

don't write *that* book!

Episode 3:

My Least Successful Book

Mike Michalowicz [00:00:01]:

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. Welcome to don't write that book. AJ and I are anticipating this may be our most listened to episode ever.

AJ Harper [00:00:23]:

We're projecting place a bet on it.

Mike Michalowicz [00:00:25]:

Because we're going to talk about a book that we did together that tanked, totally tanked, called SURGE.

AJ Harper [00:00:31]:

You probably never heard of it, and.

Mike Michalowicz [00:00:32]:

You probably never heard of it. And we're going to deconstruct why we think it failed, but also the challenge that we had in our relationship during a time which actually predates that. Okay, well, I want to hear your perspective of that story, and I'll share mine. I think it actually was necessary to get us to where we are today, for sure. But God was a shitty going through that for both of us.

AJ Harper [00:00:54]:

We've never talked about it publicly.

Mike Michalowicz [00:00:57]:

No. And we haven't even talked about it that much privately. I don't think we've talked about it well, and we've been integral about it.

AJ Harper [00:01:03]:

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Yes.

Mike Michalowicz [00:01:03]:

We don't revisit it is probably the better choice.

AJ Harper [00:01:05]:

Well, we're both let's move on type people.

Mike Michalowicz [00:01:08]:

Yeah. First, let me introduce my writing partner, my great friend AJ. Harper. She's the author of write. A must read. This is why I want to share about you. I get goosebumps. I actually am a little bit right now when I see the rankings of your book, because your book outlines everything we do together, and it is of such great service. I really do believe you've produced something that is going to serve generations to come. It's going to outlive me and you.

AJ Harper [00:01:43]:

Thank you.

Mike Michalowicz [00:01:43]:

You're welcome. And it's the truth. And so I'm just very proud of the book. I'm very proud of you.

AJ Harper [00:01:50]:

Thank you. I will introduce you as the author of ten business books, including Profit First, our Fave Pumpkin Plan, and many others. But since you brought that up, it's my great privilege to be able to be part of something that is changing lives in the way that you do. Your mission is to eradicate entrepreneurial poverty. And it's not just something it's almost like a bumper sticker on your car, which you should have that. Why don't you have that? I don't think you have that.

Mike Michalowicz [00:02:22]:

I do not.

AJ Harper [00:02:22]:

I think you love your car too much.

Mike Michalowicz [00:02:23]:

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Yeah, right.

AJ Harper [00:02:24]:

But it's not just a slogan. You mean. It's what your heart. It's what gets you out of bed in the morning.

Mike Michalowicz [00:02:30]:

Yeah, maybe my license plate. I can change the EEP.

AJ Harper [00:02:35]:

Okay, well, think considering what you drive, that's just the position work, but it's a pickup truck. To be part of that movement in my own small way is I feel like I have karma for many lifetimes.

Mike Michalowicz [00:02:50]:

I think we do. Yeah. And you're good. Karma part of the movement in a massive way. Yeah. We are changing lives. I hear it every day. We didn't share this on our episode when we talked about Profit First, but one of the things is we were talking about off the air was a story of a reader that's been changed, and that yesterday I spoke to a guy from Romania. So we did talk about Romania and that your book was translated into Romanian. And this guy called me, and we're on Zoom. He just starts tearing up, and he's like, this is preference has changed my life. He's like, you wouldn't believe what's done for me. And he just started to recount the transformation from desperation and struggling to freedom and the empowering of others, and now his inclusion of his friends, his community, and other entrepreneurs in the system. So it's just interesting. We are touching lives through our books of people that we'll never have a chance to meet.

AJ Harper [00:03:47]:

Yeah.

Mike Michalowicz [00:03:47]:

Never get a chance to hear their story. There's people out there that you and I will never know that have been transformed or served because of the work we've done.

AJ Harper [00:03:54]:

So amazing.

Mike Michalowicz [00:03:55]:

Well, there's one book that didn't transform too many folks, and it's search.

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AJ Harper [00:04:00]:

Yes.

Mike Michalowicz [00:04:03]:

In the notes here, we're talking about the impact story of Cindy Thomason. I don't even recall what that's about.

AJ Harper [00:04:10]:

What?

Mike Michalowicz [00:04:13]:

Give me some fodder here to Cindy.

AJ Harper [00:04:15]:

Thomason is profiled in that book.

Mike Michalowicz [00:04:18]:

Oh, right. So Cindy Thomason is a Profit First Professional.

AJ Harper [00:04:24]:

I mean, it's not an impact story in terms of a reader. She is a case study.

Mike Michalowicz [00:04:28]:

She's a case study? Yeah. Okay. I've had the privilege of personally coaching her in her business. She started off at \$45,000 in revenue. When I first met her, she joined Profit First Professionals and was struggling. So I quote, unquote, took her under my wing. Fast forward. It's a million dollar plus business. She and her husband regularly go on four week vacations. They travel the world.

AJ Harper [00:04:53]:

They have a great life.

Mike Michalowicz [00:04:53]:

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They have 20 plus employees. They may or may not be a target of acquisition every week. Now, like, there's people that want to buy their business. They've achieved the dream. And the concept of SURGE was that you can experience explosive growth in your business if you position yourself in front of moving trends or moving demands. If you know where the market is moving and put yourself in front of it, honestly, you could be a pretty shitty marketer and still do really well.

AJ Harper [00:05:24]:

And she's not a shitty marketer.

Mike Michalowicz [00:05:26]:

No, she's not.

AJ Harper [00:05:27]:

But it worked for her. And I want to just plug for a moment since we're talking about Cindy, who's one of my favorite people ever.

Mike Michalowicz [00:05:32]:

She's so kind.

AJ Harper [00:05:34]:

Cindy wrote one of the best selling PROFIT FIRST derivative books. It still sells. Ridiculous. And that's profit first for eCommerce. And she wrote a book that I want every mom to read, which is *Motherhood, Apple Pie and All that Happy Horse Shit*.

Mike Michalowicz [00:05:53]:

That's right.

AJ Harper [00:05:54]:

Great title. But what it is is exactly how she did it all.

Mike Michalowicz [00:06:00]:

Yeah.

AJ Harper [00:06:01]:

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And not just a hyperbole there. She figured out a way how to make her business work and raise her daughter in a way that made sense for her. And she teaches readers how to do that and has amazing stories from other entrepreneurs in that book. So I really want to plug that book as well.

