

don't write *that* book!

Episode 1:

The Book That Changes Everything

Mike Michalowicz [00:00:01]:

Welcome to our brand-new podcast. Don't Write That Book. This is Mike Michalowicz. I'm joined in studio with my business partner, my writing partner, my colleague, my extraordinary friend. Probably that's how I should start it off. And we're going to talk about don't write that book. So welcome to our show. We hope you love it. We hope you take away tons of value. AJ, I was giddy this morning. I got up ridiculously early, by the way, and I was like, I cannot wait to get here. I saw you out in the street, you saw me run to the studio. I wanted to be here early to have this sit up and ready to roll. You were early. So, thanks for being here.

AJ Harper [00:00:44]:

Yeah, it's a long time coming.

Mike Michalowicz [00:00:45]:

Yeah, it really is. What's inspiring you to teach this stuff? You don't have to. You're the master of this stuff. Why do you feel compelled to teach this and give away this stuff for free? It's a podcast.

AJ Harper [00:00:56]:

Because I think people can write better books and I think they think they can't.

Mike Michalowicz [00:01:02]:

Yeah.

AJ Harper [00:01:02]:

And I want to see people write the books they were meant to write.

Mike Michalowicz [00:01:06]:

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Yeah. And that's the essence of the show, is there's a lot of books that come out that shouldn't even be given that title book. They really are falling far short of what they could have achieved with their book. I want to introduce AJ Harper. AJ and I met 17 years ago. 16 years ago.

AJ Harper [00:01:24]:

It's been a minute.

Mike Michalowicz [00:01:25]:

Yeah, it's been a minute. We met through Elance, and I'll tell you, because on Elance, it did say where you're located. It said, like, the greater New York area. Yeah, that was definitely an influencer on me. He said, oh, I want to work with someone I can meet. You were, at that time, ghost writing. That was not your only work, but you were ghost writing. We connected. I had prepared a book, a manuscript, and I use that term very loosely. That was sucky. And I was like, I need help. I reached out to you and we met face to face.

AJ Harper [00:01:54]:

Yeah.

Mike Michalowicz [00:01:55]:

I was blown away in many aspects, but one is when you started taking sentences I had written that were like, ten or 15 words long, and you compressed it into seven words, and it transferred the same meaning, but more efficiently, more engagingly. It was unbelievable. I've subsequently watched u. AJ, in your career, you've transformed authors. You have enhanced people's writing skills, you've guided people through publishing. You've owned a publishing firm, you've sold a publishing firm. You rarely ghostwrite, and I say rarely, you do it with you don't even actually ghostwrite. We cowrite and we'll distinguish what that is, but you only do that with me. You've worked with hundreds of writers directly and authors directly. You've coached thousands. You've been engaged on or by one of the, I think one of the most impactful speaking authorities we're talking about Michael Port, here to help write speeches. You've written plays. You're a playwright. And you're an author. You've written your own book.

AJ Harper [00:02:59]:

Yes.

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Mike Michalowicz [00:02:59]:

How to WRITE A MUST READ, which is effing awesome.

AJ Harper [00:03:03]:

Thank you.

Mike Michalowicz [00:03:05]:

That's your introduction. That's who you are. Did I miss anything?

AJ Harper [00:03:08]:

I mean, probably. It's been a long time.

Mike Michalowicz [00:03:10]:

You're a mom.

AJ Harper [00:03:11]:

I'm a mom. I'm a wife. I live in the Lower Hudson Valley. But I think the important thing is I just care about authors. I care about helping authors realize their vision for their book, and that's what drives me.

Mike Michalowicz [00:03:23]:

Is there a source behind that? Like, why do you care? Because you really care. Why do you care so much?

AJ Harper [00:03:29]:

Because I'm an author, and I want to realize my own vision. And when I came up in ghost writing, I would write anything for anybody because I was just trying to pay the bills. But I was very quickly brought into the world of writing for thought leaders who write personal and professional development books, prescriptive nonfiction. And I saw this world where the dreams that authors have of writing a book sometimes were used against them. Like using hope as a weapon.

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Mike Michalowicz [00:03:58]:

Yeah.

AJ Harper [00:04:00]:

And they weren't learning the full truth. They were learning all these shortcuts. They weren't being told the consequences of making certain choices, and then they ended up with dreams dashed. So it's not just because I'm such a good person. It's because I saw a lot of authors end up with too many books in their garage.

Mike Michalowicz [00:04:19]:

Yeah.

AJ Harper [00:04:20]:

And they gave up, and they felt really sad because they had a dream. And I know they can get that dream, but they need information. They need the truth, and they need to learn the craft.

Mike Michalowicz [00:04:33]:

Yeah. Some authors have been preyed on because they have this dream. They spend their savings, their life savings, sometimes in a book that will sit in their garage forever. And it's almost like this albatross. Then every time you walk into your garage, and you see this, you start to lament the fact that you have this thing that no one else wants, even though you have such an important message.

