don't write *that* book!

Episode 6:

Transform Your Draft into a Must-Read Book

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

Welcome back to the *Don't Write* That *Book* podcast where you can learn how to write your bestseller and own your authorship. Follow along with us as we give you an insider's view of the book Industry. Now, here are your hosts, myself, Mike Michalowicz and AJ Harper. So, get ready. Here's the bizarre question. What's the thirstiest you've ever been that you can remember for in your life?

AJ Harper ([00:24](#)):

For a person? <laugh> Or for what?

Mike Michalowicz ([00:29](#)):

No, like a liquid, like you're—

AJ Harper ([00:30](#)):

Oh my gosh. I was using the slang terms. Yeah. Are you thirsty?

Mike Michalowicz ([00:33](#)):

Yeah. No, I mean, you—

AJ Harper ([00:34](#)):

Don't do, you don't know that slang. No.

Mike Michalowicz ([00:36](#)):

But it sounds like it has a very sexual orientation.

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

It can be because it'll be for like thirsty for fame. Thirsty for—

Mike Michalowicz ([00:41](#)):

Yeah, of course. Yeah, it makes sense.

AJ Harper ([00:43](#)):

don't write that book!

Okay. I watched too much reality TV. Clearly.

Mike Michalowicz ([00:46](#)):
Yeah. No, what, what's the thirst?

AJ Harper ([00:47](#)):
You're just being literal. Yeah. <laugh>

Mike Michalowicz ([00:51](#)):
I'm just thinking—

AJ Harper ([00:53](#)):
I dunno. <laugh> I'm trying to think of myself. How would I remember this? Well—

Mike Michalowicz ([00:56](#)):
It's probably a trauma state, physical trauma. <laugh> So I'm thinking like, I, I know how thirsty I've ever been, this may go back 20 years. It was a hundred plus degrees outside, and there was a pickup basketball game. And I'm like, I'm in. And I was playing and I'm like, I'm not going to drink water. I was sweating so much. And at the very end, I started getting dizzy. I'm like, I better drink some water. I, I was trying to be like, tough. I had, I brought a gallon, um, of water in like a milk jug, you know? But it was flushed with water. Thank God I brought that, I drank the whole thing. I was still thirsty after I drank a gallon of water.

AJ Harper ([01:32](#)):
Uh huh.

Mike Michalowicz ([01:32](#)):
The thirstiest I've ever been.

AJ Harper ([01:34](#)):
I can honestly say, I can't answer this question.

Mike Michalowicz ([01:37](#)):
Okay.

AJ Harper ([01:38](#)):
I don't recall.

Mike Michalowicz ([01:39](#)):

Okay.

AJ Harper ([01:40](#)):

I mean, I like water. I can't believe we're talking about— <laugh>

Mike Michalowicz ([01:45](#)):

Is this a warmup question?

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

When were you super thirsty? <laugh>

Mike Michalowicz ([01:48](#)):

Well, I, I find in life when, when you are asked a question like that, it's usually the easiest to remember extremes the most, or the, the least. Like what's the cold you've ever been or the hottest you've ever been? It's much easier than say like, what's a normal day temperature?

AJ Harper ([02:03](#)):

No, for sure. So what's thirsty? I don't know. I mean, I guess probably any the--I probably living in the desert. You're always thirsty.

Mike Michalowicz ([02:14](#)):

Yeah. I've noticed that we, Krista and I just got back from Scottsdale this past weekend.

AJ Harper ([02:19](#)):

Did you like it?

Mike Michalowicz ([02:21](#)):

No.

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

You didn't?

Mike Michalowicz ([02:22](#)):

I couldn't believe it. I've been there before, and we were there 10 years ago together. I just speaking gig out there. And, uh, I told Krista that like last minute. I was like, oh, I was speaking gig in Scottsdale. I said, you didn't tell me about Scottsdale. I want to go. I'm like, oh. So we got plane ticket. We didn't even sit in the same, um, seats or anything. 'Cause it was last minute

thing. And we had this great romantic time out there, amazing dinners. We drove up to Sedona. This is the last time we went. Like, it was just an amazing, so we're like, we're going to do it again. And Scottsdale has transformed into the number three, uh, bachelorette party center.

AJ Harper (02:58)
Oh, no. <laugh>

Mike Michalowicz (03:00)
True story. Number one's Vegas. Number two is Nashville. Number three is Scottsdale.

AJ Harper (03:04):
So you had a lot of girls running around, and—

Mike Michalowicz (03:06):
Then a lot of guys, and a lot of drunk drinking. And it was, and music all night. So we get to the hotel, we stayed at the W on the outskirts of Old Town Scottsdale. That's where we wanted to hang out.

AJ Harper (03:19):
Yeah.

Mike Michalowicz (03:20):
And he's like, "Hey, here to party." We're like, "No, I'm here for a business conference." And he's like, "Okay". He goes, "Uh, pass the red velvet, then rope on the side there for the entrance so that your, your elevator's there. But hey, good news. You're overlooking the pool to two o'clock in the morning." Krista and I go to bed at eight <laugh> you know, lights out by nine. We like to get up at five in the morning, have a leisurely… start, coffee. It was so not us. So we had to, uh, leave Scottsdale and go into another town. Uh, and we had an amazing dinner. We had some amazing times, but we had to leave the area where we were at. It was weird—

AJ Harper (03:58):
Huh!

Mike Michalowicz (03:59):
All the guys in her muscle shirts, all the girls wearing very short clothing. And I, I sound like such an old dude right now.

AJ Harper ([04:05](#)):

You do, but I, I'm with you.

Mike Michalowicz ([04:07](#)):

So, but I'll give you context. So, I felt a little under the weather yesterday. I feel better now. I just scratchy throat something and Krista is like, oh, you're having, um, what's it when you recover from like a drug addiction? What do they call that? Uh—

AJ Harper ([04:21](#)):

Dry mouth?

Mike Michalowicz ([04:22](#)):

No. Um, it starts with re— Oh my gosh, not regurgitation.

AJ Harper ([04:27](#)):

Re um, I don't know.

Mike Michalowicz ([04:29](#)):

Uh, when you stop drinking for a period of time, rehab, not rehabilitation… <laugh> Ah, whatever. But she used the word that's appropriate for when you, when you regress and she goes, oh, you missed the butt cheeks. Like, you haven't seen enough butt cheeks. That's why you're getting sick. Because all it was butts everywhere with—

AJ Harper ([04:46](#)):

Women in Scottsdale?

Mike Michalowicz ([04:47](#)):

Scottsdale. Thong Fest, and the guys all muscle shirts. And she goes, oh, you're, you're, uh, withdrawal. That's it. With not with re—withdrawal.

AJ Harper ([04:56](#)):

Not an R… You threw me on out in the R Reference.

