT the name. I also ask if they would like for me to write a date under my signature. Many people like to remember when they met you.

Authors often trade books with other authors. Remember to sign your books to them and ask them to return the favor.

DO - Ask the Community Relations Coordinator to make up some "Author Personalization Slips" (1/4 page sheets of paper with your photo and/or book cover on them with a message that says: "If you would like for (the author's name) to personalize your book for you, please PRINT the name you would like inscribed below." This will speed up the process and help keep you from having to ask, "What name would you like in the book?" or "What is the correct spelling?"

Come up with a special way of signing your name everytime you sign your books. For many years, I have signed books, "(their name), Celebrate Love! Larry James." I always mention that my website is CelebrateLove.com; that there are lots of relationship articles there and I would love to hear from them by e-mail telling me what they thought of my book. I also add, "If you like it, please tell your friends."

Adding something special like, "Happy Birthday," or "Happy Anniversary," etc., will also make them very proud to show the book to their friends. Signed books are treasured much more than non-signed books!

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TGS PUBLISHING
HTTP://WWW.TGSPUBLISHING.COM
22241 PINEDALE LANE
FRANKSTON, TEXAS 75763
903-876-3416

