

don't write *that* book!

Episode 19:

Bichon Frise Slapped

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. This is an impromptu episode. It wasn't scheduled or planned, but a call came in less than 24 hours ago that may have a significant impact on strategy, may be a great opportunity. I'm sitting in the studio with my dear friend, AJ Harper, who I want to introduce first. She is my co-writer, my colleague. She's been through the thick, in the thin, the ups and downs. The peaks in the valleys. And, uh, this could be a peak moment or a valley moment. I, I don't know. I don't know. So, I want to discuss it. Um, but I just appreciate you always being there. And the first person I call when there is something going on, AJ Harper. And it's not just around books. It seems like anything in life now, at least it's moving that way. And the first person to respond is AJ Harper with a supportive word. And you're like, I got your back. And I, and I have ideas. And, uh, I just value that relationship, that friendship more than anything. So, thank you for that.

AJ Harper ([01:09](#)):

Thank you. And also, I got to say, introducing you. The, the, I knew when I was driving in this morning, <laugh>, he's gonna want to talk, he's gonna want to talk about that. I don't know if we should. And that is you, you're said. Well, I just, I just want to be helpful, and I want to be real. Yeah. And you've always been like that.

Mike Michalowicz ([01:26](#)):

Thank you. Yeah, thank you. No, I, I think this may be the most important episode and, uh, I don't want to leave it a cliffhanger too much longer, but I do believe there's these precipice moments, these, um, inflection points is probably the better choice of words, where something happens and you, I can make a decision to springboard off this or to kind of fizzle out. So here, here's what happened. I got a call yesterday with Penguin. It was a scheduled call, planning the next book.

AJ Harper ([02:00](#)):

And Penguin is your publisher.

Mike Michalowicz ([02:01](#)):

Yeah, Penguin is my publisher. Noah Schwartzberg is the, uh, editor and the routine I've been in recently, as we're finishing a book manuscript, we start ideating about the new book. And by the time the current book is published, we're in contract for another book. I believe *All In* is the best book we've ever written. It is so freaking good. I'm so proud of it. And I feel the same way about every book we've done. It is the best of us at that time. And things have gotten better in quality of the book. So I have a call with Noah

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talking about perhaps doing a new community for this book. It's about cash confidence. And it's not just the entrepreneurial community. It expands beyond them, perhaps. And, uh, he said, Hey, let's have a conversation before we discuss that. He goes, I, I want to talk about *All In*. I said, yes. And you know what, AJ in my heart, I knew this was coming. because I, I, I look at the data. It's so interesting. Sometimes I look at information, I see the raw facts, but there's an internal emotional interpretation that puts a spin on it. *All In*, to give you some of the numbers, its first three weeks has sold 8,164 units.

AJ Harper ([03:12](#)):

So that's less than you wanted. What was your goal?

Mike Michalowicz ([03:14](#)):

Less. I wanted, we wanted 10,000 in the first two weeks. But the problem is week number three of the 500 units. So, you know, it's, it's heavy in the launch, that's normal. But the, the 500 units 150 were print books, week number three. And so Noah calls me and says, I want to talk about week three. He goes, that's, it's disappointing. And he goes, you're on a trend that week four, maybe 75 books and hard, you know, print covers, print versions. And what we've noticed, Mike, is we went through the data and the prior two books, which is *Clockwork Revised and Expanded*, *Get Different*, are not performing like *Profit First*. They're degrading. And he goes, if, if you have a book that sells 75 print copies a week plus audio, so let's say 200 books a week, which is the combined audio and stuff, it's not a sustainable model. Not, not, that's not exact words, but he is like, we need you selling thousands per of these backlist books per week.

AJ Harper ([04:17](#)):

Mm-Hmm. <affirmative> like *Profit First*.

Mike Michalowicz ([04:18](#)):

Like *Profit First*. He goes, these books need to be like *Profit First* for us to continue to do this. I he basically, at the end of the day, he says, we don't want more. We want better performance. Now here's the part I didn't tell you, and it's the truth and it's a little bit upsetting. I, I said, what do you think about the books themselves? He goes, Mike, you write the best books. And when he said you, he says, you and AJ, he goes, you and AJ produce the best books. He goes, "There's no question. Our team here, when we talk about books, they're profound, they're simple, they're impactful. He's like, you are the authority. And he goes, the Penguin team sees it." And he goes, and this was the upsetting part. He goes, "But there's these other people, I won't mention their names, they're actually names I didn't even recognize."

Mike Michalowicz ([04:55](#)):

So I can't remember their names. <laugh>They come out and he goes, "So-and-so launched a book." And he goes, "I'm the editor and I got to say it's not a good book. And they're crushing it because of the marketing. They're marketing in a way." And I asked like, what were the elements? He said, maybe influencers, maybe this and that. But they're marketing it in a way that's selling the books. And I think I've been dependent upon, let's create a great book. Let's go to the market community that knows us and they'll carry us. And I don't think that's working anymore.

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AJ Harper ([05:23](#)):

It's not. And it must really hurt to hear marketing because that is your jam.

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

I know. It's a punch.

AJ Harper ([05:29](#)):

So I got to stop you for a moment and just, how did that feel? Because it's a, we've kind of been on this, you know, it's a storied tale now that Penguin Random House at the time, it was just Penguin said No to *Profit First*. Yeah. Then correct-corrected when they realized the self-published book was selling really well and bought the rights and then hasn't wanted to lose you. And now we're having a different conversation. That's a different situation to be in. I would argue first of all that you have options. Yeah. You could get another publisher, you could a top tier hybrid like Page Two. I'm sure. I'd be thrilled to have you. But for you, I understand what this, this is a different position to be in as an author. I think you care more about eradicating entrepreneurial poverty than you do about if they're gonna automatically say yes to a book. But, uh, anyway, I just want to know how it feels to have that change, that different type of conversation?

