

# don't write *that* book!

## Episode 10:

### How to Pitch to Traditional Publishers

**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. You are listening to. Don't write that book. This is Mike Michalowicz. I'm joined in studio, literally in studio with AJ Harper.

**Mike Michalowicz** [00:00:25]:

AJ is my co-writer, my co-author. We've produced ten books together. Now, I actually do need to note that we chose from book one that I am the author name, but we will write the books together. So on each book, you don't see AJ. Harper and Mike Michalowicz on the cover. But every book, you are acknowledged in the yeah, yeah. You're acknowledged in the Acknowledgments, which actually we may even be able to dedicate an episode to acknowledgements. AJ is also a publisher. She's published multiple authors.

**Mike Michalowicz** [00:00:57]:

She sold her publishing agency. She is an extraordinary teacher of the author journey. She has a workshop called the Top Three. Actually, you've got to join the workshop. You do this twice a year?

**AJ Harper** [00:01:11]:

I do it twice a year.

**Mike Michalowicz** [00:01:13]:

And I love how the title came for Top Three. Everyone readers has their top three favorite books they can kind of rattle off. And it's the aspiration the necessity of your participants, your students, to become one of those top three book that get rattled off.

**AJ Harper** [00:01:32]:

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Yes.

**Mike Michalowicz** [00:01:33]:

And you are a savant in all things related to authorship, including publishing. That's what we're going to explore today. We're going to dig into traditional publishing. We're going to talk about how to find the one that's right for you and also how to pitch them.

**AJ Harper** [00:01:49]:

Yes.

**Mike Michalowicz** [00:01:50]:

So welcome to today's episode, AJ.

**AJ Harper** [00:01:53]:

Thank you. And I'm going to introduce Mike. I think you don't need that much of an introduction, but I'm going to do it anyway. Mike is on a mission to eradicate entrepreneur poverty. So, I can lead with all of your accomplishments, your many books, including a children's book, which you should absolutely check out, which I did not co-write that book. Just to be clear, what you need to know is that Mike is on that mission. And so every single thing that he does is to try and help entrepreneur. What he might not say that often is why.

**AJ Harper** [00:02:24]:

Because he thinks entrepreneurs can save the world through creating jobs, through innovation, and putting money in the economy. So that drives everything that he does. He's an accomplished author and speaker, of course. But all of that, the authorship and speaking, is to fulfill that mission.

**Mike Michalowicz** [00:02:44]:

If there's one thing I can implore our listeners to do right now, AJ, it's go on Amazon or your favorite book retailer and get *Write A Must-Read*. That book defines what we're talking about in this and all these episodes.

**AJ Harper** [00:02:57]:

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And I wrote it and you wrote—

**Mike Michalowicz** [00:03:00]:

And a little surprise that you wouldn't know about *My Money Bunnies*, which is my children's book, is now translated into Italian.

**AJ Harper** [00:03:08]:

It is?

**Mike Michalowicz** [00:03:08]:

Yeah, it just arrived at my house.

**AJ Harper** [00:03:10]:

Oh, that's so cool.

**Mike Michalowicz** [00:03:11]:

Yeah, it's wild. It's so wild. So, I use the Google app. There's a Google Translator where you have a camera, and you can just hover it over any kind of text and it translates in real time. It's like a virtual reality.

**AJ Harper** [00:03:24]:

Oh, how cool.

**Mike Michalowicz** [00:03:25]:

Yeah, it's so cool. So, I was going through it.

**AJ Harper** [00:03:26]:

Oh, you should do a little video of that. Yeah, that's so cool.

**Mike Michalowicz** [00:03:30]:

Yeah. Maybe try to read it in Italian. Hey, my listening friends, I encourage you to listen to episode two. That's where we talked about the different publishing paths, and that is a

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foundational learning for what you're about to discover today. So, if you haven't listened to episode two, go back to that episode one, which really is our origin. Episode two talks about the whole concept of not writing that book, but writing this book, the book you are called to write. So a little bit about my story, our story of going from self-publishing to traditional and why I love traditional, but I'm not beholden to it.

**AJ Harper** [00:04:06]:

No, you might change your mind on the next book.

**Mike Michalowicz** [00:04:08]:

Yeah, I might change my mind. Self-publishing was not a path I wanted to follow from the beginning. In the beginning, I was enamored with traditional publishing, the prestige I associated with it, why I wanted it. But it wasn't from right out of the gate. It was obvious it wasn't going to happen. And I kind of like in retrospect when I'm told I can't have something—

**AJ Harper** [00:04:32]:

And you were scrappy about it.

**Mike Michalowicz** [00:04:33]:

Because I get scrappy. I get scrappy. And so when we self-published, I followed some nontraditional ways of getting the word out. We're going to probably dedicate a few episodes to that in the future of nontraditional ways of marketing your book. I remember on my vision board, I do the vision board, like the Oprah vision board, like cut things out.

**AJ Harper** [00:04:53]:

Why did I not know this?

**Mike Michalowicz** [00:04:54]:

You didn't know that?

**AJ Harper** [00:04:55]:

I've known you for what, 15 years? You have a vision board.

**Mike Michalowicz** [00:04:58]:

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Oh, yeah. So I got to tell you about the one what? Before I met you—I can't believe I never shared this.

**AJ Harper** [00:05:05]:

What?

**Mike Michalowicz** [00:05:05]:

Okay, so I lived in Mountain Lakes, and we were renting a house there, and I didn't have space for a home office. My wife and I have three children. Everyone had their own bedroom, thank God. It was a four-bedroom home. Itty bitty rooms, but there was no office space. So, the only space for an office I can't believe I've never told you this, was in the basement, which was an unfinished basement right next to the furnace. And instead of walls, I was stapled up cardboard boxes. I unfolded them.

**Mike Michalowicz** [00:05:36]:

Yeah, that was my walls. So, I had kind of a space because we also made a play area. We put a little carpet down there. And when I would make a phone call, I had to put either the caller on mute or just wait out about three minutes when the furnace would fire up. I think we might even tell you this. And sometimes I'd hear giggles in the other line....

**AJ Harper** [00:05:56]:

Dang, we should have used this in *Profit First*.

**Mike Michalowicz** [00:05:58]:

Maybe we will. Maybe we will. Because I made a vision board, and I don't know what inspired it. It may have been that book, *The Secret*, or maybe it was watching Oprah. But I posted on this wall this board, and I did clippings well, two things I did. One is I wrote a book. The title for *The Toilet Paper Entrepreneur* originally was going to be *Launch*, which actually is probably a better title, but *Launch*. And below it I put a million books sold.

**Mike Michalowicz** [00:06:26]:

The other thing was, and it sounds so arrogant, but what it does is represent the achievement of impact. Was the cover of a business magazine, "Inc." or "Entrepreneur." On the front it says,

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this author is making millions because he's serving millions. Yeah. And so that part hasn't come true.

**AJ Harper** [00:06:53]:

What's your vision board now? Do you have one?

**Mike Michalowicz** [00:06:56]:

Yeah, my wife and I do one. Yeah, like a couple's vision board. Couples vision board.

**AJ Harper** [00:07:00]:

Oh, my gosh.

**Mike Michalowicz** [00:07:01]:

So, we'll go to Barnes and Noble.

**AJ Harper** [00:07:03]:

Do you have a picture of your house?

**Mike Michalowicz** [00:07:06]:

A beach house?

**AJ Harper** [00:07:06]:

Beach house.

**Mike Michalowicz** [00:07:07]:

Beach house.

