

don't write *that* book!

Episode 7:

Titles

Mike Michalowicz [00:00:01]:

Welcome back to the *Don't Write That Book* podcast, where you can learn how to write your bestseller and own your authorship. Follow along with us as we give you an insider's view of the book industry. Now, here are your hosts, myself, Mike Michalowicz, and AJ. Harper. Welcome to *Don't Write That Book*. Today we're going to talk about titling. I'm actually a little giddy about this subject today. My name is Mike Michalowicz. I'm the author of ten business books, my most popular being *Profit First*. I'm joined in studio with AJ Harper.

AJ Harper [00:00:32]:

Hey, Mike.

Mike Michalowicz [00:00:33]:

Or, *by* AJ Harper. I just messed it up. I said with AJ Harper.

AJ Harper [00:00:35]:

By, with...

Mike Michalowicz [00:00:36]:

We do all the above.

AJ Harper [00:00:37]:

I'm sitting right across from you.

Mike Michalowicz [00:00:40]:

Well, you are. You are physically here. I think one of the advantages we have as partners is our locale to each other. We see each other once every three months, I think, on average.

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AJ Harper [00:00:50]:

Yeah.

Mike Michalowicz [00:00:51]:

We try to talk what I call in season and off season. In season is when we're actively writing. Probably talk three times a week and text multiple times. "I have an idea. I have an idea." And an offseason. We still touch base once every couple of months. For sure. It's more often than that, probably, right.

AJ Harper [00:01:09]:

Yeah.

Mike Michalowicz [00:01:10]:

There's not too many off seasons. I want to introduce AJ. Harper. She is my writing partner. She has written every book with me.

AJ Harper [00:01:17]:

Except for your children's book.

Mike Michalowicz [00:01:19]:

Except for my children's book.

AJ Harper [00:01:19]:

My Money Bunnies.

Mike Michalowicz [00:01:21]:

Except for *My Money Bunnies*. And I may do another children's book. Yeah. And an extraordinary friend, I think. Actually, I don't know if I have it on me. I'll show you. Right here in my pocket. I'll show you why you're a great friend. So, I made this little thing called the Sacred Square or I'm sorry, the Square Squad. These are... It's a piece of paper. It's one inch by one inch, roughly. I put in my wallet. And you write down the people that you feel most comfortable with in knowing the whole you really. And the person closest to my Square Squad is AJ. Harper. Right there.

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AJ Harper [00:01:58]:

Where'd you come up with that?

Mike Michalowicz [00:02:00]:

During an exercise on a retreat, a business retreat. They said, who are the people you can be totally integral with that you can just share your ugly, true you with and they'll not judge you at all. Oh, AJ Harper.

AJ Harper [00:02:13]:

Oh, well, then you would be in my Square Squad! Oh, that sounds like a fun exercise.

Mike Michalowicz [00:02:20]:

Yeah, it was interesting because that person said, when you're feeling something and you need to talk, that's the list you look at. And you say, who's the first person you're going to call there?

AJ Harper [00:02:31]:

Oh, for sure it would be you, then.

Mike Michalowicz [00:02:33]:

Thank you. And they say, pick four to ten names. I have like, seven or eight people.

AJ Harper [00:02:38]:

Yeah, it's hard to get people, Mike. I mean, that's not a lot of people.

Mike Michalowicz [00:02:43]:

It's hard. And they're all for different reasons.

AJ Harper [00:02:47]:

Yeah.

Mike Michalowicz [00:02:48]:

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If my mother, who's 88 now, had a health scare, my sister's on the list, and I would talk to my sister because of that relationship. If it's my son who's struggling with a problem, my wife, but I could also call you and talk to you about it, and also my mom, you know what I'm saying? So the square squad is people that you could talk to about anything, but you can also cherry pick based on the scenario. First call.

AJ Harper [00:03:18]:

Right. And they know the whole you. Yeah, that's great. I love that.

Mike Michalowicz [00:03:22]:

Yeah. So that's who we are.

AJ Harper [00:03:26]:

We're in each other's Square Squad. That's all you need to know.

Mike Michalowicz [00:03:30]:

And we write a lot of books, and some of them actually sell pretty well. This episode is all about titling a book, and I don't think it's hyperbole to say that a full show needs to be dedicated to this topic.

AJ Harper [00:03:44]:

That's correct.

Mike Michalowicz [00:03:46]:

Titling. There's a saying that you don't judge a book by its cover, because... people judge a book by its cover. And there's a few elements on it. There's the design of a cover, there's a look of it, there's a title, there's a subtitle, there's an author's name. But a title is critically important. And I think is often haphazardly assigned by many authors. Why don't we start off with something that I loved? This is an exercise you and I did at our last cabin retreat when we were writing *All In*, I think it was.

AJ Harper [00:04:17]:

Yeah. It's based on a class I teach.

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Mike Michalowicz [00:04:20]:

Yeah, it's in *Write a Must-Read*, too, I believe.

AJ Harper [00:04:22]:

It's not.

Mike Michalowicz [00:04:23]:

Oh, it's not.

AJ Harper [00:04:23]:

But I teach it in my workshop. And then you adapted it.

Mike Michalowicz [00:04:27]:

Yeah, I have my own flavor of it, and I have a title test I'll bring up in a bit. But tell me about what are the different title types?