Mike Michalowicz ([04:59](#)):

Yeah. It's an R with Well, had as an R in there. Withdrawal

AJ Harper ([05:02](#)):

<laugh>

Mike Michalowicz ([05:02](#)):

All right. That was the worst question ever. Um, but I got the best question ever. It's, it's taking a draft into a must-read stage or transforming into a must-read book. And the first story we're going to start off with, I think, is *Toilet Paper Entrepreneur*. I know we talked about this in, in some previous episodes, but that's the initiation of our story together. Um, we met, as I was writing that book, and I don't even know if you consider it a draft state <laugh> for me, it was, uh, a vomit. And just to refresh our listeners' memories, when I wrote the *Toilet Paper Entrepreneur* the first time, I just wrote it all myself. I don't, I didn't have an outline. I don't remember. I just started just writing. And then I'm like, okay, I'm going to read this now and see what I got. And it was, I think I had like 300 pages of stuff. I started reading this. I'm like, this is atrocious. Like, it <laugh> it was so bad. <laugh> And I'm like, and I remember sitting there thinking, this is my own book, and it's really bad. I'm like, this is probably not how to get started. Um, I better find someone. And I, I believe in God, I believe in divine intervention. Um, I believe in serendipity.

AJ Harper ([06:12](#)):

I believe in all that stuff too.

Mike Michalowicz ([06:12](#)):

Okay. Okay. All that aligned at the same time. Yeah.

AJ Harper ([06:16](#)):

Because—

Mike Michalowicz ([06:16](#)):

Like, oh, you walked in the door with Polly, you're like, oh, some creepy dude. Um—

AJ Harper ([06:22](#)):

Did I bring Polly?

Mike Michalowicz ([06:24](#)):

Yeah, I totally remember the two of you walking into the office. This was down on Myrtle Avenue, Boonton.

AJ Harper ([06:29](#)):

I don't remember that part.

Mike Michalowicz ([06:30](#)):

We had a phone call.

AJ Harper ([06:31](#)):

Oh, yeah, I know. We had a phone call.

Mike Michalowicz ([06:34](#)):

I remember walking up the stairs With Polly and I, huh? Yeah, we had a phone call and I'm like, can we meet face to face?

AJ Harper ([06:38](#)):

Oh, maybe I brought her. Because I just wanted to be sure.

Mike Michalowicz ([06:41](#)):

And Safe!.

AJ Harper ([06:41](#)):

Yeah. Yeah.

Mike Michalowicz ([06:42](#)):

And Patty was there.

AJ Harper ([06:43](#)):

Yeah.

Mike Michalowicz ([06:44](#)):

And we all met, we talked, you agreed. We, we started the project and, uh, you, you and Polly walked out, and Patty looked at me and said, good move, Mike. You need this. <laugh> And it was, she was right. Like we, I, the book needs to be improved by a professional.

AJ Harper ([07:00](#)):

Right. So in that capacity, technically I was ghostwriting then. And I would say there was a hybrid of editing slash ghostwriting because there was new content that had to be created.

Mike Michalowicz ([07:13](#)):

Yeah.

AJ Harper ([07:14](#)):

And it basically, I mean, you know, this, it was like a tear down. Build it back up.

Mike Michalowicz ([07:20](#)):

Yeah. Was it, I guess it was salvageable, obviously. It was.

AJ Harper ([07:24](#)):

For sure.

Mike Michalowicz ([07:25](#)):

But I don't think we, I went around about it the right way. If we were working together from day one, obviously that's not the way we'd approach it.

AJ Harper ([07:32](#)):

Well, we don't approach it that way. <laugh>

Mike Michalowicz ([07:33](#)):

Exactly.

AJ Harper ([07:34](#)):

But I mean, that gave you confidence in me to say, okay, let's start right from scratch. And that's *The Pumpkin Plan*. That's the—

Mike Michalowicz ([07:42](#)):

Which I, it's such a freaking good book.

AJ Harper ([07:44](#)):

It's a good book.

Mike Michalowicz ([07:45](#)):

So good.

AJ Harper ([07:45](#)):

But I mean, I, editing is what makes a book great. And our process is different now. You know, that was, in those days, you would hand it to me and I would fix it—

Mike Michalowicz ([07:57](#)):

<laugh> Right—

AJ Harper ([07:57](#)):

don't write *that* book!

Right. And even with *Pumpkin Plan*, it wasn't as collaborative as we are now.

Mike Michalowicz (08:03):

No, it wasn't. But it was, it was leap years ahead of the *Toilet Paper Entrepreneur* experience.

AJ Harper (08:10):

Yeah. A hundred percent.

Mike Michalowicz (08:12):

One little caveat just for you to know, is, uh, Donna Lyon, she's a licensee of *The Pumpkin Plan*. Uh, yesterday we filmed Lit Video, l-i-t video. They do audio, uh, video books.

AJ Harper (08:25):

Oh, yeah. Yeah.

Mike Michalowicz (08:25):

So we filmed *The Pumpkin Plan*.

AJ Harper (08:27):

Oh, awesome.

Mike Michalowicz (08:28):

Yeah. Yesterday. So that's great. Yeah. It was really good. Donna pulled me aside afterwards and said, can we get a revised and expanded edition? And said—

AJ Harper (08:35):

I would love that.

Mike Michalowicz (08:37):

Okay. I told her, I said, we're in a purgatory. So I think we could try, but we're in a purgatory. Here's what's interesting. *The Pumpkin Plan* back list is so strong that Penguin doesn't want to touch what ain't broke.

AJ Harper (08:51):

Right.

Mike Michalowicz (08:51):

No effort's required. Uh, it, it's printing money for them. It's making a nice royalty for us. Um, and it's not low enough that a revising expanded may have a tremendous enhancement on it.

AJ Harper ([09:04](#)):

Yeah.

Mike Michalowicz ([09:04](#)):

So it's sitting like, in this middle ground, *The Pumpkin Plan*, I hope I'm right, but rather do a corrections corner. So I'm just going to guess, I think it's three to 400 books a week that is selling somewhere in that range. Um, but I wonder if we did do revised expand edition, would that release the agency rights? 'Cause there's an agent behind that one, because now it's a new book.

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

Oh. Oh.

Mike Michalowicz ([09:28](#)):

And that may actually justify for us the, the offset that—

AJ Harper ([09:31](#)):

I don't, that I don't know. But I would, I think you should check into it.

Mike Michalowicz ([09:35](#)):

Wait, then I'll check into it.

AJ Harper ([09:37](#)):

So you're, this is a conversation. You're all hearing that we've— <laugh> Yeah. This what happens. Let's just do some business. Yeah, yeah. Let's do some business. But I think, I think the— Yes, please do that. By the way, I would love to put success stories in that, that that would be something that I would love to do. And—

Mike Michalowicz ([09:52](#)):

I've enhanced the system. I've spoken on it now for 15 years, including yesterday's recording of the Lit. It's a better system now. So, uh, alright. Maybe.

AJ Harper ([10:02](#)):

So, you know, editing that then would be both of us looking at what works, what needs to change. Yeah. You just said you enhanced the system. Where can we bring in success stories from people who are using the system?