**AJ Harper** [00:07:07]:

I know that's something you want.

**Mike Michalowicz** [00:07:09]:

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Something I want. But it's our current house and we're still playing through it. So, we were talking about a vision in a destination home, a place where people want to gather. So, we have these different elements. And we're doing kind of the last piece that we wanted to do.

**AJ Harper** [00:07:24]:

That's so cool.

**Mike Michalowicz** [00:07:25]:

And my cousins, who live on the West Coast and I rarely ever see, said, hey, would it be cool if we all gathered at your house? Which is like a dream come true. Family reaching out to you, saying they want to come. For some people, it's like, oh, God. But these are my cousins. The don't get to regularly see. I love them. They are so great and like, hey, why don't we have kind of like a reunion at your house? And my wife and I are high fiving. That's the manifestation of it.

**AJ Harper** [00:07:48]:

So, what's on there for authorship?

**Mike Michalowicz** [00:07:53]:

The new book *All In. All In.*

**AJ Harper** [00:07:58]:

Oh, you mean yeah, the book you haven't told me about.

**Mike Michalowicz** [00:08:00]:

That manuscript submitted, so that's done. Okay, then the book I haven't told you about, which I don't have a title for. I don't know what it is. The rankings. Oh, this is the big one.

**AJ Harper** [00:08:10]:

Okay.

**Mike Michalowicz** [00:08:10]:

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Every book that we've written, top 1,000 selling book on Amazon. The Amazon bestseller. The ABSR. Right now, *Profit First*, I checked this religiously, almost maniacally.

**AJ Harper** [00:08:22]:

It's like a little obsessively.

**Mike Michalowicz** [00:08:23]:

Yeah, obsessively. *Profit First* was 439 yesterday. Yay, baby. Yeah. The workhorse today is 550, which means you're the 550th best-selling book out of all books. All books of the two or 3 million listed. My intention is that all of our work does that. And listen, it's a big, fat ego.

**Mike Michalowicz** [00:08:47]:

I get it. Or perhaps or it, to me, is the metric it's a metric of service that we're transforming lives, that people are consuming it and serving them. I think, dollar for dollar, there is no greater way to transform lives than books.

**AJ Harper** [00:09:06]:

But don't you think that, and this is not a pitch for traditional publishing. I think all paths are worthy. But don't you think that having a traditional publisher helps you to reach that metric?

**Mike Michalowicz** [00:09:20]:

Yes.

**AJ Harper** [00:09:21]:

Because of their massive distribution?

**Mike Michalowicz** [00:09:24]:

Yes.

**AJ Harper** [00:09:24]:

Would you share a little bit about what you like about being with a traditional publisher?

**Mike Michalowicz** [00:09:30]:



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Yeah. And I want to flip the script, too, and get your perspective, because my perspective is from the primary role I serve as the author is the idea creation and then the propagation of the idea promotion, testing, all this different stuff. The things I like about the publisher, first of all, is the simple ease of the process. Now, this is because we've been through so many iterations, I kind of know what to expect. But it is an easy, friction reduced experience yeah.

**AJ Harper [00:10:04]:**

For you.

**Mike Michalowicz [00:10:08]:**

Could I—I could call Noah. The liaison, the editor. Right. I can call Noah. And it may not be Noah next go. There's turnover in editors.

**AJ Harper [00:10:16]:**

I think he's editor five for us at Penguin.

**Mike Michalowicz [00:10:19]:**

Yeah. We had one book. We had, I think, two editors. We did, yeah. Which is a little bit disruptive, but still pretty seamless on their side. I pray Noah sticks around forever. But if we go back editor by editor, all the way back to David Mulderer, he's the first. He's the one who brought me on board.

**Mike Michalowicz [00:10:39]:**

He's the one who got me the deal with Penguin, that he was the Pumpkin Plan and the right when the deal was sealed, he left. And it was Carrie. I think I can't but then Kaushik, who was the most dreamboat... He was a freaking dream boat.

**AJ Harper [00:10:52]:**

We should be Kaushik fanboy/fangirl.

**Mike Michalowicz [00:10:54]:**

Oh, my God. I think I sent Kaushik a dozen roses, red roses. And I think I said, I love you. I would do everything I could to embarrass him, and you just couldn't.

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**AJ Harper** [00:11:04]:

He was great.

**Mike Michalowicz** [00:11:05]:

To Noah. And Noah may not be there forever, but Noah has such great assets. What I love dealing with a publisher is I could call Noah today and say, I got an idea for a book. And because of the rapport and the established history, this is he's like, okay, let's do it. We don't have to write a pitch anymore.

**AJ Harper** [00:11:24]:

We do a pitch, though.

**Mike Michalowicz** [00:11:25]:

But we do every single time.

**AJ Harper** [00:11:26]:

But it's an abbreviated pitch.

**Mike Michalowicz** [00:11:28]:

Yeah. Right. We don't need to argue why the... We don't need to argue the platform, which is a big component of pitches. You need to put your platform up there. If they don't know what your platform is we're a known quantity, so we don't have to talk about the platform. We do talk about the marketing approach in the strategy.

**AJ Harper** [00:11:43]:

Yeah.

**Mike Michalowicz** [00:11:44]:

And we really push about the concept and why this is right now.

**AJ Harper** [00:11:47]:

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Yes, why this is right now.

**Mike Michalowicz** [00:11:48]:

Why now? So I like the ease, I like the legal aspect. And this is one thing we haven't talked about.

**AJ Harper** [00:11:55]:

Yes.

**Mike Michalowicz** [00:11:56]:

They protect you. So we've had a couple instances where the legal department need to be involved. The most common situation is copycats, people who rip off your content. So, we had *The Pumpkin Plan* being published and sold or not published, but distributed and sold through Amazon. That was not *The Pumpkin Plan*. It was someone or something photocopied the pages reassembled as a book and was selling it as if it was the original book. And we want... Listen, we get no royalties for that. The perception of the book because the quality it was disintegrating people was damaging, damaging to me.

**Mike Michalowicz** [00:12:38]:

Penguin shut it down. We've had other people publish books that are implying it's actually my book or that I've involved in the book. So, I'll say, like co-authored by Mike Michalowicz, that I have nothing to do with. They aren't even—

**AJ Harper** [00:12:53]:

They helped you with that?

**Mike Michalowicz** [00:12:54]:

Oh, yeah.

**AJ Harper** [00:12:55]:

Oh, that's great.

**Mike Michalowicz** [00:12:55]:

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There was an author that wrote, an author. There was a rip-off artist that did “Profit First for Auto Shops” or something like that. Something I did not authorize, I had nothing to do with. And said co-written by Mike Michalowicz, I mean, really dirty.

**AJ Harper** [00:13:13]:

So that's a huge benefit of traditional is they have a great legal muscle.

**Mike Michalowicz** [00:13:17]:

International exposure is another they negotiate international rights. They will negotiate movie rights. And people like Mike Michalowicz doesn't get movie rights. Oh, nonfiction gets movie rights. *Moneyball* written by Michael Lewis is a movie.

**AJ Harper** [00:13:33]:

Yeah, right.

**Mike Michalowicz** [00:13:37]:

The editorial team, the proofreading, copywriters, they have a lot of those resources available to you. They'll write articles for you and stuff, like promotional stuff, PR campaigns. So, I love all those things from a traditional publisher. And it's one call away. Yeah, one text away.

**AJ Harper** [00:13:59]:

You can focus on writing the best book possible and selling the heck out of it, and they're going to handle everything else.

