One Thing – Literary Edition with Stuart Brown

EPISODE 6. THE SEYMOUR AGENCY

https://stuartjbrown.com/podcast/one-thing-literary-edition-6-the-seymour-agency

SUMMARY

In this episode, Stuart Brown speaks with literary agents Gabby Cabezut and Marissa Cleveland from The Seymour Agency about their primary advice for new authors.

Gabby Cabezut: Trust Your Process

Gabby emphasizes that writers must focus on their individual journeys rather than comparing themselves to others.

- **The Trap of Comparison:** Social media often creates a false sense of "overnight success," leading authors to feel they are falling behind.
- **Creative Joy:** Gabby notes that comparison is the "absolute thief of creative joy".
- **The Reality of Publishing:** The industry is slow and subjective; therefore, authors should find fulfillment in the writing journey itself rather than just the end goal of publication.

Marissa Cleveland: You Are the CEO of Your Life

Marissa encourages authors to take full ownership of their writing careers by viewing themselves as executives who must build a strong support team.

- **Focus on Experiences:** Instead of fixating on goals outside of their control, authors should define the "experiences" they want to have in their careers.
- **Building a "Chief Executive Team":** A successful author should surround themselves with a diverse support system, including:
  - Critique Partners: Fellow writers who elevate each other's work.
  - Hype People: Cheerleaders who provide unwavering belief and "honest support" during low points.
  - Industry Professionals: Agents and editors who are passionate about the work.
  - Personal Supporters: People outside the industry who ensure the author stays healthy, hydrated, and maintains good posture.
- **Mentorship:** Marissa highlights that even top-tier entrepreneurs utilize mentors and mentees to stay relevant and understand emerging trends.

Conclusion

The episode concludes with the idea that while writing can be a solitary act, success often depends on trusting one's unique process and proactively managing the professional and personal team that supports that process.

TRANSCRIPT

Stuart Brown: Welcome to One Thing – Literary Edition, a podcast that asks a simple question of seasoned literary agents: What is one piece of advice you would give to new authors? I'm your host, playwright and author Stuart Brown. Information about all my works can be found at my website stuartjbrown.com. On today's episode, I'm very pleased to have two literary agents from the Seymour Agency, Gabby Cabezut and Marissa Cleveland. So what we're going to do is we're going to take turns, but the other person can chime in when we talk about the "one thing." But we're going to start off with Gabby. So, what is your one thing?

Gabby Cabezut: Hi, Stu. Okay, so my one thing is to "trust your process." We live in a world where we are obsessed with overnight success, and it's something very easy for people to feel like they are already behind. This applies to us as individuals, but I see it more and more happening for authors. It's very important to trust your process, to try to hone in your skills, to believe in yourself. You look at another writer's timeline in which they are posting about their newest deal or the book tour that they just finished, and we might think, "Why isn't that happening to me?" But comparison is the absolute thief of creative joy.

Stuart Brown: So really, in a way, you want to put on the visors. You're going down your course—don't be comparing yourself to other people. If you have an idea of what you're doing, here's the process—and I think that's a key word—that's what you should be doing.

Gabby Cabezut: Yes, I think that you need to focus into your own journey. We always think about the goal, but we need to enjoy the process. And I think that in the writing process and the publishing process, it's very slow, it's at its own pace, and it's very subjective too. You have to enjoy wherever you are in your writing journey. Obviously, you want that book to be published, but the process is important, so don't just focus on publishing a book and that's it.

Stuart Brown: And I think new authors listening to this understand that. On the other hand, it's hard. The writing process can be a very lonely process, and if you're on these Facebook groups or these groups and people are posting, "Hey, I got this," or "I did that," and you're sitting there saying, "I don't have any of that, I'm a failure" or "I'm not good at this." So it's hard to juggle that.

Gabby Cabezut: Yeah, I see that happening too. I blame this on social media. I think social media is an important tool, obviously, for writers, for publishers, for anyone out there to connect with others, but it has also made it more difficult because you compare yourself. It happens to me as well, so we just have to be mindful and to believe in ourselves and to trust our process.

Stuart Brown: Marissa, is there anything you'd like to add to that?

Marissa Cleveland: I just love that. I love working with Gabby, I love everything about her whole philosophy and how she handles her clients. We share clients, and she's just fabulous.

Stuart Brown: Now it's your turn. So Marissa, what is your one thing?

Marissa Cleveland: Thanks so much for asking. My one thing is that "you are the CEO of your life." And that means that you're the CEO of your career in writing, and how you surround yourself with a team. Like how they say you're the product of the five people around you. My husband and I wrote this leadership book together, and a lot of it focuses on the people that you surround yourself with. Authors are the CEO of their career, so they have to decide who they want on their team to help elevate them to get them to where they want to be.

I used to ask my authors that I get to work with, "Tell me about your goals." And many of the goals that they would tell me are out of their control. So they're not like the "SMART" goals—the specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound goals that typically in corporate America they ask you to come up with. And so I ask them now to come up with "experiences." Like, "What do you want to experience?" And then based on those experiences, they can put together the team to help them get to where they want to be.