AJ Harper [00:04:51]:

Yeah. And that could have been you. Which leads me to it was close to it, which leads me to introduce you.

Mike Michalowicz [00:04:55]:

Yeah. Let's do it.

AJ Harper [00:04:57]:

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I mean, that should be it, right? That I would lead in with all the books you used to have in your garage.

Mike Michalowicz [00:05:01]:

That's a good start. Yeah.

AJ Harper [00:05:03]:

So when I met you, I thought of you. You were this cool client, and I liked the fact that I could drive to see you. So a lot of my clients were all over the world. And when you wrote the first book and then I helped you make it better, I distinctly remember sitting in your office in Boonton with a bunch of people who are on your team that I don't recall who they all were. And you saying, I'm going to buy 20,000 books, and I hope that's going to be enough. And in my mind, it was like sirens were going off in my brain. And I said to you, can you stop that order? Because you need to stop the order. And you were just absolutely cloud nine. No way I'm going to sell all of those right away. And I remember driving home and telling my wife, oh, my God, this is not going to be good. And it wasn't at first.

Mike Michalowicz [00:05:50]:

That's right.

AJ Harper [00:05:51]:

So you really know what it's like to be that author who's starting out and has all these ideas about what you think it's going to be like. You get a book out into the world, everybody flocks to it, everybody's excited, make a lot of money, media attention, whole everything's changed. To your credit, you didn't give up on it. I think a lot of authors are... Their hopes are dashed. That's not what you did. You made sure to sell that book and you learned how to be an author. I'm also reminded of the moment when you decided to be an author, which we can talk about later.

Mike Michalowicz [00:06:23]:

We will, yes.

AJ Harper [00:06:24]:

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And you devoted yourself to it. So together we've written ten books. Book ten comes out in January (2024).

Mike Michalowicz [00:06:31]:

That's right.

AJ Harper [00:06:31]:

You also wrote a children's book.

Mike Michalowicz [00:06:33]:

That's right.

AJ Harper [00:06:34]:

Beyond that, you have and you've sold.

Mike Michalowicz [00:06:37]:

I don't even know, 1.5 million.

AJ Harper [00:06:38]:

1.5 million books. But I think the real accomplishment is that you have this dedicated and loyal readership who will purchase anything that you write because they know it's going to help them. And I think of all the emails you get that you sometimes forward to me, of people whose lives were completely changed, saved even, because of the incredible work that you've done in providing solutions for entrepreneurs that actually work. And that, to me, is the real accomplishment.

Mike Michalowicz [00:07:11]:

Thank you. What a great, kind introduction. I'm so honored to be your partner and your friend. It's funny, when they talk about "they", talk about friends. Friends are usually social acquaintances, and usually the relationship, at least for me, for most friends, is very surface level. But you and I have intimate knowledge of each other that far surpasses what a traditional friend is. So I consider you a great a best friend. So thank you.

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AJ Harper [00:07:39]:

Yeah. Ditto.

Mike Michalowicz [00:07:41]:

I want to transition through something that was told to me, and I can't remember who said this, but the day I launched my first book, our first book, THE TOILET PAPER ENTREPRENEUR, and I launched it, I sold practically nothing. The actual launch day was a zero-day sale. When we reenacted or rehabilitated it, we moved some books, but nothing. Effectively nothing. And I called someone who was an author, and I'll never forget these words. He said, oh, don't worry. That's simply the quiet before the quiet. When he said that, my heart sunk. It was so devastating. But it also emboldened me say this, I'm in for the fight now, every day is about selling one more book, not this miraculous moment is going to happen. It's a cumulative effect. Today when I look at the landscape of books, there's, I don't know, a million launched every day or something. There's such a massive amount of books that come out, and most of them, and I'm not trying to be negative here, but most of it's junk. It's not well produced. It's a better business card or a worse business card. Honestly. I want to talk about the topic, why we came up with this title for the show, "Don't Write That Book."

AJ Harper [00:08:56]:

Yeah, well, because there's so much content out there, so many people who advise authors to just write a book as a marketing piece, a better business card, or to just write the first book, you can change it later. You can write a better one later. This kind of thinking is counterintuitive and detrimental and in fact, I think is the reason why people can't realize their authorship dreams. Because selling a great book is hard. Getting people to read a great book is hard. You know that.

Mike Michalowicz [00:09:30]:

Yeah.

AJ Harper [00:09:30]:

So imagine now trying to get people to read a book that's not great, that you didn't actually write with the intent to help an author make some sort of change. Help a reader make some sort of change. So don't write that book means don't write the shortcut book. Don't write that. I'll just get it out there. Book don't write well, it's good enough book. That's what that's about.

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Mike Michalowicz [00:09:53]:

What's the consequence of writing that shortcut book? You've seen it. You know, authors who've done that or writers who've done that.