**Mike Michalowicz** [00:14:05]:

That's a great way to summarize it. Yes, exactly.

**AJ Harper** [00:14:08]:

It—yeah.

**Mike Michalowicz** [00:14:08]:

What do you like about it? Because you see it from the perspective of co-writing editorial publishing.

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**AJ Harper** [00:14:15]:

Yeah. I've experienced traditional publishing in a lot of different ways. When I was a full-time ghostwriter, which I was for ten years, I was often the ghost in a traditional deal and almost always a super stealth ghost. That's my own term. It's not an industry term, but I was really a ghost. So even the editors did not know about me. I had an experience at one dinner one time where I went to the dinner, the editor happened to be there. I kept my mouth shut because I'm good like that.

**AJ Harper** [00:14:48]:

And then the author admitted it while I was at the table, and the editor slammed her hand down on the table and said, "I knew it." But for the most part, editors didn't know about me. So, I've experienced it from that end. I've experienced it, which I love. My favorite is with you because it's an open... I'm part of the team, so I'm not getting these sort of forwarded emails. And then I have to try and figure out how to edit and make it look like the author was actually doing the... That's great. Love that.

**AJ Harper** [00:15:23]:

But I also was a publisher, so I started a publishing house with two people. I was the editorial piece. Then we had a technology and art department person, and then we had a marketing person and we started from nothing. And I'm really proud of the fact that we were able to sell the company and it lives on. But so I understand from a publisher's perspective as well, what are the challenges, what's really going on behind the scenes in terms of money, which is a huge factor. Understanding that publishers are taking a gamble every single time that they take someone on and that their margins are crap, and how hard it is to make money in publishing. Having that insight as a publisher helped me to inform authors so they can advocate for themselves and see how can I put my best foot forward. So, I'm coming at it from a lot of different perspectives.

**Mike Michalowicz** [00:16:21]:

I love that perspective too, because you see what the other side sees. You think they're just rolling in money, but they're a business too. They're scrapping too.

**AJ Harper** [00:16:28]:

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Heck no. Yeah, heck no. In fact, you should know that most editors don't make I mean, an editor that's experienced in a Big Five Publisher might make only about 60, 70,000 a year. Shocking that's with an MFA and lots of experience.

**Mike Michalowicz** [00:16:46]:

What's the MFA?

**AJ Harper** [00:16:48]:

Master of Fine Arts.

**Mike Michalowicz** [00:16:51]:

Shocking.

**AJ Harper** [00:16:52]:

Yeah.

**Mike Michalowicz** [00:16:52]:

One thing, and this is perhaps mythology. I assumed that the editor was rewarded based upon the success of the books.

**AJ Harper** [00:17:02]:

Well, they are in that they're going to get better books, promotions move up the ladder, but they're not.

**Mike Michalowicz** [00:17:10]:

Getting financially rewarded on the spot, like, oh, because this book is a million copies. Here's a bonus for you.

**AJ Harper** [00:17:14]:

No, they're a worker bee.

**Mike Michalowicz** [00:17:16]:

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The American Publishers or the Association of American Publishers was the AAP said that the US book publishing industry alone generates \$26 billion in revenue, and that was in 2020. So, it just points to the significance and the size of this industry. It's big, it's big. But there's a lot of myths around traditional publishing. So, let's start off with that myth. One, you need to get an agent to get a traditional publisher.

**AJ Harper** [00:17:42]:

Mostly true.

**Mike Michalowicz** [00:17:44]:

Right!? So, it's a quasi-myth.

**AJ Harper** [00:17:46]:

Well, here's the thing that this always blows authors minds when I tell them this. There are thousands of publishers, and a lot of them have open submissions, which means they'll accept unsolicited work. Unsolicited, meaning you don't have representation from an agent. People don't realize. And some of those publishers are huge. The publishing house that bought the publishing house I started, Chicago Review Press. Most people have never heard of Chicago Review Press, but they did \$100 million a year. So, there's a lot of publishers and a lot of them have open submissions.

**AJ Harper** [00:18:24]:

So that's why I say yes, it's mostly true, but that really just applies to the Big Five and then some mid-tier publishers. And so you can actually get a traditional deal. It might not be the deal of your dreams. I want my six-figure deal from Simon and Schuster. It might be you don't get much of an advance, but you get a wonderful relationship with a publisher that cares about your work. And so, I think just understanding that it's not 100% true.

**Mike Michalowicz** [00:18:56]:

I'm writing down a note here that we got to dedicate an episode just to agents alone.

**AJ Harper** [00:19:00]:

Oh, yeah.

**Mike Michalowicz** [00:19:01]:

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So, we'll talk about that in depth later. What about an advance? That's another common myth, is that a traditional deal means in advance. And I think for some people, the perception is a substantial advance because I got a substantial idea.

**AJ Harper** [00:19:13]:

I mean, if you're a Kardashian, you could get a fat advance.

**Mike Michalowicz** [00:19:17]:

Okay, there you go.

**AJ Harper** [00:19:18]:

I'm not a Kardashian.

**Mike Michalowicz** [00:19:20]:

I recently became a fan of Kris Kardashian. I was watching a Masterclass that she taught. I was like.

**AJ Harper** [00:19:25]:

Was it on the Masterclass app or whatever? I love it.

**Mike Michalowicz** [00:19:29]:

It's really good.

**AJ Harper** [00:19:29]:

I love Masterclass.

**Mike Michalowicz** [00:19:30]:

Really well produced.

**AJ Harper** [00:19:32]:



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You don't always get an advance, and it's not going to be as much as you think. But a traditional publisher can still be a traditional publisher and not give you an advance. Sometimes there's just no money for advances. It's because you're already footing the bill and getting the book to markets. It costs a lot to edit a book, print a book, design a book, all of that stuff.

**Mike Michalowicz** [00:19:54]:

Do you have an estimate what it costs to do all that stuff?

**AJ Harper** [00:19:57]:

Well, I can tell you—yes. If you factor in salaries and it depends on the print run, it's pretty hard to tell you, actually.

**Mike Michalowicz** [00:20:09]:

But it's probably tens of thousands for sure.

**AJ Harper** [00:20:12]:

For sure. And smaller presses, they don't have money for big print runs. So, there's a lot of factors. But an advance is not necessarily required. And so if you can be open to it, you might get yourself a deal with a traditional publisher. And sometimes you must need to get the deal and enthusiasm is worth more sometimes than in advance.

**Mike Michalowicz** [00:20:37]:

A publisher that's God honest truth. To be nominated is what you should.

**AJ Harper** [00:20:40]:

Because if they're really thrilled with the book and they have big ideas and plans and they want to execute on that, that's actually worth more than your advance.

**Mike Michalowicz** [00:20:49]:

Yeah. And be very careful, our listening friends, to be dissuaded by an advance or diminished, meaning you get a \$50,000 advance and say, gosh, I'm really worth \$100,000. And now you're going in negatively. It's going to hamper your efforts. Must being nominated is an honor. Tell us

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about intellectual property, because this is a big point of confusion. Who owns intellectual property?

**AJ Harper** [00:21:14]:

You do.

**Mike Michalowicz** [00:21:15]:

Not the publisher?

**AJ Harper** [00:21:16]:

No.

**Mike Michalowicz** [00:21:16]:

What does the publisher own?