Mike Michalowicz ([10:17](#)):
Mm hmm. <affirmative>

AJ Harper ([10:17](#)):
Going over that whole, but we would be doing that together, which is, I feel like a *Toilet Paper Entrepreneur*. You were handing it off because you were kind of, I don't know what to do it next.

Mike Michalowicz ([10:28](#)):
Yeah.

AJ Harper ([10:29](#)):
Kind of thing. Now, our most recent book, we just finished the proofread of the past pages, which is the final step for *All In*. And the editing process is a back and forth.

Mike Michalowicz ([10:42](#)):
<affirmative>

AJ Harper ([10:42](#)):
So passing like a baton. Yeah.

Mike Michalowicz ([10:46](#)):
Passing—

AJ Harper ([10:46](#)):
The manuscript back and forth, um, and communicating almost every day about it. Um, so that's, it's different now. The editing is much more of a collaboration.

Mike Michalowicz ([10:57](#)):
It's very fluid. What is the intention of editing? What's the goal?

AJ Harper ([11:03](#)):
To make the book better?

Mike Michalowicz ([11:05](#)):

It's, um, is it *On Writing* by William Zeller?

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

On Writing is Stephen King. *On Writing Well* is what you're thinking of.

Mike Michalowicz ([11:14](#)):

Okay. Where he says the essence of writing is rewriting.

AJ Harper ([11:18](#)):

Yeah. There's no first draft that's good. That's a, that's a lie.

Mike Michalowicz ([11:22](#)):

Yeah.

AJ Harper ([11:22](#)):

If you think your first draft is good, you still need an editor. <laugh> Yeah. Yeah. It's just not, most first drafts are honestly pale in comparison to what the final draft can be. And editing is a specialized skill. Editors are people who can see what's there and what it could be. And they're mindful of the reader and their experience. A lot of the job is about, "Is this flow working? Is it accessible to readers? Is it coming across in the clearest and simplest way? Is it compelling? Is it doing its job?" But people don't realize that they need that support or how that editing process works.

Mike Michalowicz ([12:06](#)):

How many drafts in the editing process are there?

AJ Harper ([12:10](#)):

Um, there is no magic number, are you? But we can talk about stages. Oh—

Mike Michalowicz ([12:14](#)):

Yeah. Yeah. Actually, we have a document that we shared at the Next Level Author course that we did together called Stages of a Book. And you're like, oh, Mike, there's an error in there.

AJ Harper ([12:23](#)):

Yes.

Mike Michalowicz ([12:23](#)):

don't write *that* book!

There's a, there's two major stages. Right. There's—

AJ Harper ([12:26](#)):

No. <laugh>

Mike Michalowicz ([12:27](#)):

Okay. I'm, I'm messing up. Yeah. Walk me through.

AJ Harper ([12:30](#)):

So there's developmental editing.

Mike Michalowicz ([12:32](#)):

Yep.

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

And that is, technically it could be when you're also developing the outline for a book, and during the writing process, you can utilize a developmental editor at that time to make sure that the book is actually on track. So, you know, I'm kind of serving in that capacity while also writing with you.

Mike Michalowicz ([12:52](#)):

Mm hmm. <affirmative>

AJ Harper ([12:52](#)):

In the beginning. But the term developmental editing can also be used for the other part, the other stage, which is once the book is written, then going in and doing what's technically called a substantive edit. Sometimes people call it a line edit, but it's still that whatever you referring it to, whether it's developmental, et cetera, sometimes people say developmental, let me back that up. I want to start over. <laugh>

Mike Michalowicz ([13:16](#)):

Okay.

AJ Harper ([13:17](#)):

Because I, I have to get this right. It's confusing.

Mike Michalowicz ([13:20](#)):

Yeah. And when, when I say there was two stages, I meant there was the development stage and the production stage because—

AJ Harper ([13:26](#)):
Well, there, okay. You could look at it like that.

Mike Michalowicz ([13:29](#)):
Okay.

AJ Harper ([13:30](#)):
But there's developmental editing—

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

AJ Harper ([13:33](#)):
Is a term that sometimes encompasses substantive editing.

Mike Michalowicz ([13:40](#)):
Okay—

AJ Harper ([13:41](#)):
Because we'll sometimes say it to simplify rather than get an author all twisted in knots with all the different terms. But basically, if your manuscript is finished, then you're going to get a developmental/substantive edit at that point. Which also it comes in, it's usually big picture thoughts. Right. Does this book work? Is it sequenced properly? What's missing? What doesn't go here? Is it compelling? Is it clear? Does it make sense? Is there a strong throughline? It's all the big stuff. I call it 30,000-foot view.

Mike Michalowicz ([14:17](#)):
Okay. I have a question already. How does an editor do that? Meaning, do they read the whole manuscript and reflect on that? Or are they reading reflect on that and going back? How do they know that it's moving linearly? That it's all those answers, those questions are being answered.

AJ Harper ([14:35](#)):
So first of all, a good editor can look at a table of contents and tell if it's off.

Mike Michalowicz ([14:40](#)):

Okay. Oh, interesting. So the ToC matters a lot.

AJ Harper ([14:43](#)):

But a lot of, uh, editors have different ways of approaching things. Most of us will read through, and I say read through, because we might not be reading every single word. We're just trying to get a gist of the, we'll read through the whole thing, and then we go back—

Mike Michalowicz ([15:01](#)):

Okay.

AJ Harper ([15:02](#)):

And do a deeper dive. So we want to get a sense of what's happening, sense of tone, sense of sequence, the order of things, flow, all of that. Uh, and then we'll go back and do the more detailed work so that developmental editing, which also can encompass substantive editing. So I just, this can be confusing for—

Mike Michalowicz ([15:23](#)):

Yeah.

AJ Harper ([15:24](#)):

Authors, so you can use the term developmental, even if it's not at the beginning stage. But technically after the book is being, is, is after you have a first draft, it is a substantive edit.

Mike Michalowicz ([15:38](#)):

Okay.

AJ Harper ([15:40](#)):

A developmental editor can do those things. So if you're self-publishing, what you want is a developmental editor, because they can help you in the beginning and they can help you when the manuscript is done to do all that big picture stuff.

Mike Michalowicz ([15:54](#)):

Okay.

AJ Harper ([15:56](#)):

That— Usually there's two passes, meaning, as, you know, you're going to get high level thoughts back first. Usually an editorial letter, which now comes in an email. <laugh> And—

Mike Michalowicz ([16:09](#)):

That's right.

AJ Harper ([16:10](#)):

Uh, and then notes in the margins where there's big thoughts to consider. Right. But not a lot of mucking around in the actual text. You make your big picture changes. Right? Edits. That's where maybe you're moving stuff. Sometimes we've even had to write a whole new chapter.

Mike Michalowicz ([16:29](#)):

Mm hmm. <affirmative>

AJ Harper ([16:30](#)):

You know, it's the big stuff. And then they do a line edit as part of that. Right. So now they're going to go through line by line, what's working, what's not working. Once you're done with this phase, and then your book is accepted by your publisher, or you, if you're working privately with a developmental editor, they say, okay, you're good to go. And you also agree, now you're into production, which is what you were referring to, which is the copy edit stage. And it's really important to understand that that's a different person. <laugh>

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

Why is it a different person?