Mike Michalowicz ([06:32](#)):

It feels like a, uh, a little bit of like a splinter has been pulled out. You know, it's kind of painful when the splinter gets pulled out, but then you feel this relief. I knew this was coming because I can see from the data, but here's what's interesting is the backlist books, our books sustained. So they, they find a leveling point. *Clockwork* predictably sells 250 books, uh, uh, *A Week Profit First* Predictably is over 2000 a week. Like I can see them: *Pumpkin Plan* 275 a week. Like, it's, it's pretty predictable. But I'm like, we're launching books that are better than even *Profit First* and they're not working. And I'm like, something is not right. But I wasn't ready to admit it to myself. I'm embarrassed about that.

AJ Harper ([07:18](#)):

Yeah.

Mike Michalowicz ([07:19](#)):

So I, I'm, I meditate every day. I pray every day too. When you're going, you were going through a, a health challenge and your mother too. Uh, I prayed for you. I don't know if you, you would never know.

AJ Harper ([07:30](#)):

Yeah. Well, you told me. I love that. So nice.

Mike Michalowicz ([07:36](#)):

I, got the bowls out. I got the singing bowl bowls out for your mom. Yeah. I'm singing out all my vibrations to your mom.

AJ Harper ([07:38](#)):

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Oh, she's doing great, by the way.

Mike Michalowicz ([07:39](#)):

Good, good. And you had a, a minor, but it's still a little health scare. Um, and it just happens, right? How my, I didn't even realize this. My home office, how I positioned the chair, perhaps a subconscious. I stare when I open my eyes at my sign that says, "eradicate entrepreneurial poverty." And just moments before this call with Penguin, I, moments maybe the day before I said, I don't know if we we're working on next is the right thing because I was looking at that sign, and it hit me in the face. It's like, am I really doing, am I really serving this mission? So when, when Noah called me out, I kind of blurted out. I said, dude, thank you. I needed this. I needed this slap to the face because I'm not serving the mission. There's so many entrepreneurs that haven't discovered the book. And what I want to focus on now is why aren't they discovering the book? What's your opinions? I know you got some thoughts. I have some ideas. And see if we can hash this out. It's still so raw. So in the moment.

AJ Harper ([08:36](#)):

It was less, it is less than 20 hours. Yeah. I think you, I think I got a text from you.

Mike Michalowicz ([08:40](#)):

It was 10 o'clock yesterday and we're recording right now. It's eight o'clock in the morning. Yeah. So it was, yeah, 22. It's so raw right now. There's this hyper response like, let's go and market and get back into it. And, and it's gonna have to settle. And I'm sure I'm gonna vacillate and oscillate, but I just blurted out to him. I'm like, thank you. Thank you. I needed to hear the truth that I already knew existed is I'm not performing the way I expect for myself now. You know, you can, you can do all these things to make yourself feel good compared to other authors. This is top point.

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

No, you're, yeah. You're crushing it compared to most people.

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

Yeah. 1.5 million books sold and all that stuff but am not achieving the mission I need to achieve.

AJ Harper ([09:20](#)):

Well, and frankly, ROI on the books, if you're setting aside, the mission isn't great when you think about how much work you and I put into a book. Years. You know, so it is, that is a factor. It's not your prime motivation. Certainly not mine. But it's real, it's real. Yeah. because this is our profession.

Mike Michalowicz ([09:41](#)):

And it's our livelihood. That's what I think you were saying. Uh, penguin puts a lot of money into it too. I, I don't know what the number is, but if, if I went to a Page Two and they've--Trena's amazing. She's reached out enough times. Like, "We want you, we want you." That's not the issue here. It's I'm not having the impact. I must have the, um, cost, I think for Page Two can be anywhere between \$30,000 to

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\$50,000. I I don't know what the exact number is. If, if you do a hybrid rate where you're paying for the work that's done. Is that a fair range?

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

Uh, so yeah, we're talking about Page Two, which I think is probably the best hybrid. And not even, probably, probably, uh, yeah. They're, they're tremendous. It's like working with a traditional publisher except better because you have this full team. You have access to everybody. You have control. They're really good at positioning and they care about backlist. So, you know, it's the real deal publishing experience. Uh, yes. You are making an investment and you are also reaping most of the rewards though, so.

Mike Michalowicz ([10:39](#)):

Yeah, totally. Do you have a sense of what that number is? What the investment is?

AJ Harper ([10:42](#)):

You're in the range.

Mike Michalowicz ([10:44](#)):

Okay. The only reason I shared that is because I think that is representative of what Penguin must be investing. They, they have a similar team. And the only reason I said that is it's a ballpark. So, so let's say Penguin invests between \$30 and \$50,000 to, for a book project. Maybe it's less, I get it. But, but they're making that investment. So they have to make the return. They're netting \$6 a book, I'm guessing on average, maybe five? So until they move, and hence the magic number of 10,000 until they move 10,000 units, 10,000 books, they haven't made back their cost. Right? So that, that's their break even. I'm just ballparking this. So Penguin's sitting there saying, you know, we want to make our money back on day one, and now we're questioning if we're gonna move 75 books a week, are we gonna make our money back this year? I think that's what's going on. And it makes sense. And we invest a lot of time. I want to talk about my, I admire this author and I also think it's the definition of what's going on. I want your feedback on this. It's Colleen Hoover, just because I was at the airport again, and she's got five books. She's the number one selling author collectively right now in the world. Meaning she has more books ranked in the top 100 on Amazon than any other author

AJ Harper ([11:57](#)):

Any can. Multiple books on the, um, New York Times bestseller list. Everybody, she's a romance writer, but she also mashes up genres with thriller. And I would say she also has a self-help mashup with her romance.