**AJ Harper** [00:21:17]:

So, okay, caveat, asterisk always, have your agent or an intellectual property attorney review your contracts to make sure what I said is true, because there are unscrupulous publishers. There's plenty of them, and they can sometimes sneak things in where they own things that they should not own. But basically, the contract is to have the rights to publish your work. You actually own the copyright. It's copyright Mike Michalowicz okay.

**Mike Michalowicz** [00:21:48]:

Okay, so I own the copy, but then what do they own?

**AJ Harper** [00:21:52]:

They have the right to publish it exclusively.

**Mike Michalowicz** [00:21:54]:

Okay. Publish it and distribute it.

**AJ Harper** [00:21:57]:

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Yeah.

**Mike Michalowicz** [00:21:57]:

Okay. And you can control the scope of distribution, meaning you could say just U.S., you could say international.

**AJ Harper** [00:22:06]:

You can try to negotiate.

**Mike Michalowicz** [00:22:08]:

They want everything, of course.

**AJ Harper** [00:22:09]:

Yeah. That's a tough one. I don't know many publishers that would agree to that.

**Mike Michalowicz** [00:22:13]:

There was a time now this is 2023, so this goes back perhaps ten years ago, where publishers, traditional publishers, didn't really pay much mind to the audio rights. And I know of one author, I think it's called *The Personal MBA*. I cannot recall the author's name at the moment, and I don't know the person personally, but I heard through the grapevine ten years ago, whenever they published their book, they wrote in, the audio rights are mine. And I know from our experience, audio sales are 52% or 54%.

**AJ Harper** [00:22:44]:

Now, sales, paying the bills, keeping the lights on.

**Mike Michalowicz** [00:22:46]:

So all traditional publishers will grab that. This person, kudos to them. They were the last man standing. They got the audio rights, and they're probably making a mint because of it. Tell me about—

**AJ Harper** [00:22:57]:

But just to be clear, they don't own your ideas.

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**Mike Michalowicz** [00:23:00]:

Right. They don't own your ideas, and therefore you can repackage it and sell it in other ways.

**AJ Harper** [00:23:03]:

Yeah.

**Mike Michalowicz** [00:23:06]:

Your next book, once you're with a publisher, are you with them for life?

**AJ Harper** [00:23:09]:

No. Well, okay, if you get a two-book deal, a three-book deal, you've got to honor that deal. But if you just had the one book deal, you have right of first refusal, which that means the publisher, you have to tell them the next book you're going to write, and then they have the right to refuse it first, it doesn't mean you have to go with them either. So if they say never mind, like they did with *Profit First* the first time, you can move on. But if they had said, "Hey, yeah, we'll take that *Profit First* book," and you didn't like the deal, you can move on. So it's important to understand that you're not beholden. You don't have to publish with them.

**AJ Harper** [00:23:48]:

Sometimes they'll put a stipulation, like, say, if you're a fiction author and you're writing a series, they might say, you have to. Right? Because they don't want to lose book four and five.

**Mike Michalowicz** [00:23:58]:

Right.

**AJ Harper** [00:23:59]:

So it's just a contract issue, which comes to the next myth, which is people think that they can't negotiate their contracts. You can and you should.

**Mike Michalowicz** [00:24:08]:

And I think the common negotiation points are... Here's the easy points I can think of right off top of head, how many copies of your book will you get for marketing purposes? You probably

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can't negotiate so much the royalties, as long as they have an established standard royalty distribution with their other authors. But the smaller publishers, you can negotiate that. Distribution. You probably can't negotiate too much, but you should try, so you have some control over that. I think the biggest thing that you should negotiate is subsequent derivative work. Movies, Netflix, television shows, anything comes out of it that could generate income as an author, you want to maintain that. And I see some publishers trying to get your speaking rights.

**Mike Michalowicz** [00:25:03]:

Like when you speak, they want to force in that they're the agent for you and get a percentage of that. Just be aware that you can negotiate all those.

**AJ Harper** [00:25:11]:

You can negotiate. It's interesting. When I had my publishing house, we had a really successful author, and she got representation. She got an agent after the fact. She had a really successful series. We heard from the agent saying, we would like to do an addendum. So the agent was negotiating a change after the fact, after the books came out, we want an addendum because we had film rights. They couldn't sell the whole package for film rights, TV, whatever, without getting them back from us.

**AJ Harper** [00:25:45]:

They needed it clean. So, we agreed to an addendum because we just wanted that author to excel.

**Mike Michalowicz** [00:25:52]:

Sure.

**AJ Harper** [00:25:53]:

And if one of her books becomes a movie, that's only good for the book.

**Mike Michalowicz** [00:25:57]:

Yeah.

**AJ Harper** [00:25:58]:

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So they wanted it clean. They didn't want to have partial—us having partial anything. So that was even after the fact. And a lot of authors don't realize your agent could go back and try and pull something out.

**Mike Michalowicz** [00:26:12]:

That's interesting. You have a little note here, but I don't know the context. So, I'm just going to spring it up as this buying a house, a villa in south of France. What's that all about?

**AJ Harper** [00:26:21]:

Okay, I'm not going to say who this was, but I worked with an author once who said, I'm so excited to publish my novel because then I'll be able to buy a villa in the south of France, plant my lavender. She meant it. She meant it. No disrespect. Book dreams are great. You could get a villa someday. But I think the big myth is that the one book is going to be the thing, and so it's more about the body of work and especially in fiction. So, I think the myth is, "I'm going to get this traditional deal and I'm golden".

**AJ Harper** [00:26:57]:

That's it. And you still have to work your butt off.

**Mike Michalowicz** [00:27:01]:

Yeah, I 100% agree. All right, so let's go into the different types of traditional publishers.

**AJ Harper** [00:27:06]:

Let's just do a quick rundown.

**Mike Michalowicz** [00:27:07]:

Yeah. You want to roll through it? There's the Big Five.

**AJ Harper** [00:27:10]:

Who are the Five? That's what most people think of when they think of a publisher. Simon Schuster, Penguin Random House, Harper Collins, Macmillan and Hachette. And then they all have dozens of imprints.

**Mike Michalowicz** [00:27:23]:

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How do you distinguish an imprint from a publisher?

**AJ Harper** [00:27:26]:

So it's like you mentioned the children earlier yeah, right.

**Mike Michalowicz** [00:27:30]:

Of the books.

**AJ Harper** [00:27:32]:

So it's like a specialized publisher underneath them, like you're with Portfolio. That's focused on business, primarily, although they've expanded a little bit into leadership and other ideas. That's their jam. That's what they're focused on. So, it's got a specific mission and focus, and there might be dozens of those that have different specific missions and focus.

**Mike Michalowicz** [00:27:59]:

It's like a small business within the bigger business.

**AJ Harper** [00:28:02]:

Yeah. And it's got one directive with a certain kind of readership.

**Mike Michalowicz** [00:28:05]:

And one little thing I got to add is the publisher is actually a title of an individual within the imprint. So, Adrian Zackheim is the publisher at Portfolio, which is part of the publisher Penguin Random House. So, I always get this confused.

**AJ Harper** [00:28:22]:

It's confusing. So, when you look up and you say, "Oh, I'm going to look up, try know, get a deal with Portfolio," you're really getting a deal with Penguin Random House. Right, yeah. And then there's mid-tier presses like Grey Wolf, Mango, Source Books. They're doing amazing stuff. They're selling a ton of books. You may never have heard of them, but they exist.