Mike Michalowicz [00:06:18]:

And I've read that book cover to cover.

AJ Harper [00:06:20]:

That's a great book.

Mike Michalowicz [00:06:21]:

So not just for Moms. Dad could use it, too.

AJ Harper [00:06:23]:

But honestly, all that came from the work you were doing with Cindy. It inspired her to keep doing more things for herself.

Mike Michalowicz [00:06:30]:

And I dare say she intends to write another book. I don't know if that's true, but really, I just dare say because I.

AJ Harper [00:06:36]:

Think we've I hope she does, because she's actually great, great writer.

Mike Michalowicz [00:06:40]:

She's a great writer.

AJ Harper [00:06:41]:

Yeah.

Mike Michalowicz [00:06:41]:

And, oh, my God, her personality is so velvety.

AJ Harper [00:06:44]:

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Yeah. She's amazing.

Mike Michalowicz [00:06:45]:

So let's talk about what we love about SURGE, and then we can talk about where it all went wrong.

AJ Harper [00:06:53]:

I feel like readers need to understand we don't talk about SURGE.

Mike Michalowicz [00:06:57]:

No, we don't.

AJ Harper [00:06:58]:

It's like in a family, the bastard. Yeah. There's like, the cousin that was, like, left because of nefarious reasons that no one wants, no one acknowledged, and we just don't talk about that person anymore.

Mike Michalowicz [00:07:13]:

It's kind of I was reading George I am reading George Washington's biography, and he has relatives that we are never acknowledged because of their backgrounds.

AJ Harper [00:07:23]:

Yeah.

Mike Michalowicz [00:07:23]:

Everyone this is funny. Even George Washington.

AJ Harper [00:07:26]:

We all have things that we don't want to talk about that everyone knows is there, and you still don't talk about it. It's mutual agreement. We never sat down and said, let's never talk. It's not Voldemort, like from Harry Potter, where we must never utter the name. But again, we move on. Yeah, but it was a great book in many ways.

Mike Michalowicz [00:07:44]:

Yeah.

AJ Harper [00:07:45]:

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It just was the wrong book in so many ways.

Mike Michalowicz [00:07:47]:

Wrong book in so many ways.

AJ Harper [00:07:49]:

We shouldn't have written that book.

Mike Michalowicz [00:07:53]:

That's exactly right. This is the title of this whole podcast. Maybe this is even the inception of it. SURGE. This is my best estimate, because I don't have the data right in front of me. Has sold 30 to 40,000 copies, all types of formats, in its lifetime. This book came out, it was the next book after *The Pumpkin Plan*. So this book is probably twelve to 13 years old. It still sells today, but it sells maybe a copy a day.

AJ Harper [00:08:20]:

That's better than I thought.

Mike Michalowicz [00:08:21]:

Oh, really?

AJ Harper [00:08:22]:

Yeah.

Mike Michalowicz [00:08:25]:

But the reason it's selling a copy a day isn't because people are like, oh, you got to research by Mike Michalowicz. Someone reads another book—

AJ Harper [00:08:32]:

Wait a minute. That's not a failure.

Mike Michalowicz [00:08:33]:

Then 30,000 no. A copy, 30. Yeah, 30,000 collective. And now it's selling about a copy a day. So it's selling about 350 to 400.

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AJ Harper [00:08:45]:

So when you figure in that most nonfiction books will never sell more than 2000 copies in its lifetime yeah. That's technically not a failure.

Mike Michalowicz [00:08:56]:

Okay. But give it context. It is very clear. People are buying the book, not because people are referring SURGE and saying, you got to read SURGE.

AJ Harper [00:09:04]:

It's because they read *Pumpkin Plan*.

Mike Michalowicz [00:09:07]:

Yeah. And they say, oh, I read Proffers by Mike McAllister. What else is in his catalog?

AJ Harper [00:09:11]:

Catalog.

Mike Michalowicz [00:09:12]:

Yeah. That's why they're buying it.

AJ Harper [00:09:14]:

So how would you define it? As a book that didn't work? I define it as a book that didn't work. People don't know about it. People don't talk about it.

Mike Michalowicz [00:09:20]:

Correct.

AJ Harper [00:09:21]:

It doesn't have comparable sales.

Mike Michalowicz [00:09:24]:

Correct.

AJ Harper [00:09:25]:

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And we aren't hearing stories from people implementing it.

Mike Michalowicz [00:09:29]:

And if someone discovers that book and that's their first read, it doesn't get them to say, I want to read the rest of the catalog. They're like, oh, I'm done with this guy.

AJ Harper [00:09:36]:

Yeah, okay, good. That we clarify that.

Mike Michalowicz [00:09:37]:

Yeah.

AJ Harper [00:09:39]:

So it's being held up by the other books.

Mike Michalowicz [00:09:43]:

Yeah. Dragged along. The other ones are in their race cars and there's like I don't know if you ever saw that episode, that movie Vacation where you see Chevy Chase driving the station wagon with the kids and he forgot that the dog was leashed to the back and he's driving down the highway for like 5 hours with a dog behind him dragging? That's what this book is doing. All the other books are in the car driving along down the highway, and SURGE is on a chain behind it, flopping around on the highway, just being mauled.

AJ Harper [00:10:12]:

Oh, SURGE...

Mike Michalowicz [00:10:14]:

So that's why I consider it not to be a success. The book came about here's my recollection. *The Pumpkin Plan* was a successful book and continues to be. It's not PROFIT FIRST standard, but by.

AJ Harper [00:10:26]:

Most standards, it's a strong backlist title.

Mike Michalowicz [00:10:28]:

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Yeah. SURGE was a spin off of *The Pumpkin Plan*. It regurgitated it. It, quote, unquote, advanced it, but it wasn't what readers needed next. They were served with a pumpkin plan. And I think I was exploiting the success of *The Pumpkin Plan*, saying, oh, I can just replicate this.

AJ Harper [00:10:44]:

Really?

Mike Michalowicz [00:10:45]:

Yeah. That's what my recollection and feelings are. Yeah.

AJ Harper [00:10:48]:

I don't have a recollection, and the reason I don't is because I wasn't part of that decision, which is part.

Mike Michalowicz [00:10:53]:

Of the that's a big problem.