Mike Michalowicz ([12:10](#)):

Oh, interesting. Here's what I think is happening. She in an interview, said, admittedly, her books are not to the standard. Uh, they're not extraordinary books. She says she's not extraordinary writers. It was self-defined. And I'm paraphrasing, but she's not an Amy Tan or, or something like that. Okay. But her books sell so well. So the question is why, and here's my assumption is that the influencer community

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through social media platforms like TikTok, BookTok, is the big one, is a high degree of emulation. So Influencer says, I love Colleen Hoover's book. And then everyone else that was influenced by Influencer says, I better like Colleen Hoover's book. And may they buy it. I don't even know if they're reading it. Honestly.

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

They're reading it.

Mike Michalowicz ([12:57](#)):

You think so? Okay.

AJ Harper ([12:57](#)):

Yeah. Because you have to remember that she's writing in a, the most lucrative genre in all of publishing, which is romance. So romance readers read anywhere from eight to 11 books a week.

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

Oh, wow.

AJ Harper ([13:10](#)):

They're extremely... They have community around romance. They go to conventions, they have romance writers are like rock stars in the, the big ones in communities. People are voracious readers. So you have to take into account the genre she writes in. You can't compare yourself as a business author to a person who's writing in the most lucrative genre.

Mike Michalowicz ([13:32](#)):

I I'm looking at the behavior on TikTok though. What, what I see is this emulation of everyone parroting or recommending the same book. So my question is, if everyone's reading Colleen's books, and I've read her books too, and I'm not into that space, but I've read it just to understand. And you read Amy Tan's book, or you read, you know, Judy Bloom, I, I don't know what they are there, there's a lot of other fiction books out there. Why aren't those being parroted like that? It, it just seems like this one got on fire. It's not because it's an extraordinary book is my argument. It's because there's extraordinary parroting. That's what my perception is.

AJ Harper ([14:13](#)):

Oh. I don't know that it's parroting. I think honestly, people get, there's a little bit of a, this really is lightning in a bottle. She, her situation is lightning in a bottle, but that's not the first time that a book that is not well-written. And I'm just gone, sorry, everybody listening. You know, look back to *50 Shades of Gray*.

Mike Michalowicz ([14:33](#)):

Same thing.

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AJ Harper ([14:33](#)):

But there's, I actually have a whole breakdown of why that book worked, but we're not gonna get into that. Uh, how, but I will tell you the Cliff Notes version is leveraging community. And so that's, yeah. So people who love a genre or love an author, what they also love is being in a community of fans who love that. It's like— Its actually not even that different than say Marvel fans or Star Wars fans. But we don't think of people reading romance books like that. But that is actually what's happening. I've been to actually several romance book conventions. You would be shocked to see the lines out the door to meet authors you have never heard of and will never read.

Mike Michalowicz ([15:19](#)):

Interesting.

AJ Harper ([15:20](#)):

So I think you have to take that into account. And then when you bring book talk in, that was a rise to be a phenomenon Right. When she was coming up and she leveraged it perfectly. And then I think she has figured out a formula for ma— You know, using the romance formula, but then incorporating some mystery, but also trauma stuff. Yeah. And she's mashed it up. It's just hitting at the right time. So that's, you know, there's too many factors in her success. But I do think what we can take away everybody is that how she is leveraging community and builds community around her so that anytime she has something new, people are excited.

Mike Michalowicz ([16:03](#)):

Clamoring. Yeah. Yes. Yeah. So thank you for that clarity and that perspective. What I was doing was, and I can't remember if we recorded this, but going after our established community, people have read *Profit First* and so forth and saying, "Here's the new book." And expecting or hoping that the book is of such service that community that they start parroting and talking about it, but it's, it's not catching on. Here's another thing Noah said before he hung up and it was like, oh, this is a, another slap to the face, wake up. He goes, Mike, you've moved, um, it's over a million books of *Profit First*. I think it's 1.2 million. There was self-published, but through Penguin there is about 600,000 recorded transactions that concludes audio. Um, there was a little problem historically with Gildden in the reporting, but it's roughly that. And then the self-published was, uh, 500,000. So let's say 1.1, he's like, we would expect those readers who've fallen in love with your book, even if it's only the revised and expanded one. So not the original, just the revised and expanded. So say there's only 600,000 people, that 10% of those people would buy the book, the new, your new book that you, you've won over 10% of those fans. So why didn't you sell 60,000 bucks on Launch Week?

AJ Harper ([17:15](#)):

Hmm.

Mike Michalowicz ([17:16](#)):

That's a great point.

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AJ Harper ([17:18](#)):

So you were low in what your goal should have been. Yeah. I mean, I have, I have a personal life theory about goals.

Mike Michalowicz ([17:25](#)):

Tell me.

AJ Harper ([17:26](#)):

When it comes to numbers, like, I want to earn this much or I want to sell this much, I think we need to set a goal that is out of our comfort zone, but based in some sort of data. So that was data from Noah. Yeah. It's like this is a reasonable expectation. Okay. So not like I want to sell 5 million copies. That's not reasonable. Right. But 60,000 is a very different goal than 10. And you would've behaved differently and you would've created different strategies if that was the goal. So you right there is part of the problem is having an inaccurate goal to start that. Because when we have a goal that's based in some realism and that is out of our comfort zone a little bit, we're going to think differently about how to approach it.