**AJ Harper** [00:28:45]:

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And then there's small presses, and then there's even smaller, which is boutique, which say maybe they do just like two or three books a year. And then there's academic and textbook publishers, which is its own category. And then finally you have book packagers and pro-publishers. So say maybe they just sell within a certain professional marketplace, like a 300-page manual for dentists. It's not going wide. It's going within the industry. So, there are different types of publishers.

**Mike Michalowicz** [00:29:14]:

One thing that did surprise me, but maybe it no longer does, is when it comes to the academic book, in college, you had to buy a book for \$150 or probably \$300. Now, and I look at those books and are they ten times better than the book that sells for \$30? And my answer. Is? No, but they have such a small scope of consumers, which are just the students. They have to increase the price, I think, to justify or create enough income for it to be a profitable venture.

**AJ Harper** [00:29:41]:

Sure. And then there's academic presses that ... Say, Harvard. That's not just publishing those kind of textbooks. They're also publishing really great voices. I worked with Anthony Jack, Tony Jack, who wrote *The Privileged Poor*, and he published through an academic press that went totally mainstream viral. I helped him with his TEDx Talk that made it onto TED.com. He's an example of someone who used an academic press because he is an academic, he's a professor, and that went wide.

**Mike Michalowicz** [00:30:15]:

Let's move on to vetting out the traditional publishers. Maybe you start off with the red flags, the stuff to avoid or watch out for.

**AJ Harper** [00:30:24]:

So, yeah, I love starting out with how can you see if this is going to work for you? Because a lot of people don't know how to tell. So, number one is, if you're trying to work with a traditional publisher, your investment should be zero, and that includes not purchasing copies of a book that also should be zero. Also look at their backlist. That's books that have been published a year or more in the past. Are they successful? Go check them out. Go on Amazon. Are they selling pretty well? Do they have reviews? Are people still talking about it? I like to go and look at the reviews, and then I switch the drop-down menu, so it says recent instead of featured.

**Mike Michalowicz** [00:31:07]:



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Okay.

**AJ Harper** [00:31:08]:

So, I can see “oh, man, they haven't had a review in, like, four years.”

**Mike Michalowicz** [00:31:13]:

Oh, that's super interesting. So that's an indicator that it's fallen off the cliff.

**AJ Harper** [00:31:17]:

It's fallen off the cliff. And to me, that means the author has let it go, and probably the publisher isn't doing anything either.

**Mike Michalowicz** [00:31:26]:

That's interesting.

**AJ Harper** [00:31:27]:

So go look at their backlist. Don't just look on the website. Go find the book on Amazon and see how it's doing.

**Mike Michalowicz** [00:31:35]:

Great insight.

**AJ Harper** [00:31:36]:

Look at their editorial team and process. Do they have an experienced team? Are they legit? What is the process like? Are they following traditional standards?

**Mike Michalowicz** [00:31:47]:

How do you determine that, though? Is it just some online research? You get to interview folks.

**AJ Harper** [00:31:53]:

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I wouldn't necessarily interview them, but just go look and look up the people. Just check, read their bios. Most of them have their own sites or their own social media. 15 minutes spent checking out an editorial team could save you a lot of heartache.

**Mike Michalowicz** [00:32:08]:

And one little asterisk I want to put here. It doesn't guarantee that will be your editorial team, even though you may be negotiating with that team. Things change. We're working with Kasey Compton. She has a deal with Ben Bella, who's doing a traditional publishing deal with her, and the editor that signed her up subsequently got a new opportunity elsewhere, moved on, and she got a new editor, the people you vet. But at least by vetting who you have, there's probably some kind of consistency.

**AJ Harper** [00:32:35]:

Yeah. Also, we talked about trade distribution in Episode Two. You got to find out, do they have it or not? How are they actually getting books to market? Is it just P.O.D., print on demand? That's something you got to understand because a lot of bookstores won't stock P.O.D. So just ask questions, check and see. Do they have a trade distribution? And don't just ask if they have it, because sometimes they say yes and they don't. So ask who is your trade distribution then? Also, book positioning. This is a question you can ask them directly. How would you position my book for success? Where do you see my book fits in the marketplace.

**Mike Michalowicz** [00:33:16]:

Oh, that's cool. Give me an example of that. If I'm writing a book on personal finance, and I have a technique of making you wealthier because we divide your money up at bank accounts, how do you position that book?

**AJ Harper** [00:33:29]:

So, you want them to have an understanding of the marketplace so they can say, well, there's these other books and they tackle it this way. So, this is the angle that we think is the best approach. Okay, so I'll give you an example. So, I don't have a traditional publisher. I have a hybrid publisher, which was a choice I made for various reasons, but I just met with her because I'm thinking of doing another book.

**Mike Michalowicz** [00:33:51]:

Oh, really? Cool.

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**AJ Harper** [00:33:53]:

And we thought, I really should do an editing book. But then they went and did all the homework because a good hybrid acts like a traditional publisher.

**Mike Michalowicz** [00:34:03]:

Yes.

**AJ Harper** [00:34:04]:

And we met over lunch, and she said, it's going to just be a small group. It's going to be editors, colleges, and universities, not the average person. So, let's go back to the drawing table. That's what I'm talking about. You need a publisher that's not just going to say, this is great, but that has some idea of its marketability and then what to do about it.

**Mike Michalowicz** [00:34:25]:

If you do a book on advanced techniques, *Write Another Must-Read*. There's your title.

**AJ Harper** [00:34:30]:

I do have an idea for which I'll tell you offline that I think I'm going to do.

**Mike Michalowicz** [00:34:35]:

So, book positioning is it sounds like you're evaluating the comps, the comparatives and how do you fit in this puzzle piece. And what I want to emphasize I talked about this, I think in our first episode, is that when a reader falls in love with a book, I find they often fall in love with that space, and they'll buy comparative books. So, these aren't competitive books. These are books you're complementing with, but you got to position yourself uniquely so it expands their knowledge.

**AJ Harper** [00:35:05]:

Yeah, but I mean, you have a good positioning example, too. Think about *All In* the focus on leaders.

**Mike Michalowicz** [00:35:11]:

Yeah.

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**AJ Harper** [00:35:13]:

That came from Noah.

**Mike Michalowicz** [00:35:15]:

That came from Noah. Yeah. So originally the book of *All In* is about how to recruit, retain, and raise the bar with employees through discussions with Noah. And we do a lot of optimization, testing of titles where anonymous feedback comes in was it wasn't about the recruiting and retaining of employees. It was how great leaders did it. And that the reader, the prospective reader wants to align themselves with being a great leader themselves. And that little adjustment book, like, it's positioned the book for much greater acceptance, even though the core content remains the same. It's that framing.

**AJ Harper** [00:35:49]:

Yeah. So another red flag is, is this traditional publisher willing to negotiate? Will they be open to you taking time to read your contract and ask questions? And if the answer is no that would be a run for the hills. And two of the ways that I think are really the best ways to vet publishers is to ask other authors.

**Mike Michalowicz** [00:36:08]:

What's been your experience?

**AJ Harper** [00:36:09]:

Yeah. Ask the authors who were published through them and don't ask them through the publisher. Reach out on your own. You can easily get in touch with the and then there's a really good resource called *Writer Beware*, which you can get on Twitter or also *Writerbeware.blog*. And she does a free service where she keeps track of all the scams.

**Mike Michalowicz** [00:36:29]:

Oh, really?

**AJ Harper** [00:36:30]:

Yeah, she's great. So, you can go in there and search to see if the publisher you're interested in shows up on there.

