

# don't write *that* book!

## Episode 20:

### PROPOSALS

**Mike Michalowicz** ([00:01](#)):

Welcome back to the Don't Write That book podcast where you can learn how to write your bestseller and own your authorship. Follow along with us as we give you an insider's view of the book industry. Now, here are your hosts, myself, **Mike Michalowicz** and **AJ Harper**. Today we're *going to* talk about your book proposal, the Rights and Wrongs, I think. And I'm joined in studio as I know, you know, with **AJ Harper**, my friend, my colleague. And, uh, you just shared a little insight, someone who's really good at writing proposals, but didn't really realize that it sounds like me.

**AJ Harper** ([00:35](#)):

Yeah.

**Mike Michalowicz** ([00:38](#)):

What?

**AJ Harper** ([00:38](#)):

No, I was talking about me.

**Mike Michalowicz** ([00:40](#)):

I know. I'm saying but you didn't realize that of yourself.

**AJ Harper** ([00:42](#)):

Well, because when you're a ghost writer, which is how I started, you end up doing a bunch of stuff that you didn't sign on to do. And, you know, you end up writing book proposals. But I guess in my mind, I thought I'm good at writing the books, not necessarily the proposals. And over time, I think I figured it out, but I didn't acknowledge it.

**Mike Michalowicz** ([01:05](#)):

Well, I want you to acknowledge the game-changing proposal for my life's trajectory, was when we did *Pumpkin Plan*. So I want to talk about that. So **AJ Harper** in studio with me. Welcome to the show.

**AJ Harper** ([01:19](#)):

Thanks. Welcome to the show. <laugh>.

**Mike Michalowicz** ([01:23](#)):

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All right, so we're going to talk about book proposals.

**AJ Harper** ([01:26](#)):

No small talk. You always asked me weird.

**Mike Michalowicz** ([01:27](#)):

That was my, that was my small talk. That was it.

**AJ Harper** ([01:29](#)):

You always asked me stuff like what, uh, when have you been the thirstiest or when you--

**Mike Michalowicz** ([01:34](#)):

Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.

**AJ Harper** ([01:35](#)):

You don't, you don't have that today.

**Mike Michalowicz** ([01:37](#)):

Um, yeah. Let me ask you one, when is the last time you changed a light bulb in your house?

**AJ Harper** ([01:43](#)):

Years. Right. I give that even if it needs to be changed, I give that job to someone else.

**Mike Michalowicz** ([01:50](#)):

No. Okay. You're a delegator. I haven't changed the light bulb, I think in years either, but I think it's because the advancements of light bulbs. So the LEDs, you don't need to change them.

**AJ Harper** ([02:01](#)):

Why did I suggest that you do the small talk? I don't know. Sometimes you, you could give good questions that are thought provoking, <laugh>. This just not one of those times. Not one.

**Mike Michalowicz** ([02:09](#)):

All right, let's get into the meat and potatoes. You ready? Yeah. Okay. So, one thing about book proposals is I am now immersed in it. We are representing eight authors and, uh, doing proposals for them.

**AJ Harper** ([02:25](#)):

We, being Pen With Purpose, your company Pen With Purpose.

**Mike Michalowicz** ([02:28](#)):

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Yeah. So Pen With Purpose came about because, uh, some authors were approaching me saying, I, I would like to be like you. And, and you get those calls too. Like, I, you know, I get the call.

**AJ Harper** ([02:37](#)):

No, I get the call that says, I want to be like Mike. Yeah. So I want you to make me--

**Mike Michalowicz** ([02:43](#)):

Make me like Mike.

**AJ Harper** ([02:44](#)):

I would work your magic. Yeah.

**Mike Michalowicz** ([02:46](#)):

And we get that with our marketing too. Particularly the website design. I want a Mike website and we get it with, um, the authorship experience. I was like, oh, this may be something we can do. Penguin also back in the day, asked me if I wanted my own imprint. And we went through the math and stuff. It just didn't make sense, but it did trigger this, oh, we can start a Pen With Purpose organization. Let me set the stage of what Pen with Purpose is. It acts like an agency. We're an agency. I mean, we go out and get the deal, so to speak. It's a book optimizer we go through and we are really heavy in testing, particularly titles and subtitles, but also the content of a book. The Click ability *All In* was interesting. That subtitle is How Great Leaders Build Unstoppable Teams. That subtitle came out of about 15 tests we ran. And when you have the Words Great Leaders in there, the Click ability was up significantly.

**AJ Harper** ([03:42](#)):

Now that's not, that's your book.

**Mike Michalowicz** ([03:44](#)):

That's my book. Yeah.

**AJ Harper** ([03:45](#)):

And you can do that for other folks.

**Mike Michalowicz** ([03:46](#)):

We do it for other folks who, so that's the, I was just giving an example of book optimization and then the marketing, which is pre-launch. Launch post-launch, which is Evergreen. And a big part of Pen with Purpose is this early stage of writing a book proposal. We're working with an author right now. We're just starting the proposal. I want to give away, my big kind of secret is if you need to show to the publisher that you see your book as a product, not a representation of yourself, <laugh> it, it is part of your business model. It needs to sell as a product on an ongoing basis and treat it that way. And then you have that, the proof of the pudding. And there's always different elements. But I think that's the essential thing that we have to have our authors understand before we can start working on a proposal.

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**AJ Harper** ([04:36](#)):

Yeah. Because the proposal is designed to persuade an agent. If you're going with an agent or a publisher, if you're going with open submission, that the book is saleable. And also I would argue that you know how to sell it. That's

**Mike Michalowicz** ([04:48](#)):

Right.

**AJ Harper** ([04:49](#)):

And so it's like a business plan.

**Mike Michalowicz** ([04:51](#)):

Now, you had a publishing company yourself. How many proposals were you receiving versus how many were you accepting? Meaning community?

**AJ Harper** ([05:00](#)):

Well, zero proposals. because I was, our publishing, we publish fiction and fiction novelists do not submit proposals. Okay. A novel.

**Mike Michalowicz** ([05:07](#)):

It's a manuscript, then?

**AJ Harper** ([05:09](#)):

Yes, you have to have your complete manuscript, or sometimes, you know, you, you know, you have to have it done for sure. Okay. Publishers might not request the entire manuscript that once. They might say, we'll take three chapters or a certain number of words. Um, but definitely you need a query letter for fiction. And then, uh, a publisher will request a manuscript and then we go forward. So there's no, there's no book proposal in fiction.

**Mike Michalowicz** ([05:32](#)):

What is a query letter?

**AJ Harper** ([05:34](#)):

It's just, it's now, it's an email where you're following certain parameters where you're basically pitching the book. Okay. And it's usually less than, say, 500 words.

**Mike Michalowicz** ([05:43](#)):

So almost like an executive summary, you

**AJ Harper** ([05:45](#)):

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Know, it has to do a lot. I mean, it's, it's, it has to sell the book and sell you as an author. But it's not, it's, and it has to have personality to it. So it's, I don't know, when I think of executive summary, I think, blah, you know.

**Mike Michalowicz** ([05:59](#)):

Yeah. I gotcha.

**AJ Harper** ([06:00](#)):

It sounds very corporate to me.

**Mike Michalowicz** ([06:02](#)):

It does sound corporate. What do you, as a publisher, and I know this was in the fiction space, but what were you looking for that made you switch to saying, oh, this is something we want to make a bet on? What was the deciding factors?