Mike Michalowicz ([18:17](#)):

That's exactly right. So I just finished reading a book by Dan Sullivan. I don't know if you've ever heard of his name. Yeah. Okay. I've heard of his name for 10, 20 years. I didn't ever consume Envi books. So he's the founder of Strategic Coach. I think it's, is it? Or is it? Yeah. Strategic Coach, not Action Coaches is another one.

AJ Harper ([18:36](#)):

Strategic coach. Yeah. You know Mary Miller? She is a part of that. I believe.

Mike Michalowicz ([18:40](#)):

She is a, uh, like a, a member so to speak.

AJ Harper ([18:43](#)):

I think she was a strategic coach.

Mike Michalowicz ([18:46](#)):

Oh, I should, should talk with her.

AJ Harper ([18:47](#)):

You should.

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

Yeah. So, uh, I started reading his book, *10x Is Easier Than 2x*.

AJ Harper ([18:53](#)):

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Yeah, you were telling me.

Mike Michalowicz ([18:53](#)):

So it's, you just nailed the philosophy. So here's the summary for our listeners is that he argues a two-X is an incremental improvement. So it's not necessarily a multiple, but it's an incremental improvement over your current standard. And he goes, the vast majority of humanity lives this way. My life standard right now is, uh, I make \$50,000 a year. Next year I'm gonna aspire to make \$55,000 a year. It's a small, incremental thing. And he goes the least, this is my interpretation. The way to achieve that is to simply apply more of yourself, more input, work harder, and so forth. He goes, it's the exception that someone sets the 60,000-book standard. The massive leap forward. because what happens, he argues, is now it's a whole different strategy. Therefore it's a mindset shift, not an action or effort shift. And he goes, inevitably, it's way easier because there's very few people aspiring for that. So, very people, very few people are demonstrating that behavior. So the example I have, the example you used to provide is perfect. 10,000 was an incremental move off of our best launch prior, which was 8,000 for launch week. 60,000 is, oh, all the former plans no longer apply.

AJ Harper ([20:08](#)):

Yeah. You know, right away when you say 60,000 that you would've, that what you were doing wouldn't, wasn't gonna work.

Mike Michalowicz ([20:14](#)):

Yeah.

AJ Harper ([20:14](#)):

Yeah.

Mike Michalowicz ([20:15](#)):

Oh. So that's, that is the aha. And even with more clarity live as we're doing this.

AJ Harper ([20:21](#)):

I should point out to everybody listening, we exchanged audio text yesterday. Yeah. You told me bad news. I sent you back a positive message.

Mike Michalowicz ([20:30](#)):

I love that. Thank you again.

AJ Harper ([20:31](#)):

Which I believe wholeheartedly. And then that was it. And now we are talking about it <laugh> for the first time here. And I feel like we need to get into the hard, harder conversation about why did this happen.

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Mike Michalowicz ([20:46](#)):

So you asking me?

AJ Harper ([20:47](#)):

Sure. What's your interpretation? And I'll share mine.

Mike Michalowicz ([20:50](#)):

My fat ego.

AJ Harper ([20:52](#)):

It's always, it's always, that's always the thing killing you.

Mike Michalowicz ([20:54](#)):

Yeah. So I'm...

AJ Harper ([20:56](#)):

Such a tough, you're not a, you were just confident in what you were doing.

Mike Michalowicz ([20:59](#)):

To the degree of ignorance and arrogance.

AJ Harper ([21:02](#)):

But don't you think it's partly because you are an entrepreneur, and you understand the value of systems? And so you get into this thing of, okay, well this is a repeatable process.

Mike Michalowicz ([21:11](#)):

Sure. It, it, it's blinders.

AJ Harper ([21:12](#)):

I don't think it's just ego.

Mike Michalowicz ([21:14](#)):

Okay. It's not just ego, but part of me said, this has worked in the past. This is predictable. If I do it, *Profit First* is inevitable. And what I did this discounted, well *Get Different*. It's not working to the degree, not even close to the degree we want. That's an anomaly. *Clockwork*. I had my excuse for that. Revised, expanded saying, well, it's an established market. It sold a hundred thousand copies. So it's not like *Clockwork* is a flop by any stretch of imagination. But the new revised and expand edition didn't take another leap forward. And my excuse was, "Well, there's already community consuming. It already has its own momentum. So it wasn't a fresh story."

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AJ Harper ([21:52](#)):

Oh, so you were explaining it away?

Mike Michalowicz ([21:54](#)):

Explaining it away. I didn't think I was, and then this wall of awareness hits me. I'm like, my God. And so what I thought was, oh, *All In* is, it is the best book we've ever written. The for sure. The introduction is a jaw dropper, in my opinion. And I'm not, I'm not trying to be selfish.

AJ Harper ([22:12](#)):

Well, setting the writing aside, I feel like it's, it's just like all of our books. It True game changer for entrepreneurs.

Mike Michalowicz ([22:19](#)):

And the strategy are so expected.

AJ Harper ([22:20](#)):

Oh, that's great. But *Get Different* is great too, Mike. These are good books.