AJ Harper [00:04:33]:

Well, first I want to say why I created it. I created the exercise because people have a tendency to just try and pick a title out of thin air. I'm going to come up with the title drumming my hands on the table, what's my title? Or they get this sort of download from the heavens. "This is my title. It's amazing." And the problem is, they haven't really thought about it. And I created this way to think through coming up with title ideas based on forced constraints so that you could think about different aspects of who your reader is, what your book is about, the main message, the promise, all those things, results. Choose one aspect of your book. Focus only on that as the constraint, in order for you to force your brain to come up with other ideas. So, it's just a tool to think through titling, to open yourself up to possibilities. And so that's why I created it.

Mike Michalowicz [00:05:38]:

Okay, so why don't you walk me through it? There's different title types.

AJ Harper [00:05:42]:

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Yeah. This is not be all end all by any means. I'm sure there's other types, but this is what I've seen. There's a solution is. By the way, this is Mike's interpretation of the class I teach, so I'm going to go with your interpretation.

Mike Michalowicz [00:05:57]:

Okay, thank you.

AJ Harper [00:05:58]:

Yeah. So, it's a solution to the problem. So, there's also problem titles, but they aren't as popular. But they do work. What's a good problem title? Well, here's problem and solution. *Stop Walking on Eggshells*. That's a popular title. Okay, so the *Walking on Eggshells* is the problem and you're going to stop it.

Mike Michalowicz [00:06:24]:

Okay, so the solution title is yeah, right.

AJ Harper [00:06:26]:

But say *Crooked* would be a problem title.

Mike Michalowicz [00:06:30]:

Okay. There you go.

AJ Harper [00:06:32]:

They're not as popular as the more positive titles, but it is a constraint you could think about is how could I think about the problem? Could I come up with a bunch of titles for the solution to that problem? Must the solution, which is often tied to core message, like, for example, your book *Profit First* is a solution title.

Mike Michalowicz [00:06:53]:

Right? Yeah, right, because it tells you what to do. Does the solution title need to imply the problem or is that something that's carried by the subtitle?

AJ Harper [00:07:05]:

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No, it doesn't need to imply the problem. It could, Mike, you have sometimes solution plus or problem plus solution. Like, I said *Stop Walking on Eggshells*. For example, *Codependent No More* is another example. Right. Not that creative, but see, codependency is the problem, but not anymore. Yeah, I got it, right. Well, actually that's more like promise with it. So, then there's the desired outcome, or what I call promise. Those are really popular titles. And I would say of your books, *Clockwork* is a promise title because you want your business to run like clockwork.

Mike Michalowicz [00:07:43]:

Right, okay, so a promise title is the outcome you want to achieve. A solution title is the actual approach to resolving a problem.

AJ Harper [00:07:51]:

Yes.

Mike Michalowicz [00:07:52]:

Problem title is just nailing what the problem is specifically.

AJ Harper [00:07:56]:

Yeah.

Mike Michalowicz [00:07:56]:

So, I assume a problem title I can identify, I can relate with. Yeah, that's my problem. So, it may be compelling to me.

AJ Harper [00:08:02]:

Yes.

Mike Michalowicz [00:08:02]:

The solution title to me sounds very "parrot-able." I can repeat it saying, "Here's the fix man: take your profit first."

AJ Harper [00:08:08]:

Yes..

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Mike Michalowicz [00:08:08]:

And then a desired outcome is kind of like almost a relief. Like yes, this is where I want to be. I want to be “clockworked.”

AJ Harper [00:08:18]:

Yeah. One of my favorites is actually someone we were just talking about, Michael Port, his book *Steal the Show*.

Mike Michalowicz [00:08:23]:

Right. I love that title.

AJ Harper [00:08:25]:

Yeah.

Mike Michalowicz [00:08:26]:

Actually, his book is fascinating. Not just for the title, the cover design and the technique he used by using a Dr. Seuss design. Actually, I don't even know if you—

AJ Harper [00:08:36]:

Isn't that for *Book Yourself Solid*?

Mike Michalowicz [00:08:37]:

No. For *Steal the Show*. If you look at *Steal the Show*, it was a Cat in the Hat. And what he did is he looked at all different cover designs and said, oh, this is one that's really popular. It complements my kind of flavor. I want to give this book. And so it's based upon *Cat in the Hat*.

AJ Harper [00:08:54]:

He likes a lot of promise titles. He has *Book Yourself Solid*. Who doesn't want that? If you're that type of reader? *Steal The Show*. That's his book on public speaking. And then his newest book that he wrote with Andrew Davis, *The Referable Speaker*.

Mike Michalowicz [00:09:12]:

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Right. You want that too, right?

AJ Harper [00:09:13]:

If you're a speaker and you hear that term, "referable speaker," that's what you want.

Mike Michalowicz [00:09:18]:

Yeah.

AJ Harper [00:09:19]:

Right.

Mike Michalowicz [00:09:19]:

Yeah.

AJ Harper [00:09:20]:

So, he likes those promise titles.

Mike Michalowicz [00:09:22]:

Those are good examples as we go through, is any one better than another for certain circumstances? If you're writing prescriptive nonfiction, the space we're in. Is a solution title better than a desired outcome?

AJ Harper [00:09:34]:

Not necessarily. I think there are other factors. Once you go through this exercise, then there's the stickiness factor. Is it easy to repeat? You're going to get into some of these things later. But also, I do think it matters. What are you all about? Right. So, if you're a super positive person, you might not want a problem title.

Mike Michalowicz [00:09:54]:

Yeah, that's true. It does have to speak to your nature.