**AJ Harper** ([06:13](#)):

Okay! I, all right. I, yeah, I'll talk about this. So, if I got a query letter that in the letter the author had some sort of personality, did not over represent them, like over, uh, the ego, you know? Yes. Like, I once received an email from a dude who told me that he was giving me, um, this was a masterpiece. Oh, I am instantly not even interested.

**Mike Michalowicz** ([06:38](#)):

I still regret sending that to you. <laugh>

**AJ Harper** ([06:40](#)):

Oh, no. Ha. So if a person is, you know, not using a lot of adjectives about how great their book is. Yeah. If they have a succinct and compelling and intriguing summary synopsis that tells me what the book is about, but also makes me want to read it. And if they had some knowledge of us as a publisher, meaning they understand our body of work, they're not sending us something. It's like, why? Why are you sending us this? We don't do this. You know? So having some understanding and then had some sense that they knew how they were *going to* position that book, where it fit in the marketplace was really important. I think a lot of authors go wrong is they expect the publisher to provide that information for them. You tell me where this fits now that is part of the publisher's job, but you need to know going in where you think it fits. So that you have some knowledge of the market for your book, where it fits with other books, understanding of the genre. So if I didn't see that, then I thought, oh, I'm dealing with a real, a noob here. You know, because that's a big factor. We would often, we would like a book, but maybe the author was too green, and then we knew we, we just, it was *going to* be such heavy lifting to try and get them to even promote it. Mm.

**Mike Michalowicz** ([07:52](#)):

Why does it matter that a book fits? And what I'm thinking of is in the nonfiction space or the fiction space, but I'm thinking portfolio. A book is a book is a book. Uh, the consumer, the reader doesn't

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necessarily even know of the imprint or care, or maybe they do, isn't a book a book. Why? Why does the author have to have a book that matches the publisher's space or niche of books?

**AJ Harper** ([08:18](#)):

Well, for several reasons. So for our company, we had a mission. So, you know, we had to have books that were, uh, representing LGBTQ characters in a positive light. We also wanted books where being gay, being transgender or whatever, however you identify, it was not the central conflict that was actually our mission. And we also wanted books that were not tragic. So they had happy endings, or happy for now endings. And so we weren't going to take a book that didn't have those elements. We also, you know, had other restrictions about the kind of things we wouldn't publish on the page. You know, extreme violence or some, you know, graphic stuff. Right? Mm. So if a book falls outside of those parameters, then that's important. If on a, for a mission purpose, not all publishers have a mission. We did. Right? We were trying to not just sell books, but change the landscape, uh, which we did.

**AJ Harper** ([09:11](#)):

I'm really proud of that. But you also have the, just the pure ability, can you sell it? Right? Right, right. So you have deep, you'll have deep knowledge in your genre. Right? That's, I was thinking, you have connect, you know how to write editorially. Your team knows how to, how to handle those books. But then beyond that, the marketing team knows how to position those books. They have contacts in the industry. They know how to pitch it to the sales team. If it falls outside of those parameters, it's harder to do. So, for example, we had, we published maybe three or four books of works of literary fiction, and they were amazing. It wasn't our main deal. Yes. Which really believed in the books. Yes. We didn't have the same ability to get them sold that we did with other books despite our best efforts. Right. So we were proud to do it. And the authors were proud to be with us, but I do think that's a factor.

**Mike Michalowicz** ([10:05](#)):

Yeah. I love that. Team efficiency. You know, a publisher is a business entity like any other entity, and you want to be efficient, effective, masterful at your craft, because therefore you build a reputation for excellence. So you want your authors to complement that. So you become the authority in the space. It's, you know, it's Business 101. Let's talk about the purpose of the proposal. So the first thing that we're digging into is the publisher. We're trying to show the publisher that this is a prudent investment for them.

**AJ Harper** ([10:32](#)):

Yeah. It's an investment.

**Mike Michalowicz** ([10:33](#)):

The, the second thing is, in part how we're *going to* sell the book, we're *going to* treat it like a product.

**AJ Harper** ([10:39](#)):

Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>.

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**Mike Michalowicz** ([10:40](#)):

How do you express that? Because my sense is I can just copy off the web how to sell books and paste it in. And there's my proposal. I'm just *going to* follow the script. I don't think that's the answer. How do I embed the proposal and how do I show the publisher that, yeah, I can and will move books.

**AJ Harper** ([10:57](#)):

Well, there's several sections mean we can go through the sections. It's, you know, should we do that? I think that's good to do. But I do want to just say so's for clarifying. If you are a nonfiction author, say prescriptive, nonfiction, business, spirituality, self-help, et cetera, you need the book proposal. You do not need to finish the entire book. In fact, I don't think it's necessarily a good idea to do that.

**Mike Michalowicz** ([11:17](#)):

Why not?

**AJ Harper** ([11:21](#)):

Well, because in the process of working with an agent or a publisher, your outline might change. Some of your messaging might change. I've never, ever heard of an agent not change a proposal. My point is, right, <laugh> at a certain, you, you want to get, you know, two or three really good chapters, really rocking chapters. But you don't need to finish the entire book. In fact, you're *going to* delay the process. If you wait to first finish the book, then do a proposal, you're writing months and months and months and months to your timeline. Because while you are submitting your proposal to agents, and then hopefully you get one and an, and then an agent is submitting your proposal to the editors. They know you can still work on the book. Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>. But if you wait for that process, which can be months to go out and try and get the deal, you're just adding time. And you might have to change a bunch of stuff. I once had an author who did have— Wrote the entire book and the proposal, got an agent, and then ended up having to write a completely different book. True story.

**Mike Michalowicz** ([12:19](#)):

Oh, a different book. So to your point of the agency needing to change the proposal we have had with Pen, with purpose, a couple authors come to us with a completed proposal, and we're like, "we have to make changes." And they're like, "What's wrong with my proposal?" Like, there's nothing wrong with it. How you were approaching it. We as an agency, have a reputation with certain publishers of how we present to them. So the story I kind of teased earlier on, we had a major publisher, uh, that we pitched on an author, and they declined. Not because they didn't like the proposal, it just didn't fit in their sequence or schedule and compliment what they were doing. Yeah. But they called, they said, we've got to tell you, this is the best proposal we've ever received.

**AJ Harper** ([13:01](#)):

Amazing!

**Mike Michalowicz** ([13:01](#)):

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Which was such a great compliment. Will

**AJ Harper** ([13:03](#)):

You tell me who it was after?

**Mike Michalowicz** ([13:04](#)):

Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. It was within the Random House.

**AJ Harper** ([13:08](#)):

Uh, no, the author.

**Mike Michalowicz** ([13:09](#)):

Oh, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. Okay. Yeah. But so what was interesting was we understand what the publisher needs and how to speak to that. And that's how we had to modify the proposal. So, um, that, I think that's why agents modify the proposal as they have a experience with publishers. They, they understand what the publishers are needs, needs are, what they're speaking to, how this author can complement their suite and all that stuff.

**AJ Harper** ([13:35](#)):

Wait, before we go in, just a little addendum. Not addendum, just the one, one piece I, I wanted to get in. If you're writing memoir, you need to write the whole manuscript.

**Mike Michalowicz** ([13:45](#)):

Why, why is that? As, as, because it sounds like, is it like a fiction kind of demand?