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**Mike Michalowicz** [00:36:38]:

Oh, that's interesting. And those scams that happen, are they usually nefarious publishers or is it sometimes like a hiccup or a problem that happens with maybe one of the Big Five?

**AJ Harper** [00:36:53]:

The Big Five is not on there.

**Mike Michalowicz** [00:36:54]:

That's good.

**AJ Harper** [00:36:57]:

But I mean, it runs from people who are actually scamming to people who are so inexperienced at what they're doing that they can't deliver on those promises.

**Mike Michalowicz** [00:37:06]:

I see. Okay.

**AJ Harper** [00:37:07]:

Yeah.

**Mike Michalowicz** [00:37:08]:

Let's now talk about the timeline. So we're vetting out the publisher. We know the red flags to look out for. What do we have to be concerned with or consider when it comes to timeline and process?

**AJ Harper** [00:37:20]:

Well, it's a pretty simple, straightforward process. Once you have the deal, if it's nonfiction, you're finishing the book, and then you're moving into developmental editing or substantive editing, which is the 30,000-foot view, making sure the book works, which can be a month-long process at best, but it's more like a three month process. And then you're in copy edit, which is officially production, which is now that you're not making any big changes. So, they consider the book ready to go and on track so they can really count on that release date.

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And then you have proofread and they're doing interior page design. They give you what's called pass pages or first proof, where you see the book as it is going to look typeset, and then you do one more pass, and then you're pretty much out and they're handling the rest. And that process can take six months to a year, depending on how long it takes you to finish the book.

**Mike Michalowicz** [00:38:22]:

And supply chain issues have delayed things, for sure.

**AJ Harper** [00:38:25]:

Yeah.

**Mike Michalowicz** [00:38:25]:

And that maybe will resolve. Know one thing I didn't know when I was talking with Noah yesterday, the past pages are about to come out, the first pass pages for copy edit. Oh, you're right. Copy edits. When the first pass pages come out, he's like, oh, we can bind those for you, too, if you want. Like a galley, almost.

**AJ Harper** [00:38:43]:

Yes.

**Mike Michalowicz** [00:38:44]:

And he's like, oh, you want to get early blurbs? Because we're entering a little different space with all in with great leaders. So, it's positioned a little bit differently, not just micro enterprises. And he's like, if we get some blurbs, particularly the larger companies, some of these folks, they play into their ego, like, oh, since I'm on the back of the book or I'm on the praise page, I'll buy 7,000 copies for the entire company. He's Mike. So, there's a technique there. And so we're going to use bound pass pages as opposed to galleys. So, a little insider tip advances. Lots of confusion around that.

**Mike Michalowicz** [00:39:18]:

There was a statistic that came out from Good e-Reader said the average advance for a first-time author is \$10,000, but that can range. Sully got more than \$10,000. Sully did, Amanda Knox got more than \$10,000. Be aware of that. One key thing to understand about advances, should you get one, they're often tranced either into thirds or quarters. In our case,

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it's quarters. And the advance is distributed on signing contract, 25% on delivery of the manuscript, and acceptance.

**AJ Harper** [00:39:53]:

Acceptance. So that's after the editorial phase, it's when you go into production.

**Mike Michalowicz** [00:39:57]:

That's right. So if you deliver what they deem to be a crappy manuscript, you ain't getting your money.

**AJ Harper** [00:40:01]:

So, it's six months to a year after the first one.

**Mike Michalowicz** [00:40:04]:

Yeah. Then on the publishing day, the day it goes to market, and then the final one is one year after. How it's broken out? What are some other considerations we need to know about advances?

**AJ Harper** [00:40:16]:

Just that you probably won't... They don't expect you to earn it out, actually.

**Mike Michalowicz** [00:40:21]:

Right. Which is kind of absurd.

**AJ Harper** [00:40:23]:

It is, but it's just because most authors don't.

**Mike Michalowicz** [00:40:27]:

Right.

**AJ Harper** [00:40:28]:

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You could, but you have to really hustle. So, they're basing your advance on what they know they can earn in the first six months to a year of your book being out.

**Mike Michalowicz** [00:40:37]:

Yeah. But also, be forewarned, if you don't earn out advance, that's also a warning that you don't earn out advances. So future considerations. I got to tell you a quick story. I'm with Ryan Holiday. He's a very popular nonfiction author and I would argue is a slightly eccentric guy. And we're sitting as a group of us, and we're talking about advances, and there was a fire burning. He's just staring at the fire, though, speaking to me, and he goes, when you get your advance, make the publisher feel the pain of giving you that advance.

**Mike Michalowicz** [00:41:20]:

He goes, the got to be struggling to give it. And he goes, that's when you've wrote written or that's when you've got an advance that's fair for you, so maximize it. The flip side, though, the risk is if you don't earn it out, the publisher notices, and the next go around, you may not get a deal.

**AJ Harper** [00:41:36]:

Well, and that's realistic for him now.

**Mike Michalowicz** [00:41:38]:

Yeah. That's from his perspective, too.

**AJ Harper** [00:41:40]:

A debut author, I say get the deal with a publisher that can actually get the book sold, that cares about your work, and don't split hairs over if it was Big Five, and don't split hairs over if it was a six-figure advance. Get out there, get the best team you can that cares about your work, even if they're small, and then sell the heck out of it.

**Mike Michalowicz** [00:42:00]:

And publishers, you know, they're taking that risk of some authors are going to be their bell cows. They're hoping to find the next Stephen King.

**AJ Harper** [00:42:10]:



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Yeah. They're gamblers.

**Mike Michalowicz** [00:42:10]:

Yeah. The next Colleen Hoover. They're just rolling the dice. And the minority of authors, I think it's I can't remember what the statistic was, but let me say it's, 10% of authors pay the income of everybody. Yeah. The whole organization and all the other authors that they lost money on.

**AJ Harper** [00:42:29]:

Yeah. So, let's talk about the pitch process real quick.

**Mike Michalowicz** [00:42:32]:

Okay.

**AJ Harper** [00:42:34]:

So, this is pretty basic, and I say that with the caveat that there can be a million bumps in the road. But in general, if you're trying to get a traditional deal with a Big Five, you're going to need an agent. So, let's do with the agent part first. If it's nonfiction, you write a book proposal and you have one to three chapters ready to go. Then you submit that to agents. If the agent accepts you, the agent might ask you to revise it. They probably will the proposal. Then they're going to send it out, which is called going out on sub.

**AJ Harper** [00:43:19]:

They are going to send it to people they know are looking for that book or if it's worthy of it, it might go up for auction where you have multiple publishers bidding on it within a specified time frame. The once you have the deal, you write. You get going and finish the rest of the book. Or if you're a fiction author and you want an agent, you need to write your entire manuscript. Or if you're a memoirist, you can't just do a proposal and one or two chapters. If you're a fiction author, you don't need a proposal, but you need the whole manuscript. So, there's variations on when to get started in that process. You can also go with, as we said earlier, a publisher that has open submission. And the house I had, we had open submission.

**AJ Harper** [00:44:08]:

And they might when you submit the manuscript or proposal, they might ask you to what's called revise and resubmit, meaning we like it, but we kind of wish you would... it's too long. Or we wish you would focus more on this character. That's a good thing when they invite you

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to do it instead of just rejecting you. But then once you have the deal, then you move forward in the process. So traditional publisher is going to need for nonfiction proposal, one to three chapters, fiction, memoir, full manuscript, and you're going to need that if you try and get agent representation as well.

**Mike Michalowicz** [00:44:48]:

How many publishers do I pitch as an author at one time?