AJ Harper [00:09:58]:

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Exactly. So the other constraint is a unique label for the process, which I like to call topic or theory definitive. And I would say *The Pumpkin Plan* of your books is an example of that. Or say *The Five Love Languages*. Right. So, you've created a process framework, some sort of intellectual property that the book is going to have that title.

Mike Michalowicz [00:10:24]:

The 4-Hour Work Week comes to mind.

AJ Harper [00:10:26]:

Yes. But that's also a promise, actually.

Mike Michalowicz [00:10:29]:

It's also a promise, actually. That's a good point. Can these titles blend and serve more?

AJ Harper [00:10:33]:

For sure, 100%. Yeah.

Mike Michalowicz [00:10:36]:

I think interesting about the unique label is you can start owning a space. So *The Toilet Paper Entrepreneur* there was and still is a community that considered themselves TPEs. I'm doing the reread of *Profit First* right now. I was telling you, and I'm at the studio rereading it, and there's a section where I shout out to TPEs and I'm like, "You know who you are?" And they email me and say, "I know who I am!" So, it allows a unique title like that, at least in my case, allows people to belong to a community. They use that title to say, I'm part of this community. I'm a Pumpkin Planner.

AJ Harper [00:11:07]:

And there's other blends, too. You can have solution plus promise. Like *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*. Right? So, you can mishmash, you can combine them. But I think put the constraints first. See if you can come up with things. Here's one that you changed to a call to arms, because it's so you, but I call it a "Call to Greatness."

Mike Michalowicz [00:11:31]:

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Okay. Yeah. Mine's much more militant, I guess.

AJ Harper [00:11:34]:

Yeah. But it's for those titles that are really about beyond the thing they want beyond the problem, beyond even the solution. So like *Big Magic* is an example of one, the book that every Tony Robbins fan has ever read, *Awaken the Giant Within*.

Mike Michalowicz [00:11:54]:

I've read that. It's amazing.

AJ Harper [00:11:56]:

Yeah, that's a call to... yeah.

Mike Michalowicz [00:11:58]:

Yeah.

AJ Harper [00:11:59]:

It's beyond solving the problem. It's beyond even any promise you could come up with. He's going to the mountaintop. *The Giant Within* or *Big Magic* is Elizabeth Gilbert. That's an example of this. Is this whole next level awesomeness in a title, right?

Mike Michalowicz [00:12:25]:

Okay, let's talk about generating titles. Do we just randomly write stuff down? How do we go about it?

AJ Harper [00:12:34]:

Well, we just apply those constraints. So you say, let me bring up my class. I say, "Hey, let's try to find five examples of a problem title. Let's try to find five examples of a solution title, solution plus promise, call to greatness."

Mike Michalowicz [00:12:48]:

Yeah, right, but what do I need to know prior? I can't just start picking out titles. I need to know what the book is generally about.

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AJ Harper [00:12:55]:

Oh, well, this is what I'm—you don't do this process until you have your reader set, you know your core message, and you know your book's promise.

Mike Michalowicz [00:13:05]:

Okay, but I think many people just come up with a title. "I'm going to write a great book and it's going to be called So and So."

AJ Harper [00:13:09]:

Listen, let me just pause for a moment and say there is a good reason why it's okay for you to have a title that you love, that you came up with in the shower or in a conversation or whatever, because it's motivating to you. It feels real, it feels exciting, and it propels you forward so that you can actually start the process. That's good. Hang on to that title to get you moving. You're probably going to ditch it or your publisher is going to make you ditch it, which happens a lot. Or I just had a student who had a great title and her publisher loved it. And then we went to go look up and there was a competing title, the exact same title that was selling like gangbusters. And so why would she compete with that exact same title, exact same genre? So she had to ditch it.

Mike Michalowicz [00:14:03]:

But you can title a book. It is permitted for you to title.

AJ Harper [00:14:07]:

There's no copyright. The exceptions will be things like trademarks. So, when I had my publishing company, we had a book we wanted to call Orange Crush.

Mike Michalowicz [00:14:16]:

Okay.

AJ Harper [00:14:17]:

That's how the author had titled it. Great! Such a good title for a young adult romance. Orange Crush. Can't. It's trademarked as the soda pop.

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Mike Michalowicz [00:14:26]:

Oh, which I don't even know if that is the case. I got to look into that.

AJ Harper [00:14:31]:

No, we couldn't.

Mike Michalowicz [00:14:32]:

We couldn't. Okay.

AJ Harper [00:14:33]:

So, we ended up changing into a different title, which was just as awesome. And this is something for everybody to hear. You love your title. You think you could never part with it. You will love the next title.

Mike Michalowicz [00:14:44]:

Interesting. Yeah. And you will.

AJ Harper [00:14:46]:

Yeah, you will.

Mike Michalowicz [00:14:48]:

We do title testing, so when we come up with the title and subtitles, we'll use a couple of tools. One's called Poll... Pollfish. And what's interesting is you can specify a demographic of people. I want females who are business owners of such and such size business and a certain age range. And it goes out top their community of people who subscribe to respond to this. And they get paid to respond, and then they respond, but they also will give you their feedback. Here's why I selected this title, and here's why I was turned off by other titles. So, it's just interesting feedback. And I find that feedback. I see these common threads like, oh, I didn't realize that was confusing. So, a title may you think may be inspiring, but people feel it almost to be offensive or something like that.