**AJ Harper** ([13:51](#)):

Yeah. So that's creative nonfiction, you know, it's, it's a different, they need to see the whole scope of it. They need to see the whole memoir. And memoir is, you know, relies heavily on the writer's ability to write. And a book, a business book. It should be well written, but it's the ideas.

**Mike Michalowicz** ([14:09](#)):

Yeah. I think that's the big differentiation, right. It's, it's ideas and perhaps applicability of those ideas versus the, the immersive immersiveness in a story, which is a fiction book.

**AJ Harper** ([14:24](#)):

Yes. And memoir is, uh, you know, it's tricky to write. You know, people don't always do, they don't always write the story they need to write from their own personal life. They don't always connect the dots. They don't always have a central question that needs to be answered and a publisher needs to see. Is there any there, there,

**Mike Michalowicz** ([14:44](#)):



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JK Rowling famously pitched her book, which was a completed manuscript to 50 publishers that declined her. Do you think that—

**AJ Harper** ([14:52](#)):

mean, there's many stories like that

**Mike Michalowicz** ([14:54](#)):

<laugh>, Right? And then, and that, but is it these publishers were ignorant of the opportunity that was sitting in front of them? Or did she pitch wrong? Uh, do you have a, what's your gut there? I

**AJ Harper** ([15:03](#)):

Mean, there's so many factors. I think she, uh, okay. I don't think people always see the right. Um, publishers don't always get it right. They don't always see the opportunity. If they had other books like that, they probably would've passed. So that's a huge factor that people don't realize. You mentioned an author, the publisher told you, this is the best proposal we've ever seen.

**Mike Michalowicz** ([15:22](#)):

Right. They still passed.

**AJ Harper** ([15:23](#)):

They passed, but they passed because they had a front list author who was probably had a similar topic.

**Mike Michalowicz** ([15:28](#)):

Yeah.

**AJ Harper** ([15:28](#)):

Yeah. And they can't do that. They can't have competition within their front list. So front list is books that are coming out and also books that have been in the last year or so. Mm. Year or two. As you know, publishing cares about what's next. And they can't have two authors that are writing about the same thing on their front list. Makes sense? So, but people think it's personal, but they might already have the contract and it's coming up and they can't really do it.

**Mike Michalowicz** ([15:52](#)):

It does make sense. You also shared something with me, maybe it was during public complaint. I don't recall. When we were working on the proposal and I said, well, maybe we'll self-publish. And you're like, oh, we have to write the proposal anyway. And I'm like, what? Why do you need to write a proposal even if you don't plan, or don't get a publishing deal, so to speak, with a traditional?

**AJ Harper** ([16:12](#)):

Because the clarity that you gain from writing it. It helps you write a better book and it helps you understand how you're going to sell it. That's why. Okay. You have to really, really be clear about what

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you're doing, why it matters, where it fits in the marketplace, and how you're going to sell it. Those are all elements in a book proposal that often, if we don't do a book proposal, we don't really think about it as much. We let ourselves wing it. And the clarity's everything. Yeah.

**Mike Michalowicz** ([16:40](#)):

Yeah. You know, with last episode, we'll see how the sequence comes out. But we talked about that call I got from Penguin. We just dug into it. It was the slap that, that woke me up. And I'm thinking we didn't do a proposal for *All In* it. It was so easy.

**AJ Harper** ([16:54](#)):

We didn't have to.

**Mike Michalowicz** ([16:55](#)):

We didn't have to. I said, "Hey, I got an idea." And we're like, oh, great. We'll take it. Like that was the proposal for the last three or four books. Like literally not—

**AJ Harper** ([17:03](#)):

Well, we are like a one pager.

**Mike Michalowicz** ([17:05](#)):

A one pager. But I wonder if, if we did that, if I did that, that I would've said, we've got to sell 60,000 books the first week.

**AJ Harper** ([17:11](#)):

Well, you wouldn't have said that. because you didn't have that cut. Have perspective. You have to listen to that episode. Or now we're saying stuff they don't maybe understand.

**Mike Michalowicz** ([17:17](#)):

I know. I know. You're right. You're right. I hope that episode has already come out. So listen to that episode. But I wonder if writing that proposal fully would've given me a better perspective, but maybe pro—

**AJ Harper** ([17:28](#)):

Maybe not.

**Mike Michalowicz** ([17:28](#)):

Maybe not. Because I may have just said the same perfunctory stuff. Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>. Let's talk about the submission process. Can you tell me what that is? How you go through the process? Then we'll get into all the elements.

**AJ Harper** ([17:38](#)):

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Sure. So first, you should know that traditional publishers, you are going to need a book proposal for nonfiction. Hybrid publishers, it's still good to have a book proposal, but they might ask you to just pull a piece of it, or you might shorten it, you know? So it, it's good to do it, but you might have to chop it up according to their submission requirements. For traditional publishers, most require agent submission, but some don't. And so you can go to their, the publisher's website, look at their submission policies, and then they might say, okay, I want these elements. You can pull it from the proposal. Or they might say, just send the proposal. Whatever. Point being, you need to figure out, do I need an agent to submit to these publishers? Hybrid, you never need an agent. So if you're going with hybrid, write the proposal, then find out what are their submission policies.

**AJ Harper (18:27):**

Maybe they want the whole thing or part of it. Traditional. If they, same deal. If they do not require agent submission representation, but let's say they do, then you have to find an agent. So you're going to research agents, which we can, we can do a whole call on agents. We should, yeah. Yeah. So you're *going to* research agents, then you're going to figure out their submission policies, and you're going to submit your, it's usually a query first. And then if they want the proposal, they'll ask for it. And that can be, you know, they might get back to you that week. They might get back to you in a couple three months, then they will most likely want you to change it. Right? So you have to, that doesn't mean you give them a nice draft. You still give them the very best book proposal that you can do. And then they'll say, change, change, change.

**AJ Harper (19:21):**

Why are they doing that? Because they know what they need to be able to pitch it. For sure. So then they're going to, you go out on submission, which we say "go out on sub," all that means is your agent is now shopping it. So they have likely a short list of editors. They know they're looking for books like that, and they're going to send it out. And then probably some other editors that they maybe don't know as well, that they might also send it to. And if it's a hot property, they might go for auction. So that's something only an agent can organize for you. Pretty hard to do on your own. So you need the contacts. It's this short timeframe when publishers are aware that there is an auction for a title with a lot of buzz. They have a limited window to submit their bid. You know, and that's how, you know, you can get pretty high advances when publishers are competing for a book.

**Mike Michalowicz (20:12):**

Why do some publishers mandate you have an agent, they won't take direct submissions?

**AJ Harper (20:17):**

Because the agent is vetting whether the book is good or not. I mean, I, I cannot begin to tell you how, even at my little tiny publishing house with my two partners that I founded with two other people, how much time I spend reading going through queries and manuscripts. Oh my gosh.

**Mike Michalowicz (20:33):**

Yeah.

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**AJ Harper** ([20:34](#)):

It's, and we were, we're tiny. We were tiny. I cannot, if they had open submissions, it would be impossible. It would be impossible.

**Mike Michalowicz** ([20:44](#)):

You know what's interesting? Uh, a couple days ago I went, went to a bookstore. I was invited to speak there.

**AJ Harper** ([20:50](#)):

Oh yeah. I saw that on social. How did that go? I, you've haven't done that.

