

# don't write *that* book!

## Episode 21:

### Personal Story

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

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**.

**Mike Michalowicz** ([00:15](#)):

Today we're going to talk about using personal stories in your nonfiction book. But first I want to introduce my cohost. **AJ Harper** is in the studio. Hey, AJ.

**AJ Harper**

Hi.

**Mike Michalowicz**

And I have a personal story about you. I really think, think that you're a great storyteller, not just in prose, not just in books, but in, in just personal conversations. I remember a story. I hope this isn't really too much. When your mother would be at work. I think it was at the University?

**AJ Harper** ([00:45](#)):

Oh, she was getting her PhD.

**Mike Michalowicz** ([00:47](#)):

Yeah. And you would be in a closet in the hallway immersed in books.

**AJ Harper** ([00:51](#)):

It sounds like I was in trouble, in solitary.

**Mike Michalowicz** ([00:55](#)):

Yeah, it sounds, yeah, it does sound like, yeah, you, you were being held hostage, but you share a story and the visuals, you didn't give too many elements. You said you were in this hallway and there's this closet here, and you could have a books and you kind of had your own for—

**AJ Harper** ([01:08](#)):

I had a green cot.

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**Mike Michalowicz** ([01:10](#)):

A green cot. It sounded like you had a fort. All the imagery kind of filled in. And that's why I found so remarkable is you were telling a story. I could see the, the, it wasn't brick walls, but it was like these, it was a form of cement and it had this cool archway in my mind. And I'm not saying that's what it was. And I, I could see that water fountain from the seventies that would sit there, that every kid.

**AJ Harper** ([01:29](#)):

I mean, the fountain was probably there. (I, I don't know.) It was at Jones Hall, at the University of Minnesota campus. So less cinder block. And more brick.

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

Brick. Okay. <Laugh> just, you give such color to specific elements, the green cot. (Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>) I, I pictured a little bit of a Harry Potter kind of under the steps thing, and that the reader or the listener in this case could fill in the rest of the story. And it became personal to me. And I think that's the power of a great story.

**AJ Harper** ([01:59](#)):

You remembered that. That's so interesting. Because my mom at that point was a single mom, so if she had to work on this computer at Jones Hall, she had to bring me with her.

**Mike Michalowicz** ([02:08](#)):

She's like, I'll stick my girl in the closet, you know?

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

Well. The door was open.

**Mike Michalowicz** ([02:12](#)):

<Laugh>. Yeah. I I suspect it was.

**AJ Harper** ([02:14](#)):

I got tired. I had to take a nap.

**Mike Michalowicz** ([02:16](#)):

Well, that's my introduction of you. Thanks for being a great storyteller.

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

Thank you. Hmm. I usually like to mirror that with you in terms of, you're a good storyteller, too. The one you actually told a story on this podcast that I almost peed my pants with the airport story where you were, you slept in the truck, and you were worried about that maybe—

**Mike Michalowicz** ([02:40](#)):

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To make it to my speaking gig.

**AJ Harper** ([02:41](#)):

<laugh>. But you were worried that people would think you were a terrorist.

**Mike Michalowicz** ([02:45](#)):

No. Well...

**AJ Harper** ([02:45](#)):

And you all this

**Mike Michalowicz** ([02:47](#)):

Human trafficker.

**AJ Harper** ([02:49](#)):

Worse. Okay. But not only did I almost pee my pants, but Laura Stone who is a magical person on my team, she's amazing. She listens to all these episodes, and she cleans up the transcripts and she writes a bunch of copy for it. She texted me. She was just beside herself with that story. I don't even remember which episode it's in. You'll have to probably listen to all of them to find it. Yeah. But the thing about your stories is you get, you love to talk about how ridiculous you are.

**Mike Michalowicz** ([03:19](#)):

I do. I guess I do.

**AJ Harper** ([03:20](#)):

And that's those are the best stories.