Mike Michalowicz ([22:23](#)):

They are. So, so my head is like, game changer when people discover this. It's simple, it's actionable, and it's so radically different than you expect and so forth. So that's, I'm like, okay, the book is perfect for that. Then I, uh, simply said, well just follow the system that works. This is what we did with *Profit First* and it, it will work. No consideration for the big goal. No thought that was even necessary. And that they would just fall in my lap. You know what? I did this with research too. I'm like, I'm beyond this. I don't need this anymore. Like I, we can talk, we can go on our podcast. I can tell people what works. We, I have the gift of success. I can then deliver.

AJ Harper ([23:03](#)):

You are being too hard on yourself.

Mike Michalowicz ([23:08](#)):

No, I'm not.

AJ Harper ([23:10](#)):

I mean, no, I think you are. Okay. I really do. I just have to be assertive about this. Okay. I think ego plays a part. But honestly, you track everything. You're so fastidious with all of that. You are. It's not like you're just kind of checking Author Central once in a while. You are tracking everything. So the data is telling you this or that. And granted your ego is probably explaining away the downturn, but it's not like it plummeted. So if you had plummeted, you would've gone to work on thinking about this earlier. Anyway, I just... Let it go, let it go.

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Mike Michalowicz ([23:40](#)):

Yeah. Yeah. Let it go. Yeah.

AJ Harper ([23:42](#)):

It's an opportunity right now. I'm actually really excited.

Mike Michalowicz ([23:45](#)):

I feel the same way. I feel it's an opportunity, but I'm gonna do this. You know, me vacillating, it's like with a book subject. I'm like, I love it. I hate it. Okay.

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

But listen, don't you think that it's interesting that you had this conversation with him after we have had the strangest experience trying to decide on the latest book we outlined and did fundamentals on three books so far. I'm excited, super excited about the one we were starting. Yep. I was genuinely like, this is Woo hoo! I can't wait. In fact, it's on my calendar to start actually drafting February 5th, which is Monday <laugh>, which I'm gonna change now. But you were, you were just not sure. And so it's not, none of this is a coincidence. I think you're at what you said, an inflection point. Yeah. Where you just need to pause.

Mike Michalowicz ([24:37](#)):

I think you're right.

AJ Harper ([24:37](#)):

But I do have thoughts if you want to hear them.

Mike Michalowicz ([24:39](#)):

I do. My God, do I want to hear them.

AJ Harper ([24:41](#)):

And I'm slight, as I said before we started recording, are you sure you want to do this live? Because I'm slightly nervous. <laugh>

Mike Michalowicz ([24:47](#)):

<laugh>. Yeah. And I think that's, that's the power of this. You know, the, the feedback we got on this podcast is the authenticity and the genuineness of our dialogue. And I think this is, this is literally what we go through. If we were at a cabin right now, we're just putting it to tape. So lay it on me, sister.

AJ Harper ([25:04](#)):

All right. So I don't think you remember this. I'm just gonna say, but it, a few years back I said, you know, have you ever thought, "Hey, let's not do a book a year."

Mike Michalowicz ([25:13](#)):

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I do. Yep. I do remember you time.

AJ Harper ([25:14](#)):

You do remember. Yep. The reason I said that is because you need time to really get a book rocking and rolling before you, I mean, we can start working on it, but it doesn't mean we have to go at the pace.

Mike Michalowicz ([25:27](#)):

Yes.

AJ Harper ([25:28](#)):

So we could have been working, um, slower, which actually would've been better for our mental health, I think. Honestly. Setting that aside, what do people always say to me? I don't know how you and Mike do it. You guys are a machine. But the thing is, the part of the machine that wasn't happening was really getting to how are we gonna get this book into as many hands as possible? Because we're just, you're onto the next one. So I think that is part of it, honestly. I think it's too many books. I think you don't need one every year. Because what's happened is you have a catalog of books that's remarkable. If an entrepreneur bought all the books, they're set.

Mike Michalowicz ([26:13](#)):

They're set. Yeah.

AJ Harper ([26:14](#)):

I mean, except maybe if there was a sales book, we might not. And a customer service, I would still argue. Oh yeah. And customer service, I would say you're pretty well set. So the problem is the amount of work you did to get *Profit First*, where it is you're not doing on the other books. How could you, what time would you have? We work our asses off to create a remarkable book. You're in the future when that book needs your, when the book that's about to come out needs your full attention. So that's number one is I think slowing your roll a little bit. because also that's part of the pressure of, okay, I have all these 25 ideas, which you always, you've had them since *Pumpkin Plan*. The number hasn't changed, even though we've written a bunch.

Mike Michalowicz ([26:58](#)):

I know, I know, I know.

AJ Harper ([26:59](#)):

But maybe, maybe they're not all books. Maybe they're not all worthy of your audience. So you're just at that point, you know, you're, you're just, you've written a lot of books. Maybe the pace is not right. I think strongly that it isn't. Number two,

Mike Michalowicz ([27:18](#)):

Well, first of all, let me say thank you for that. because that what you said, it lands with me and it's, it's reverberating. It's like that's a, that's not hot.

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AJ Harper ([27:28](#)):

But at the time, you, you were like, no, just go Almost immediately you were like, no. The I'm, I'm confident in this.

Mike Michalowicz ([27:34](#)):

It's so interesting is human wiring. You know, I go to the gym and actually it's a, it's a running thing. But what I discovered was I've been trying to run faster and faster and faster to meet these arbitrary objectives I set. And I read in this running magazine, one of the worst things you can do is just keep pushing harder and harder. It actually degrades it. Part of getting fast at running is running very slow. It, it's called zone two whatever. And it's better for the heart and so forth. So I did that. Was it last year? Yeah. I did that last year. And, and then I had my event, I had my best run time in my life. I mean, I was, I'm 51. I was 51 at the time. My best run time in my life by going super slow. So it, I don't, it, it's so funny. Like it's resonating with me at the same time. I don't want to hear it. I just want to produce my 25! That's my mommy voice

AJ Harper ([28:20](#)):

Yeah. But that's just the, that's an arbitrary number. Yeah.