AJ Harper [00:15:36]:

Yeah.

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Mike Michalowicz [00:15:37]:

So PollFish. There's another one called Pick fu or Pickfoo.

AJ Harper [00:15:40]:

“Pickfoo.”

Mike Michalowicz [00:15:41]:

Yeah. But Fu pickfu.

AJ Harper [00:15:43]:

I just say pickfoo.

Mike Michalowicz [00:15:44]:

Pickfoo is better. So pickfoo.com. Google has its own to Google.

AJ Harper [00:15:49]:

I use... Yeah, for my testing.

Mike Michalowicz [00:15:52]:

It's great.

AJ Harper [00:15:53]:

Use it for title. Use it.

Mike Michalowicz [00:15:54]:

For the title and cover design. Right?

AJ Harper [00:15:56]:

Yeah.

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Mike Michalowicz [00:15:56]:

And subtitle. I use it for subtitle also.

AJ Harper [00:15:59]:

Yeah, I do like a combo thing.

Mike Michalowicz [00:16:02]:

All right, so generating titles, do you do it with other authors? Do you just sit in the room and you go through this? Once you have your core message and stuff, give me some more parameters on how to must come up with it.

AJ Harper [00:16:14]:

Once you have your reader core message and promise, then enforce these constraints. So, brainstorm, get as many as you can come up with. Try to make yourself get five. It's really hard. And then once you have that, narrow it down to those that you think might be contenders. You might have to tweak them a little bit. For example, when I titled my book, which is *Write a Must-Read: Craft a Book that Changes Lives, Including Your Own*. I was just trying to get the main title. It was going to be called "Reader First." Everyone loved the title that I talked to. Reader first is my philosophy. Put the reader first in everything you're doing. Right?

Mike Michalowicz [00:16:55]:

Yeah.

AJ Harper [00:16:57]:

They loved it because they understood it.

Mike Michalowicz [00:16:59]:

They understood it. Yeah.

AJ Harper [00:17:00]:

That's key.

Mike Michalowicz [00:17:01]:

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Right.

AJ Harper [00:17:01]:

So, you have all this inside baseball stuff, and you love the title. Your peers love the title. Whoever you work with loves the title. But that's because they know what it means.

Mike Michalowicz [00:17:10]:

Yes.

AJ Harper [00:17:11]:

Right. So, I realized, oh, dang, I don't get to keep that title.

Mike Michalowicz [00:17:15]:

Yeah.

AJ Harper [00:17:16]:

And from that, I got to the promise section. I did these same constraints. My problem section was bad. This book sucks. Maybe it would have been Don't Write That Book. That actually would have been maybe a good title, but it was mostly about book sucking in the promise section. I had this little scribble that said "must read," and I presented that as an option. And you start to feel that like, oh, maybe that could be something. You don't have to love it all the way. I presented that to my publisher and they added write a yeah, right. So they added the write up part onto it so that it's more active. But then I think once you've done all those things, you do need to do the testing. You have to do the testing, but you also have to go do your research. Yes. You can have another title that's the same, but why would you compete with a really popular book that has the same title? Why would you do that? Most people don't remember the author's name.

Mike Michalowicz [00:18:21]:

That's right.

AJ Harper [00:18:22]:

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So go check and see. Are you competing with other books or products or whatever that have the same title? Yeah, I think that's important.

Mike Michalowicz [00:18:32]:

Yeah. So *Write a Must Read* is a Call to Greatness. That's how I would define it.

AJ Harper [00:18:38]:

It could be, yeah. And I think it's also a promise.

Mike Michalowicz [00:18:41]:

Title and a promise. Yeah, totally. A promise title. *Reader First* was a solution title.

AJ Harper [00:18:47]:

Correct.

Mike Michalowicz [00:18:47]:

Yeah. Interesting, dynamic. And what I read is you had insiders who supported it. So, there's almost a confirmation bias. Oh, my God, this is great because everyone I know loves it because they already get it.

AJ Harper [00:18:57]:

Exactly.

Mike Michalowicz [00:18:58]:

It's the audience who doesn't get it that we have to appeal to. Michael Hyatt, a very famous author, created a concept called the "Pinc Concept." When it comes to titles, P-I-N-C not pink. And he says, in essence, your book title should have one or more of the following four things you should make a promise. Your book title can be your promise to your reader. What they will get out of reading your book, which we talked about. Create intrigue. Your title can engage your potential reader in a compelling way. Identify a need. Your book title can point out a need in someone's life or state the content. Simply state what the content is within the book. So interesting, this is another perspective of what we're talking about, is this pink strategy. *Profit First*. That title was interesting as compared to, I don't know, clockwork. When we wrote *Profit First*, it was very clear that it was a solution title, but also had an essence of promise around

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profitability. I remember speaking with Lisa, I can't remember her last name anymore. Dimona. Lisa Dimona, who I was considering as an agent. She never became my agent. She represents Seth Godin and so forth. She loved the title. She didn't like the book concept, and that's why we decided to part ways. But when we departed, she goes, "Mike, since you're doing this book," because I wanted to do the book. And she's like, "I don't think it's a good idea." She goes, "Make them regret it." Because I was going self-publishing.

AJ Harper [00:20:36]:

I remember that.

Mike Michalowicz [00:20:36]:

Yeah, it was her. I'm forever grateful. And now, as of this morning, 118 is its rank today.

AJ Harper [00:20:47]:

And that's an old book.