**AJ Harper** [00:44:54]:

It depends. Some publishers you have to always read the submission guidelines for agents and for publishers, which you can find on their website, or you can find through Query Tracker, which is a free service. Sometimes they'll say, "No, this has to be exclusive submission," which is frustrating because they might get back to you in six months.

**Mike Michalowicz** [00:45:14]:

So, you sit and wait.

**AJ Harper** [00:45:15]:

Yeah. So, some people really go around that. But as being a former publisher, it does kind of suck when you like a book and you finally had time to read it and then you contact the author, and they say they already accepted another deal.

**Mike Michalowicz** [00:45:27]:

So frustrating.

**AJ Harper** [00:45:28]:

But you got to do what you got to do as an author.

**Mike Michalowicz** [00:45:30]:

You got to survive. Yeah.

**AJ Harper** [00:45:33]:

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So, when you pitch agents and you pitch publishers, there's a query process. So, it's just like think of it like a great email, that great short email that explains why this book is awesome, why you're awesome, and why they should publish it. And there's an art to it. There's an art to doing queries. A really good resource for queries is Jane Friedman. You can go on [JaneFriedman.com](http://JaneFriedman.com) and she has a lot of information about that. The query is when. That's what they'll ask you if they want to see the full manuscript or if they want to see the proposal.

**AJ Harper** [00:46:06]:

And you can learn about which agents are available. Know you said Publishers Marketplace. You can also, if you want to find the right agent for you, look in the Acknowledgments section of a book. Who are the authors you love thanking in terms of their agents and publishers? You can also go on Twitter. I know this is what I always tell people when they're surprised. They say this, I understand it's a hellscape, but if you can just stay really focused on the publishing part because publishing is on Twitter. So, an agent will update their Twitter more than they update their website.

**Mike Michalowicz** [00:46:42]:

Interesting.

**AJ Harper** [00:46:43]:

So, an agent will often go, if you see an agent that you think might you might want to represent, you follow them on Twitter and the they will go on there and say, "I'm going to be open for submissions from January 15 through March 1."

**Mike Michalowicz** [00:46:55]:

Interesting.

**AJ Harper** [00:46:56]:

That's the only way you're going to know. And sometimes they're good about putting it on their website, but very often not so scoping out the agents, figuring out who you think you might want to pitch to, and then go honestly follow them on Social so you can be aware of what they also say. I'm looking for this. This is the kind of project I want to do next. They go on there and share that information. So it's super valuable to go follow them on Twitter.

**Mike Michalowicz** [00:47:23]:

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Do you have a sense how many submissions an agent gets on any given period?

**AJ Harper** [00:47:28]:

Oh, my God. Sometimes hundreds.

**Mike Michalowicz** [00:47:29]:

So how do you stand out from the hundreds? They can't read 100 proposals in depth.

**AJ Harper** [00:47:35]:

No. Well, I mean, so they'll start with all of them have different submission requirements. You should always follow them to the letter. Don't say, make an exception for me. I was an acquisitions editor.

**Mike Michalowicz** [00:47:45]:

Okay.

**AJ Harper** [00:47:46]:

Nothing irritated me more when it's literally right there in black and white exactly how to submit. And then people would say, well, I know you said this, but I'm going to do this other thing because I'm so great.

**Mike Michalowicz** [00:47:58]:

Yeah. So basically, you built that for efficiency so you can find the best, and now they're disrupting your system. They're making it harder on you by being the exception.

**AJ Harper** [00:48:08]:

Yes. So, I automatically don't like you.

**Mike Michalowicz** [00:48:09]:

Yeah. I assume some of them you trash right away.

**AJ Harper** [00:48:13]:

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Well, an example would be if an agent says they only want to work with memoir and then you send them your business book, why would they look at it?

**Mike Michalowicz** [00:48:26]:

Yeah.

**AJ Harper** [00:48:26]:

Or if they say they only want to work with short book. I'll look at books that are 40 to 60,000 words, and you send them your opus of 100,000 words, but it's really, really good. They won't look at it.

**Mike Michalowicz** [00:48:37]:

Okay. So, I like that hack of using Acknowledgments, but I also think there may be a risk here. So, if I pick an author I like, I like Malcolm Gladwell, who, by the way, just got back to me. I'm trying to get him to an event I'm doing with Don Miller, and I invited him about two years ago. It didn't work out. I know he likes Greek yogurt. So, I said, "Malcolm, I'd love to have you retreat and meet with us authors." And I said, "I promise you I will have Greek yogurt there for you."

**Mike Michalowicz** [00:49:09]:

And he kindly wrote back and declined, but said, "Yes, I like Greek yogurt." So, there you go. But I read it. There's a little aside. I read his books. He has an acknowledgement section. I don't know who his agent is or if he has one, but say I identify the agent. That's wonderful.

**Mike Michalowicz** [00:49:24]:

Malcolm Gladwell has that agent. But for me now, to contact the agent, say, I know you work with Malcolm Gladwell.

**AJ Harper** [00:49:29]:

Well, you don't do that.

**Mike Michalowicz** [00:49:30]:

How do you do?

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**AJ Harper** [00:49:31]:

You just well, first of all, even if it isn't clear which one is his agent in the Acknowledgments, just go. You can see on an author's page who is representing them.

**Mike Michalowicz** [00:49:40]:

They often will state it on an author's page.

**AJ Harper** [00:49:43]:

Where their website?

**Mike Michalowicz** [00:49:44]:

On their website, they'll often say that?

**AJ Harper** [00:49:46]:

Not always. So, there's another way you can sleuth it out.

**Mike Michalowicz** [00:49:49]:

That's interesting. Yeah.

**AJ Harper** [00:49:52]:

I would just follow their submission guidelines, but then you can say, I chose you. So, this is important to personalize in a query. I chose you as an agent because you represent Malcolm Gladwell, and his books are my jam. Like, I'm all about I even tried to give him some Greek yogurt.

**Mike Michalowicz** [00:50:13]:

Right.

**AJ Harper** [00:50:14]:

You know, they want to know, why me? Because they're used to people just doing blanket submissions where they just send them everywhere. And you can always tell Dear Sir or

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Madam. Or just not even...the publishing house that I started focused on LGBTQ fiction, and we would get all this stuff. Nothing. I don't think you read the label.

**Mike Michalowicz** [00:50:42]:

Yeah, right.

**AJ Harper** [00:50:43]:

So just do your homework and find out what are they into and then express to them why you had an interest. And that goes for publishers, too. You should know what they published. Why is it meaningful to you? Yeah, I really loved this series of books. Of the ten books on my shelf, you published four. That would get my attention. Right. This is what your books meant to me, because they care about the books, and they want to hear why you're choosing them.

**AJ Harper** [00:51:13]:

And the agents care about the books they represent, too. They really care a lot who's the person, if you have an agent or not, you vetted out the publisher you want.

**Mike Michalowicz** [00:51:09]

Who's the person at the publishing side that's receiving this information? Who's that?

**AJ Harper** [00:51:29]:

So, if you're skipping the agent and you're going with open submissions, okay.

**Mike Michalowicz** [00:51:32]:

Yeah.

**AJ Harper** [00:51:32]:

Is that what you mean?

**Mike Michalowicz** [00:51:33]:

Yeah. Or if you have an agent. I'm just wondering, on the publisher at the publishing house, who is the person receiving what you're sending?

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**AJ Harper** [00:51:39]:

So, you're not sending it if it's through an agent.