AJ Harper [00:10:00]:

So, I mean, I want to play devil's advocate here. Any book elevates whatever you're doing. So just saying you're an author is cool to people. It will open doors, even a book that isn't great. But the thing is, people aren't reading that book. They're just impressed that you wrote one. And if that's what you want, you can do it. Go. Godspeed, absolutely no problem. But if you want the kind of career they say you have, Mike, you actually have to write a book people talk about. They say, oh, I read this great book. You got to read PROFIT FIRST. They say that every day. People are saying that every day. Yeah, they're saying it because it actually works for them. And they know it works for them because they actually read it and did the stuff that you asked them to do. And in order to write a book people actually read, you have to write a book that's for them. And when people read the book, do the thing, experience the change, they'll tell everybody. So now you don't just have I'm a person who wrote a book. Now you have a book that people recommend over and over and over again. And that leads to a lot of financial gain, notoriety, becoming a real legit, thought leader in a space. But more importantly, and I think what your heart is and where my heart is changing lives.

Mike Michalowicz [00:11:22]:

Yeah. I wish you could go to every speaking engagement I go to. I spoke this past Tuesday in Nashville to 1100 or 1200 people, and the venue was amazing. It was a floor plus a first tier plus a second tier, which was elevated so far up it almost looked like I was looking into the sky. And I presented on PROFIT FIRST, which is our most popular work. And afterwards, person after person comes up to me and some people tears in their eyes, some people smiling ear to ear. Yeah. And what's so interesting, too, is this cascade effect. So people will say, I've implemented Profit First, and then they start talking about my marriage is improved, or I sleep well at night, and it becomes empowering. The other thing that's interesting, and you kind of alluded to it, is a book is not a kind of single island. It's not this or that. It's not I'm going to read this book to the exclusion of other books. When someone becomes enamored with a book that's served them, they start exploring that genre. So I found is if someone reads profit first, they're going to read Ramit Sethi's book. I'LL TEACH YOU TO BE RICH. They'll start exploring the concept more. And I think, conversely, the book that you shouldn't write is the one that dissuades people from exploring that genre when they read the book and say, this sucks, I'm done.

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AJ Harper [00:12:48]:

Yeah, but I don't think people even get past the first few pages, honestly.

Mike Michalowicz [00:12:52]:

That's right. Oh, I agree.

AJ Harper [00:12:54]:

So you're not going to achieve the level of success that you imagine for yourself as an author when you don't write a book that's awesome. And you can write a book that's awesome. Yeah, it's totally doable.

Mike Michalowicz [00:13:05]:

So let's transition into that. Let's talk about writing this book. Our title of the show is "Don't Write THAT Book" because Adela who did our research for this identified there's 2.2 million books being published every year. There's a lot of stuff being pumped out there. There is a few books that are an exception that's the this books write this book. That's the exception. So how do you define a this book? You already started alluding to it.

AJ Harper [00:13:28]:

Yeah, it's very simply a book that people love, find useful, and can't stop talking about. They're just raving about it. And it's hard for authors to think that they can do that when they question whether they should be writing the book at all. How can I imagine that I could write something so great? That's how the shortcuts happen. But when you actually take the time to write a book that's in true service to your reader, that's the book people love and they tell everybody about it. Also, books are still sold by word of mouth.

Mike Michalowicz [00:13:57]:

Yeah.

AJ Harper [00:13:58]:

So that's why you can that's why you need people to read it.

Mike Michalowicz [00:14:01]:

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Yeah.

AJ Harper [00:14:02]:

That's a real thing. And also, when people feel that way about a book, they don't just tell folks they'll make their best OFS their fave lists.

Mike Michalowicz [00:14:12]:

Right.

AJ Harper [00:14:13]:

It continues to live on and become a classic. Which you have books that are always on people's lists.

Mike Michalowicz [00:14:20]:

Yes, that has happened. And what I'm hearing is a great book in the prescriptive space. That's what we're talking about, meaning prescriptive. What does prescriptive mean? Could you define that for me?

AJ Harper [00:14:33]:

Well, so there's different types of nonfiction, and we can talk about all types of fiction and nonfiction because it's certainly my background in both areas. But today we're talking about specifically, and we'll mostly be talking about prescriptive nonfiction, which is when you're basically helping somebody make some aspect of their life or work better.

Mike Michalowicz [00:14:55]:

Okay.

AJ Harper [00:14:56]:

Yeah.

Mike Michalowicz [00:14:57]:

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One thing I love that you write about in your book, how to Write a Must Read. You shared this. When we do our retreats, little insider access for our listeners, you and I will get a cabin.

AJ Harper [00:15:08]:

And usually it's a terrible cabin.

Mike Michalowicz [00:15:09]:

Right. It's freaking creepy. Usually.

AJ Harper [00:15:11]:

And I'm going to tell you that the cabin we're going to next, it has like little plastic lawn chairs, and if there was a fence there's a picture of it has a fence that's sort of bent. And I was like, all right, I guess we're going to write a great book there because it's always a terrible cabin.