Mike Michalowicz [00:20:48]:

And it's ten years old. Yeah. 118 in the world. It's 118th best-selling book in the world today. That could change. That's the Amazon ranking. It will change, hopefully for the better. But that title walked in, and she's like, that is a great title, because it had that intrigue. It had the formula there. Once you understood it, you could just tell people, take your profit first. And that was never questioned by Penguin because we had self-published it. It was just an expansion clockwork. On the other hand, had like a thousand iterations.

AJ Harper [00:21:17]:

Do you know that I actually tell this story in my class?

Mike Michalowicz [00:21:20]:

Yes.

AJ Harper [00:21:20]:

You know better than I do now every session. And I call it the Horror Story.

Mike Michalowicz [00:21:24]:

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It was what was the original? Original?

AJ Harper [00:21:28]:

I have a whole slides deck that show some of the it was a horror story because you have to keep it's normal to have back and forth. But we actually had three times decided on final titles. That's what made it a horror story for me, because you have to adjust the book accordingly. Not the whole book, but enough of it that you're trying to make it work with that title. Right. So remember, we started with streamline was.

Mike Michalowicz [00:22:03]:

The proposal that was streamlined, but we.

AJ Harper [00:22:05]:

Knew it wasn't going to stay. It was just there. The protect the queen. You and I were we were down for that because about the queen bee and the beehives. And we were adamant. It's got to be that. Yeah, it's got to be that. And then we literally had dozens and dozens of back and forth ideas. And I'm just no offense to Penguin Random House, but some of the stuff they came across, the worst one—

Mike Michalowicz [00:22:35]:

I'll tell you, because it had the number 40 in it.

AJ Harper [00:22:38]:

Yes. They wanted to call the book The 40 Hours Entrepreneur.

Mike Michalowicz [00:22:45]:

Yeah.

AJ Harper [00:22:47]:

Who wants that? No, that's not—no. And then their subtitles were nuts, too, like how to streamline any business, any something, any anything. What are we doing? Yeah, we're clockworking the world. We can't do that! There were so many bad iterations, but the worst

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part was deciding, saying, "This is the title." So, we wrote most of it as *Protect the Queen*. Then they came back with, do you remember this? *Primetime*?

Mike Michalowicz [00:23:30]:

Oh, I do remember that.

AJ Harper [00:23:32]:

And I remember saying to you, okay. I said, "What is that?"

Mike Michalowicz [00:23:36]:

Yeah.

AJ Harper [00:23:37]:

You said, "I don't even know."

Mike Michalowicz [00:23:38]:

Yeah.

AJ Harper [00:23:39]:

But we were...so depleted. We had been back and forth.

Mike Michalowicz [00:23:43]:

I wanted to give in at times.

AJ Harper [00:23:45]:

And we did give in. And I remember I said to you, "You must swear a blood oath that I will make this work. I don't know what 'prime time' is."

Mike Michalowicz [00:23:53]:

Oh, yeah, that was it.

AJ Harper [00:23:55]:

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Blood oath. That this is the end, because we had to then restructure this concept of having a prime time.

Mike Michalowicz [00:24:02]:

Yeah, that's right.

AJ Harper [00:24:03]:

Okay. That changes things. Let me go back and rework these sections. And this is what I tell in my class. I was sitting in the hairdresser chair, which is my only “me” time, when you texted me: *bad news, prime time*. You must have been scared to text me. I don't know your version of this event, but I know you said, “Prime time's out,” and it was supposed to be the end.

Mike Michalowicz [00:24:29]:

Yeah.

AJ Harper [00:24:30]:

And that's the only time I ever considered throwing my cell phone against the wall. You found the title, but it was in that chair. I said, “All right, we're doing this now.”

Mike Michalowicz [00:24:41]:

Game on.

AJ Harper [00:24:42]:

And you and I were back and forth while I was getting my hair dyed.

Mike Michalowicz [00:24:44]:

Yeah.

AJ Harper [00:24:45]:

It was like a three-hour process. By the end of the three hours, we had a title. We had *Clockwork*.

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Mike Michalowicz [00:24:50]:

When that title hit, I was like yes. It felt like such a relief.

AJ Harper [00:24:54]:

It was a relief, but I didn't trust it because I thought they were going to say it's too much like Clockwork Orange.

Mike Michalowicz [00:24:59]:

Yeah. Which I did get some of that pushback people were like, oh, you're writing Clockwork Orange? No. And that was squashed within the launch. And there's no confusion. That book has now sold well over 100,000.

AJ Harper [00:25:11]:

And we wrote a revised and expanded edition.

Mike Michalowicz [00:25:12]:

Which came out last year, and it's cruising. It's cruising, that book.

AJ Harper [00:25:16]:

But that's my horror story. And the reason it was a horror story is just because once you settle on a title, it changes everything. So to have to go backwards correct. Is the part, but you should anticipate that you're going to have back and forth until you finally settle on it.

Mike Michalowicz [00:25:32]:

Yeah. There's no question about it.

AJ Harper [00:25:34]:

Yeah.

Mike Michalowicz [00:25:35]:

The Great Gatsby. I just finished reading that. But I should have read it in high school, I guess. I didn't, but I just finished reading it. That title... The author *loathed* the title.

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AJ Harper [00:25:46]:

I didn't know that.

Mike Michalowicz [00:25:46]:

Yeah, but the publisher forced it upon him. I can't remember the other title. They said some of the alternative titles that he came with, and they no, no. And I said, how about *The Great Gatsby*? And he's like, he acquiesced but didn't love it. And it's his best-selling book.