**Mike Michalowicz** ([20:53](#)):

It's cute. Yeah. It, yeah, there were five people were there. Just to give you context, it's not how I market my books. And, and, uh, but I did a TV pilot at this, which actually may, we may be getting a TV show. It's, it's imminently going to be decided. It's being shopped right now. But we filmed it at this bookstore. So I was down there, it says...

**AJ Harper** ([21:14](#)):

Oh, so you had a connection there.

**Mike Michalowicz** ([21:16](#)):

But here's what was interesting. Uh, it was, it was great. There was some people that traveled hours to be there at this five people. So that was, was profound. But they don't sell to the entrepreneurial community. Yeah. This, you know, so it it's—

**AJ Harper** ([21:28](#)):

Probably a lot of fiction. A

**Mike Michalowicz** ([21:29](#)):

Lot of fiction stuff. Yeah. Three of the people were authors themselves,

**AJ Harper** ([21:34](#)):

<laugh>

**Mike Michalowicz** ([21:34](#)):

And so I was talking with the, and they all had brought their own books, and they were like, Hey, look at my book. You know, <laugh>, because two pictures together, I spoke with the bookstore owner, and she says, you wouldn't believe how many authors come in here with their books trying to, wanting me to display their self-pub book. And she goes, it's distracting, it's overwhelming. And everyone says, this book is so amazing. Everyone will want this book and are angry when the bookstore says, "We don't take books this way." Uh, they're like, but my book is so amazing. And I wonder if that's the same thing in

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authors promoting themselves. We're, we're so entrenched in what we've done. I believe our books are amazing that it overwhelms a publisher because everyone's pushing so hard for their book. It's not vetted to any degree. I wonder if that's it?

**AJ Harper** ([22:19](#)):

Yeah. Incidentally, that's why I'm a big fan of getting trade reviews for your book. Because if you're trying, if you're an indie author and or you're with a hybrid and you're trying to get a, a bookstore to take you seriously or a library to take you seriously, and they can easily look up a trade review, then you can, then you can get that in the store.

**Mike Michalowicz** ([22:37](#)):

Interesting. Okay. Let's go on to the components of a proposal. The, the, the meat and potatoes.

**AJ Harper** ([22:44](#)):

Yeah. They're standard so that you might design them differently. You're going to write them differently. Yep. But there's a standard format. Okay. It starts with the, obviously you've got a title, page, whatever contact info. But the, the hardest thing to write in the whole proposal is the overview. And that's first. And basically for a lot of folks, that might be all they read and they might not even read the whole overview. So page one, paragraph one. You better have a strong hook. No, no windups. Right. No windups to the good stuff. Right. Right. And, uh, an overview, I think it's important to note is not people make the mistake where they're just talking about the book itself, but it's helpful to think of it more like an overview of the proposal. So not a summary of everything they're going to learn, but just weaving into the pitch.

**AJ Harper** ([23:33](#)):

It's like the overview is the main pitch. This is the book, this is where it fits in the marketplace. This is why I am the perfect person to write it. Yep. These are the book fundamentals, core message, promise, here's my reader. All that needs to be in there as well as a hook that answers questions. Like, so what? So you think your idea is so great? I guarantee you that publisher or agent has seen it. It's more times than they can count, some version of that. So, and then also urgency. Why do we need this book now? Yep. Which can be, you know, part of that is market positioning, but then what else is going on in the world, et cetera. So you might think, why is this urgent now in terms of how you can help people? And I hope you do, but that's not what they want to know. They want to know why is it urgent now in terms of demand. So all that is in the overview. And I warn you that it takes many drafts to get that right.

**Mike Michalowicz** ([24:30](#)):

We, uh, in our proposals, we say basically, why this book? Why this author, why this moment? That's actually the, the reframe we use. And it was interesting word in Pen With Purpose. We're doing a lot of work in the grief space. It just is naturally presenting itself. So we're doubling down on this. And, uh, we have a lot of data now around, uh, what happened with the Covid pandemic and this kind of cascading or ripple effect in grief. So we speak to a very articulately and we have numbers behind it. And that one publisher is like, this is the best proposal we've ever seen. He says, you show the numbers of what's going on, and we, we can correlate with this. We see this and this. Now it makes sense.

# don't write *that* book!

**AJ Harper** ([25:12](#)):

Right. So you're talking about scope of problem in terms of grief, but also understanding market demand for the problem and yeah.

**Mike Michalowicz** ([25:19](#)):

Yeah. Exactly. Yeah, exactly. And, and we also point to the, the thing is that, uh, we have a statistic in there about therapy and the demand for therapists. So we can see this demand for therapy is skyrocketed. And there's now, uh, less supply than demand. So people are saying, I can't, I literally cannot hire a therapist. What do I do now? This book will be your bridge. Yeah. That's a, so that's,

**AJ Harper** ([25:42](#)):

So that's, that's part of it. It's part of saying that this is the urgency piece.

**Mike Michalowicz** ([25:45](#)):

And that's all on the first page. <laugh>

**AJ Harper** ([25:47](#)):

It is.

**Mike Michalowicz** ([25:47](#)):

Yeah. I know. That's how we do it.

**AJ Harper** ([25:49](#)):

You, you, and then, I mean, you can, you can keep talking about the book on the second and third page of the overview if you go that far. Yeah. But you can't bury it. Okay. Uh, so then there's about the author.

**Mike Michalowicz** ([25:59](#)):

Tell me about that.

**AJ Harper** ([26:00](#)):

So this is your bio. It's in, if you want to be regarded as a person of authority, it's in third person. If your book is say, uh, book of essays and you're being, it's humor or something like that, you would use first person. So you kind of have to decide what's the tone here? This, I really need to say it is your bio as it pertains to the topic and your influence in the world. So both. So if you're writing, if, so, if it were you with a business book, you wouldn't talk about your corporate experience back in the day. Right? That's not right. You don't need that. Or something completely unrelated. Right. Uh, you don't need to talk about your education, let's say, I know you didn't, but let's say you got a teaching degree, you wouldn't put the teaching degree in your book pitch for a business book. Right. So it's relevant credentials, but also understanding cool stuff that shows that you are a big deal in whatever way, whatever you've got and that you're connected.

# don't write *that* book!

**Mike Michalowicz** ([27:05](#)):

There's, um, for podcasts, we do have an, uh, a podcast called G-Map, where my accounting practices is for *Profit First* professionals. And we have people constantly applying to be on the show. And sometimes we accept people and we say, please submit a bio. And it's to your point, it's just a, a, a vomit fest of credentials. "I'm a this, I'm a that, I'm a this, I'm a that." And there's no relevancy. So we have a person here, AKA myself, who before reads the bios, scratched out all the stuff that's irrelevant to our guests. Yeah. And I've seen these in proposals. I have this, I have that, I have this and that. And it does not add credibility. It actually detracts from it.

**AJ Harper** ([27:41](#)):

It does detract. It's like when you get a business card from someone and it says, I'm a coach therapist, yoga teacher, you know, consultant, author, speaker. I'm like, ah, this too, you know? No,

**Mike Michalowicz** ([27:55](#)):

I, I referenced this book in the past, but the book by, uh, captain Sully who landed. You know what? His bio was on his proposal. I landed a plane on the Hudson.

**AJ Harper** ([28:05](#)):

Well...