AJ Harper [00:10:55]:

And that leads us to talk about something we've never shared publicly. In fact, we didn't even discuss how we would talk about it today.

Mike Michalowicz [00:11:03]:

Yeah.

AJ Harper [00:11:03]:

So we might scrap this whole episode, which is our breakup story.

Mike Michalowicz [00:11:10]:

This is our breakup story.

AJ Harper [00:11:11]:

Yeah. It's not that we don't I've shared with people before that it happened, especially in the context of helping people understand that artistic partnerships can have challenges. But we've never shared the details of it.

Mike Michalowicz [00:11:27]:

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No. So let's go into it I mean, my wife knows. Well, let's go into it. I want to give context. We wrote *Toilet-Paper Entrepreneur*. I wrote that myself. You came in, saved the day. *The Pumpkin Plan* was a full start to finish project together. SURGE was our next book. No, PROFIT FIRST was next. I'm sorry, PROFIT FIRST was next?

AJ Harper [00:11:45]:

Yes.

Mike Michalowicz [00:11:46]:

Then SURGE. SURGE was also a self published book. This is because *Profit First* was self published.

AJ Harper [00:11:51]:

We were on the self-published track.

Mike Michalowicz [00:11:55]:

Do you want me to go first?

AJ Harper [00:11:58]:

So if you listen to the episode where we talk about the book that did work really well, which is *Profit First*, you'll hear us talk about getting an offer from Penguin for the revised and expanded edition of *Profit First*, which, I don't know if you remember, it happened while we were writing SURGE.

Mike Michalowicz [00:12:16]:

Oh, I didn't realize that.

AJ Harper [00:12:17]:

We were sort of at the end of SURGE developmental edits.

Mike Michalowicz [00:12:21]:

Okay.

AJ Harper [00:12:22]:

But we were in that process when you got that call.

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Mike Michalowicz [00:12:26]:

Yeah. Okay. So our breakup here's, my recollection or my sense we have different styles which are very complementary. Now, when there's guidelines or guardrails in place, and I have the tendency to be very assertive, time driven, my German upbringing, German upgrade.

AJ Harper [00:12:56]:

I also have a German upbringing. You can't put it in the German upbringing.

Mike Michalowicz [00:13:00]:

Okay.

AJ Harper [00:13:00]:

We share that.

Mike Michalowicz [00:13:01]:

I wanted to blame that, but it's like I'm always down. It's got to be now. And I realize I'm willing to compromise quality for timeliness.

AJ Harper [00:13:13]:

Yes. You will run with an idea without if you kind of like it.

Mike Michalowicz [00:13:17]:

Yeah.

AJ Harper [00:13:20]:

I mean, you used to yeah. You don't anymore.

Mike Michalowicz [00:13:23]:

Yeah. If I like an idea, it's just go go back then I was I was, I think, in my late thirties at this point. So I still in my thirties. I think I was, like, 39 when we wrote SURGE. 38.

AJ Harper [00:13:35]:

My God.

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Mike Michalowicz [00:13:36]:

Isn't that crazy? Now I'm 50.

AJ Harper [00:13:38]:

You're really making me feel old. Okay.

Mike Michalowicz [00:13:40]:

You were in your 30s, too.

AJ Harper [00:13:41]:

I know we're not that different in age, but it okay.

Mike Michalowicz [00:13:44]:

I know we started SURGE together. No, we didn't. Okay, then you tell the story.

AJ Harper [00:13:54]:

See, everybody, this is the first time we're really hashing it out, and we're doing it online. Why did I think this was good? Yeah. We were working on the streamline proposal. You might not remember this.

Mike Michalowicz [00:14:10]:

Okay.

AJ Harper [00:14:10]:

Streamline became *Clockwork*.

Mike Michalowicz [00:14:12]:

Yes, I know that.

AJ Harper [00:14:13]:

You set it aside for SURGE.

Mike Michalowicz [00:14:16]:

I don't remember that.

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AJ Harper [00:14:17]:

You did, but we didn't finish the streamline. We were working on streamline, and I could not meet the deadlines. So my issue is that's right. My issue was I was ghostwriting at the time. You were not.

Mike Michalowicz [00:14:33]:

Yeah.

AJ Harper [00:14:33]:

So you and I are partners. I never consider you a client. Except for *The Toilet-Paper Entrepreneur*. That was definitely a client situation. But from *Pumpkin Plan* forward, we've been partners. The problem was, do you remember with *Pumpkin Plan* and I did this willingly, but I basically got swallowed up by the Michalowicz machine. So I wasn't just working on the book marketing blog, endless blogs. I was at the cookie factory office all the time. Yes, I had other clients. I had a young kid, most of the parenting duties a lot of the time, and I wanted to always say yes. And I got kind of swallowed up by your enthusiasm and awesomeness and I want what I went willingly.

Mike Michalowicz [00:15:22]:

Yeah.

AJ Harper [00:15:23]:

Then I also ghostwriting is hard. Everybody just got to let you know because what will happen is a person will say, well, I'll get you my stuff by June and then they get it to you in August. But in August is when this other thing is due. And so it just starts to steamroll until finally you have nine books you're working on at the same time or something ludicrous like that. I didn't have the ability to assert myself. So I think what we learned from what I will get into it. But at the time I said yes too often, I didn't assert myself and say, hey, I waited for three months, so you have to wait three months. I would just try.

Mike Michalowicz [00:16:06]:

Right.

AJ Harper [00:16:06]:

Burn myself out so that if anything ever happened personally, then everything came crashing down because I was so working 15 hours, days. And I started to resent being swallowed up by the Michalowicz machine. But I had the worst problem ever, which was perfectionism.

Mike Michalowicz [00:16:26]:

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Yeah.

AJ Harper [00:16:27]:

So I wouldn't send you anything until I absolutely felt amazing about it.

Mike Michalowicz [00:16:31]:

Right.

AJ Harper [00:16:32]:

So that was my problem. So you weren't pushing too hard too fast and not taking a breath.

Mike Michalowicz [00:16:37]:

Right.

AJ Harper [00:16:38]:

And I'm a creative. I have to have time to think about stuff.

Mike Michalowicz [00:16:42]:

Right.

AJ Harper [00:16:43]:

There wasn't any time to think. But I also was being holding on too long to stuff.