**Mike Michalowicz** ([03:24](#)):

Yeah. They're

**AJ Harper** ([03:24](#)):

Humbling. When you kind of like the do dork-tastic.

**Mike Michalowicz** ([03:27](#)):

Yeah. Yeah. Oh, dork-tastic. That's a great word. I've got to remember that.

**AJ Harper** ([03:30](#)):

You need a T-shirt that says that.

**Mike Michalowicz** ([03:31](#)):

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Yeah. You know what, I'm going to write it down. I do need that. Laura is a beautiful soul. Laura Stone.  
Yeah. Laura Stone

**AJ Harper** ([03:38](#)):

Couldn't, couldn't do a thing without her.

**Mike Michalowicz** ([03:41](#)):

And an avid gardener.

**AJ Harper** ([03:43](#)):

She's a Master Gardener, actually.

**Mike Michalowicz** ([03:45](#)):

More than avid, then.

**AJ Harper** ([03:45](#)):

Yes. But also she's, you know, over the years, learned so much about helping authors. I initially hired her because she's so good at encouraging people. And she's also a novelist, three novels. She's working on her fourth. But I knew she would be great to help authors, but she's also become now over the years so knowledgeable. So she's just like, she's like the whole package.

**Mike Michalowicz** ([04:12](#)):

Great cheerleader, too, for authors. Yeah. You know what, one last thing about her, because I think it's relevant to what we're talking about in just a minute, is she shared with me the proper ways to prune fruit trees <laugh>. Right. but what's interesting is, I believe, and why I think this is relevant is our mind has an inventory, a catalog of where we acquire maybe material things, but also knowledge. And I think that parlays to this, I, I will forever, I think remember that Laura gave me guidance on this from my little mini orchard at my house. And I think when you give great personal stories in your book, it has this stickiness factor. And you therefore will always remember the source. Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>. Yeah. It builds this great affinity.

**Mike Michalowicz** ([05:07](#)):

What is... Why don't you just tell me about the importance of storytelling as a general concept in books, and then why personal stories is extremely relevant?

**AJ Harper** ([05:17](#)):

Yeah, so it's really basic storytelling. You know, there's the entertainment factor. We all have a good story. But really in a non-fiction book, you use story to provide clarity. So maybe you impart a message, and then the story gives the reader greater understanding about that message. Hmm. Right. Or let's say you had a framework and then you introduced the framework and then tell a story that demonstrates the framework in action. That's a clarity piece. Using story for clarity, for greater understanding. Then there's recall, which you already mentioned. We are more likely to remember a message when it's tied

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to a story. If you want to teach your reader something, and then you tie it to story, they'll remember it. (Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>) because of the story. A really, really important connection. I think this is maybe the most important reason to demonstrate that you understand the reader where they are in the journey by sharing your own story that may not be exactly where they are but has the same emotional notes. Right?

**AJ Harper** ([06:20](#)):

And you can also create connection through what we just talked about, your story. So that story about the green cot that would help you connect with me, especially if I threw in, if I framed it right. So the Green Cot story. Yeah. I write books about writing. So I believe that because my mom was a single mom trying to get her PhD in ancient history and raised me, that the environment she put me in contributed to me being who I am today. Because not only was I in Jones Hall with books and stuff, she also had to spend a lot of time at the library at the U of M. And this was the <laugh>. This was, I'm Gen X, like you, so that means we were feral <laugh>. So <laugh>, you know, you would never, you would have your kids sit next to you at the library these days.

**AJ Harper** ([07:11](#)):

Yeah, yeah. But (Not, no, not back then.) Mom was like in this, I still remember this glass room where the smokers could sit. Yeah. So they, all the smokers would be doing their research in this glass room, and then she would just be like, all right, "See ya." Yeah. I'm like seven wandering around floors and floors, reading whatever. (Yeah.) There was no limit. So I could frame that whole cot story about how I was immersed in this land of literature. Yeah. I could also frame it in a totally different way about my mom's diligence in writing her dissertation, which incidentally is like two giant door stops. It's a two-volume thing. Once went and founded in that same library when I was an adult. And how that influenced me about how you need to work toward creating something great. So, if I just told you that it wouldn't have as big an impression on you as if I told you the Green Cot story. So, also there's you and another form of connection. We do this intentionally, but not manipulatively. And it's not manipulative. We kind of always throw you under the bus in the books.