**Mike Michalowicz** ([28:06](#)):

It wasn't, I went through aeronautical training. I've been this...

**AJ Harper** ([28:09](#)):

But. Okay. He does extreme. He gets to say that.

**Mike Michalowicz** ([28:12](#)):

I, no, I, but I, I want to take an extreme example because the relevant thing is that—

**AJ Harper** ([28:17](#)):

Yes.

**Mike Michalowicz** ([28:18](#)):

All the credentials behind it has almost no significance. And I think we've got to identify what's the 20% of things in our history. That is 80% of the significance.

**AJ Harper** ([28:28](#)):

Yes. And I will say, what I see with authors I work with this is the disease unwillingness reluctance to say how awesome they are. So they leave stuff out. So they'll put stuff in, they don't need, but then they leave stuff out.

# don't write *that* book!

**Mike Michalowicz** ([28:46](#)):

Yeah.

**AJ Harper** ([28:47](#)):

Because they don't want to be braggy.

**Mike Michalowicz** ([28:48](#)):

What would be an example of something as braggy versus credentials of—

**AJ Harper** ([28:54](#)):

I've had people leave, um, commendations from the British royal family out. I've had people leave. Oh, they have this podcast. It's like a million listeners. It's not even in there. Yeah. Okay. You know, like, what's happening? Yeah. Here's what's happening. They feel uncomfortable. The more they talk about themselves and the more they talk about their book and is it good? And it comes down to a self-esteem issue and a worthiness issue. So they just start editing it out too much. Too much. Please hear me when I say this. Your book proposal is not the time to be modest. Amen. I mean, take out Amen. Take out the adjectives, please. We don't need sought after accomplished, you know? Right. We don't please stop using sought after. Yeah, yeah, yeah. Just say the facts, but include the good stuff. Don't omit the stuff. That's really interesting. Yeah. Yeah. And it happens every time.

**Mike Michalowicz** ([29:52](#)):

By the way, I want to put an underlined underworld. Interesting. Here's a little hack I found is if many people have a similar or likely credential, it's less valuable than something that's interesting and especially unique. So if you have a degree from a university, which probably a lot of people have a degree from a university, but if you have a million downloads on a podcast, that's atypical. Yeah. And that's the point of emphasis.

**AJ Harper** ([30:13](#)):

That said though, if you're writing a book that has to have academic rigor, of course, then put the degree in. It's got to be relevant.

**Mike Michalowicz** ([30:19](#)):

Yeah. Totally. All right, give me the, uh, target audience component.

**AJ Harper** ([30:22](#)):

Okay. So target audience, I want you to think about it in terms of psychographics. So what's driving hearts and minds? What's, what's the emotion? What's happening in the world of your reader? But you also need to think about the demographics there in terms of scope. What's the scope of readership? So you need to do a little bit of homework to see how many people are we talking about here? No publisher thinks you're going to, if your readership is, you know, 150 million if you say it's women.

**Mike Michalowicz** ([30:50](#)):



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Right.

**AJ Harper (30:50):**

<laugh> No publisher thinks you're selling to all those women. So they don't take you seriously. So you do have to try and niche down a little bit to who you're actually talking about. And then think about it in terms of primary market. So that's who you're writing the book for. But then there's a secondary market and a tertiary market. So I would say, I can use my book as an example, if that's okay? That's true. Primary market would be authors and aspiring authors.

**Mike Michalowicz (31:17):**

So this is *Write a Must-Read*.

**AJ Harper (31:19):**

*Write a Must-Read*. Yep. Secondary market would be, say, book coaches, publishers, people who are in the business of helping people get books to market. And tertiary might be education. Right. Or even some corporate folks who are selling products to, or maybe even business coaches might be one. So I didn't write a big fancy book proposal for my book. I will admit I was lucky enough to get my deal without that, but—

**Mike Michalowicz (31:49):**

Which is again, atypical.

**AJ Harper (31:51):**

Yeah, that's true.

**Mike Michalowicz (31:52):**

But you are, but you are a known quantity in many ways with, with your publisher.

**AJ Harper (31:56):**

Correct. At any rate, you want to delineate that and you want to give them some numbers, but you don't want to sound like everyone in China, you know, like you don't do that.

**Mike Michalowicz (32:07):**

Because it's rooted in reality. Books don't sell that way. There's a community that clings onto it. And you've got to speak to that community. Yes. I do want to just underline *Write a Must-Read* is a must read. If you have not read AJ's book, go on Amazon right now. Purchase *Write a Must-Read* It is the definitive, it is the authoritative source for authors. I promise you. You're welcome. Comps, comps stands for comparatives by the way. Not competition. Someone's like, oh, here's my competitors. I'm like, no, no, it's a comparative.

**AJ Harper (32:34):**

# don't write *that* book!

Well, because sometimes we use the term competitive title analysis. Okay. And sometimes we say comparative titles, either way it's comp.

**Mike Michalowicz** ([32:41](#)):

It's comps. I want to say it's comparative because there is not a single book, in my opinion you compete with.

**AJ Harper** ([32:48](#)):

No. This is the, this is where people get stuck. Yeah.

**Mike Michalowicz** ([32:50](#)):

Like, oh, it, they're *going to* buy my book or their book. And my experience is, if someone buys a book and falls in love with it, they're *going to* buy more books in that space. We are all collaborating. It's the most unique industry, in my opinion. It's we don't have competition.

**AJ Harper** ([33:02](#)):

Yeah. And so the pur – But this is the thing people don't, they misunderstand the purpose of comps. Yeah. Purpose of comps is to establish market demand for your topic. So people freak out, they say, oh my gosh, I found two books just like mine on Amazon. And if I say, is it selling decent? <laugh> And they say yes, say, great. That's fantastic news. Yes. So we have this, um, myth. Right? I have to be, this is the only book like this that's not good for a publisher. That's right. A publisher wants to know that people want to read the book. And publishers know that people don't read just one book on a topic. So the key is to establish a demand for your topic and show how you can differentiate yours to fill a gap in the marketplace. So it's not to say that these books suck, and mine is better to say these books are doing well and they're serving this market, and here's how I fill another gap, another need in that readership and can build on that. And that's why you need to really shift your focus about what are comps.

**Mike Michalowicz** ([34:05](#)):

One tendency authors have to say is that book sucks; here's why my book's better.

**AJ Harper** ([37:12](#)):

Yes. You don't want to trash a book that's really helpful to millions of people.

**Mike Michalowicz** ([37:17](#)):

<laugh>. Yeah. I don't think you want to trash any books,

**AJ Harper** ([37:19](#)):

Honestly. No. I think you should never trash a book. Once you've decided to be an author, this is now a time for you to realize that you are no longer trashing authors.

**Mike Michalowicz** ([37:27](#)):

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So I, I mean.

**AJ Harper** ([37:28](#)):

And not that you were, but you, you're no longer doing it. For example, you're not putting up a book review if it's less than four stars. Just walk on by.

**Mike Michalowicz** ([37:34](#)):

And I wanted to talk about a story about that. And so my lesson, my advice is never, no matter what you think of a book, uh, if you have nothing good to say, don't say anything at all. Yeah. I read a book that I think was an ineffective book. And so in my review, because Amazon's like, you want to review book? I said, yeah, this is a two star book. I said, here's why this book is repeating. You should, but doesn't have a how. It's not action whatsoever. I think there's another book in this space that's better. And so I think it's a two star book and I put it under my name.