Mike Michalowicz [00:16:48]:

Yeah. I realized, and still a blind spot for me is speed over quality. Just go. Go. I sense that if I said I'll get something to you by June, that I'd get you something at June, but it wasn't good.

AJ Harper [00:17:04]:

That wasn't you, by the way. It was a ghost writing class.

Mike Michalowicz [00:17:06]:

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Okay. But I think I would quote unquote, always hit my deadlines, but with lack of quality or content. It was just garbage in many cases. And what I decided then was we got to keep this pace going. I saw authorship wrongly as a quantity game, not a quality career.

AJ Harper [00:17:27]:

Which is so funny, Mike, because what do people always say to me now? How do you guys do it? You guys are constantly churning out books. So we don't have that pace anymore. But the perception from readers is still, yeah, but we don't have that pace.

Mike Michalowicz [00:17:42]:

Yeah. And the book quality is amazing. All in is our best written book and *Get Different* was even was the best written book up to that point.

AJ Harper [00:17:51]:

So we broke up.

Mike Michalowicz [00:17:52]:

So we broke up.

AJ Harper [00:17:53]:

It was during Hurricane Sandy.

Mike Michalowicz [00:17:58]:

Okay. Yes, I remember. I don't remember that. I remember superstar finding a ghostwriter named Becky Blanton. This was after that who I'm still friends with. Yeah, but that was to help with SURGE.

AJ Harper [00:18:08]:

Yes, because I wasn't involved with SURGE.

Mike Michalowicz [00:18:10]:

I know. So I'm like, I need someone, because I realize this is a weakness of mine. She is great, but she's not a partner. We met in Virginia, and I told her ideas, and she's like, let's just start working. And we started working. I was like, this is what I needed, someone that's just ready to work. But she was doing more of what I did. She was an amplification of me. Not a compliment to me.

AJ Harper [00:18:35]:

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Well, also not your voice.

Mike Michalowicz [00:18:37]:

And not my voice. And she's an excellent writer, and we're still friends today, actually. I just talked to her recently, and she's been you know, where she is amazing. She brings in the best stories in the world. So the University of Chicago, the medical department, jewel, who we interviewed for all.

AJ Harper [00:18:57]:

Oh, that was great.

Mike Michalowicz [00:18:58]:

Becky Blanton.

AJ Harper [00:18:59]:

Oh, my God. That was a great interview.

Mike Michalowicz [00:19:00]:

When I tell Becky, I I'm think looking for this, she's like, oh, I know the person. She's an extraordinary journalist and author. But it was through the sessions I'm like, we're producing a lot of garbage. Not because of her, because of me. She was just spitting out what I was saying with more words, and it's like, this isn't fucking working well, because.

AJ Harper [00:19:21]:

How we work together is we are bouncing stuff off each other all the time. I ask you about a thousand questions. We go back and forth. That's what we love to do, is work on how do we make this into a book so it's a more collaborative experience.

Mike Michalowicz [00:19:37]:

There's two favorite things I have that happen between me and you moments. There's occasions you'll say, that's hot. That's the exact words. You when you say that's hot. When you say that, I'm like, we failed it. It feels so good because you I.

AJ Harper [00:19:57]:

Never say that any other time. I don't know how that comes out of me. It just comes out without thinking.

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Mike Michalowicz [00:20:02]:

But when you say that, that's the moment. Like, we've nailed it. Because you reserve that. It's rare. It happens once or twice in a book. More often, it's like, I don't get it. And you are relentless is not the right word. But you will not give in. No, you will not give in. And I'm so grateful for that, because I will. When we have a concept, an idea, but it's not fully baked, you're like, Put it back in the oven. Put it back in the oven. And I'm like it's. Good enough. And there's that compulsion of me to say it's good enough. That's the let's move this along component. And that's where the balance, I think, is between perfectionism and moving along. And I simply know now I'm mature enough to know it ain't ready. Keep going until we get to it's, hot.

AJ Harper [00:20:51]:

And I had to say, okay, you got to stop hiding work in progress from Mike. Just send him what you have. But also be honest and say life is hard right now. I can't pull this off. And then I also got real about it probably wasn't working for me to be a ghostwriter, so I quit Ghostwriting. I started that process. But you reached out to me. I don't remember. I bet I still have the email because I'm an email hoarder.

Mike Michalowicz [00:21:22]:

Oh, we should look it up.

AJ Harper [00:21:24]:

I'm only an email hoarder because I hate email, so I don't go to the trouble of just, like, organizing it and deleting. But you sent me an email or you called me. I can't remember.

Mike Michalowicz [00:21:34]:

I know we spoke and you said.

AJ Harper [00:21:37]:

We need to get back together.

Mike Michalowicz [00:21:38]:

Basically. Yeah. I hope I grappled a little bit because I needed to take that little narcissistic approach I had to authorship.

AJ Harper [00:21:48]:

I didn't think it was narcissistic.

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Mike Michalowicz [00:21:50]:

Well, I thought I was right and you were wrong.

AJ Harper [00:21:52]:

Okay.

Mike Michalowicz [00:21:53]:

That's narcissism. I wasn't ready to accept that. Oh, maybe two different approaches actually bring about a better result.

AJ Harper [00:22:01]:

See, I didn't think. I just felt so burned out. That's why the breakup was welcome to me, because I felt like I can't keep up with this dude.

Mike Michalowicz [00:22:08]:

So we sat back down and we did search together.

AJ Harper [00:22:13]:

You sent me the copy of what you had so far, but I wasn't there for the original concept stuff from scratch. So I think that I'm going to be bold here. To me, the number one thing reason why Search didn't work is because it wasn't the correct answer to what do my readers need next?

Mike Michalowicz [00:22:34]:

I 100% agree.

AJ Harper [00:22:35]:

And so we never had that conversation.

Mike Michalowicz [00:22:37]:

I 100% agree and I'm ashamed of this. I distinctly recall saying this is an easy one. I had the arrogance.

AJ Harper [00:22:46]:

Yes.

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Mike Michalowicz [00:22:46]:

The arrogance came back. I said, oh, because *Pumpkin Plan* is successful, it surpassed 100,000 units by and *Profit First*, too. In profit first. Yeah. That people will just read my stuff.

AJ Harper [00:22:57]:

Yeah.

Mike Michalowicz [00:22:57]:

I arrogantly said, oh, well, if Malcolm Gladwell put something out, I just read it because it's Malcolm Gladwell. My readers are going to read me because it's me.