Mike Michalowicz ([28:23](#)):

And it's totally arbitrary.

AJ Harper ([28:25](#)):

And it's not actually gonna help. What are you gonna feel? You have 25 books. What does that mean? Nothing. It actually doesn't, what matters are the people that you're serving. You just have to keep coming back to it.

Mike Michalowicz ([28:34](#)):

I want to add one more point, and I want to hear your next point. Uh, in *10 X is Easier than 2X* by Dan Sullivan, there's a section they dedicate to James Clear. James Clear spent three years writing that book. And year he, he was maintaining a journal of his writing. I didn't realize this. After year one, he says, this has been the most difficult year of my life. He goes, I've devoted myself to writing a book and it's, I'm struggling deeply. And then year two, he talks about his transformation. And year three, he's like, the book's on the precipice of release. Uh, and it's still not the best book I've written. I still need to work on it further. And then after that, the marketing, which he was already building up, has been relentless. He's written in one book, uh, that is extraordinary.

AJ Harper ([29:19](#)):

Over 10 million copies.

Mike Michalowicz ([29:20](#)):

And is over 10 million copies sold. And we've written 10 books. I mean, you know, it was revisions too that are at 1.5 million.

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AJ Harper (29:27):

That's right.

Mike Michalowicz (29:28):

So it's painful to hear that.

AJ Harper (29:30):

Yes. So, number one, I think it's not about volume or an or arbitrary number. I think you need a reset. I think you need to change the 25 goal. And just say, what, what do I need to do? Because 25, that doesn't line up with eradicating entrepreneur. That's a, that's your goal. For your, again, ego. I want to be able to say, I did that. But I think that's actually not what you care about. Really, you're just stuck on it. I think you need to let it go. You need a reset goal that's about the mission, which is helping people. So that's number one. But the, now this is the thing I never talked to you about because, and if y'all listen to the episode where we had another uncomfortable conversation about *Surge*. And we also talked about when we had a creative breakup, one of the challenges, we didn't talk too much about it, then we, we did, we did mention it preceding that creative breakup.

AJ Harper (30:25):

I had been involved in the marketing on the *Pumpkin Plan*. I used to come to the Cookie factory Where you, the office and work with you. I, I was, I think it was every week, multiple times. And I was writing all this copy and brainstorming the marketing and writing. Just, I was consumed by what your team now calls the Michala-verse. It wasn't really a Michala-verse then. And that wasn't good for me or healthy for me because there was no room for me in my own business or my own. Right? So that was, that's sort of what was churning in me at the time. So when we kind of came back together in our creative partnership better and stronger, there was a clear line. Mike is doing the marketing, AJ is out of it. If you at needed me to write, um, you know, a really important article or column for something or whatever, I would do it.

AJ Harper (31:19):

I didn't even, I barely even would know what y'all wanted me to do for the launch. I was, so I'm over here in the writing world. Marketing is separate most of the time I didn't even know what you were doing. But I, that was on purpose because we had to have that split. And also you were killing it with the marketing. So what am I gonna say about it? Okay. So that's all my preamble to say. I just feel like there are whole avenues of marketing that you just haven't even wanted to do that are missing links. You know, marketing the book is, I'm telling my students, it's like a tree. You have to look at all the branches and you've just been like in your same zone. And not developing audiences outside of the network or getting, doing what you do best, which is how do you are great at, how do I get these people?

AJ Harper (32:11):

How do I get those people? Yeah. But you actually haven't been applying your best skills to find new audiences. Also, engines that you, so I've mentioned to you before, nervous to say this part, about Bulk buy. And you're always like, nah, no one, they don't actually read the books. This is why. because you want people reading. Yeah. But we do have to care about sales! So both. And it doesn't have to, don't,

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don't ignore it. You know, you look at people like Phil Jones, he's a great example. Is it a million copies now of *Exactly What To Say*?

Mike Michalowicz ([32:46](#)):

Yeah. Or if not more.

AJ Harper ([32:47](#)):

That's, I mean, those are custom books, bulk buys. It's brilliant. He's just one example of that. But I don't think you've been focused on corporate sales. Not at all. Because you've been focused on entrepreneurs. But then let's look at *All In*. That is where you should have been. Because that is for entrepreneurs, but it's also for big companies. And they don't even know about you. So that's one. I feel like you are missing branches.

Mike Michalowicz ([33:11](#)):

A hundred percent agree.

AJ Harper ([33:12](#)):

I also feel like your messaging is, has lost some edge. And I did mention that to you before.

Mike Michalowicz ([33:18](#)):

Yeah, no, totally. Yeah. And this may be where I need your, um, maybe you involved again in meeting with our team. Because the challenge with the messaging was it was managed directly by me. And now it's removed from me. And it's become this diluted version. Yeah. So I would love for you to meet with me and Andrea who's responsible for the, the management of our messages.

AJ Harper ([33:45](#)):

Yeah. And this happens to people when they have a lot going on and they need help, you know? The other piece that I think is really important is, I think you have to think about your catalog now. Yeah. And how can you work to show people the breadth of experience, all the books, and how can we get them working together? You know? Um, I would love to see you have just a killer backless plan.