**AJ Harper** ([38:03](#)):

Oh, no.

**Mike Michalowicz** ([38:04](#)):

Yeah. And I didn't mean anything. Ill, I just meant to be of service. The author reached out and said, why the hell did you do this? Um, and actually had other people calling me. I'm like, oh, I am so sorry.

**AJ Harper**

Did you pull it?

**Mike Michalowicz**

I pulled it. Yeah. Yeah. I pulled it, but at the same time, I said, it is an authentic, authentic conclusion I have reached.

**AJ Harper** ([38:22](#)):

I know. But when you become an author, you need to accept the fact that that's your community now. Yeah.

**Mike Michalowicz** ([38:27](#)):

Learning lesson. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. So it wasn't even trashing, it was just being honest and critical, but it, it hurt this person's feelings. And Oh, and then, oh, I noticed, my gosh. Always one stars that started appearing in my book. So I think there was, there was retribution.

**AJ Harper** ([38:40](#)):

Yes. Uh, it happens. Yeah. That's why No, don't do it. And just think about this, your book has comps. That editor worked on the book. Yeah. Now they're looking at your proposal and you trashed the book.

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Yeah. And you didn't know. Yeah. Don't do that. Don't do it. Yeah. Anyway, quick little note about comps. Where people go wrong. You need books that have been published within the last two years.

**Mike Michalowicz** ([39:04](#)):

It's great tip. Great tip. And generally pick books that have a volume of sales. If you pick a book that is very similar, you, you love, it has three reviews after over two years and sold a hundred copies, it's probably not going to be a good time.

**AJ Harper** ([39:19](#)):

Right. Because you're trying to establish demand. Right. So you're not, it's not *going to* help you if it's a book nobody bought.

**Mike Michalowicz** ([39:23](#)):

That's right. Tell me about the marketing promotion component.

**AJ Harper** ([39:25](#)):

Okay, I have a lot of thoughts. Okay.

**Mike Michalowicz** ([39:28](#)):

I am all... lay it on me.

**AJ Harper** ([39:29](#)):

So you have to be able to show that you understand how to sell a book. You, you have to be able to show that you have influence and reach and it people get stuck on, well, I don't think I have enough Twitter followers. I don't think I have enough. This publishing knows that social media, except for TikTok right now, TikTok is still good, is not really the thing. It's not, you know, they used to give these big book deals to people with millions of Instagram followers and then the books didn't sell. So don't stress over it. But I think you need to, you need to understand that. You do have to demonstrate how, what are the channels through which you can sell the book. Social media is part of it. Email list is huge. But there's other components like speaking, which is huge, podcasts. And then of course the influencers, the people you know, which don't even have to be celebrities.

**AJ Harper** ([40:19](#)):

They could just be people who are experts in your field, who you, maybe they only have a list of three or 4,000 people, but it's a super dedicated list, or associations, memberships, affiliations that you have. It's your reach. You have to demonstrate that these are the people that you can go to and organizations you can go to to help. Also, it's showing what are your assets. So if you have a podcast, if you do a class, if you are regularly speaking, what are the big venues to demonstrate that you're already doing it? I also think in marketing and promotion, don't start with what you're going to do. Start with what you're already doing to promote the book. So I have all this that I'm already have in place. Then another tip I want to give is, when you list people who can help you, or organizations also give numbers.

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**AJ Harper** ([41:08](#)):

So I, you know, I can this alumni association or this college, well, what are we talking about? What's their email list? What's their reach? You can find that. You can research that. It just takes time. Finally break it down into, here's what I'm going to do to get pre-orders, which publishers really want. Here's what I'm going to do to do for launch and here's my plan for post-launch reader engagement for say, five years, seriously to show that they, you are committed to the book and you're not going to just drop it a month after it comes out.

**Mike Michalowicz** ([41:39](#)):

One analysis we do with influencers when we're working with an author is we will put the influence they have the size of their community, but also our, we, we put a weight in there on their, uh, effectiveness within that community. So, let me give you an example. If there's an influencer that has a hundred thousand people on their email list, and they email all the time promoting their own stuff, versus another person that has a thousand people on their, their list and they've been catering to that community very well, the second person has a high likelihood of having influence and influencing a decision to buy books where the other person's a constant promoter. So that first one, the a hundred thousand on the list may have a 10% waiting, and the person with a thousand on the list may have a 90% waiting. Then we run the number 90% times a thousand. That's a 900 book move. And 10% times a hundred thousand is 1000. So they're actually, they're of similar value. So that waiting's important quantity does not necessarily represent quality. That's what I'm getting to. Manuscript, uh, the, the, the specs on the word count.

**AJ Harper** ([42:44](#)):

Oh, this is the easiest part of the whole proposal. Yeah. It's potentially three sentences. It's manuscript delivery specifications. It's just basically saying, I think it's going to be approximately this many words. I will, uh, deliver it approximately at this time. You don't, nobody expects you to be perfectly adhering to that. So I'm expect this book will be 70,000 words and the completed manuscript will be done at this time. And then if your book has say a lot of illustrations or graphics Yeah. Or photos, you do need to note that. You know, just anything that's out of the norm, it just important to note.

**Mike Michalowicz** ([43:20](#)):

That's great. And that's one thing I've been leaving out is that specificity. We do the word count, we do the estimated size. Uh, we leave out the illustrations component. I, I just, that's a shame on me. I just, the assumption is that's lays on the author. The author's got to do the illustrations no matter what.

**AJ Harper** ([43:36](#)):

Well, it's just to let them know what you envision for the book, right? .

**Mike Michalowicz** ([43:39](#)):

That makes sense. Because that'll influence too, the format, uh, of the book and so forth.

**AJ Harper** ([43:42](#)):

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Yeah. Or say, say you were *going to* have a nonfiction book that had a strong workbook component, so maybe it's kind of a mashup. Yeah. You would want to say that.

**Mike Michalowicz** ([43:51](#)):

Outline?

**AJ Harper** ([43:52](#)):

Okay. So to me this is, uh, maybe if other people would disagree, where the overview is the hardest, the outline descriptions comes in a close second, maybe tied. So now you're taking your outline and you're doing chapter descriptions. That could be couple paragraphs all the way up to a page. And this is, you know, a summary of what you're doing in that chapter. So you can see how if you don't have a detailed outline and you haven't really considered the reader journey and how they move through the content and what's, you know, this is the clarity piece. You have to be able to show how you get the reader from here to there and clearly describe what happens in that chapter.

**Mike Michalowicz** ([44:33](#)):

You know, what we start with before we do a proposal, when we're conceiving a book, it's the outline structure is a big component. because you have to visualize the flow of the book. Uh, I like the inclusion of stories. I think it's attributed to Les Brown. But don't tell a story without a, don't make a point without a story. Don't make a story or give a story without a point. So I think there's that component, but when we submit a proposal, we don't include every single story. We don't, we just do the major bullets of the IP. We don't include every element.

**AJ Harper** ([45:02](#)):

No, but I think, I think there's things people leave naturally leave out. I think chapter descriptions don't have a lot of personality and they should show the author voice. That's number one. Number two is they leave out intellectual property. Did you create a framework, a steps? Are there graphics terms? What's, what's yours? Also, do you have exclusive content? So maybe you have, for example, in Surge you had an exclusive interview with two big business folks. Bert Bees guy and then the Uggs guy. So if we were pitching that, we would say these were, this is exclusive content. Right. Never, you know, so it's important to show what's unique and value-based, but also I think you need to describe the reader journey. I think you by the end of this chapter, like we're moving people through a process. At least with prescriptive nonfiction, that's the case.