AJ Harper [00:23:04]:

Yeah. And you were jazzed about the concept, though. Don't sell yourself so short. You really thought it would help.

Mike Michalowicz [00:23:10]:

I did. Oh, of course. Yeah, I did.

AJ Harper [00:23:11]:

Yeah. You're like, oh, my God. And Cindy Thomason coming back to her was having ridiculous results with it, for sure. But you didn't have enough testing to see if it was going to be easy for folks.

Mike Michalowicz [00:23:22]:

Correct. But it was a rehash of the *Pumpkin Plan* and it was very theory based. It was a lot of what ifs, but not doable. And we talked about that in the *Profit First* episode, like you didn't by Chapter three see accessible doable results. You had theory you could try things out, but you wouldn't see results.

AJ Harper [00:23:46]:

Yeah. And readers weren't, you know, if you're struggling we also talked about high stakes in that episode. This isn't high stakes because readers are not, wait, I'm supposed to get in front of trends. I can't make payroll. Right. So it just didn't connect with people. It connected with some people who were ready to hear it. And there are people who love that book so much who did it because they were ready for it, but it just wasn't enough people.

Mike Michalowicz [00:24:16]:

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Yeah. I mean yeah, exactly. Listen, today the last five years. I can't think of a single person that emailed me and said, oh, my God, SURGE is amazing.

AJ Harper [00:24:27]:

It is a good book, though.

Mike Michalowicz [00:24:28]:

I know.

AJ Harper [00:24:29]:

And it has that ongoing throughline story of Burt's Bees, the guy who started.

Mike Michalowicz [00:24:33]:

Burt's Bees, yes or no?

AJ Harper [00:24:37]:

The Uggs guy.

Mike Michalowicz [00:24:38]:

Yeah.

AJ Harper [00:24:38]:

Brian both.

Mike Michalowicz [00:24:39]:

Yeah. Brian Smith is the online the going story. But Burt's Bees is in there, too. Yeah. And broadcast I did learn how to interview during that book. So Brian Smith, I spent a couple of days with the guy from Burt's Bees. His name is Burt. I can't remember his last name at the moment. He subsequently has passed, but I got one of the last interviews with him before he died.

AJ Harper [00:24:59]:

Yeah, and then you had the Brian, there's a lot of original content in that book that you can't get us elsewhere.

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Mike Michalowicz [00:25:03]:

But I learned how to interview. I just got to tell you about the Burt story. Little antidote.

AJ Harper [00:25:06]:

Oh, yeah.

Mike Michalowicz [00:25:07]:

He didn't have a cell phone. He lived in Vermont or New Hampshire, and the only way to get hold of Bert was to call the local pharmacy or I think it was a pharmacy or deli. And Burt is, quote, unquote, usually there on Tuesday around noon. And you call and you're like, hey, is Burt there? I did call over a couple of Tuesdays, maybe three or four Tuesdays, and say, Is Burt there? And one time, oh, yeah, he's here, and got the phone. He's like, yeah, what's up? And he told me he let me interview him and told me this story at the pharmacy. At the pharmacy.

AJ Harper [00:25:40]:

I don't think I knew this.

Mike Michalowicz [00:25:41]:

Oh, yeah, he didn't have a cell phone. He had a cabin in the woods. He was a multimillionaire for selling his business.

AJ Harper [00:25:46]:

Right. I knew he was off the grid.

Mike Michalowicz [00:25:49]:

And most of the call, he lamented his business partner who took advantage of him.

AJ Harper [00:25:53]:

Allegedly.

Mike Michalowicz [00:25:54]:

Allegedly. Roxanne yeah. According to him. And he just lamented about that. It was a fascinating way to interview someone, to give them the freedom to say what they had to say, but also extract what I needed to know.

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AJ Harper [00:26:05]:

Yeah. So another reason why the book didn't work, which is what we're talking about, is it had a complicated core message, which, honestly, I don't think I could recite today.

Mike Michalowicz [00:26:17]:

Correct.

AJ Harper [00:26:18]:

And that's saying something because I know every core message.

Mike Michalowicz [00:26:22]:

I mean, my best stab would be, put yourself in front of market trends. The market will carry your business forward. And that's not even good.

AJ Harper [00:26:29]:

That doesn't and you can't share it.

Mike Michalowicz [00:26:32]:

No. And there's always challenges. Well, what's a market trend? How do you identify it? Too complex.

AJ Harper [00:26:38]:

It didn't fit our Doable immutable law.

Mike Michalowicz [00:26:43]:

That's right.

AJ Harper [00:26:44]:

We didn't follow our own rules.

Mike Michalowicz [00:26:45]:

That's right. Which I now have pinned above my desk at my home office are rules for the books.

AJ Harper [00:26:52]:

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Yes. Immutable laws.

Mike Michalowicz [00:26:53]:

And that probably came around with *Pumpkin Plan*. Yeah, it was from *Pumpkin Plan*.

AJ Harper [00:26:57]:

But you've modified it.

Mike Michalowicz [00:26:59]:

I've modified it, enhanced it. But I think it came around due to SURGE because it was such a diversion from what we committed to during *The Pumpkin Plan*.

AJ Harper [00:27:07]:

Again, high concept. Hard for people to practice. I'm going to tell you, I don't know if I ever said this to you. I don't think it's a good title.

Mike Michalowicz [00:27:16]:

I agree. Now, I would say it's a shitty.

AJ Harper [00:27:18]:

Title, but see, those were the days when you would fall in love with a title, and then that was I.

Mike Michalowicz [00:27:24]:

Would pry open your mouth and jam it down your throat because you would say, Are you kidding?

AJ Harper [00:27:30]:

But see, this is why you had to hear the breakup story, everyone. Because I didn't feel I was in a position and we were just sort of back, and we were to your credit, I feel like you really approached coming back in a really wonderful way that made it easy for me. Made it easy for me to say yes to you. I can still remember my wife saying, I said, oh, my God, a message from Mike. Because I thought that we were done.

Mike Michalowicz [00:27:58]:

Yeah.

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AJ Harper [00:28:00]:

And she said, what are you going to do? And I said, Well, I'm going to say yes, because if I hadn't realized my own stuff and I want to just say just as a diversion, I'm so glad that happened because we are so vulnerable and honest with each other now that we couldn't be that way before. But I think that I was still feeling a little tenuous to say, Mike, what the hell?