Mike Michalowicz ([34:09](#)):

That's just it. I think you just nailed in those, the backlist plan, those three words. I don't have a backlist plan besides the occasional, impromptu promotion. But nothing consistent. And this goes back to my ego. I'm like, the backlist takes care of itself. *Profit First* is my example. It just, all these books should do the same. And you know, it's, my thought was, oh, if the book is better than *Profit First*, shouldn't it just be like *Profit First*? But when Noah said that, why didn't you sell 60,000? I was like, uh, literally I froze up and didn't know what to say. because he, he's right. My God. He's right. You're right. Ugh.

AJ Harper ([34:54](#)):

Listen, get. Okay. This sucks. I want to just It does suck. <laugh>.

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Mike Michalowicz ([34:57](#)):

It does suck.

AJ Harper ([34:58](#)):

It sucks. But it's a huge opportunity, Mike.

Mike Michalowicz ([35:00](#)):

It totally is.

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

I feel it. So let me tell you why. It's a huge opportunity, number one. I feel that slowing your roll a little bit. Yeah. It's gonna be better for you. Creatively

Mike Michalowicz ([35:10](#)):

It does. Right. Feels like a relief. When I got fired from that company that, that bought one of my companies. I hated it there.

AJ Harper ([35:16](#)):

Which is a story, an *All In* story.

Mike Michalowicz ([35:18](#)):

An *All In*. And when I walked out that door onto Avenue of Americas, it was like the brightest day birds were chirping. At least it felt that way. It felt so good. To be released. And I had this similar feeling like, I don't have to write another book today.

AJ Harper ([35:32](#)):

Not today. And you will, you will. We'll, we'll do it. Yeah. I also want you to, to see, see something that those 10 books are assets. They're assets. And you are not making the most of those assets. We already invested the money in terms of time. Sometimes actual money. Other resources. Did it, you know? So that's actually, if we're using, you know, I'm not gonna use the right terms, but Mike, the author that knows about entrepreneurial wellness and success would say, you got to go back to those assets. You're leaving money on the table. So it's actually the most, uh, the best news of all, because you aren't, you are always trying to create something new to make that happen. But you have this tremendous catalog of, of really important game-changing books.

Mike Michalowicz ([36:25](#)):

Yeah. And you know, my thought too is it's a disservice not marketing them. Meaning I'm not pushing them, because that means someone's not discovering it. And it's funny, I'll ask a client that I'm working with, we're investing in companies and we'll go in and say, uh, if, if a prospect discovers your competitors offering and decides to go with them, do you feel your product or offering is better? And they'll say yes. And we'll say how. And they'll say, so if they never discover you in the first place and hire your

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competition, is that a disservice? They're like, yeah. So I'm like, well it, you have a responsibility to market it. You know, my, my brother-in-law, he plays bass guitar and I play guitar. And yesterday he came over, he likes to jam every so often. It's a lot of fun. So we're playing "Take It Easy." We go out to dinner and uh, he goes, how's things going? I said, "Hi, I got this slap call from, you know, like a Google, almost like a Google slap from, from Penguin. I got a slap call and woke me up." And he looks at me and he's not in the business space. He was a, uh, a former prison guard. Like that's, that's his profession. He doesn't have an interest in entrepreneurship. He knows I write books, but he's never read. One doesn't care. He goes, "Are you taking your own advice, dude?"

AJ Harper (37:38):

<laugh>

Mike Michalowicz (37:39):

I'm like, wait, Al and Cheese, do you have to say that to me? He's like, "I think you would say something else to yourself. Like, I don't think you're taking on advice." Yeah. And he starts eating this cranberry sauce. I'm like, you son of a...

AJ Harper (37:50):

I mean, there's a reason why we always have, we always talk about the cobbler's kids don't wear shoes and Yeah. Yeah. You know, it's because it's a common problem. You're not unique in this.

Mike Michalowicz (37:59):

I do feel it's an opportunity. I know my behavior all vacillate. I'm an idiot. I don't deserve anything. And then tomorrow morning I'll like, but I got to market this and I've got this. So I don't need to prepare you anymore because you know me so well, but prepare for the vacillation of self loathing.

AJ Harper (38:14):

That's fine. Send me some more audio messages. I'll send some back to you.

Mike Michalowicz (38:17):

Self-loathing and self-loving.

AJ Harper (38:19):

I, but I do think this is what I wish you would do. Yeah. I wish you would convene, you know, you do your retreat days. Yeah. I wish you would convene a backlist, specifically backlist retreat strategy session. I will come if you want.

Mike Michalowicz (38:32):

I want you. I want you!

AJ Harper (38:33):

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I have actually some pretty exciting ideas. And I mentioned them to you before. This how I was thinking about for my own book.

Mike Michalowicz ([38:41](#)):

Do you mind rattling off a few just so we can share with our audience?

AJ Harper ([38:44](#)):

Yes. Uh, we need to do a whole episode on it, honestly. But it has to do with the branches. Yeah. And how to go about thinking about it. And I'll give you one hint, which is instead of just thinking about the end user, think about marketing to the people who can help you facilitate the change you want to see in the world.

Mike Michalowicz ([39:03](#)):

Yeah. That's the, that's a one-to-many is what I'm hearing.

AJ Harper ([39:06](#)):

So it's, no, it's not even the influencer marketing. It's not, I mean...

Mike Michalowicz ([39:10](#)):

Oh, Okay.