AJ Harper ([17:06](#)):

Well, first of all, it's a different skill.

Mike Michalowicz ([17:08](#)):

Okay.

AJ Harper ([17:08](#)):

I'm not, I am a developmental editor. I can look at a book and see where it's out of order, what's missing, what's the plot. I can look at a book and I can doctor that thing. I can, this is, this is what we're going to do. Yeah. <laugh> But do not ask me to remember all the rules of *The Chicago Manual of Style*.

Mike Michalowicz ([17:27](#)):

Okay.

AJ Harper ([17:29](#)):

And that's copy edit. Copy editors, those people are beasts. I mean, they—

Mike Michalowicz ([17:32](#)):

That's the em-dash versus a dash and stuff.

AJ Harper ([17:35](#)):

It's all the little rules with the exceptions to the rules. And the exceptions to the exceptions. Yeah. And they know their stuff. I can do a lot of it just because I've been in the business a long time.

Mike Michalowicz ([17:47](#)):

Yeah.

AJ Harper ([17:48](#)):

But I, you would never want to hire me for it. Yeah. Because I'll get a bunch wrong, and I don't care. <laugh> That's, that's their job. And a lot of copywriters don't want to do developmental edits. They don't want to mess around on that high level stuff. They just, they love their, they love their meticulous work. And then you have a proofreader who's also a different person. So that's the next stage. So that is after the copy editor has done spelling, punctuation, grammar, syntax, formatting continuity, minor fact checking, and a whole host of other stuff that's too complicated to explain, a proofreader comes in and finds the basic mistakes you missed and all those editors missed.

Mike Michalowicz ([18:32](#)):

That's like, what the word the is used twice in a row or something.

AJ Harper ([18:35](#)):

Yes. Because our brain fills it in. Yeah. And we don't notice.

Mike Michalowicz ([18:39](#)):

Yeah.

AJ Harper ([18:40](#)):

Proofreaders are kind of like the last, the last defense.

Mike Michalowicz ([18:43](#)):

The last bastion. Yeah. Yeah.

don't write *that* book!

AJ Harper ([18:45](#)):

But it can't be any of those other editors because they have to come to it fresh.

Mike Michalowicz ([18:51](#)):

Interesting. One little thing I want our listeners to know is that a little tip is in the front of the book when it has that number sequence. This is in the page where there's, um, I don't know even know what it's called, but where you see the publisher's information and so forth, copyright law specified, it says 10, 9, 8, 7, 6. Those numbers reference this print edition of the book. And if the number is removed, so maybe number one's removed now, it's in the second printing of this book with edits that were made. Because I'm surprised how many errors still get into a final book with all these people looking at it. There's still inevitably errors.

AJ Harper ([19:27](#)):

Yeah. For my book, I am <laugh> an editor. Right? Yeah. Uh, I also had my developmental editor slash substantive, my copy editor, my proofreader. And I also got the best copy editor in the world. Who is Zoë Bird. She did me a solid, because she's my best friend.

Mike Michalowicz ([19:48](#)):

Yeah.

AJ Harper ([19:49](#)):

And she read it.

Mike Michalowicz ([19:52](#)):

Wow.

AJ Harper ([19:52](#)):

I still had 11, 11 errors. Eleven. And I, I, I, I discovered it when I recorded the audio book.

Mike Michalowicz ([20:01](#)):

That's the tip. I was about to say—

AJ Harper ([20:02](#)):

That's the best tip you ever came up with. <laugh>

Mike Michalowicz ([20:05](#)):

<laugh> Yeah. Read your own book for the audio edition before it goes to print. Yes.

don't write that book!

AJ Harper ([20:11](#)):

If you can time it like that.

Mike Michalowicz ([20:12](#)):

If you can time it like that. Here's the hack, the workaround. Because sometimes, at least in traditional publishing, I record the book. I'm actually surprised how short of a window is usually about a month and a half before it's released. So *All In* is getting, coming out in, uh, January, 2024. It's probably November, December. I'll be recording the audio. So there's not enough time. But what I do now is I use a tool called Speechify. And Speechify is an AI tool that can read PDFs and it reads it. So when we are doing our edits, I have Speechify reading the book to me, and I'm listening to it as I'm looking at it. And then you hear, I can't see the, the twice, but he'll say like, oh, then they went to the, the store. And I'm like, uh, there's the error. So that's my workaround.

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

You know, I, I also, I read— The other thing. I'm, I, I have to hang my head because I actually read the book to myself out loud so quickly before the audio book. The mistake I made was, I just was trying to read it quickly.

Mike Michalowicz ([21:12](#)):

Yeah, yeah.

AJ Harper ([21:13](#)):

But if you actually try and read it out loud as though.

Mike Michalowicz ([21:18](#)):

Yeah.

AJ Harper ([21:18](#)):

It's going to be an audio book, then you'll catch it.

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

But, but it's going to be an eight-hour read out loud or whatever. So yeah.

AJ Harper ([21:25](#)):

So Speechify, that's, that's a good way.

Mike Michalowicz ([21:26](#)):

Yeah.

AJ Harper ([21:27](#)):

The point is the editing process takes longer than you think. It's going to, involves way more people than you think. Yeah. And, uh, requires many, many drafts.

Mike Michalowicz ([21:37](#)):

Yes. <laugh> That's totally, I totally agree. Um, let's talk about the story. So the developmental editing, we have a note in here about our meeting with Kaushik out at the Penguin Random House offices.

AJ Harper ([21:48](#)):

Yeah. So, so to show what developmental editing can be in the first stage is we used to go up to the Penguin offices. That was before they moved over to Random House offices. So this was mm-hmm <affirmative> downtown. And we would go for two-, three-hour sessions with Kaushik I loved it. I loved it. It was the best. And we would rum the outline by him in the detailed outline. Yep.

AJ Harper ([22:09](#)):

And he would see where we might have holes, but mostly he asked us questions, and then we would work it out and have a better outline in the process. That's an example of what a developmental editor can do in the beginning. I have a little anecdote to share with you, though. I met with— Noah connected me with one of the, uh, assistant editors who is now an editor at another house. And I had a conversation with her about this author. And I mentioned, uh, going up to the Penguin offices to do, uh, editing. She, you came up, she said what? I said, we, well, Mike and I, we used to do these great editing sessions. I was talking about pre-Covid, right? Yeah. Oh, we haven't been up in so long. "Oh. Why would you come up?" Well, because we used to have these editing sessions with Kaushik. "You what?" She was flabbergasted.

Mike Michalowicz ([23:03](#)):

Really?

AJ Harper ([23:04](#)):

Because it's not the norm.

Mike Michalowicz ([23:05](#)):

It's not the norm.

AJ Harper ([23:06](#)):

don't write *that* book!

But I think authors should ask. You asked.