Mike Michalowicz [00:28:26]:

Yeah.

AJ Harper [00:28:27]:

You know what I mean?

Mike Michalowicz [00:28:28]:

Yeah.

AJ Harper [00:28:28]:

I didn't push back that much, but I do remember trying to push back on some of the doability, but then I felt like I was just on the ride a little bit.

Mike Michalowicz [00:28:37]:

I think the smartest thing that I and we subsequently did is you're not a ghost writer, not a contractor or servant, if you will, to the author, to me. We're full partners. We went together to the Penguin meetings. Penguin knows that we are co writing this book. Yeah.

AJ Harper [00:28:59]:

All that changed after the breakup.

Mike Michalowicz [00:29:01]:

Yeah. *The Pumpkin Plan*. You were the ghost. But all the things would channel through me, and I think it put me in this. Position of thinking that I was I don't know, it just it just it didn't make us equal partners. And therefore it wasn't a balanced experience. And maybe it was since the breakup. I can't remember when it happened, but I'm like, we are equal partners in all this writing.

AJ Harper [00:29:23]:

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But at the time I didn't have the I couldn't say. Are you sure about SURGE? Yeah. And then cover design. I got to be honest.

Mike Michalowicz [00:29:32]:

Can I say a few more things about the title?

AJ Harper [00:29:34]:

Yeah, please.

Mike Michalowicz [00:29:35]:

Here's another reason it's a shitty title. SURGE is a soda. SURGE is a power protector, a search protector. If you go to Amazon, which represents over 80% of our sales, and you type in the title of the book, SURGE, you will not see the book. You'll see power protectors and really highly caffeinated soda. You won't see the book if you type in *Profit First* or *Pumpkin Plan*, or even *All In*. You see the book listed right there in the beginning. So one thing we've done in title testing is how accessible is it on Amazon? What about the domain itself? Is that available? Like SURGE.com is I don't know what's owned by, but they owned by us. There's more to than just having a title that connects and serves the reader and intrigues them, inspires them to read the book. It's also how accessible is it when they hear the title that they're going to find it. One, two, three. Yeah, you can't find search and if you can't find the analogy I use is like you go to a supermarket and you're looking to buy a box of cereal. These mega supermarkets, if it's a new cereal, good luck finding it, even in the cereal aisle. Now, amplify that pretend the entire food store is only cereals and that there's ten stores all linked together, and you have one box somewhere in there. It is impossible to find. And that's what books are. There's so many books out there. So you have to put yourself in a position that makes you at eye level, distinguishable, noticeable, and SURGE just ain't.

AJ Harper [00:31:08]:

Yeah. Do you want to talk about the...

Mike Michalowicz [00:31:09]:

Cover. Oh, one last thing. Subtitle the subtitle below, too.

AJ Harper [00:31:12]:

What is the subtitle?

Mike Michalowicz [00:31:12]:

We did try it, remember? Outmarket your competition something and Ride the Wave. The big kahuna.

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AJ Harper [00:31:20]:

Yeah, no, that's right. I do recall thinking kahuna.

Mike Michalowicz [00:31:26]:

Yeah, it was a mechanic. Okay. That's where good intentions went to die. No.

AJ Harper [00:31:33]:

Okay. And the cover design.

Mike Michalowicz [00:31:36]:

Yeah. What do you think?

AJ Harper [00:31:37]:

I don't like it, but I don't think I told you.

Mike Michalowicz [00:31:40]:

Yeah, I think the title isn't prominent enough. What else don't you like about it?

AJ Harper [00:31:48]:

It's got that weird little guy figure on the Wave.

Mike Michalowicz [00:31:52]:

Yeah. Which is Browie, by the way, because it says wearing a tie, which could disenchant half our readership or even more.

AJ Harper [00:32:04]:

Which is you know what, to me it looks self published.

Mike Michalowicz [00:32:08]:

Oh, that's a good one.

AJ Harper [00:32:09]:

It does and nothing wrong with that. Okay, but you don't have to.

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Mike Michalowicz [00:32:14]:

Yeah.

AJ Harper [00:32:15]:

You can self publish and no one will know.

Mike Michalowicz [00:32:17]:

Yeah.

AJ Harper [00:32:18]:

And I felt like it stood out as a self-published title, kind of like TPE, like *Toilet Paper Entrepreneur*, which is a cult classic. I didn't call it that, by the way.

Mike Michalowicz [00:32:28]:

Over 100,000 copies sold.

AJ Harper [00:32:29]:

That is what who called it that? Cult classic? Entrepreneur Magazine. Yeah. And then you're going to have to speak to other issues because those are my main issues.

Mike Michalowicz [00:32:40]:

Okay. So the marketing was nonexistent. It was pure arrogance. I was like, I got other books out there. If I just tell my... Yeah, we did an email announcement to our list. I'm like, I don't need influencer. Other influencers. Marketing this. I got all these sales. I'm on the upward trend.

AJ Harper [00:33:00]:

Okay. So it was arrogance. I often wondered if you just didn't love the book so much, because I see that a lot with authors is they end up sort of not liking some aspect of their book. Often it's the cover or they made compromises with the book that they aren't happy with, and so they don't promote it. That wasn't it.

Mike Michalowicz [00:33:23]:

No, I still actually still like the book. I think it's a great book.

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AJ Harper [00:33:28]:

I think a lot of people who are ready for it should buy it.

Mike Michalowicz [00:33:31]:

Yeah. I think it's very well written. I think it can be great service to people. But I didn't market accordingly. And I do believe in marketing, that regardless of how successful your last books have been, your prior books is you need to get a big push out of the gate. So these are my little formulas, and this is truly subjective. I just made these numbers up, and they feel right, that if you sell 100 books, that 10% of the people are actually going to read that book cover to cover, and of that 10%, 10% are going to become rabid fans if you wrote an extraordinary, extraordinary book. So a lot of people are going to read *Profit First* and say, yeah, it's great, and that's it. But 10% of those people that read it will say, this transforms everything for me. I need to tell the world. So 100 books sold, ten readers, one zealot. So you need to sell 1000 books to get ten zealots. You need to sell 10,000 books to get 100.

AJ Harper [00:34:23]:

Right.