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

So, you know, I'm not driven by money. So I had to come up with a way to motivate myself to sell my book, *Write on Must-Read*. Yeah. Because I just don't have the money motivation. And I actually don't even, I don't have the ego motivation either. I'm just sort of on, you know, onto the next thing. I, I came up with, okay, this is the what I, the change I want to see in the world through this book. And then I thought about who can facilitate that? Not just, you know, who are the people that will read it, but who are the people who will read it and/or maybe not even read it, but getting it into the hands of other people. Not influencers, but different groups or professions or associations or types of people. And you do this massive brainstorm, which I can do in a retreat with you.

AJ Harper ([39:57](#)):

It's hard to do. Explain it all. because we're already long in this episode. Yeah. But I'm testing it in my own author collective community. And it's a game changer for people. because it also helps you set a goal like the 60,000. It helps you figure out, okay. I was just actually working on this with, um, one of my alums from my workshop to figure out what is a realistic sales goal that's also out of the comfort zone that's based on some sort of research around who can help me facilitate this change. It's a game-changer. Yeah. And then what you do is you create specific marketing for those different groups and get that automated. But I can walk you through it. If let's do a, let's do a backlist retreat day with your team and I'll come.

Mike Michalowicz ([40:45](#)):

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Okay. My commitment is right when we finish this podcast, I'm gonna schedule that retreat date for the four of us. Me, you, Andrea, and Kelsey. I, I think it is a extraordinary team. I think we have to talk some broad truths, the edge is gone and so forth. And we have massive opportunity here. It, it does trigger a final story I want to share with you. The number one salesperson at Cutco Knives of all time is a guy named John Rulan. John Rulan changed the whole strategy of how you market knives. So the prior salespeople would go door to door, effectively sell to friends and family. John said, I'm gonna go to executives of companies. I'm gonna gift them a knife that has their name inscribed in it. And when it, when they are blown away by this remarkable gift I give them, I'm then gonna say, can we meet? because I want to tell you how you can do this with all of your employees and all of your prospects. So that one, CEO now started this behavior of selling Cutco knives for him effectively. And he's gone on to dominate Cutco sales. He left the organization. He still is one of the lead sales persons because of the ongoing residual. They're opportunity.

AJ Harper ([41:54](#)):

Yeah. So this is, uh, let's do it, let's do the retreat day. I'll walk you through my whole formula. And I tried to share it with you before.

Mike Michalowicz ([42:02](#)):

Yeah. I, yeah. I suck at listening. Have we figured that one out?

AJ Harper ([42:05](#)):

You know what we need, what we need a code word. So I, I have, I have this friend Joe Munich, we've been friends for a really long time, and we were roommates and we used to sometimes guilt each other. And he'd say, "I hate how you guilt me into this." And I would say, "I hate how you guilt me." Yeah. So he said, okay. When it's hard to mention that. Right. So every time it's happening, I'm, we're gonna have a code word. You can just say it. So the word was ginger.

Mike Michalowicz ([42:36](#)):

Mm.

AJ Harper ([42:36](#)):

Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>. And so if you were out with friends and I was, he was doing it, or I was doing it, I could say, "You know, um, have you tried this candied ginger? Oh. Or do you like ginger in your cookies?" And then nobody knew. Yeah. And you didn't have to have this big, we need to talk <laugh> conversation. And so we need a code word so that if I feel like I'm trying to tell you something.

Mike Michalowicz ([42:59](#)):

And I'm not listening,

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

I can just say the code word.

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Mike Michalowicz ([43:03](#)):

You got a deal.

AJ Harper ([43:04](#)):

But what's, what's the code word?

Mike Michalowicz ([43:06](#)):

Oh, you want to figure it out right now? Yeah. Um, I don't know. I want to put thought into it. because I want it to be meaningful.

AJ Harper ([43:11](#)):

Okay. It doesn't have to be that me, like, we didn't think of any thought in it. We just, we just came off with it on the fly.

Mike Michalowicz ([43:15](#)):

I'm looking at a drill set.

AJ Harper ([43:17](#)):

Drill set. Okay. Yeah. That's not great.

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

That's not, yeah. All right.

AJ Harper ([43:21](#)):

We'll come up with it. But I don't want it to be like, meaningful is not the point. The point is just—

Mike Michalowicz ([43:25](#)):

I know.

AJ Harper ([43:26](#)):

No, it has to be something you can, and also you can weave into a conversation and have fun weaving into a conversation.

Mike Michalowicz ([43:31](#)):

Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. Yeah. Okay. We'll think of something.

AJ Harper ([43:32](#)):

So that's what we'll do. Because I also need to be stronger. We have that to, you know, maybe we're at a new thing to—

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Mike Michalowicz ([43:38](#)):

You know, I love when you call me out, I always in retrospect go, "Thank God she did." But I also, I bulldog.

AJ Harper ([43:45](#)):

I almost never talk about the marketing, because again, we had that division to keep us sane. Yeah. Yeah. All right. It's a new day.

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

New chapter, new day. All right. We hope you enjoyed this episode. Uh, that was <laugh> raw and as real as it gets, uh, we would love to, it's a big deal for us for don't write that book that you are a subscriber. What that does is it triggers algorithms and Apple, if that's where you're listening in or wherever it may be, it uses that avatar, your avatar to promote to other people. So I'd really be honored if you right now, subscribe to Don't write that book. Also, uh, you can email us through dw.tb@podcast.com. We'd love to hear your stories. And, uh, we'd love to answer any questions you have. So you can email, uh, AJ and me at hello@dwbpodcast.com. Thanks again for joining us for today's episode. We hope it was an eyeopener, it was for me, and I'm looking forward to seeing you on the next episode. As always, don't write that book. Write this one.