AJ Harper [00:26:03]:

You know what's interesting? Fiction is so different. With fiction, very often you got to have that title before you even you just have to feel it. It's something yeah.

Mike Michalowicz [00:26:13]:

That makes sense.

AJ Harper [00:26:14]:

Yeah. But then you often end up dishing it.

Mike Michalowicz [00:26:17]:

Yeah.

AJ Harper [00:26:17]:

Yeah.

Mike Michalowicz [00:26:19]:

Rory Vaden is a guy who has an extraordinary business. I can't remember the company's name at the moment. They help launch authors. Lewis Howes is one of their I think, and this is my own guess they represent hundreds, I think it may be over a thousand authors now in launching books and so forth. And one thing the came up with is this concept called the seven-title test. So I'm reading verbatim what Rory and his team have developed. He was kind enough to share with me. He goes, when looking at title, he goes, just run these seven tests to enhance the potential the I want blank test. And basically he said, "When you insert the title into the blank, it

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must speak to the target and be their biggest desire." The lesson was don't be intriguing, be enticing. So I want *Profit First* is intriguing, as opposed to perhaps some title where.

AJ Harper [00:27:13]:

It's like *The Pumpkin Plan*.

Mike Michalowicz [00:27:15]:

Yeah, I want right. That hurt.

AJ Harper [00:27:19]:

That's a good book.

Mike Michalowicz [00:27:20]:

It's a great book. And the title works. The second test is the positive energy test. High energy words, bright colors for the cover design. People want to feel good about it. So, is it positive energy, the clarity test? If the title needs to be explained, it fails word.

AJ Harper [00:27:37]:

That is so true.

Mike Michalowicz [00:27:39]:

Yeah.

AJ Harper [00:27:40]:

And if you need the subtitle to carry right, you can't lean on the subtitle. Subtitle is extra. It's not to explain the title.

Mike Michalowicz [00:27:51]:

Oh, I love that.

AJ Harper [00:27:52]:

Yeah, people don't get that.

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Mike Michalowicz [00:27:53]:

Don Miller said, "If you confuse, you lose." I like that term to phrase that. The native tongue test use terms specific to your community. Trust comes from common language. So interesting is *Profit First* doesn't translate into Spanish. In Spanish, it's *Lagancia es Primero*, which means "the gains come first." And so, if you say profitable, I think, which is *rendablay*, it doesn't make sense. So, you have to change it to gains. There's different phrasing. So, use the native tongue. And that's why when your book is published in other languages, that sometimes they won't use the title verbatim. *Fix This Next* in English is fix this, then fix that. In Spanish as an example... Interesting. The memorability test makes it a metaphor or extremely easy to parrot. We believe what we can repeat.

AJ Harper [00:28:54]:

True.

Mike Michalowicz [00:28:54]:

Yeah. So memorable is cool or metaphor is cool. I like the parrot-ability most.

AJ Harper [00:28:59]:

Yes.

Mike Michalowicz [00:29:00]:

The thumbnail test. Now, this really isn't just more of a design orientation, but the design must work perfectly at thumbnail size. 99% of sales are thumbnail sales now.

AJ Harper [00:29:11]:

Yeah. Yet another reason to not rely on the subtitle, because you can't see the subtitle in the thumbnail.

Mike Michalowicz [00:29:16]:

Yeah, I like that. The last of these seven tests is the availability test. This is what you were talking about. Is the title unique and not used before or at least not popular? People need to find you and only you. So, Orange Crush not just being trademarked, but you'd find a lot of soda when you Google *Surge*. The book *Surge* gets buried under *Surge* soda.

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AJ Harper [00:29:39]:

Yeah.

Mike Michalowicz [00:29:40]:

God damn soda takes all the titles for book.

AJ Harper [00:29:46]:

Okay. I always tell folks to do the simple free test, which is say it out loud, it's so silly, but we don't always practice that.

Mike Michalowicz [00:29:59]:

Oh. That's interesting.

AJ Harper [00:29:59]:

You say it, but not just as a title. You say it in a sentence. Have you read *Profit First*? Right. You practice saying and referring your title and recommending your title. Does it roll off the tongue? Do you have to trip over it like *Toilet Paper Entrepreneur*? That one is a lot of consonants and syllables.

Mike Michalowicz [00:30:20]:

Yeah, right.

AJ Harper [00:30:21]:

It's not quite rolling easily. It's memorable for other reasons.

Mike Michalowicz [00:30:26]:

Right. And it works.

AJ Harper [00:30:28]:

It worked. That said, there are plenty of titles that are really tough for people to remember. So they go into bookstores and they say, it's got a red cover and there's a million books with a red--

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Mike Michalowicz [00:30:41]:

Right.

AJ Harper [00:30:43]:

So, does it roll off the tongue? Does it sound like something people can remember and repeat to others?

Mike Michalowicz [00:30:49]:

There are online generators for titles. Hopefully we can put this in the show notes, but if you go to [Selfpublishing.com](https://www.selfpublishing.com), check out their nonfiction book title generator. You can also go to [Titlegenerator.com](https://www.titlegenerator.com) and check the out there, Chat GPT. You can go in and put synopsis and say, give me 100 title ideas. None of them may work, but it may be a great fuel for inspiration.

AJ Harper [00:31:15]:

Yeah. I think the main thing is get out of your own way with it. You've got to be willing to just write a bunch of bad titles.