Mike Michalowicz [00:15:27]:

Yeah. I can remember the creepiest one. Do you remember?

AJ Harper [00:15:30]:

Was it with the dolls?

Mike Michalowicz [00:15:31]:

I don't remember the dolls. No. I was thinking the dolls. No, I was thinking that one. I think it was in New York State.

AJ Harper [00:15:38]:

Oh, my God.

Mike Michalowicz [00:15:39]:

It was in a very kind of tight community, small. The houses were on top of each other, and it was like the 70s retro.

AJ Harper [00:15:46]:

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It looked like we were going we were like in The Sopranos.

Mike Michalowicz [00:15:49]:

Yeah. Or a hunting lodge or something.

AJ Harper [00:15:51]:

Well, driving up to it was scary.

Mike Michalowicz [00:15:54]:

Yeah. But I think the best one was our first one, which was on that little stream running.

AJ Harper [00:15:59]:

Oh, yeah, that was a good one.

Mike Michalowicz [00:16:00]:

Yeah.

AJ Harper [00:16:00]:

We should have just gone back. I know.

Mike Michalowicz [00:16:02]:

We should stay there, but it's so hard to get food. We could drive so far.

AJ Harper [00:16:06]:

Yeah.

Mike Michalowicz [00:16:07]:

And by the way, I schedule, my responsibility is to get the cabin. So every cabin because of me. But you shared something on those cabin retreats, and you say it in your book is that a book

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will transform the reader. The book will also transform you, the author. Tell me about that part of the.

AJ Harper [00:16:25]:

Oh, gosh, I'm so glad you mentioned this, because I hear this from the authors I work with all the time, and I just heard it last night. We were talking before we started recording about a live edit I did with some of my students. And one of the students mentioned that because she went through the process of getting clear on all the things she needs to get clear on doing all the hard work, the thoughtful work. Thoughtful work of what does the reader really need? She realized that she's teaching her course in the wrong way.

Mike Michalowicz [00:16:58]:

Wow.

AJ Harper [00:16:59]:

Yeah. So what it does is it provides clarity for all the intellectual property that you put out into the world, whether it's programs or classes or even your one on one work with clients. It crystallizes your messaging. People always end up changing their marketing, so forth. But it also transforms you in that I think when you actually write a book, that you say, dang, this is a good book. I put my heart into this. And the confidence level your confidence raises and just the work you're doing. I see it with authors all the time who wrote a great book, and they start to get the feedback from people, their careers just take off. And it's not just because they are now published authors. It's because they feel different.

Mike Michalowicz [00:17:43]:

It reminds me, I just finished reading THE CREATIVE ACT by Rick Rubin, and in his book, he is a publisher of music, producer of music, all different genres, from heavy stuff like Metallica to jazz to opera. And what he shares is that constraint brings about creativity.

AJ Harper [00:18:05]:

Yeah.

Mike Michalowicz [00:18:06]:

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What's so interesting is, in writing a book, you don't have the opportunity to show pictures necessarily. I guess you could insert one or two in a book, but you don't have a PowerPoint by any stretch. You can't show gesticulation, your body movements.

AJ Harper [00:18:19]:

You can't give feedback.

Mike Michalowicz [00:18:21]:

It's a one-way stream. And yet you have to bring about all those emotions that those other forms of communication can bring about just in the written word.

AJ Harper [00:18:31]:

Yeah.

Mike Michalowicz [00:18:31]:

And so therefore, you have to be really cognizant of what you're saying, the sequence of how you're saying it in those words, to bring about all those emotions.

AJ Harper [00:18:42]:

Yeah.

Mike Michalowicz [00:18:43]:

And I wonder if that triggered for your client the understanding, oh, I'm not communicating effectively, because you can subsidize with throw a little PowerPoint here, a video, there, speculation there.

AJ Harper [00:18:55]:

Yeah. You can write a blog post, then you write a different blog post. When you have to string all of your ideas together into some sort of framework or process or any sort of codified intellectual property, boy, it challenges you to think, wow, what am I really doing here? And also, what do I stand for and what matters to me, and how do I want to come across and how do I want to be perceived across all books and all communication? These are big, deep questions you have to ask yourself as an author. We talk about immutable laws, you and I.

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Mike Michalowicz [00:19:27]:

Yes.

AJ Harper [00:19:27]:

I teach about that. And I've added a part, Mike, that's immutable laws and characteristics.

Mike Michalowicz [00:19:32]:

Oh, nice.

AJ Harper [00:19:34]:

Right?

Mike Michalowicz [00:19:34]:

Yeah.

AJ Harper [00:19:35]:

Because a characteristic of all of your books is this arm over the shoulder feeling? That would be an example, but that took time to think, how do I want not in a calculated way, but just who am I? How do I want to be consistent and authentic across all types of communication? These are just some of the things you have to think about when you write the book that's meant to be a game changer. And because you wrote it, so many other things are clear for you.