Mike Michalowicz [00:34:23]:

But 100 people that speak about it over the lifetime may move another hundred books over their lifetime over the next 30, 40 years with e-Myth. I've sold that many books because I.

AJ Harper [00:34:33]:

Believe I've sold thousands of copies of *The War of Art*.

Mike Michalowicz [00:34:36]:

I know. Yeah. I was about to say, I can pick the book for you. *War of Art*. Yeah, right. You sold that? My number is I moved 100 books. If I can get 100 people, move 100 books, that's 10,000. It starts the recycle. So you need to get 10,000 readers that have received an extraordinary book, and that may trigger just enough for a perennial bestseller. That's my fuzzy math.

AJ Harper [00:34:57]:

I love your fuzzy math, but even though it's fuzzy, it's helpful. It helps us get perspective and see what we need to do. So you weren't doing that? You were just doing some email blasts.

Mike Michalowicz [00:35:07]:

That's right, some email blasts. I don't remember the launch, but maybe we moved 1000 books.

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AJ Harper [00:35:12]:

But you remember you were also, during the launch, working on revised and expanded edition of *Profit First*. Do you feel like your excitement about that, about being back at, now Penguin Random House, and focusing on that might.

Mike Michalowicz [00:35:25]:

Have maybe I'm sure it's so much easier in so many ways to be with a traditional publisher. You don't have to worry about the team. We just got to do what we do best.

AJ Harper [00:35:34]:

That's right.

Mike Michalowicz [00:35:35]:

And they share a lot in the proceeds. I mean, they get a lot of money. They're making money, and they need to my gosh, it's just so much easier. It's like a circus, and maybe we're the lion tamers or whatever. We can put on a great show. But when you also got to be the conductor or whatever that person is in the three ring circus and also the trapeze artists. It's just a lot of stuff. Yeah, I would say, because all we do is all we do is the writing and marketing that we do it better than someone has to do all the other things just because the nature of we can focus more there. And that's probably part of it, that I was distracted. I was grateful to be back, that we're back with Penguin.

AJ Harper [00:36:22]:

So what do you want to do with SURGE? I've always wondered this. Do you want to revive it?

Mike Michalowicz [00:36:29]:

If we revive it? No, I think let the dead rest. I just can't see.

AJ Harper [00:36:36]:

I love that 30,000 copies is dead to you.

Mike Michalowicz [00:36:43]:

You have to see in comparison to.

AJ Harper [00:36:44]:

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What we I know, I know, but I have to rethink that. I don't think I and that's news to me. So I have to think about it differently now, honestly.

Mike Michalowicz [00:36:52]:

So here's the funny. I see SURGE is almost dead or dead. I see *Pumpkin Plan's* purgatory. This is the funniest thing. The *Pumpkin Plan* sells two to 300 copies a week right now, which is now 15 years old or 11,12 years old. That is on the verge of it could be a revised expanded edition.

AJ Harper [00:37:14]:

Really?

Mike Michalowicz [00:37:14]:

Yeah.

AJ Harper [00:37:15]:

Oh, man.

Mike Michalowicz [00:37:16]:

It could be. But the thing is, Penguin says it sells pretty darn well.

AJ Harper [00:37:20]:

Yeah. They don't want to mess with it.

Mike Michalowicz [00:37:22]:

Yeah. That means they're netting every week. If it sells 300 books, they're getting \$1,000 check to 1500 every week. They are. That's when they're netting. So I guess why reinvest our team's efforts and so forth if it was selling 500, 600 a week, I think that push them over, saying, well, if we revise it, maybe we can get to 1000. And it was selling less than 300. Maybe selling 100 a week or 200.

AJ Harper [00:37:45]:

Yeah. Be a no go, right?

Mike Michalowicz [00:37:46]:

No, it would I think it would be a go. Because you're like, it sells enough.

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AJ Harper [00:37:50]:

Maybe we can push it over.

Mike Michalowicz [00:37:51]:

Maybe we can push it over. I think it's in this purgatory in the middle where it's like like it's a money maker. Why do I change what's kind of working? SURGE, I think, is just dead? I mean, literally, one copy a day of one. The audio here or the print there, that's 350 a year. It'd be very hard pitched to go to Penguin and say, hey, let's do SURGE again. I think the only way to do it is take the best out of it. Write a brand new book and don't call SURGE.

AJ Harper [00:38:22]:

That's what I meant. Another book called no, what I meant Revive is the idea. Oh, because the idea is cool.

Mike Michalowicz [00:38:31]:

Yeah.

AJ Harper [00:38:31]:

Totally changed Cindy Thomason's life.

Mike Michalowicz [00:38:36]:

And there's always practical opportunities. Right now with AI, the advancements in AI, there's no question we are a major trend as Afoot, not AI alone. All the residual effects of AI. The up and coming prompt engineer title that people yes. That is a massive opportunity for businesses to grab onto that. And we'll see extraordinary change. And there's so many residual benefits, too.

AJ Harper [00:39:02]:

And also people who are providing security measures around AI.

Mike Michalowicz [00:39:05]:

Security around AI. I haven't seen an opportunity. I have a call with a tech company. I can't off the air, I can divulge a little bit what we're doing. Call next week. There's something that I want to see if we can put a little seed in and see if we can catch this wave ourselves at our office.

AJ Harper [00:39:21]:

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Nice.

Mike Michalowicz [00:39:23]:

So SURGE. It's funny how the ashes comes to Phoenix. I'm going to get an ulterior. I'm so grateful that our relationship evolved. And that's when you became my closest friend or one of my yeah.

AJ Harper [00:39:37]:

So you know what? Down with SURGE. But it was what we had to do to form the partnership we now have.

Mike Michalowicz [00:39:46]:

Yeah, exactly.

AJ Harper [00:39:47]:

This was good for me. This is like our therapy session.

Mike Michalowicz [00:39:50]:

Yeah.

AJ Harper [00:39:50]:

But I hope that listeners hear that we did things wrong. The number one thing is, what do your readers need next? That's where everything went kablooey. And then I guess I didn't realize that you chalk a lot of it up to arrogance.

Mike Michalowicz [00:40:03]:

I do, of course.

AJ Harper [00:40:04]:

And I guess that's arrogant, too, to not ask, what do my readers need next?

Mike Michalowicz [00:40:08]:

Totally arrogant. It's total tunnel vision. I was demanding the readers to read something, not serving them.