Mike Michalowicz [00:31:22]:

Yeah. Tell me about the subtitle. We referred to it. It's an extension of the title. What purpose does the subtitle serve?

AJ Harper [00:31:31]:

Yeah, so it is an extension of the subtitle. Very often it is sharing some other aspect of the book. So, if the promise is not in the title, it might be in the subtitle. If the solution is not in the title, it might be in the subtitle. Or maybe the promise. It's more than just the promise. It's benefits. Right. But for the most part, I see it as that's where the promise lives.

Mike Michalowicz [00:31:55]:

I want to share a story about *Get Different*, that title. So *Get Different* is not a good selling, well-selling book. Good gosh. It does not sell well.

AJ Harper [00:32:06]:

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It's not selling as well as the other books.

Mike Michalowicz [00:32:07]:

No, it's not. The lowest selling book is probably *Fix This Next* and *Get Different*, probably the second lowest selling in volume, but had the most hype and anticipation by the publisher of all my books, including *Profit First*.

AJ Harper [00:32:25]:

And I would argue people really wanted.

Mike Michalowicz [00:32:28]:

That book from you, they really wanted the book. And I think it's probably my favorite.

AJ Harper [00:32:33]:

Well, I know the new one is my favorite.

Mike Michalowicz [00:32:36]:

The new one's my favorite, too.

AJ Harper [00:32:37]:

But *Get Different* is next underneath that. And the reason is it's a game changer of a book. It is, but it's a lot to ask of readers because we're not all Mike. It's hard to be different.

Mike Michalowicz [00:32:52]:

It's hard to be different, and it's hard to be different. And I think the title hurts it. My favorite rankings of book... *All In* is our best book ever, there's no question. Number two, I think is *The Pumpkin Plan*. It was just such a oh, really?—

AJ Harper [00:33:04]:

You love that title.

Mike Michalowicz [00:33:06]:

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—book. Yeah. *All In*, I think is the best book we--

AJ Harper [00:33:11]:

The Pumpkin Plan is really good.

Mike Michalowicz [00:33:12]:

It's really freaking good. It's really good. It still has that bite and edge to it.

AJ Harper [00:33:16]:

Well, it also is the first time that you and I were really all in with each other.

Mike Michalowicz [00:33:20]:

Yeah. But the story about *Get Different* is interesting, and I wonder if the title hurts it. The book was not titled *Get Different*. The book was titled *Different is Better*, and it was titled *Different is Better* until weeks before the hard stop.

AJ Harper [00:33:38]:

Talk about an 11th hour.

Mike Michalowicz [00:33:40]:

Yeah.

AJ Harper [00:33:40]:

Do you remember this? Oh, gosh.

Mike Michalowicz [00:33:42]:

So, I get a call from Sally Hogshead, who is a great friend. She's an extraordinary author. *Fascinate* is my favorite book that she's written. And we met up on multiple occasions. We horse around. She sent me some fabulous fun gifts. And she's really into eclectic, crazy stuff. So I sent her some stuff for hashtag. She collects skulls and stuff and puts on her walls and just crazy, but really artistically done. It's beautiful. She calls me and she's always this jovial uber optimist. And she's pissed or hurt or hurt, pissed or hissed. And she's, "Mike, your new book." I'm like,

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“Yeah?” She goes, Different is yeah, she goes, “My new book's coming out.” And she goes, “It's called *Different is Better*. You're killing me, Mike.”

AJ Harper [00:34:30]:

O, that was the title of her book.

Mike Michalowicz [00:34:31]:

Well, *Different Is Better Than Better*. Was her full title. *Different Is Better*.

AJ Harper [00:34:35]:

Okay, yeah. And she goes she had reason to be hurt.

Mike Michalowicz [00:34:39]:

Well, because she had speeches around this and so forth.

AJ Harper [00:34:41]:

But we didn't know that. You weren't thinking of that.

Mike Michalowicz [00:34:43]:

I wasn't thinking of that. Yeah, I wasn't thinking of it all. And I'm like, I just wasn't thinking. I knew she had said speeches on this, and I did a speech on *Different is Better*. Yeah, that's why it was very popular. Still is. If you go on YouTube, *Different Is Better*. And she's like, “It's really going to hurt me. Is there anything you can do?” I'm like, “I am so sorry, of course.” And I said, “Let me see if we can move heaven and earth.” We had to do a new cover design. I mean, this is all 11th hour, literally in the hours, so late into the night. The cover designer, which was Liz Debrisk at the time, we're working on the new cover design. We didn't even have a title. So, we start iterating with Penguin. And we have an emergency call with Nikki Papadopoulos and other folks. She's the number two at Portfolio.

AJ Harper [00:35:33]:

That was the fastest titling session I've ever been.

Mike Michalowicz [00:35:36]:

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Were you on that call?

AJ Harper [00:35:37]:

Yes.

Mike Michalowicz [00:35:37]:

And it's, like, *Get Different*. How about *Get Different*, everyone? We're in. And it was *Get Different*, and I don't know if it's the best title.

AJ Harper [00:35:46]:

It could have been what *Would You Have Done Differently?*

Mike Michalowicz [00:35:50]:

The problem with *Get Different* is it tells you what you must do right. And it sounds like outrageous to me. It means get outrageous.

AJ Harper [00:36:00]:

Maybe a promise title would have been better.