**Mike Michalowicz** ([08:20](#)):

Yeah. But it's, it's, it's stylistically who I am.

**AJ Harper** ([08:22](#)):

It's who you are. That's right. You told the story about what a dork-tastic person you were. You could have avoided all the things I know in your airport story, and you have all these stories all the time, and that's authentic to you. You're always humbling yourself and showing your mistakes. And we do that in the books, but it's a point of connection. It makes people laugh. It makes people feel close to you. Correct. Because you're not a guru. So, so we've got clarity recall, entertainment and connection. And the last one is social proof. So you can use a story to say, here's the thing that I believe and I know it's true, because here's the story. Yes. Or here's the thing that I think works and I know it's true, because here's a results outcome story that I can share with you.

**Mike Michalowicz** ([09:08](#)):

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The number one form of feedback I get from readers that affirms stories work is when they say, I know you've been there. (Yeah.) And that is a big affirmation. I trust you because I know you've been there. Maybe that's the social proof part. I'll give you two stories that I hear most frequently. You won't be surprised. It's the *Profit First* piggy bank story, my dog.

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

It's a piggy bank story.

**Mike Michalowicz** ([09:29](#)):

Yeah. It, it connects with people. It's raw, it's real. And it was my darkest moment in my life and triggered my mission for profitability, to drive profitability. So, what's interesting is it's relatable to people. because A lot of people have been there a flavor of it. But they also see why I am so passionate about eradicating entrepreneurial poverty. The second story, which I'm hearing frequently now, and I don't even know what book it's in, (I can tell you.) maybe you can tell me the book, probably the Lobster reanimation.

**AJ Harper** ([10:00](#)):

What is that? Wait, maybe I can't tell you.

**Mike Michalowicz** ([10:03](#)):

It's so, it, because it's there is, I, this is a very,

**AJ Harper** ([10:07](#)):

Wait, what is it?

**Mike Michalowicz** ([10:08](#)):

In one of our books? Maybe it was *All In*, I talk about one day if we bump into each other, you've got to ask me about the lobster reanimation, because my wife and I went to a hunting camp by accident. So the story is this, I book a camp to, to get a family way. It's an all-inclusive for family, food, stuff up in Maine. I'm like, I found it.

**AJ Harper** ([10:29](#)):

Oh yeah. The f the camp, the failed camp story.

**Mike Michalowicz** ([10:31](#)):

And we go there and everyone's wearing camouflage. I'm like, what the hell did I do?

**AJ Harper** ([10:34](#)):

Oh. Yeah. Oh, it's not in *All In*.

**Mike Michalowicz** ([10:37](#)):

Mean, it's clockwork. I,

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**AJ Harper** ([10:39](#)):

I, I can't remember. Okay. I totally should not have been so confident <laugh>.

**Mike Michalowicz** ([10:42](#)):

Right. But here's what's interesting. So in there, there's just a one liner saying, and by the way, if we ever run into each other, ask me about the lobster reanimation. And I'm hearing it with frequency now. People are like, "What was the lobster reanimation story?" So I've recounted on podcasts, if people ask me a live presentation, someone raised their hand and they tell me about the story. And it's a funny—

**AJ Harper** ([11:03](#)):

Okay. But I'm—

**Mike Michalowicz** ([11:04](#)):

—bad Father moment

**AJ Harper** ([11:05](#)):

<Laugh> Okay. I think they're ask asking you that though, because they don't know, and they want to know.

**Mike Michalowicz** ([11:12](#)):

Correct. There's the—it's a cliffhanger inside the book.