Mike Michalowicz ([23:10](#)):

I asked. Yeah. Oh yeah. It wasn't the norm back then. I asked, and I've asked Noah, and he's willing to come to our writer's cabin and experience the bare spottings, <laugh> uh, to do a session with us. And the offices are very difficult to get into anymore. I actually made a request to come up there with a group of people that want to tour, and they're like, nah, you just keep with COVID restrictions. You can't. But I mean—

AJ Harper ([23:34](#)):

You could do it on Zoom. The point was the time That's—

Mike Michalowicz ([23:37](#)):

Yeah, that's true.

AJ Harper ([23:38](#)):

I know you like in-person. But the point is that, you know, you need that. You might need—yeah. A person who is an editor who's experienced in the genre. So that's one tip I make is just because a person is an editor in general, meaning, they may have edited a book. If they don't understand your genre and what else is out there, it's, that's, that's not good for you. You need somebody who understands it. For example, for 18 years.

Mike Michalowicz ([24:08](#)):

Yeah.

AJ Harper ([24:08](#)):

I have been exclusively writing and editing personal and professional development books, self-help, business, spirituality, wellness. That's my jam. I also did with my publishing company some fiction. Uh, well, quite, quite a lot actually. But my point is, I'm not your person if you, say, have a journalistic book or, um, a history book.

Mike Michalowicz ([24:38](#)):

Mm hmm. <affirmative> Right.

AJ Harper ([24:38](#)):

You don't want me. That's not, that's—

Mike Michalowicz ([24:41](#)):

don't write *that* book!

Not your jam.

AJ Harper ([24:42](#)):

It's not my jam. I have deep knowledge in this other style of writing. And that's what you want. You want someone who has deep knowledge and experience in your genre.

Mike Michalowicz ([24:52](#)):

So I want to get a sense for your process. 'Cause you've edited so many books. What do you do when you first get a manuscript? What's the process?

AJ Harper ([24:59](#)):

Well, if I don't know the, so I don't get a lot of manuscripts anymore that I haven't, you know—

Mike Michalowicz ([25:06](#)):

Didn't John Briggs send you one? Isn't—aren't you working with him on *The 3.3 Rule*?

AJ Harper ([25:11](#)):

Yeah.

Mike Michalowicz ([25:11](#)):

Yeah.

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

Of course. Yeah. He's, uh, but see, he's my student though, so he's in my Author Collective. Oh—

Mike Michalowicz ([25:16](#)):

Okay. So it's a little bit of a different perspective. Then.

AJ Harper ([25:19](#)):

I already, he workshopped that whole thing—

Mike Michalowicz ([25:22](#)):

Gotcha.

AJ Harper ([25:22](#)):

—already. So when I'm getting it, I'm not, it's not—

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

Okay. It's not from the ground up.

AJ Harper ([25:27](#)):

No. So that said, I still kind of have, would have the same—

Mike Michalowicz ([25:32](#)):

Okay.

AJ Harper ([25:33](#)):

—policy. I, like I said, we'll skim through and see, okay, what's the flow, what's happening, what's going on here? So I could get a full sense of it. And also really important to understand the author's tone.

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

Mm-hmm. <affirmative>

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

So that you're not thinking, why are they saying it like this? Or why, why are they talking about this? Or sharing this anecdote? If you understand what they're trying to do and they're toned, then, then you won't have to backtrack and pull recommendations. So I'll go through that, and then I just start right at the beginning, honestly. Um, and I'm looking for primarily what's out of sequence.

Mike Michalowicz ([26:16](#)):

Okay.

AJ Harper ([26:16](#)):

The thing to remember about an editor is that we can't do all the edits at once. <laugh> We can't do them all at once. We can't fix all the problems at once. In fact, we can't see all the problems at once.

Mike Michalowicz ([26:28](#)):

Hmm.

AJ Harper ([26:30](#)):

We have to look at things, uh, first clear the big stuff, and then we can see what else. So the more you do as an author, the better job we can do for you as an editor, there's a limited time.

Mike Michalowicz ([26:43](#)):

Right.

AJ Harper ([26:44](#)):

So, if you submit a super messy manuscript, I have a lot of heavy lifting. Yeah. I might not actually see all the opportunities to improve it.

Mike Michalowicz ([26:53](#)):

That's a good one.

AJ Harper ([26:54](#)):

Because I have to go clean up all the debris first. Yeah—

Mike Michalowicz ([26:56](#)):

Yeah. Yeah.

AJ Harper ([26:57](#)):

So I will do that. By the way, I clean up stuff right away that are huge gaping problems. Um, I also have OCD, legit, so there are things I will fix immediately. <laugh>

Mike Michalowicz ([27:09](#)):

Yeah.

AJ Harper ([27:10](#)):

I can't stand it when a manuscript isn't formatted correctly. That sort of thing. I have to get that all cleared out before I can even think about it.

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

Sure.

AJ Harper ([27:19](#)):

But that's said, I'm primarily in the beginning looking for: Is this sequence the right way to draw readers in and to help them with the flow of information. That's probably the biggest issue, is sequencing.

Mike Michalowicz ([27:32](#)):

Okay. What if I'm doing a self-edit? Is there rules or techniques for that? Meaning I the author want to edit myself or just don't do it.

AJ Harper ([27:42](#)):

No. So self-edit is the one stage we didn't talk about. We were talking about the professional stages.

Mike Michalowicz ([27:47](#)):

Yeah.

AJ Harper ([27:48](#)):

But I believe authors should do a self-edit before they turn that manuscript into an editor.

Mike Michalowicz ([27:54](#)):

Okay.

AJ Harper ([27:55](#)):

I think they need to spend more time than they realize. The problem is most people don't know how to do go about it.

Mike Michalowicz ([28:01](#)):

So what, what is it the same rules you just shared?

AJ Harper ([28:03](#)):

Yeah. So you, you develop it One, you do, you focus on one thing at a time. So in my book, I actually laid out the system I created when I started ghostwriting. I actually didn't know how to write books. I just started writing them.

Mike Michalowicz ([28:19](#)):

Mm-hmm.

AJ Harper ([28:19](#)):

I just took the jobs. The first time I got a really big book that I <laugh>, it wasn't just like 20,000 words or something. It was a self-help book that I had to get. Right. I had no idea how to make sure if it worked. I now know that not all ghost writers necessarily are going to worry about this stuff. But again, as I mentioned, I mean, I legit have OCD.

Mike Michalowicz ([28:44](#)):

Yeah. <laugh>

AJ Harper ([28:45](#)):

So, I was worried. <laugh>

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

Yeah.

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

Does this work? Oh my gosh, what if they don't get this? What if they, this change doesn't happen for them? How can I make ah, yeah. I was freaking out. I did what I always do because of OCD, I made myself a checklist of stuff I had to make sure I did. Make sure this, make sure that. That helped me to think about things about one at a time. Because it's daunting to look at your own manuscript. You've never edited anything before, maybe in school, and figure out what to do.

Mike Michalowicz ([29:24](#)):

Hmm.

AJ Harper ([29:24](#)):

Why doesn't this sound right?

