

Financiers Turned Authors: 'The Good Men Project'

By Judith Rosen -- Publishers Weekly, 11/12/2009 1:36:00 PM

When James Houghton and Tom Matlack, former partners in a venture capital firm founded by the latter, left the world of high finance and decided to collaborate on a book about the challenges men face, they soon learned that a book deal can be harder to negotiate than a multi-billion dollar deal. Despite the services of Boston literary agent Ike Williams of Kneerim & Williams at Fish & Richardson, strong essays by 31 men, including photojournalist Michael Kamber in the Baghdad bureau of *The New York Times*, Pulitzer Prize-winning reporter Charlie LeDuff with the *Detroit News*, and NFL Hall of Famer Andre Tippett, plus poems by Robert Pinsky, *The Good Men Project* was turned down by 50 publishers.

"We were told: men don't read books, they certainly don't read anthologies, and they don't read about manhood," said Matlack. So he and Houghton decided to finance it themselves. One advantage is that it means more money for The Good Men Foundation, which will funnel all royalties to organizations devoted to boys at risk--Street Potential, for young men in Boston's juvenile justice program; **The Boys & Girls Club of Boston**; Big Brothers, Big Sisters of Massachusetts Bay; and Dorchester Youth Alternative Academy, which targets truant.

Matlack and Houghton, who co-edited the collection with former *Robb Report* editor-in-chief Larry Bean, would like to see it spark conversations about manhood. "There is no more important question at this moment in history—with markets collapsing, corruption rampant, two foreign wars, environmental disaster at hand, and the fabric of the American family disintegrating—than what it means to be a good man," said Matlack.

The book and a 60-minute companion DVD have an official pub date of November 15, but the men have generated plenty of pre-pub interest. A launch party with a DVD screening and book signing at the Institute of Contemporary Art in Boston was held last week and other events include a reading at The Tank in New York City, a screening at Raleigh Film & Television Studios in Hollywood, Calif., a talk at Sing Sing correctional facility and bookstore signings at Brookline Booksmith in Brookline, Mass.; Metropolis Books in Los Angeles and Bluestocking in New York City. *The Good Men Project* also has an active presence on YouTube, Facebook, Twitter, flickr and blip.tv.

The Foundation printed several thousand copies of the book, which is being released as a paperback original, and will supply additional copies using print on demand. Both the book and DVD have a suggested list price of \$14.99 each; the set is priced at \$24.99 to encourage people to buy both. According to Matlack, they are intended to work together. "We want viewers to see that it's okay to be macho and talk about these issues. So we believe in the end that the film will drive viewers to the book. The book will also drive people to the DVD, since it provides in depth portraits of ten authors," he says.

As to going the self-publishing route, Matlack has no regrets. "The publishing industry is broken," he said. "Publishing houses, bookstores and agents are all scratching their heads." In addition, he added, friends told him that even if he had gone with a traditional publisher, he would still have had to pay for a marketing and publicity campaign.