**Mike Michalowicz** ([45:53](#)):

In *Write a must-Read* you make that point. So apparent is where's the reader entering when they read the book? And how are they exiting?

**AJ Harper** ([46:01](#)):

Yeah. And so then in the chapter descriptions, have some awareness about where they are. And if you include all those elements, these are the main takeaways. This is the cool in intellectual property I'm

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sharing in this chapter. Maybe not for everyone. Here are the stories that are unique and exclusive. And then what's the reader journey? I think you're covering it.

**Mike Michalowicz** ([46:21](#)):

Uh, and then sample chapters. Does it have to be chapter one?

**AJ Harper** ([46:24](#)):

You should have a chapter one.

**Mike Michalowicz** ([46:26](#)):

Okay. I have the first chapter.

**AJ Harper** ([46:27](#)):

You should have it.

**Mike Michalowicz** ([46:28](#)):

Okay. Yeah. Can you have more than one chapter? Should you have more than one chapter?

**AJ Harper** ([46:31](#)):

Yeah. I think it's good to have three chapters ready to go, but if you can't and you want to get started, it's okay to one or two. But then some publishers want them from different places in the manuscript. So, you know, sometimes they'll say first, middle, and last, which is just like, oh my God, are you crazy?

**Mike Michalowicz** ([46:48](#)):

Why must you have chapter one? What's the importance of that?

**AJ Harper** ([46:50](#)):

You're making the case for the, like that's the beginning. Yeah. That's, do you have a grasp on how you're *going to* hook readers and how you, how you're *going to* set up the book.

**Mike Michalowicz** ([46:57](#)):

I agree. It's the hook and front loading is now necessary. I think

**AJ Harper** ([47:01](#)):

Front loading is when you take your, the main gist of what you're doing. And it's in the first three chapters.

**Mike Michalowicz** ([47:07](#)):

Yeah. So I think the front load starts happening in chapter one. So they can see that coming across. I can guarantee for any book on this planet, the most read chapter of any book is chapter one.

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**AJ Harper** ([47:17](#)):

Right. And you know, my philosophy on chapter one is it should connect with the reader where they are clearly identify the problem. It's why solutions that they've tried and didn't, may not be working or work as well. Introduce core message and make a case for core message. Show how you figured that out. Give some social proof and then share the promise. It's basic elements. Yes. In chapter one that people tend to either dump in the intro or wait too long to tell people. I think you should, if you have a framework, I think you should also have an overview of it in chapter one. So basically it's like, this is the book in chapter one and then now we'll get into it. And I think a publisher who sees you winding up, taking too long. First let's have four chapters on mindset. First let's talk five, five chapters on what's the problem. Who is reading this?

**Mike Michalowicz** ([48:07](#)):

Of all the books we've done *All In* has the best intro. Do readers skip the intro a lot?

**AJ Harper** ([48:13](#)):

Yeah.

**Mike Michalowicz** ([48:15](#)):

Why? What's that behavior behind that?

**AJ Harper** ([48:16](#)):

Because they're usually bad.

**Mike Michalowicz** ([48:18](#)):

Yeah. That's why.

**AJ Harper** ([48:20](#)):

Because they usually are about the, they don't connect and they, you, you have to connect. I'm snapping my fingers here like anybody...

**Mike Michalowicz** ([48:26](#)):

<laugh> I love it. I love it. Yeah. I love it.

**AJ Harper** ([48:28](#)):

If you can't connect with the reader where they are, they will not read it. Yeah.

**Mike Michalowicz** ([48:33](#)):

Thank you.

**AJ Harper** ([48:34](#)):

You are not that interesting. They are reading the book for themselves. Wow.



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**Mike Michalowicz** ([48:39](#)):

I appreciate you bringing the soapbox with you today.

**AJ Harper** ([48:41](#)):

Sorry.

**Mike Michalowicz** ([48:44](#)):

I love, you're usually on it. I love it. No, I wanted to hear that.

**AJ Harper** ([48:46](#)):

Yeah. So that, you've got to demonstrate that. And if it goes a long way to show a publisher that you get it,

**Mike Michalowicz** ([48:52](#)):

Is there any no-nos? Is there stuff that people include in proposals that like, oh, that's actually a distraction harming you, you shouldn't include?

**AJ Harper** ([49:00](#)):

Oh God, I get, please don't make your own cover and put it in <laugh>. Okay.

**Mike Michalowicz** ([49:04](#)):

Why is that?

**AJ Harper** ([49:05](#)):

You're not going to be good at it. Yeah. They're never *going to* use it. Yeah. And it's an amateur move. Yeah. They're not using it. So take it out.

**Mike Michalowicz** ([49:14](#)):

Should you have picture elements? Maybe a picture of the author?

**AJ Harper** ([49:17](#)):

Well I do think, you know, back when we started, nobody was designing book proposals.

**Mike Michalowicz** ([49:22](#)):

Yeah. It was like a word doc.

**AJ Harper** ([49:23](#)):

It was a word doc. Now you know. I know you're doing it. We do it. Yeah. Yeah. So yeah, you've got picture elements. Got some graphic design It doesn't have to be super fancy, but I think it is also a chance with graphic design to show personality.

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**Mike Michalowicz** ([49:39](#)):

Did you get Kasey Compton's book? Did you get the print copy? Yeah,

**AJ Harper** ([49:42](#)):

You sent it to me. You did.

**Mike Michalowicz** ([49:43](#)):

You received it. Okay. Yeah. It is such an effing good book. My God. <laugh> my God. I love the cover. I love everything about it. But that book reads so well.

**AJ Harper** ([49:54](#)):

Yeah. She worked really hard on it.

**Mike Michalowicz** ([49:56](#)):

And one of the comments, well,

**AJ Harper** ([49:57](#)):

Let's, let's give everybody the title and where they, you can order it right now. Yeah.

**Mike Michalowicz** ([50:01](#)):

It's called *In Search Of You*. *In Search of You*. *In Search of You*. It's on Amazon. Get a copy. Listen, you may not even be interested in the subject. The subject is, it's for the person who's trying everything but never finding satisfaction. And the thesis is, until you love yourself, you won't love anything. And that's the essence.

**AJ Harper** ([50:21](#)):

Well, that's not perfect. It's steeper than that. It

**Mike Michalowicz** ([50:22](#)):

Is, it

**AJ Harper** ([50:23](#)):

Is. It's also, uh, form, uh, structured in a way that is so unique.

**Mike Michalowicz** ([50:27](#)):

Correct. There's journal entries and here's the thing. Everyone listening right now, please go on Amazon, get a copy of *In Search of You*. Here's how it's going to serve you. You'll discover how an author can lean into their voice. in such a unique, powerful way. They'll blow your mind. You'll also see, well, you won't say your proposal, but the way she wrote a proposal is so in synchronicity with this, the publisher said it's the same publisher for *Miracle Morning*. They, they had just acquired *Miracle Morning*.

# don't write *that* book!

**AJ Harper** ([50:56](#)):

Hal Elrod.