Mike Michalowicz ([29:26](#)):

Hmm.

AJ Harper ([29:26](#)):

Why? What do I do first? I don't know. So, I created this checklist for myself, which over the years, and this is over 18 years, has now become my Must-Read Editing Checklist, which incidentally you can get for free. You don't have to get my book. You can actually just get it at *Write a Must-Read*.com/tools if you don't want to read my book. But in my book, I do, this is the official list and it's the same checklist I use for your books. Yeah. And teach in my class. It's a way of thinking about one issue, one problem in a manuscript at a time.

Mike Michalowicz ([30:05](#)):

Got it.

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

It's overwhelming to do it all. So, let's do one thing. Let's just look at the sequencing. Or let's just make sure that we have core message throughout the book. Or let's make sure everything we're asking them to do—exercises, action steps—are doable. Can we make them simpler? Let's just look at those.

Mike Michalowicz ([30:27](#)):

So, you'll read through the book, skim through the book, and then go first thing is the sequence. Right?

AJ Harper ([30:34](#)):

Yep.

Mike Michalowicz ([30:35](#)):

Then, go through and say, okay, I skim through it. Now, is this correct?

AJ Harper ([30:38](#)):

Yes.

Mike Michalowicz ([30:38](#)):

I gotcha.

AJ Harper ([30:39](#)):

Yep. And I have the checklist in my head now.

Mike Michalowicz ([30:41](#)):

Yeah.

AJ Harper ([30:42](#)):

I don't physically need it anymore. But, and I will, I will admit, when you and I are working on a book, I'm already doing most of that in the writing.

Mike Michalowicz ([30:51](#)):

Yeah. I can tell.

AJ Harper ([30:52](#)):

Yeah.

Mike Michalowicz ([30:53](#)):

You're doing it in our, when we're just talking about the concept of a book.

AJ Harper ([30:56](#)):

Yeah. It becomes, it's so integrated in me now. Yeah. But a big one, an example, one of the edit, I call them editing passes. So, I will look at "doubts and criticisms." This is huge, huge! Where in the book might a reader question you, push back?

Mike Michalowicz ([31:14](#)):

Yes.

AJ Harper ([31:14](#)):

Be upset with you. Um, think they can't do it.

Mike Michalowicz ([31:18](#)):

Right.

AJ Harper ([31:19](#)):

And then you have to get in front of it because those doubts and objections do become the criticisms.

Mike Michalowicz ([31:25](#)):

Right.

AJ Harper ([31:25](#)):

Over time. And ultimately what that is, is a reader doubting themselves.

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

Interesting.

AJ Harper ([31:32](#)):

So that's a whole pass. And it doesn't mean that you're starting from word one, page one. It means you're thinking, "Okay. Where you just ask yourself, where am I introducing a controversial topic? Something that might be hard? Something that they've never considered, something complicated? Okay, let me go there and get in front of that." That's again, being attentive to the reader. So that's a pass. Instead of trying to think about sequencing doubts and criticisms, core message, doability, all of it at the same time. You just go through. So one pass could take you half hour if it's a simple one or a week, if it's a longer one. Um, but if you do this, your book, when you turn it in, the editors, it's a dream for an editor, first of all.

Mike Michalowicz ([32:26](#)):

Yes. Because I'm thinking of Noah's comments. You saw that letter, letter he sent back to us.

AJ Harper ([32:31](#)):

Yeah.

Mike Michalowicz ([32:31](#)):

The editorial letter is like, this is the best book you two have ever written.

AJ Harper ([32:34](#)):

Yeah.

Mike Michalowicz ([32:35](#)):

Yeah.

AJ Harper ([32:36](#)):

But an author can do that for themselves. I'm experienced. But that doesn't mean, uh, an author, even a first-time author, can't do that.

Mike Michalowicz ([32:43](#)):

Kasey Compton got the same feedback.

AJ Harper ([32:44](#)):

Yes. She's been through that whole process. That's ingrained in her now, though.

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

It's ingrained in her.

AJ Harper ([32:50](#)):

She, she's so she's her second book.

Mike Michalowicz ([32:52](#)):

Yeah.

AJ Harper ([32:53](#)):

She's so good at taking, um, knowledge. Yeah. And incorporating it that for this book, when we would talk about her draft, I could just use shorthand. And say, well, you know, this this, yeah. I was thinking doubts here and blah, blah, blah. She, uh, she just knows it.

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

Yeah.

don't write *that* book!

AJ Harper ([33:11](#)):

And that does happen over time. It happens with practice that you don't always have to refer to the checklist, but it's helpful to have it. Because now you just think, here's another one that's on there. Um, inclusion. Inclusiveness.

Mike Michalowicz ([33:26](#)):

Mm-hmm. <affirmative>

AJ Harper ([33:26](#)):

It's important. You might forget to do it.

Mike Michalowicz ([33:30](#)):

You know, in *Get Different*, you caught this, I make a, a joke about being pulled over. And I said, you know, the, the lights are behind me and I get pulled over and I make a joke about Sammy Hagar's "Don't Drive 55." And you said, in the consideration of inclusion, some people may receive, uh, police lights behind them differently than a joke.

AJ Harper ([33:54](#)):

Mm-hmm. <affirmative>

Mike Michalowicz ([33:54](#)):

You know, and you said, if you're of color, your life circumstances may have been radically different than this white dude. And so that was an excellent comment. And we edited the book accordingly and have gotten accolades because of that.

AJ Harper ([34:07](#)):

Yeah. And it's just, it's not that you were intentionally overlooking a whole part of society, it's just that you look at the lens world—

Mike Michalowicz ([34:16](#)):

Through this lens that I have. Yeah.

AJ Harper ([34:17](#)):

And that's fine. There's nothing wrong with it. But by having a pass where you dedicate yourself to say, now I'm going to look at inclusiveness.

Mike Michalowicz ([34:25](#)):

Yeah.

AJ Harper ([34:25](#)):

And inclusiveness isn't just that. It's also—

Mike Michalowicz ([34:29](#)):

The, the avatar or the ideal reader.

AJ Harper ([34:31](#)):

Ideal reader, thinking about, okay, wait, I have all these resources. What if my reader doesn't have them?

Mike Michalowicz ([34:38](#)):

Yeah. Yep.

AJ Harper ([34:38](#)):

You know, oh, okay. I'm <laugh> I'm just asking them to do a task that's going to take them 40 hours. Yes. Is that even realistic for most people? Nah. You know, so all these things to just take them one at a time.

Mike Michalowicz ([34:53](#)):

Mm-hmm. <affirmative>

AJ Harper ([34:53](#)):

Then when you're done, you have a manuscript that you have really considered everything you can think of, and you can put it forth and say, here you go to a professional who will then bow down and kiss your feet. Well, at least at home, they'll say, I mean, honestly, I remember, um, uh, we talked about Tricia Timm on another podcast, episode. But she got a message from her editors, and the editors like, what's going on? Because they aren't used to getting a manuscript like that. Yeah.