**Mike Michalowicz** [00:51:42]:

Okay.

**AJ Harper** [00:51:42]:

Agents have relationships or should have relationships with publishers. It's all about relationships.

**Mike Michalowicz** [00:51:48]:

But it's the publisher.

**AJ Harper** [00:51:49]:

Meaning, like, the editors, the acquisitions editor.

**Mike Michalowicz** [00:51:51]:

Okay, that's what I was curious about. So, it's the acquisition editor. What is an acquisition editor?

**AJ Harper** [00:51:55]:

So, it's—Noah's one. He just doesn't have that official title, but he's looking for opportunities, looking for authors to publish, looking for books, the next books. So, they're just acquiring books.

**Mike Michalowicz** [00:52:09]:

Clear.

**AJ Harper** [00:52:09]:

Sometimes a publisher has just an acquisitions editor that literally looks at every submission and the funnels it to an editor. But it's more common that an editor will choose the same person that read your submission and wants it is the same person you'll end up working with.



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**Mike Michalowicz** [00:52:27]:

When the editor identifies one. I want this one. It ain't over yet. There's more that the publisher goes through. So, what are the next steps that the publisher is doing to consider if they really want your deal.

**AJ Harper** [00:52:38]:

Yes. A lot of authors don't realize that editors have to pitch, too. So you pitch the agent and or the publisher. If you have an agent, the agent pitches the editor. But now the editor has to convince the publisher to do it. So the editor says, "Oh, it's a great book. I really want to publish it." And if it's a small house, they probably just have to convince the other people in the house.

**AJ Harper** [00:53:01]:

Right. The founding people. But if it's like portfolio. So Noah has to go sit in a room with the other editors at Portfolio. They maybe have 20 books they're going to do that season. They all want to have one of those slots or multiple slots. So they have to convince, we want to do Mike's next book. This is what it's all about.

**AJ Harper** [00:53:22]:

They have to be ready to pitch it and prove that it's something that's worth one of those slots.

**Mike Michalowicz** [00:53:27]:

And the deciding factor is the publisher, not the company, the person, which in this case is Adrian Zackheim. He's the publisher. There is a VP of marketing. It used to be Will Wisser.

**AJ Harper** [00:53:38]:

I don't know who it is. Yeah, they'll weigh in on it.

**Mike Michalowicz** [00:53:40]:

Yeah, there's probably a couple of other people. So it becomes a discussion. Can the agent or if we're direct pitching the editor, if they have interest, can we better arm them for that negotiation or that internal pitch?

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**AJ Harper** [00:53:53]:

Yeah, you want to be able to make it easy for them to pitch it. You know your reader, you understand where your book fits in the marketplace, you know the potential for it. You have a clear messaging, and you understand, and you've been able to express your platform. Even as a fiction author, it's important to show, this is how I plan to sell this book.

**Mike Michalowicz** [00:54:15]:

And one little tip is, once you know who the editor of interest is, the acquisition editor who's interested, ask them, how are you pitching the book? I asked Noah yesterday in this conversation we were having. I said, "How do you pitch me?" He goes, "Oh, it's real simple. We call it the McCalla College," which I kind of like that one. "Michalowicz has an entrepreneurial college he's developed, and he's bringing the McCallah College to us. He's writing all the different 101 classes. So we in-house call it—"

**AJ Harper** [00:54:48]:

Oh, that's interesting.

**Mike Michalowicz** [00:54:48]:

Yeah. And this was really interesting. I called the McCalliverse, and so he liked that better. So now it's McCalliverse.

**AJ Harper** [00:54:55]:

So he's pitching. This is the body of his work, and we're getting all of these readers.

**Mike Michalowicz** [00:54:59]:

Exactly. And I said— Oh, and this was really brought clarity to it. I said, "One of the considerations I want to pitch to AJ is *Profit First Advanced* "or whatever, because I said, "*Profit First* is selling so well, it's guaranteed to sell." And he goes, "It's a 201." I said, "What do you mean, it's a 201?" He goes, "It's class 201. Less students will go to that class."

**AJ Harper** [00:55:21]:

Right.

**Mike Michalowicz** [00:55:21]:

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He goes in McCallough College. We need all the 101s.

**AJ Harper** [00:55:24]:

Yeah.

**Mike Michalowicz** [00:55:25]:

I was like, oh, dude, I said that's out. He's like it's out.

**AJ Harper** [00:55:28]:

What a great different so, see, this is how a traditional publisher really helps you, because they can see that big picture, and an agent can also do that for you, too, who's invested in your career.

**Mike Michalowicz** [00:55:38]:

Yeah. And with that understanding now, I know when you and I meet, once we pick the topic that we love, that most importantly, our readers need next, then I can go and position it with Noah to be part of the next one on 101 class. Yeah.

**AJ Harper** [00:55:54]:

That's valuable.

**Mike Michalowicz** [00:55:56]:

Yeah.

**AJ Harper** [00:55:56]:

So just to sum up, the pitching and the vetting, it's all about research. There's no cutting corners with it. You can just spend a little bit of time getting to know publishers, figuring it out, finding what they're interested in, understanding their submission guidelines, and start earlier rather than later. Don't write the book and the proposal, and then look, start balance your time so you're having some research time and some writing time rather than just doing it in this weird sequential order, because then you end up delaying the process.

**Mike Michalowicz** [00:56:30]:

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I think there's a homework assignment right there. Pick three you want to pursue and do the research. Really develop a proposal, a pitch that's specific to them, that shows that you understand them.

**AJ Harper** [00:56:45]:

Oh, can I say must one more thing before we close?

**Mike Michalowicz** [00:56:47]:

Yeah.

**AJ Harper** [00:56:48]:

I mentioned the gatekeepers and the gatekeepers and the gatekeepers and the gatekeepers and the gatekeepers. Who are in charge of all the gatekeepers? If you have a person who can get you past all of them, that is worth more than the best query you have. If you have a person who knows someone at a house, publishing house, or an agent, even if it's not in your genre, meaning their friend represents fiction authors, but you're nonfiction, they're at a firm. Get in the door. They can walk it down the preferable hall. Maybe it's the Zoom hallway, but they can walk it down because they owe a favor to that person. If you can get it on someone's desk, then you have already given, your chances are just quadrupled. So, think about who do you know that might know someone at an agency or at a publishing house where you can bypass. And at first, people tell me, "I don't know anyone."

**AJ Harper** [00:57:55]:

Did you ask? You might be surprised who your cousin knows, who your business partner knows, et cetera, that can hook you up and then wait until you're ready for the introduction. That's the other part. Don't do it immediately. Make sure you have your query or your full manuscript, if that's required or your proposal, if that's required, ready to rock. So that if they say you know what they said, they will look at it. You can just attach whatever needs to be attached.

**Mike Michalowicz** [00:58:26]:

Yeah. Don't go in ill prepared.

**AJ Harper** [00:58:28]:

# don't write *that* book!

Yeah.

**Mike Michalowicz** [00:58:29]:

We encourage you. We want you to visit our website. It's DWTB, so Don't Write That Book. [Dwtbpodcast.com](http://Dwtbpodcast.com) and I ask if you would please give us a rating and review. That's a big deal for us. That's how this show will propagate. We hope we're transforming your perspective, at least, and maybe your life as an author as you go through this journey with us. And please make sure you subscribe so you don't miss a single episode.

**Mike Michalowicz** [00:58:56]:

Thanks for joining us today. And as a reminder, don't write *that* book. Write a *better* book.