**Mike Michalowicz** ([50:57](#)):

Elrod, which was already out there as self-pub, and they reacquired it the next day, or in the same timeframe, maybe it was the next day they acquire Kasey's book. So this is a big time deal. The proposal, they said the fact that there was a note from the author in her voice with her picture, they said, we fell in love with her on the first page. One unique thing about our proposals is when we work with an author, we're like, write a letter that speaks to why this is so important to you.

**AJ Harper** ([51:23](#)):

Where did you put it?

**Mike Michalowicz** ([51:24](#)):

We put it page three or four. So there's the executive summary. So

**AJ Harper** ([51:26](#)):

You got the, the big hook

**Mike Michalowicz** ([51:28](#)):

Established. Oh, the hook. The hook in the book, then this. And we say, I the author want to speak to you. And it's a letter from them. And she's like, my Memaw <laugh> said, you know, it's, I start off like this. Like, what? And you, you read this And she's like, I love this human. And now there's a humanistic component to the proposal as you read through. Yeah. The technical parts.

**AJ Harper** ([51:47](#)):

Yeah. That's great. I love that. You could put it near the, about the author.

**Mike Michalowicz** ([51:51](#)):

Yeah. Yeah. But it, we said from, from the author. I can't remember what the title was. I

**AJ Harper** ([51:55](#)):

Love that. Can I, can I just, I know we're talking about proposals, but you brought up Casey Compton. Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. Okay. So Kasey Compton, she wrote her first book in my workshop, top three book workshop. And it was a derivative of Fix This Next. It's a fantastic book. But that's not why I'm talking to you. So she comes in to workshop and about two thirds of the way through, I asked her to write this call to Greatness, which is how I like to close a book. And she sends me this call to greatness that you mentioned Memaw, she talks about these family members of hers. And it's just her voice completely shifted to this southern real, but so warm. So warm. So warm. But also just, just real. But very authentically southern voice. And I remember I said, what, who is this?

# don't write *that* book!

**AJ Harper** ([52:50](#)):

And I said, I think you found your voice. And the good news is you found your voice and the bad news is you have to go back to the other book. She was fine. But I said shortly thereafter, I said, you do know that you actually are an author, and I'm not just telling you to call yourself that. This is actually who you're supposed to be. Yeah. I don't say that very often. Yeah. But this is actually the path because she has innate talent. So she got better at her craft. Then the second book she brought into, she's part of my Author Collective, and she brought into live edit and we worked through it. But what I love about her is that she gained so much confidence in her voice that then she allowed herself to play with structure.

**AJ Harper** ([53:33](#)):

And she's so firmly rooted in serving the reader, which is my whole philosophy that she just doesn't naturally now she doesn't have to get anything from me on that. She just does it automatically. So that's how you ended up with this remarkable book. That honestly isn't like any book I've ever read. And how could I say that after 20 years in publishing? So I just had to say this about her book, because if you want to see a person so confident in their writing ability, their voice, and in total service of an author, play with structure and narrative and storytelling in a super effective way, get *In Search of You* just, just as a, even if it's not your jam, just to see the artistry and how she put it together.

**Mike Michalowicz** ([54:19](#)):

I went to a public speaking training course with Michael Port, Amy Port.

**AJ Harper** ([54:24](#)):

Heroic.

**Mike Michalowicz** ([54:24](#)):

Heroic Public Speaking. And he said, I'm on stage and he's talking to the audience. He says, don't break the rules until you've earned the right to break the rules. And what I did on stage, he goes, you never turn your back to the audience. I opened up, I turned my back to the audience and I said, you never do this. And I stuck my butt out. I said, unless you got this <laugh>. And that's how I started. And, uh, that you have to earn the right to break the rules. Other things not to include in proposal. Don't lie about the performance of your past books. I've had a people person saying, bestselling crushing it. Author, hundreds of thousands of copies sold. And you don't run a Nielsen book scan on it, or you can just, you just do a BSR analysis calculator. I'm like, you've sold 10 books in your life. Like you're a liar.

**AJ Harper** ([55:11](#)):

You're lying. And don't forget, publishers can look it up. They know. Also, can we just ring this from the treetops? They don't care that your book was an Amazon bestseller on Tuesday. <laugh>

**Mike Michalowicz** ([55:24](#)):

Exactly.

**AJ Harper** ([55:25](#)):

# don't write *that* book!

They do not care. Yeah.

**Mike Michalowicz** ([55:27](#)):

Yeah. No one cares. No one cares. I think we should dedicate an episode. I'm getting many of these, uh, things on my social media feeds where they're advertisements of write a book in 30 days. And what they're using is testimonials. And I think it's more than sinful, is an author comes on and says, I did write my book in 30 days. I can't believe it. And I became a bestselling author and all this stuff, and I looked at these books, I'm like, I never heard this person. I'm like, they haven't sold a single book.

**AJ Harper** ([55:52](#)):

It's misrepresentation. Yeah.

**Mike Michalowicz** ([55:54](#)):

And what they're trying to do is coerce an audience who has some degree of ignorance about what it is to write that book into believing. So... whatever. I'm going down a tangent. Um, what else can you do the book proposal? We've written a, uh, book proposal. Is there any other assets we can or any other value can extract from it?

**AJ Harper** ([56:12](#)):

Sure. If you're trying to get an investment in the book sponsorship, you want to use elements of it to get corporate bulk buys because of the clarity that you've put together. You can use it to get deals. Yeah. You can chop it up into pieces. Use it as is. It's just a tremendous document that you can use.

**Mike Michalowicz** ([56:30](#)):

And then getting assistance and help agents will help. They're working in conjunction with you to make this book wildly successful.

**AJ Harper** ([56:35](#)):

Yeah. But you should never pay them to help you with the proposal. It's unethical according to their standards. Great tip. So please don't do that. Okay. Unless maybe sometimes they have classes. That's different. But no, they should not be charging you to help with the proposal. But there are people who are experts in book proposals. There are some really great, inexpensive classes. You can take. Jane Friedman. I'm always wrapping her. I'm not, you know, I'm one of many who does. She has a very simple template you can download for free on her website for book proposals, which is basically the format we just discussed. And then she has a number of inexpensive classes that she does through Writer's Digest and, and so forth. So definitely check her out.

**Mike Michalowicz** ([57:16](#)):

I think we're done. I think there's two books are listeners should be purchasing right now. Buy *Write a Must-Read* by **AJ Harper**. My God. Read that. And then get Kasey Compton's book *In Search of You*. And you'll see perhaps how *Write a Must-Read* also plays into Kasey's book. I think the learning's *going to be* massive. All right, my friends, we're *going to* let you go. We hope you enjoyed this episode. I invite you

# don't write *that* book!

to get any of the free materials we have and also sign for our email list. That way we can be in touch with you. Go to [dwtb-podcast.com](http://dwtb-podcast.com). We'd be really honored to, if you subscribe to your pod catcher, I guess. I guess that's it. Call wherever you're listening on right now. Please subscribe. It's a great way for us to make sure you get every single episode. And selfishly, it also helps us in spreading the word because when you subscribe, the pod platform promotes to other folks. Also, if you have questions, tips, shares, anything, you can email me and AJ at [hello@dwbpodcast.com](mailto:hello@dwbpodcast.com). Thanks again for joining us for today's episode. Hope you learned a lot about proposals. We look forward to seeing you next week. And always don't write that book. Write this one.