Mike Michalowicz ([35:24](#)):

They—

AJ Harper ([35:25](#)):

Had almost nothing.

Mike Michalowicz ([35:26](#)):

Yeah.

don't write that book!

AJ Harper ([35:27](#)):

You know, so I feel that if you take that time, then it also helps you to make sure you've doing the book you want to do that's written for your reader. Because as great as an editor is, you are the one that knows your reader.

Mike Michalowicz ([35:42](#)):

Yes. Oh, for sure.

AJ Harper ([35:43](#)):

So an example of that, there's so many from our life, but—

Mike Michalowicz ([35:48](#)):

Well…

AJ Harper ([35:48](#)):

With Penguin. Yeah.

Mike Michalowicz ([35:49](#)):

Well, Noah says that regularly. Whenever I come to him with an idea, he'll or his comments in the edits, he'll say, "I think this should be excluded. But you know, you're reader better than I do." So he's so cognizant of that.

AJ Harper ([36:02](#)):

Well, it's interesting though. So we've had a number of editors at Penguin, but at the first book he had with us, he put up a lot of flags. I, I don't know if this joke's going to go over. Oh, yeah—

Mike Michalowicz ([36:13](#)):

Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.

AJ Harper ([36:14](#)):

I don't know if you need to repeat this encouragement here. You already said it once. He doesn't do that anymore.

Mike Michalowicz ([36:19](#)):

No.

AJ Harper ([36:19](#)):

Because he knows we know.

don't write *that* book!

Mike Michalowicz ([36:22](#)):

No, you know, there's a flip side to this too. It's like, is he being critical enough? Kasey said that to me. She called me and said the editor didn't have many comments. I don't know how to sharpen this anymore, but it's not there. <laugh> She has a very high standard for herself, which is amazing, but also with—

AJ Harper ([36:38](#)):

I'm super proud of that, by the way.

Mike Michalowicz ([36:40](#)):

Yeah. You set that standard for—

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

I, well, she's that way anyway, to begin with. But she, she's, she's, yes. She will not settle.

Mike Michalowicz ([36:48](#)):

Yeah. She just submitted and you maybe got, she resubmitted the manuscript. Uh, yeah—

AJ Harper ([36:50](#)):

I got a text from her. Yeah—

Mike Michalowicz ([36:51](#)):

Yeah, yeah. Um, I'm actually getting printed bound. Copy. If you want, I can send it to—

AJ Harper ([36:56](#)):

You. Yeah.

Mike Michalowicz ([36:56](#)):

Okay. Okay. Um, with Noah though, the feedback on the last one was like, this is the best book you both have written.

AJ Harper ([37:05](#)):

Mm-hmm. <affirmative>

Mike Michalowicz ([37:06](#)):

Uh, that we've submitted to him, and the comments were scanned. So then there's this hesitancy, like, well—

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

Mm-hmm. <affirmative>

Mike Michalowicz ([37:14](#)):

Is, is he ignoring this? Is there not enough? Like, so there's that flip side, and I think we've got to acknowledge that. And then I think my and our responsibility then is to team up again and say, are we missing anything? And keep pushing the elevation.

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

Well, the best way to do it is with reader feedback.

Mike Michalowicz ([37:31](#)):

How do you do that? And when do you do that?

AJ Harper ([37:33](#)):

So, okay. Uh, you want to give your manuscript for reader feedback. I, I'm a believer that you should hang on until you have a full manuscript.

Mike Michalowicz ([37:43](#)):

Mm-hmm. <affirmative>

AJ Harper ([37:43](#)):

Now some people think you should do it early to make sure that your concepts are landing.

Mike Michalowicz ([37:49](#)):

Mm-hmm. <affirmative>

AJ Harper ([37:49](#)):

I'm not going to disagree with that. I just happen to know that a lot of writers get waylaid, and they start to think that their book doesn't matter. So, I'm always going be in the side of let's keep your little fragile baby in a cocoon until you feel pretty good about it. So after you do the self-edit, send it out. So send it out to ideal readers. Um, again, there's a whole, I actually have a whole chapter on this in my book. The same feedback protocol that we follow for your books and that I teach in my class. But basically here it is, it's um, you want at least 10 folks who represent your ideal reader.

Mike Michalowicz ([38:28](#)):

Mm-hmm. <affirmative>

AJ Harper ([38:28](#)):

Not your friends, not your cousins, not anybody who's a super fan. If you're— <laugh> that's one of Mike's problems is trying to get people who are not super fans is almost impossible.

Mike Michalowicz ([38:37](#)):

Yeah. Because when I, you these blowhards like, oh, this is amazing. Everything's perfect.

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

Yes.

Mike Michalowicz ([38:40](#)):

Yeah.

AJ Harper ([38:41](#)):

And when I did it, I specifically said, you can't have worked with me on anything. So it's nobody. It has to be someone who's fresh to the concepts. Um, you want 10 to say, 25 people. You give them a series of questions that are designed to see how they felt about it. And then you evaluate the, their responses to see look for patterns. So, you don't want to take any one person over another, you want to… want to look for: Are several people seeing kind of the same thing?

Mike Michalowicz ([39:13](#)):

Mm-hmm. <affirmative>

AJ Harper ([39:13](#)):

And then come up with a plan to address those things and make the book better. If you do that, uh, that gives you more confidence sometimes than even what an editor can say about something. And in fact, we have used that to get what we want in. It's not that we had arguments with editors, but just to say, we don't want to do that. We want to do this. We've used, uh, reader feedback to get the editor to agree, because editors are, they want to know about reader feedback. They think that's really valuable. So, you and I do it when we submit to the editor.

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

That's right. And, and one of the tips is we give our reviewers a very short period of time, about two weeks for our early readers to get feedback. What I found is when we gave them a long time, they put on the shelf, never got to it. When there's a compressed amount of time they actually do it. We have maybe 50% do a full read, and the remaining 50% do a partial read. But everyone gives feedback. I also got reader feedback. I didn't tell you Clint Pulver. Remember we wrote the story of Clint, Clint Pulver the drummer.

don't write *that* book!

AJ Harper ([40:18](#)):

Yeah.

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

Okay. He wrote a book called, *I Love It Here: How Great Leaders Create Organizations Their People Never Want to Leave*, and it's crushing it. So, uh, I was reading that, and I was like, I'm looking for endorsements. I'm like, oh, Clint's perfect for this. So, I reached out to Clint, this is only a week ago, and said, "Hey, would you be willing to endorse *All In*?" He's like, "Yeah, send me the manuscript," and so forth.

Now, the dirty, hidden truth is most people that endorse books never read the book. They skim through it most, or they read a summary. And some of those, uh, endorsements are templated just to make it easy for the endorser, the blurb-er. So, Clint says, "Yeah, send me a summary. Send me the actual PDF of the manuscript, and then gimme a couple suggested endorsements." No problem. I want to make it easy for him. I get an email the next day. He goes, "Here's your endorsement." He goes, "I read 80% of the book." He goes, "I was on a flight." And he goes, "I started reading the first page." And he's like, "I kind of got into the second page." He goes, "I couldn't put it down." He goes, "This is a great freaking book."