Mike Michalowicz [00:36:02]:

Yeah, exactly. Be noticed or be the popular kid. I don't know what it is but *Win The Business*. The problem with *Get Different* is I think people are seeing "Get Outrageous" and they can't see past that.

AJ Harper [00:36:15]:

Yeah.

Mike Michalowicz [00:36:16]:

And I'm not going to be outrageous. That's not who I am. I'm not going to be shot out of the cannon.

AJ Harper [00:36:23]:

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I think you're right.

Mike Michalowicz [00:36:24]:

I think that's the problem.

AJ Harper [00:36:24]:

I think the title is yeah, it's such a good book.

Mike Michalowicz [00:36:30]:

It's such a good book. It's such a good book. And the people who have read it and done it, the feedback is: "Business exploding. Transform myself. I believe in myself more than ever. I'm not faking anything."

AJ Harper [00:36:41]:

Yeah. Of all your books, it's the most personally transformative.

Mike Michalowicz [00:36:46]:

Yeah. And I wonder if it could have just been like *Sell More by Being You* or something like that. Basic. So must be an interesting story of a blind spot I had to a titling thing, which I don't think I was seen unless Sally picked up the phone. Thank God she did. And she was so kind. She's like, I will support you in every single way. And she did when the book came out. And she sent me this beautiful gift and her book is now coming out. So Google Different—

AJ Harper [00:37:14]:

Get that one.

Mike Michalowicz [00:37:14]:

Yeah. Different is Better than Better by Sally Hogshead. Get it, but also get mine as like a backup material. A couple other tips I have is make sure you check out... Amazon is a great resource for searching titles. Once you have title ideas, is to see what comes up prior to you publishing your book. So, once you have your titles, go on Amazon and do searches for it and see what you find. Make sure you can secure a domain. And here's a little tip, because so many domains already taken, I still think the dot coms are the way to go. But there's a lot of new ones that you can get, and I think they work too. But add the word book at the end or the book to the domain. So, if

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you're trying to get *Surge* and *Surge* is taken surge.com, maybe you can get Surgethebook.com. Another thing is you can do buy in the author's name. So surge by Mike Michalowicz or surge by Mike, and even a long kind of Mike surge by Mike Michalowicz, it sounds like. Oh, that's unruly or unwieldy. That is very good for SEO. It feels like Mike Michalowicz. So they'll find it and then you can get a tiny URL or a forwarding link that will go to that page. So, when I read the audio for *Surge*, for example, I won't say, "Go to Surge by Mike Michalowicz." I'll say, "Go to thesurgebook.com" and you type in the Surgebook.com. Hit the forwarding link and goes to *Surge* by Mike Michalowicz. Anything else we need to cover in titles?

AJ Harper [00:38:45]:

I think just be willing to be really bad at it for a while. Just let yourself be free with it. We hold too many. We're just afraid of what every title is going to sound like. We're afraid of saying something bad, we're afraid of getting it wrong. And sometimes it's that process of just letting yourself write a bunch of really crappy titles that helps you land on it.

Mike Michalowicz [00:39:07]:

What I do is I would make a cover for even if its hand drawn initially, just to see how the words look visually. I think that's often overlooked. So, every book we do, I have, it either roughly designed or hand designed. I put it in my office, and it'll sit there for a year. So, *All In* is in my office now for the last actually 18 months.

AJ Harper [00:39:27]:

I just saw the cover on Amazon.

Mike Michalowicz [00:39:29]:

Oh, it's on Amazon?

AJ Harper [00:39:30]:

Yeah.

Mike Michalowicz [00:39:31]:

Looks pretty cool. But it was in my office just to get a sense for what's the book's like. And sometimes ideas pop up of graphics. So how that? It's one hand pulling up the other in *All In*, right? That's what I wanted to represent, is teamwork. And I've been looking at it and think, oh, the eye in *All In* could be two hands joined together. And then when Izzy, our in-house designer,

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looked at it, she goes, oh, that's one pulling up others dependency. She goes, what if it's more of a cross? The angle on the end? And that's how it became what it is today. So just by having it on a piece of paper written, it allows your mind to start playing with it visually more than just the text itself. Last thing I want to say here, Codex President Peter Hildeck Smith said their presence on the bestsellers list and Codex charts demonstrates the direct impact of a strong cover design and the use of the title, particularly from results based on Amazon, that people deeply understand the necessity to get their title across in their cover designs. So, interesting insight. All right, I think that's all I had on titling. Is that all you got?

AJ Harper [00:40:40]:

Yeah, that's all I have.

Mike Michalowicz [00:40:41]:

Okay, so here what we ask you to do, our dear listeners, is go to our website. We have our free materials there. We'll put links up there for you and we want to get you on our email list so we can share our latest and greatest stuff. By the way, AJ has an amazing course called the Top Three Workshop. Right? Is it workshop?

AJ Harper [00:40:59]:

Top Three Book Workshop.

Mike Michalowicz [00:41:00]:

Book Workshop, which will be transformative for you. So we'll have information there. I have a little group called Penned with Purpose, which we're helping authors become what they've always dreamed not necessarily mainstream authors, but very successful authors. We have all that information@dwtbpodcast.com that's don't writethebookpodcast.com. Also, we'd love to hear your stories about your book. Any best tips you have that we can share and maybe we can feature what you're doing on the show. Email us at hello@dwtbpodcast.com. Thanks for joining us today. We look forward to seeing you on the next episode. And as always, don't write that book close.