



**MICHAEL
FINLEY**

Correspondence with an Autoresponder

MIKE FINLEY



I recently sent a letter-to-the-editor of a major online publication. In reply I got this e-message:

Thank you for taking the time to contact USA ONLINE. On behalf of the Editorial Board, I would like to thank you for your thoughtful letter. It is important to us that readers like yourself engage in this dialogue with us.

If your letter is one of those selected for publication, congratulations. But competition for space is keen. If no one from USA Online has called you within two weeks, it is probable that your letter was not selected. Don't give up; try again!

Ellen Arbogast, Editor, USA Online.

This was terrific news. My letter wasn't flat out guaranteed of publication, but plainly I had Ellen Arbogast herself in my corner and on my side. You know what they say: "It's not what you know, it's who you know." (I always wanted to change that to *whom*, but I never knew who to suggest it to.)

Anyway, I felt pretty connected, for a change, so I did write back.

Dear Ellen Arbogast, thanks so much for the nice note! Some publications just answer with a form letter. But yours was so courteous and warm. I did, as you noted, put a lot of myself into that letter. But I feel like you are really giving it careful consideration. What more can any writer ask? Rest assured, I will never give up, not with persons of your caliber and goodwill cheering me on. Yours sincerely, etc., Michael Finley.

And I got this response:

Thank you for taking the time to contact USA ONLINE. On behalf of the Editorial Board, I would like to thank you for the letter to the editor you submitted. We value you ... etc.

So I answered:

You responded with the same exact letter to two different letters I sent you. At first I'm thinking, What are the odds of that? Then I'm like, maybe these are just form letters, you know?

So I reread the letter, and my heart sank. You probably tell everyone their letter is thoughtful, and that their opinion is important to you. I am so embarrassed. I really felt you were reaching out to me.

I am just writing to let you know I do not expect any special favors from you regarding my letter. Read it, evaluate it, and lay it on the line. Then tell me straight out. I'm a big boy. Sincerely, etc., Michael Finley

And this is what I got in reply:

Thank you for taking the time to contact USA ONLINE. On behalf of the Editorial Board, I would like ... etc

I fired back with:

Dear Ellen Arbogast, I'm not a fancy editor. I don't enjoy the respect of millions. But I do know a bit about simple manners and decency. And when I lay my heart out like I did, the last thing I expected from you, and from USA ONLINE, was a flippant reply.

Is business so slow, are you and your staff so idle, that you have nothing better to do than toy with an honest correspondent's emotions?

I'm shocked and disappointed, and unless I get word from you by return mail that you intend to use my letter, I intend to very seriously consider canceling my subscription! Sincerely ... etc.

The reply:

Thank you for taking the time to contact USA ONLINE. Et cetera.

I was stunned. Quaking with rage, I composed the final message:

Dear Ms. Arbogast. I am sorry that our communications could not proceed along more civilized lines. I believe that I offered my part sincerely and without reservation. You, for your part, saw fit to reply with a teasing, wheedling tone.

All I can say is that I am happy that you live and work in New York, where there are lots and lots of psychiatrists and you can pick one that has special knowledge and experience with the kind of anger syndrome your behavior evidences.

What makes this especially poignant for me is that I felt, from your first letter, that we might be friends.

Please let me know if this means my letter will definitely not be published. Sincerely, etc.... Michael Finley

Michael Finley writes about topics relating to culture and change. His book with Harvey Robbins, *The New Why Teams Don't Work*, won a Booz-Allen & Hamilton Global Business Book Award. Mike has also been named one of a handful of "Masters of the Wired World" by Financial Times Press. BH SmartDocs™ are published by BrownHerron Publishing and are sold exclusively on Amazon.com (www.amazon.com/brownherron).