AJ Harper [00:40:15]:

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Yeah.

Mike Michalowicz [00:40:15]:

That's horrible. *All In*. I think it's the best book we've ever written.

AJ Harper [00:40:21]:

I'm so excited about it.

Mike Michalowicz [00:40:22]:

Oh, my God, I'm so excited about it. And we'll see. I get it now. It may not be popular, but I know we're putting out our best work ever together. What's interesting is, I think also our level of synchronization or compliment was the best in *All In*. The book evolved and just got better and better.

AJ Harper [00:40:44]:

Yeah.

Mike Michalowicz [00:40:44]:

There wasn't setbacks or what. There was elements we get past, and it wasn't clicking, but it was always evolving.

AJ Harper [00:40:51]:

Yeah.

Mike Michalowicz [00:40:51]:

There was never I don't remember once this book sucks. Other books in the past have been like, we're not getting there. And there's like this major blockage that had to get passed. And *All In*. Didn't have that.

AJ Harper [00:41:04]:

You know why I think that is? I mean, part of it is obviously we have a good working relationship, but I really think it's because of the subject matter and how near and dear it is to your heart about how much you care about employees, your team, your work, family, and so it's just something you love to talk about.

Mike Michalowicz [00:41:22]:

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Yeah.

AJ Harper [00:41:23]:

So I think that's why it was just a joy for you to write, even when we were hitting stumbling blocks that every writer hits, by the way.

Mike Michalowicz [00:41:30]:

Yeah.

AJ Harper [00:41:30]:

That's just normal.

Mike Michalowicz [00:41:31]:

Tomorrow I'm doing a keynote, my first keynote on *All In*, and the concluding line is, great leaders make people believe in them. I'm sorry. Good leaders make people believe in them. Great leaders make people believe in themselves.

AJ Harper [00:41:44]:

So good. Yeah, so good.

Mike Michalowicz [00:41:45]:

Good. Rehearse that one.

AJ Harper [00:41:46]:

Right now, that book comes out in January, January 2, 2024.

Mike Michalowicz [00:41:51]:

We're laughing because right now it's May of 2023 while we're recording this. And the book the manuscript was done in 2022.

AJ Harper [00:41:58]:

That's right.

Mike Michalowicz [00:41:59]:

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In December.

AJ Harper [00:42:01]:

And I will say at this, a week from tomorrow or a week from tomorrow, I'll be seeing you, because we'll start book number twelve.

Mike Michalowicz [00:42:12]:

Yes. And actually, that's what I wanted to conclude on. We're going to a cabin up near where you and your wife live.

AJ Harper [00:42:17]:

Yes.

Mike Michalowicz [00:42:18]:

And I think this is one of the great outcomes that was rekindled with SURGE, the punk plan. We used to meet at the library, and honestly, that's all we could afford.

AJ Harper [00:42:30]:

Oh, yeah.

Mike Michalowicz [00:42:32]:

Now, hey, we can put down a little bit of money for a nice cabin in the woods.

AJ Harper [00:42:36]:

It's got those *Profit First* royalties.

Mike Michalowicz [00:42:38]:

Yeah, exactly. There's something magical that happens for humans when working together. In person.

AJ Harper [00:42:47]:

In person, yeah.

Mike Michalowicz [00:42:48]:

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And for me, even when we're just exhausted sometimes, it's the exasperation of working a twelve hour day at the end to say, and out comes the great idea.

AJ Harper [00:42:58]:

Yeah.

Mike Michalowicz [00:42:59]:

That time together allows us, from my perception, for the good ideas to develop, to just come out naturally. You still know what's going to happen, and you can't do that over Zoom. You can't do over an hour meeting. It just happens.

AJ Harper [00:43:13]:

And we've done the retreats for several books now. Last five books.

Mike Michalowicz [00:43:19]:

Yeah.

AJ Harper [00:43:19]:

And there's going to be a new book. I don't know what it is. Mike comes in with a whole host of ideas, but the first question we always ask is, what do they need next.

Mike Michalowicz [00:43:32]:

Yeah. What does a reader need next?

AJ Harper [00:43:33]:

Yeah.

Mike Michalowicz [00:43:36]:

I got 25 ideas. Three I'm leaning toward one penguin is particularly interested in.

AJ Harper [00:43:42]:

But we do have to ask, and I tell Mike, don't tell me.

Mike Michalowicz [00:43:46]:

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Yeah.

AJ Harper [00:43:46]:

So I find out when we get there, and then we talk about it.

Mike Michalowicz [00:43:50]:

Yeah. And what Penguin's interested in was not something I was even thinking. It was almost a throw. Yeah, it was almost a throwaway. No, that's the one.

AJ Harper [00:44:01]:

By the time this airs this podcast, you could probably go back in time and see our social media, because we usually tell people we'll post pictures from the retreat. Book twelve is being born.

Mike Michalowicz [00:44:12]:

Book twelve is being born. I'll tell you one last thing before we got to wrap up, is Penguin. Noah, the editor, that's who I speak with almost all the time, said, hey, this is what your readers need next. He is in alignment with that now.

AJ Harper [00:44:25]:

Really?

Mike Michalowicz [00:44:25]:

Yeah.

AJ Harper [00:44:26]:

Oh, that makes me so happy. He knows now because he's on I think we're on our second book. We just finished our second book with him.

Mike Michalowicz [00:44:32]:

Yeah, this will be our third. Exactly.

AJ Harper [00:44:33]:

Yeah, exactly.

Mike Michalowicz [00:44:35]:

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All right. We hope you enjoyed this episode. It's a little cathartic for me.

AJ Harper [00:44:39]:

Me, too.

Mike Michalowicz [00:44:40]:

Hopefully for you two, our dear listening friends. And hopefully you discover things not to write, not to do, I should say, while writing that book, and things to do when writing this book. Now, here's the deal. We would love to give you some free materials. Selfishly, we'd love for you to be on our email list so we can be in contact with you. We're going to do other stuff. I'm hoping one day we do a live podcast with many authors in the room. Go to DWTB. Don't Write That Book, Dwtbpodcast.com. Also, if you have stories of your own book, if you have tips that you think we should be sharing, stuff we should be exploring, we want to hear that. So you can email us at hello@dwtbpodcast.com. Thanks again for joining us for today's episode. We're looking forward to having you on our next and as always, don't write that book. Write this one.