**AJ Harper** ([11:14](#)):

Yeah. Is that... okay. I don't think that the story's memorable though. No,

**Mike Michalowicz** ([11:18](#)):

The story's not memorable. What? But—

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

In the same way as piggy bank.

**Mike Michalowicz** ([11:23](#)):

By all means, by all means. I think it's as interesting that we inserted something that triggered connection in a unique way in a book. It simply said, when we get the opportunity to meet face to face, ask me this. (Yeah.) Which basically said, this is going to transcend a reading of a book. And I think that was kind of a cool thing. So, it was a really unique use of a teaser to build further connection.

**AJ Harper** ([11:48](#)):

Yeah. And I, I also think, I, I think that we also need to show how we figured things out. We need to tell the stories about how we figured out core message, how we came to believe that. (Yes.) And it's usually not one aha, it's a journey. But when you we're afraid to do it, because we want to come off as knowing

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it's a credibility factor. It comes back to who's going to read this book? Who, why me? I shouldn't do this. It comes back to these insecurities I hear all the time. And if we share a personal story about how we came to understand the message that we are trying to impart now, that actually is maybe even the most important personal story. Because that shows that you, that you, how you came, that get builds the credibility right there in that statement or not statement. That that journey you have that in chapter one of *All In* It's the journey. It's also in *Get Different*, the whole core message, origin story is in *Get Different*. It's in *All In*. It's in *Clockwork*. (I agree. Yep. Yeah.) *Profit First* isn't set up the same way.

**Mike Michalowicz** ([13:10](#)):

No. It, no, it's not really in the beginning.

**AJ Harper** ([13:12](#)):

But I think it's really effective use of personal storytelling. And most people leave out how they figured things out, and I think it's because they worry that it doesn't make them look professional enough.

**Mike Michalowicz** ([13:25](#)):

It is interesting. When we're working together, one of the questions you'll ask early on is some flavor of when did this become important to you? (Mm-Hmm. <Affirmative>.) And where was your aha moment? Should all books, all nonfiction books have personal stories?

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

I think so. I people will disagree with me though, but I, I'm going to stay there. I'm going to stay in my lane. I'm, I all the reasons I just said, they're so effective. And you don't have to have a lot of them. But I think we want to know the author when we're talking about prescriptive nonfiction, I think we want to know who we're learning from that's telling us how to change our lives.

**Mike Michalowicz** ([14:03](#)):

What if we're depicting medical research, this is what the industry says. Or what if we're writing about the stock market trends, do you think,

**AJ Harper** ([14:10](#)):

Well, that's not prescriptive nonfiction, that's a different kind of nonfiction. Okay. But if you're trying to help somebody change their life, I think they want to know you.

**Mike Michalowicz** ([14:19](#)):

Interesting. Yeah. Okay. Any mistakes people make with personal stories? I shouldn't say any. What are the mistakes people make with personal stories?

**AJ Harper** ([14:27](#)):

Too many to count on this podcast, <laugh>. Okay. But here's just a few things I see a lot: dumping their life story. So what they do is they don't know how to pull apart the story, their personal story. They don't



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know which ones to use. So incidentally, if you wrote down the clarity, connection, recall, entertainment, social proof, that will help you figure it out. Does your story help you with the one of those things?

**Mike Michalowicz** ([14:51](#)):

Do you want to check off many of those things? Just going back to that, do I want to have connection and social proof and entertainment?

**AJ Harper** ([14:59](#)):

No. It can just be one.

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

But is it better when you have multiple in there? Does it amplify the effect?

**AJ Harper** ([15:05](#)):

I mean,, not necessarily. An entertaining story is always good. (Yeah). But sometimes we throw a story in just for entertainment.

**Mike Michalowicz** ([15:12](#)):

Okay.

**AJ Harper** ([15:14](#)):

No, you don't have to check off everything on that list. (Okay.) But don't include it if you can't check off one.