Many people give away their CEO position of their lives or their careers to others, like their boss or society or something. And I think that once we look at experiences and say "You are the CEO," my authors then can shift.

I love working with them because they come up with their own mission and vision, and they have a great sense about how to chat with me about where they want to be in five years. What does it look like? What does the road to get there look like? And we've just had so much more positive outcomes when we shifted to this. When we focus on being our CEO of our own life, we're focusing on the encouragement side of it, understanding life goals, increasing our social interest out there as literary citizens, and recognizing that we have the power to change the direction of our life. It all started with my husband saying, "Change doesn't happen if you stay in your lane." And you know, this is all very aligned with: Yes, I am the CEO of my life. And so that's my one thing for all the authors I work with—anybody I work with.

Stuart Brown: Let's take that point: build your team. Who are the people that they should have on their team?

Marissa Cleveland: Depending on what stage of their career they're in, definitely they should have "critique partners" or other people that are writing. This is something I've seen where authors—kind of circling back to Gabby's point—authors may have a critique group and then somebody in that group lands a huge deal, and then another person lands a deal because they're all kind of elevating each other. And then there's always going to be that first person to land the deal in the group and the last person. So, the last person just needs to trust the process.

But definitely critique partners, "hype people", cheerleaders—people who are just going to cheer for you and believe in you no matter how crazy it seems. But I do know a lot of writers who are totally confined into a solitary existence and they're just writing and trying to do outreach on their own. But I think if I'm putting together my chief executive team, it would be your hype team and your critique partners, your "agent", an "editor" who is passionate about your work and just can't wait to get it into the hands of the general public, and then "somebody who's not a reader or a writer" who just can be there to support you.

Stuart Brown: So for individuals that don't have an agent yet or publisher, we're looking more at the hype, the critiquers, and the support person who is giving you, I would say, honest support. Not just mouthing, "Oh, you're good, you're good," but to have a little depth in their friendship, in their support, to keep you going when times maybe might be low.

Marissa Cleveland: Yes, that's an excellent way to phrase it. I also think the person who is going to help—if you can have that person on your team—make sure you're hydrated, make sure you're fed, make sure your posture isn't getting terrible in front of the laptop or the computer.

Stuart Brown: I think as an author myself, both as someone who is an author looking to get an agent, published, etc., etc., but a playwright that has had plays staged around the country, I do find support groups out there. But it's something that I think the individual has to be comfortable in looking for. So that solitary person might have a little more difficulty because they're just in their own world. And yes, they're the CEO, but they're the CEO of one as opposed to the CEO of a couple of people.

Marissa Cleveland: That also brings up another—reminded me of another point. When you asked about the people to surround yourself with, I do get the opportunity—I'm very fortunate and I love this—to work with a lot of entrepreneurs who are outside of the writing industry, outside of the publishing industry, but they are like the subject matter experts in their field. And one thing that they always say is even if they're at the top of their game, even if their company is for one or 1,000, they are huge into "mentorship." So they also are constantly looking for a mentor and they are also having mentees around them. And I think that works really well because it makes you stay relevant and it makes you kind of stay focused on what the trends are or what the emerging new topics are in your field.

Stuart Brown: Gabby and Marissa, I want to thank you for sharing your one thing. I think it's so important for new authors to hear these things and to help them grow as writers, to be able to get them to sit down at—I'm not going to say the typewriter, but at the keyboard—to start to write. And the information that you've provided, I think, will help them. So thank you for sharing your one thing.

Marissa Cleveland: Thanks for having us.

Gabby Cabezut: Thank you.

Stuart Brown: You've been listening to One Thing – Literary Edition, a podcast that asks a simple question of seasoned literary agents: What is one piece of advice you would give to new authors? I'm your host, playwright and author Stuart Brown. Information about all my works can be found at my website: stuartjbrown.com. I've been speaking with Gabby Cabezut and Marissa Cleveland, both literary agents at The Seymour Agency. I hope you will join us next time for another edition.

ABOUT THE HOST

Stuart J. Brown is an award-winning Connecticut playwright whose 10-Minute works have been staged across the country. He's also written four full one-act plays. You can see all his work at stuartjbrown.com.

Brown is a theater critic with the Outer Critics Circle and the Connecticut Critics Circle. Additionally, he operates the 24/7 online Broadway radio station, Sounds of Broadway (soundsofbroadway.com), featuring the best from Off-Broadway, Broadway, and London stages. His 'On Broadway' podcast features discussions with figures from the world of music and stage. He's aired more than 700 episodes since 2006. (broadwayradioprograms.com)

Additional podcasts include "One Thing with Stuart Brown" (stuartjbrown.com/podcast) with the latest edition focusing on the publishing and writing world. He asks a simple question of seasoned literary agents…

"What is one piece of advice you would give to new authors?"

For questions & press inquiries, email stu@stuartjbrown.com. Follow on Instagram @stuartjbrown_author. More resources available in the Press Room at stuartjbrown.com/press-room.

