



Tennessee Copywriter Turns Career Around, Tops \$200,000

When Sean McCool needs to fill his gas tank, he doesn't think twice. He simply tops it off.

But this simple act means so much. It's just one small reminder that life has changed for Sean and his family.

"In the last four years, never once have I had to think about whether to fill up my gas tank," he said. "The money's there. But I remember when we were scraping, and we'd get a couple dollars in gas just to get through to the next check."

For years, Sean and his family rode an exhausting cycle of survival as he bounced from one job to another, just trying to pay the bills, never mind finding meaningful work.

But today, their financial situation has pivoted 180 degrees. He and his family own a nice house and cars, and take vacations – even with Sean working less than full time. He found a prosperous career in just about the last field he ever expected: writing.

"Anything to Survive"

In middle and high school, Sean failed English class – twice. After high school, he tried a couple of years of college, but flunked out.

He decided to enlist in the U.S. Army, where he spent three years. Upon leaving, his experience as an infantryman in The Old Guard was rewarding – presiding at thousands of ceremonies in the nation's capital – but it didn't translate to the job world.

Sean spent years playing musical chairs in different jobs, trying to find a fit: factory work, trade show displays, and sales of timeshares, insurance and funeral properties.

"I was doing anything to survive," he said.

CASE STUDY:

Sean McCool

"The relationships formed through AWAI ended up being huge for me. Without Job Fair at Bootcamp, I couldn't have gotten in front of contacts as easily. Those clients have amounted to hundreds of thousands of dollars in work."

MEMBER:

Sean McCool

LOCATION:

Chattanooga, Tennessee

OTHER CAREERS:

Handyman, factory work, trade show displays, annuity sales

HOW SHE GOT HER FIRST CLIENT:

Sean landed a project with a friend to write an advertorial for a local in-home water treatment company – closing \$100,000 in sales for the client.

TOP AWAI PROGRAMS:

- *The Masters Program for Six-Figure Copywriting*
- *FastTrack to Copywriting Success* Bootcamp and Job Fair

When he finally did well, nearly reaching an income of six figures, he admittedly “wasn’t ready for it.” Overextended, his family lost everything in bankruptcy.

The Turning Point: An 80-Hour Work Week

Somewhere along the way, Sean received a letter from American Writers & Artists Inc. (AWAI) promoting its programs on copywriting. Despite his poor showing in English classes, Sean actually liked writing. But could he make a career out of it?

Seeing a possible avenue, he scraped together the money in 2003 to invest in AWAI’s self-paced *Accelerated Program for Six-Figure Copywriting*. But before he could dig into the course, he started working with his father in the construction business.

Still mulling over a career in copywriting – but skeptical – he attended his first AWAI *FastTrack to Copywriting Success* Bootcamp and Job Fair, the organization’s flagship annual event in Delray Beach, Florida. But Sean returned home not yet ready to move forward.

Ironically, it was Sean’s new copywriting skills that helped him grow his new handyman business in 2006. He invested the balance of his checking account - \$26 – to print and circulate flyers he had written.

“I took what little I knew about copywriting and wrote a one-page flyer with key persuasion elements,” he said. “I spent \$16 on printing the flyers and the \$10 I had left on gas. I targeted neighborhoods that were just the right age to need some repairs. The next morning, I got a call to paint someone’s basement for \$1000.”

For two years, he “rinsed and repeated,” to keep the handyman work flowing until one day he’d had enough.

“It was a really good week as a handyman. I made \$8,000 installing floors for 80 hours on my

hands and knees,” he said. “I realized this was as good as it was going to get and there was no way to sustain it.”

Bootcamp Bonanza: Projects, Job Offers

That same day or week, Sean received a promotion from AWAI: the opportunity to join *Circle of Success*, which would give him lifetime access to all AWAI programs, including *Bootcamp*.

“The flyers I wrote paid our bills. I thought, ‘Maybe I can do this.’ Right then, I decided that by 2009 I would be a copywriter, come hell or high water.”

At the 2008 *Bootcamp*, Sean even surprised himself when a spec piece he submitted won him \$1,000 in new project work with AWAI – enough to pay for his hotel with some leftover.

His winning spec assignment caught the attention of companies at the event, opening the door for work with leading info-marketers, Net Profit Explosion and Stansberry & Associates. After completing projects with both in the months following *Bootcamp*, Sean found himself in an unexpected spot; four months after *Bootcamp*, both companies offered him jobs within the same 15 minutes.

“The relationships formed through AWAI ended up being huge for me,” Sean said. “Without Job Fair at *Bootcamp*, I couldn’t have gotten in front of contacts as easily. Those clients paved the way for hundreds of thousands of dollars of work.”

A Money-Maker for Clients

Sean ultimately chose to join Stansberry & Associates Investment Research at its Baltimore

**American
Writers &
Artists
Inc.** SINCE 1997

offices, where he worked for more than a year. But his family's heart was back in Tennessee.

There was no question about what Sean would do next. He had the skills, experience, contacts, and confidence, to be an independent copywriter. It didn't hurt that soon after leaving Stansberry & Associates Sean won AWAI's \$10K Challenge again.

Today, Sean is an in-demand direct-response writer for organizations such as The Oxford Club, Stansberry & Associates, StreetAuthority.com, Leeb Publishing, Lombardi Publishing, Nightingale-Conant, Braxton Bragg, Kiefer and others.

Clients call him again and again for one primary reason: he makes money for them. He beat one client's control by a stunning 51 percent. He grew another client's subscriber list by 2,000 names in just 30 days.

True Financial Security

Since going out on his own, Sean's income varies month to month – but it's never dipped below \$10,000 in a single month. Last year, he grossed more than \$200,000. Those are numbers he

never expected to see, especially working a less-than-full-time schedule.

On a typical day, Sean writes until 11:30 a.m., and then heads to a CrossFit class for a couple of hours. He fields emails and makes phone calls for a bit in the afternoon.

The high income and flexibility of *the writer's life* have completely changed life for the McCools, who homeschool their daughter. They recently picked up to move from Knoxville, Tennessee to a town north of Chattanooga to assist as their church builds a new location. Sean's work flexibility also allowed him to spend a few precious months helping his mother when she was battling the final stages of cancer.

And, the McCools have a level of financial security they've never known.

"A huge a-ha moment was when we realized we had left a \$2500 royalty check on the kitchen counter for two weeks before we got around to taking it to the bank, and the bank's right around the corner," he said. "It used to be, 'we have to take a \$50 check to the bank, now!'"

Sean's Tips For Copywriters

- **Commit to a path** – Decide that you're going to succeed and go all in. "AWAI has all the tools that I needed but it was worthless until I decided to do something," he said.
- **Get on the phone** – If you want clients, pick up the phone. "A lot of writers hide behind email," he said.
- **Work on retainer** – Achieve reliable income by establishing retainer agreements with clients to provide a certain amount of work for a set rate. Most of Sean's retainers are 9-12 months.
- **Learn continuously** – Sean isn't afraid to sell a project – and then learn how to do the work. For that, he returns to AWAI programs on specific types of copywriting.

Ready to pursue *the Writer's Life*?

Learn more about the program that launched Toni's career, [The FastTrack to Copywriting Success Bootcamp & Job Fair](#).