Mike Michalowicz [00:20:02]:

You have a concept that you call the reader transformation sequence. It reminds me a little bit of the hero's journey, but not exactly. Can you just walk us through what that is? Because that's in a book that you must write.

AJ Harper [00:20:16]:

Yes. So transformation sequence, again, is speaking to, "Let's make something better, let's provide change for the reader." So how do you do that? And the transformation sequence is people will buy your book because you solve a problem. And that one's easy. And a lot of

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authors just stop there. Right, so what's the problem? I'm solving? Okay, great, I've got it. Let me just do that. But they'll read it because they feel seen by you and they've got to feel it on the first page.

Mike Michalowicz [00:20:47]:

Underline that like 100 times on the first page? Yeah.

AJ Harper [00:20:50]:

In fact, the first line has to grab them, but by the end of the first page, they should feel like, this person gets me.

Mike Michalowicz [00:20:56]:

Quick side note, I Googled this, or no, I actually chat GPT this one, so I can't speak to the source. But I asked of the people who purchase a book, what percentage actually start the book? And the system came back and it was in the 80 I'm sorry, in the 20 percentile. So 80% of people that purchase a book, shelve it 20% will say roughly start it, 5% of that 20% complete it, or yeah, five of the 20%. So if you multiply 5% times 20%, that's 1%. So if you sell 1000 copies of your book, that means ten people are actually statistically completing it. Now, this is considering, considering all books, you better write a great book. Right, but to your point, to improve those ODS, statistically, you got to get people engaged from sentence one, page one, for sure. Yeah.

AJ Harper [00:21:50]:

And then hold them the whole way through.

Mike Michalowicz [00:21:52]:

Correct. Right.

AJ Harper [00:21:53]:

And that's the next part, which is the third part. So it's by read and then they'll finish it because they trust you. And that's thinking of them the whole way through. We tend to think about our readers in the beginning and then we kind of forget and we don't think about, wow, what's it like to hear this for the first time, to read something like this or learn this, having not known this. So we forget what it's like for them, but if we can build that trust, then they will

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act on and that's the fourth part of the sequence. So we have buy, read, finish, act on, because you believe in them. So they'll do the thing. You want your reader to do the thing, whatever it is, because then they'll experience change. And then again, that's when they say, you got to read this book.

Mike Michalowicz [00:22:43]:

Yeah.

AJ Harper [00:22:43]:

And the last one is tell. And they will tell everyone about your book because now they believe in you. And you know that's true because people don't just love your books. They love you.

Mike Michalowicz [00:22:56]:

Yeah. That's the absolute truth. And I see it manifest in a couple of ways. One is that speaking engagements, when I have an opportunity to meet with people face to face, which is my favorite thing, people ask me, what's your favorite thing about speaking? My favorite thing is when the speech is over and I get an opportunity to meet with people, and they come up and they start telling their story. At the end of the day, I realize that a book is about the reader. And when someone is fully engaged and doing what you taught, you are simply the person who provided the recipe as the author. But they're the cooks, they're the chefs. They're the ones who actually are mixing up the ingredients and cooking it and trying things out and tasting. They're putting in all the effort. And so when they see the result, they're so proud to share their stories. So to me, it's the greatest privilege of listen, if I could speak to everyone in the audience, if they were willing to wait long enough, I want to hear every single story of their transformation. And you're right. And then they are demonstrating. They are such fans. Like, you know, they'll say, like, oh, this book, Mike. You saved my life, or whatever. They say those exact words. The reality is they saved their own lives. They were willing to trust in the process. Everything you're saying here, because the book that we created was structured away, that it solved a problem. They felt heard and seen. They weren't embarrassed or ashamed. They felt empowered. They tried it. What we often do, too, is we step them through the process. We give them easy early wins. Here's a small step. Don't nail this thing-

AJ Harper [00:24:34]:

And everything's doable.

Mike Michalowicz [00:24:35]:

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Everything's doable. They become fans. The one component I want to add that's kind of an umbrella around this is, I believe, authorship gives us this super intimate access to a reader. It is such a privileged position that we are in as authors, because a reader will explore their most challenging, deepest, most secret, perhaps even darkest moments with you, because it's a one way passive experience. Someone will buy a book about navigating trauma and will immerse into it because they're not having to discuss this, and they're not making it public. And there you are in the pages of a book while someone's in their bed, in their pajamas. It is such a gift and privilege for us, and I think we need to respect it that way. There's two mind shifts we need to make as authors. What are the two mind shifts we need to make to pull off a this book, write this book.

AJ Harper [00:25:40]:

So to understand that you're an author and to stop thinking about being a person who's writing a book, to make the shift from identity shift to author. I believe in every single person. Even though I don't know you and I can't see you through this podcast, I believe every single person can write the book they dream of writing. I know you can. And that's not hyperbole. That's not BS. It's because I understand that by simply making this other mindset shift to understand that a book is not about something, it's for someone, you can write the book you want to write. That's the... Understanding I'm an author, and that the book is for someone, not about something. Those two mindset shifts make it possible for you to realize those dreams. And again, it's not BS. It's based on evidence. This is the work that I do with hundreds of authors, and I've seen it happen time and time and time again. Even with authors who not only didn't do well in English, but maybe were in remedial. I've got no, seriously.