AJ Harper ([41:12](#)):

Awesome.

Mike Michalowicz ([41:13](#)):

Um, that is great reader feedback too, where you have this unexpected no, no requests made of him. Um, no expectation for feedback and he just did it. So just wanted to share that.

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

Yeah. I think that's a, what I love is that you sent it to him also. So sometimes people make a misstep with their ideal readers, and they send them to, to the experts and the influencers.

Mike Michalowicz ([41:36](#)):

Mm-hmm. <affirmative>

AJ Harper ([41:36](#)):

Kind of like they want the stamp of approval. But those, you can do that in addition to the other feedback.

Mike Michalowicz ([41:43](#)):

Correct. Yeah. Yeah. It's those, those consumers you want. Um, is there anything else we wanted to talk about on this?

AJ Harper ([41:49](#)):

Well, I think it's just, I, I just want to encourage people to mark, to plan to take more time with editing. <laugh>

Mike Michalowicz ([41:57](#)):

Yeah.

AJ Harper ([41:57](#)):

It's, I can always tell when a book has not been edited.

Mike Michalowicz ([42:01](#)):

Yeah.

AJ Harper ([42:02](#)):

It's, it's, it's everything to make sure that the book works. And most people, when they hear how much it's time it's going to take, get very frustrated because we have this idea about our book coming out in this specified period of time. But it's the thing that can make or break your book.

Mike Michalowicz ([42:18](#)):

Yeah. If the manuscript takes six months to write, the editing takes six months, it seems.

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

Sometimes longer. Yeah. It just kind of depends on the state of your manuscript.

Mike Michalowicz ([42:27](#)):

With *All In* and *Clockwork: Revised and Expanded*, I tracked every single unique manuscript. Meaning when, once it went from us to Penguin or Penguin to us, each time it volleyed back and forth with substantial modifications of some sort. I made a new manuscript and *All In* had nine iterations back and forth. *Clockwork* was in the similar range that, that there was the original manuscript and then nine more iterations until we got to the final proof pages.

AJ Harper ([42:55](#)):

And keep in mind also that and the average that's, we're on a tight streamlined system.

Mike Michalowicz ([43:01](#)):

Mm-hmm. <affirmative>

AJ Harper ([43:02](#)):

The average author is actually going to have more drafts because you have your own self edit that you're doing in the process. We have streamlined that a bit.

Mike Michalowicz ([43:10](#)):

Mm-hmm. <affirmative>

AJ Harper ([43:10](#)):

So I think a lot of people will have more than nine drafts.

Mike Michalowicz ([43:13](#)):

What have you seen? Like, what's reasonable?

AJ Harper ([43:15](#)):

There is no reasonable. <laugh>

Mike Michalowicz ([43:17](#)):

So you, so you can go in the twenties.

AJ Harper ([43:19](#)):

Yeah.

AJ Harper ([43:20](#)):

You just, honestly, it's just let go. This is not a reflection of if your manuscript, if you did a good job or not. It takes time to really see what's there and realize your vision. It's not supposed to happen in two drafts. It's a process and it's a collaborative process with your editor. So I think shift your mindset from thinking, I'm just going to blow this out. Bang, bang, boom, get myself a copy editor. Good to go. Really just commit to the process. And then you have a book that people can't stop talking about.

Mike Michalowicz ([44:00](#)):

One last question for you. Have you ever seen a situation or believe there's a circumstance where you're moving along with your drafts and say, you know what, this book just is not going see the day, the daylight and start anew?

AJ Harper ([44:14](#)):

One that I'm writing?

Mike Michalowicz ([44:15](#)):

No. Yeah. Or have you ever seen a situation like that where it's justified, where it can't be edited to salvation and just needs to be abandoned?

AJ Harper ([44:23](#)):

Uh, not, not that I worked on as a ghostwriter. Because—

Mike Michalowicz ([44:30](#)):

Because you're the ghost.

AJ Harper ([44:30](#)):

—I actually, yeah.

Mike Michalowicz ([44:31](#)):

<laugh> Yeah. But have you—

AJ Harper ([44:33](#)):

Um, not with my students. I will tell you where I've seen it is, uh, in fiction.

Mike Michalowicz ([44:39](#)):

Okay.

AJ Harper ([44:40](#)):

Yeah. Maybe. Yeah. Because when I, I didn't really do a lot of developmental editing. I did mostly ghostwriting and then teaching. So I haven't really seen, received a lot of manuscripts that were tear downs.

Mike Michalowicz ([44:52](#)):

Okay.

AJ Harper ([44:53](#)):

But, uh, listen, you can tell when an author hasn't taken the time to actually make sure their book works. And that's, you know, there are editors with plenty of horror stories. Lemme tell you.

Mike Michalowicz ([45:08](#)):

I believe it. Uh, you have a six-week editing course. That's the one I literally came back from the run and you were doing. Oh, that wasn't an edit. What was that? That was a live edit.

AJ Harper ([45:18](#)):

Yeah.

Mike Michalowicz ([45:19](#)):

Is that different than the editing course?

AJ Harper ([45:20](#)):

In my workshop, I do live edit. Okay. Which is where I take, uh, with my students who volunteer. Uh, so they, it's not like I'm putting them on the spot. I'll take a chapter and do, uh, and edit it live in the group.

Mike Michalowicz ([45:35](#)):

Okay.

AJ Harper ([45:36](#)):

And we'll have a conversation about it. But I'd made a class to walk people through this past method I just talked about today to walk you through those different steps in the checklist. Okay. And how do you do that.

Mike Michalowicz ([45:47](#)):

That's the system.

AJ Harper ([45:48](#)):

Because honestly, people just don't know how to do, how to edit their own stuff. So I would like people to learn. That's the class.

Mike Michalowicz ([45:55](#)):

How do people get access to it?

AJ Harper ([45:56](#)):

Ajharper.com.

Mike Michalowicz ([45:57](#)):

Gosh, it's so simple. I'll ask every single time. Where do I go? AJ harper.com. But—

don't write *that* book!

AJ Harper ([46:02](#)):

You know what, can I just say one more thing?

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

Of course you may.

AJ Harper ([46:04](#)):

You can do it without the, I mean, you don't need, you can just sit down and ask yourself these important questions about what the reader needs all the way through. And you can make it better just by following that checklist, which again, is free. So you can just do this stuff free. Just follow the checklist. And even if you aren't quite sure if you're doing it the right way, even your small attempt of considering it will make it easier for your editor to help you fi get to the finish line.

Mike Michalowicz ([46:38](#)):

All right, my friends, visit ajharper.com. Thank you for listening in. We have some free materials for you. We'd love for you to join our email list too, so we can give you more tips at dwbpodcast.com. Also, we want to hear your stories. If you have some things you want us to talk about, tell us. Email me and AJ at hello at DWBT. That's *Don't Write* That *Book* podcast.com. Thanks for joining us for this episode and every episode you listen into. And as a reminder, don't write *that* book, write this one.