Mike Michalowicz [00:26:50]:

I know. I believe it.

AJ Harper [00:26:52]:

I have authors who have been crushed creatively. They feel like they can't. It's sad. They don't think that their words matter. I'm not a good storyteller. I'm not this, I'm not that. They also wonder if their ideas are any good. All authors think that. They don't think they can execute on it. They're really terrified. But they want to. They're driven to do it. They really want to do it. They can. There's absolutely no reason why they can. Now, I'm not saying you can go out there and write Pulitzer Prize winning literary fiction, right? But I'm saying if you want to write a book that's designed to help people, you can do that. And you can do it in a way that's absolutely remarkable and your book becomes a must read that everybody talks about simply

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by shifting your mindset from I'm just writing a book to I'm an author, and then, this book is not about something. This book is for someone.

Mike Michalowicz [00:27:49]:

Yeah. So let's explore those two things. So if it's okay, let's start with this something versus someone first.

AJ Harper [00:27:55]:

Sure.

Mike Michalowicz [00:27:56]:

Okay. How do we flipped from the I'm writing about something for someone? Because my default is well, my book is about the subject. It is about something. So how do I flip that?

AJ Harper [00:28:07]:

I mean, technically it is. Yeah, but not when you write this type of book that's designed to help someone or help a business or help a community. It is for them. Otherwise, why are you writing it? There are plenty of books about things, and that's fine, but that's not what we're talking about here is the specific type of. Nonfiction, but it also ends up working with memoir, creative nonfiction, and I've even had fiction authors say, how can I apply this?

Mike Michalowicz [00:28:33]:

Sure.

AJ Harper [00:28:35]:

It actually can help when we are in the mindset of, this is my book about what I'm thinking and my ideas. My, my, my. It's not in service of who's the person that's actually picking it up and turning the page. It's not even about the \$27 they spend. It's about the hours they spend with that book and then respecting it. When you make that critical shift, it helps you to make all of the decisions you need to make about the book. And this is what's really cool. People ask me all the time, how do I know if I have enough content? How do I choose the content? What goes in my book? Should I tell this story or that story? Is it too much me or not enough me? Do I need more research or less research? Is this too short, too long? A million questions like this? When you're writing for someone, every decision is easily made. What do they need? This is

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my reader. I understand them deeply. Do I include this action step? Do I include this story? Quick question. Does this serve them? No? Okay. The answer jacket goes somewhere else.

Mike Michalowicz [00:29:35]:

Yeah.

AJ Harper [00:29:36]:

Yes. Okay. It probably goes in the book, so it makes it easier. See how already it's easier to actually write it? That's one of the main features of writing a book for someone. But it also helps you to zero in on what is your main message, what is the promise you want to make to readers? These are fundamentals of developing a book. Helps you, like I said, filter the content. This is key. That part we talked about. They need to feel seen, helps you meet them where they are. If you're just thinking about, these are my ideas, my book. You're not thinking about, well, wait a minute. My reader is not here. My reader is 4 miles back. So how am I going to help them feel seen if I'm not writing it for them? Right, but then it also helps you not give up. This is the little hidden gem. Because when a book is when you think, this is for someone, this is for someone. This is for someone. But also you're clear on who the someone is. Right?

Mike Michalowicz [00:30:32]:

Yeah.

AJ Harper [00:30:32]:

On the days when you think you can't write anymore, you think it's terrible. You think you're not good at it, it's taking too long. All the things, all the road-beer. Because publishing is not for the faint of heart, but it keeps you going. Okay, I'm going to be of service today, and that might not do a great job, but I'm going to go ahead and do it because I care about this reader. So that mindset shift not only helps you craft a good book, but it helps you stay the course.

Mike Michalowicz [00:31:01]:

One thing I want to underscore is the question, what do they need? So we're at one of these cabins. This is the most recent one, when we were on that lake that was partially frozen, and there's like, no parking spots. You know that one?

AJ Harper [00:31:12]:

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Yeah. Remember we yeah.

Mike Michalowicz [00:31:14]:

I tried to start a fire. Almost burned the place.

AJ Harper [00:31:15]:

I think you had to stand so I could back out. Direct me.

Mike Michalowicz [00:31:19]:

Yeah. I tried to start a fire. I arrived a couple of hours before you like, oh, I have a roaring fire. We'll make it very kind of cozy. I couldn't get the fire going.

AJ Harper [00:31:29]:

Yeah.

Mike Michalowicz [00:31:30]:

That trip, what we were doing is there was like a beam that we were pasting those big postie note flip charts.

AJ Harper [00:31:38]:

Yeah. I have pictures of it.

Mike Michalowicz [00:31:40]:

Do you?

AJ Harper [00:31:41]:

Yeah.

Mike Michalowicz [00:31:42]:

And I remember you with a refrain of what do they need? And the only tweak you would make to that is sometimes you'd say, what do they need now?

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AJ Harper [00:31:51]:

Yeah.

Mike Michalowicz [00:31:51]:

And that was it. And that kept us going for we did it a twelve hour marathon or something. Yeah.

AJ Harper [00:31:57]:

And we had the book totally outlined by the end of it.

Mike Michalowicz [00:31:59]:

Yeah. I think I had two crying sessions.

AJ Harper [00:32:01]:

Where you're like, yeah, you were actually crying.

Mike Michalowicz [00:32:02]:

I know. That one. I know, but we went through it.

AJ Harper [00:32:07]:

But not because you were frustrated, because you were emotional. You felt so much for the reader.

Mike Michalowicz [00:32:12]:

Yeah. And our best book has come out of that experience. That was ALL IN.

AJ Harper [00:32:19]:

It seems like so long ago.

Mike Michalowicz [00:32:20]:

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I know, I know. Like, was that get different? That was all in. And I'm proud to say that every book we've written in my interpretation has been better than the preceding book. There's a famous actor, I do not recall her or his name, but this person I vaguely remember the quote, so I'm paraphrasing. It said, My job is every time I perform is that last night's audience is jealous they didn't attend today. Always getting better. And the thing that's done it every time is, what do they need now? And it transcends just the book. It's the series of books like the next book we write. I know. The first question is, well, what do they need now, Mike? And then we're going to debate it.

AJ Harper [00:33:01]:

Most people don't realize this, but you always have 24-25 books you want to write.

Mike Michalowicz [00:33:05]:

I know.

AJ Harper [00:33:06]:

So I remember when we were getting ready to write The Pumpkin Plan, and we were in the NIAC Library, and you said, okay, this is when we decided to be partners. And you pitched it to me and you said, I have 25 books I want to write. This was about twelve years ago. You still say I have 25. We've written a lot of books.

Mike Michalowicz [00:33:28]:

I know. We've got ten under our belt.

AJ Harper [00:33:29]:

Yeah. And so this is an infinite number. I don't know what they are, by the way. I have no idea. We'll show up at the retreat, you'll see I'm kicking these around. And then we always start with, what does Mike's Reader need next?

Mike Michalowicz [00:33:44]:

Yeah, right. Yeah. And I have four I'm bringing to the retreat. Already spoke with Noah, our editor at Penguin, and got some interesting feedback, and I may come with different ideas, too. Let's go into one final subject. In this category is the author versus writer.

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AJ Harper [00:33:59]:

Yeah. So that's the other founding principle that my big key mindset shift, you need to make.

Mike Michalowicz [00:34:05]:

So tell me about that. What is the difference between seeing yourself or defining yourself or being an author versus being a writer?

AJ Harper [00:34:12]:

Well, I mean, I want you to talk about also, I think sometimes when you write with someone, you don't think of yourself as an author, but you do think of yourself as an author.

Mike Michalowicz [00:34:24]:

Totally.

AJ Harper [00:34:25]:

And that's because they are your ideas.

Mike Michalowicz [00:34:27]:

Right.

AJ Harper [00:34:28]:

They are your stories. It's your codified frameworks and processes that you've proven, but you're also the ambassador for it.

Mike Michalowicz [00:34:37]:

Correct.

AJ Harper [00:34:37]:

You're promoting, building community, building readership. Those are all aspects of authorship. And you do write, right? I think sometimes people, when they work with a writer

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or they work with a ghost, they don't think of themselves as authors. But those are your that's your intellectual property. Someone's just putting it into an organized fashion.

Mike Michalowicz [00:34:58]:

Correct.

AJ Harper [00:34:58]:

That's all that's happening. Our relationship is slightly different because I care about your readers as much as you do, and we think about a body of work. But I think that's also part of authorship is thinking about a body of work. And you might say, I'm just writing this one book, but if it really lands, why wouldn't you write another one to support so that's one of them is an author is not just about writing. It's about the ideas. Also, this is so crucial. Authors are not short sighted. They understand that publishing is a long game. It's so long. It's so long. And it's not about just getting a book to market. It's not even about the first year. You have to really think about, how am I going to make this book a part of my business, my life, my mission, whatever focus you have for 5-10 years or longer. And you know, that works because and I think we can say it without boasting you're one of the rare authors that has a backlist where your royalties keep increasing year after year after year. That's because A, wrote a great book, but also commitment to authorship in promoting those books and continuing to build readership. So I think writers, when you think of yourself as, I'm just writing a book, you aren't thinking about ten years. Sometimes that scares authors when I say that. Ten years. But you wrote this amazing thing that's your life's work. Why wouldn't you be investing in getting it into the hands of a lot of folks?

Mike Michalowicz [00:36:35]:

Yeah, authorship is a career choice.

AJ Harper [00:36:39]:

It doesn't have to be the career instead of what you're already doing.

Mike Michalowicz [00:36:42]:

I agree.

AJ Harper [00:36:44]:

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It is for you.

Mike Michalowicz [00:36:45]:

I've chosen to go all in, and I believe, basically, I'm summarizing what you said, is that an author creates ideas, is a spokesperson for ideas, the promoter of the ideas, the codifier of the systems, and the writer is the person. Or maybe it's the same person. It could be the same person that puts it in the written word and gets it to the point where we talked about earlier that you are communicating just as effectively or more effectively than if you had all the tools of communication available, the PowerPoints and all that stuff in the written word. And I think I'll wrap up on my case. One final story before we wrap up the show is the day I declared as an author. I remember it, and perhaps my memory of it may be different than yours. It was during the PUMPKIN PLAN. I had an office that was granted to me by Howard Hirsch, a wonderful man who had started or invested in a cookie factory. And he said, you have a free office. You can use the space as long as you need and work on your books there. And so you'd meet me there. The office had no windows. It was above the baking ovens of the cookies. And these are industrial baking ovens. There was maybe, at that time, ten. They now have about 50 of these ovens cooking at 350 degrees, and the heat would emanate up from the ovens. My office was above them, into the office. I remember one particular summer day, my office was 98 degrees, and outside it was, like, 93 and sweat coming down. And it was a certain moment. I was undeterred. Like, the temperature had no effect on me. And I think it was because a reader had written to me. Maybe it was the first one I received, or maybe it was the first one I really acknowledged that said The PUMPKIN PLAN. Or maybe it was THE TOILET PAPER.

AJ Harper [00:38:32]:

Entrepreneur, but something it was an earlier book.

Mike Michalowicz [00:38:34]:

Maybe it was the toy paper entrepreneur. Something had transformed them. And they said, I think it was THE TOILET PAPER ENTREPRENEUR. They said, this has transformed me. I'm seeing impact. Thank you. And something like, Please keep writing. And I don't know if it was face to face. I probably was I probably start crying.

AJ Harper [00:38:51]:

Iris in the room with you.

Mike Michalowicz [00:38:53]:

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Okay. And we had that big whiteboard. That huge.

AJ Harper [00:38:55]:

Yeah.

Mike Michalowicz [00:38:56]:

Which, by the way, wasn't a whiteboard. That was a part of an old shower. And we put I don't know if you knew that.

AJ Harper [00:39:02]:

That's such a Mike thing.

Mike Michalowicz [00:39:03]:

It was an old shower, side of a shower, a laminate. And then we put over it like a wax, like a car wax, and you could use it as a whiteboard.

AJ Harper [00:39:11]:

Oh, my God.

Mike Michalowicz [00:39:12]:

And that's the day like, oh, my God, I'm an author.

AJ Harper [00:39:15]:

But do you remember this other part of the conversation? I don't know if you remember this. You were frustrated. I think you're leaving that part I.

Mike Michalowicz [00:39:23]:

Don't recall at the moment. Okay.

AJ Harper [00:39:25]:

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I'm doing this on the podcast. I've never said this to you before. I guess you were frustrated because you wanted to sell more books and you wanted this kind of author life, but you hadn't really made that mindset shift yet. You were still an entrepreneur who writes books.

Mike Michalowicz [00:39:45]:

That's right.

AJ Harper [00:39:46]:

And I remember saying to you, because you kept saying, I'm writing this book, or I also write books. And I remember saying to you, you need to make that shift, because until you make that shift, you are not going to be all in. And you did. And everything changed from that moment forward.

Mike Michalowicz [00:40:08]:

Yes, that's right. It's interesting when people ask me, the Uber driver, when I'm going somewhere, someone I don't know is what I'm saying asks me, well, what do you do? I say, I'm an author. And that's it. And I go, oh, cool. In the rare circumstances, I'm an author. I happen to also have some businesses. It used to be the authorship was the hanging chad. Oh, I'm an entrepreneur. I got some books, and now I'm an author. And everything else is secondary to that.

AJ Harper [00:40:39]:

And you don't have to choose that life. But I still think choosing to say I'm an author versus this transactional thing of I'm checking a box and writing a book is important, because that's the energy you need to get the kind of outcomes you want.

Mike Michalowicz [00:40:57]:

All right, our listening friends, I hope you got a context now for the lens of the rest of our shows. I hope you enjoy this and have a perspective that perhaps is a little bit different, that you felt a shift listening to this. Everything we're going to talk about in our subsequent episodes is going to be from this lens. Don't write THAT book. Write this book. Go all in on your book. Do you have a call to action? This is something I actually embed in my books themselves. I want you to email myself or AJ. It's DWTB, so don't write that book, dwtbpodcast.com and make your declaration. Make it easy for me and AJ, please. In the subject line put, "I am an author," so we know that you're writing to us for that specifically. Hey, you can send that email

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