**Mike Michalowicz** ([15:18](#)):

Right. Exactly. So you've got to have at least one and more could be your vantage.

**AJ Harper** ([15:23](#)):

Yeah. So people, people do this thing where they don't know how to do it. And you look, if you don't know how to do it, that's okay. (Yeah.) This is not, doesn't come naturally to people who are not writers by profession. So don't chastise yourself about it. But what happens is people don't know what to do, so they dump their whole life story into the open. (Yeah.) It's in the Intro or it's in Chapter One, the whole long thing, which is absolutely counterintuitive because you're supposed to be focused on the reader.

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

Yeah.

**AJ Harper** ([15:55](#)):

So then, and I've seen this happen so many times, pages and pages of life story, most of which we don't need. And then nothing.

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**Mike Michalowicz** ([16:05](#)):

My wife and I were once in an argument and I start going on about all my points, and she just looks at me and she goes, "Boring!" <laugh> And she walked out of the room. <laugh> It cut like a knife. I was like, and that's what, that's what some of these authors are doing.

**AJ Harper** ([16:17](#)):

Yeah. They're focused on themselves.

**Mike Michalowicz** ([16:19](#)):

Boring! And you lose the reader.

**AJ Harper** ([16:21](#)):

And we don't really need all the details. We, we need the turning point moments in personal stories. A turning point moment is when something happens. And it doesn't have to be dramatic. We're not talking car accident here. (Yeah.) Could be. But it could be, you heard something on a podcast. Yep. It could be you were flooded with memories of the green cot. (Right.) It could be a difficult conversation you had or a string of moments. But the point is, a turning point moment is when you, something happens that changes the way you think about something, which then changes your behavior. And those are the personal story moments that we need. We don't need the stuff in between. We just don't.

**Mike Michalowicz** ([17:07](#)):

Some authors dump their grievances.

**AJ Harper** ([17:10](#)):

Oh yeah. That's a huge one. Yeah.

**Mike Michalowicz** ([17:14](#)):

They call them rants to make it a little more sexy.

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

Well, they're rants or they are honestly throwing people under the bus. I tell this story in my book of a woman I worked with once who wrote a chapter for a book. So, you know, one of those book collections. And she kept writing this <laugh> really nasty stuff about her ex-husband. And she was fresh off the divorce. (Yeah.) And I kept editing it out, and every time she'd send it back to me, it was back in. Yeah. And I finally had to have a frank conversation with her and say, "Okay first of all, this is really fresh for you. So your perspective is, you know, you don't, it's not far enough in your rear view to give us a good perspective. Secondly, I don't know how this is useful to your reader. Third, I want you to go fast forward five years, and I want you to think about picking this book up. Are you going to be happy you wrote it or are you going to regret the things that you said and the real estate on the page that you used to write about a person that's in the past?" And finally, I said, "What are your, what will your kids say?"

**Mike Michalowicz** ([18:26](#)):

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Oh my gosh.

**AJ Harper** ([18:28](#)):

So we keep

**Mike Michalowicz** ([18:28](#)):

Just good tips.

**AJ Harper** ([18:29](#)):

Listen, don't put the grievances. Write them in your journal. That's it. Just write them in your journal.

**Mike Michalowicz** ([18:36](#)):

I love that framing of five years, what we were, what your kids say. Little side story. I'm meeting with Suzy Welch this weekend next, you know, this Sunday. So a few days from now she is the author of the *10-10-10*. She was married to Jack Welch who subsequently has passed. But, but she wrote the 10, 10 10. And the framing of her book, and I think it's such a simple insight, is any consideration you're making in life, ask yourself how I feel in the next 10 hours, the next 10 months. In the next 10 years. Because we put this heavy weighting on the a-ha moment now. (Yeah. Mm-Hmm. <Affirmative>.) So it, it's very similar. And with a personal story. I like that you, you gave that same framing. Anything else we should avoid as personal stories?

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

So it's not really avoiding, it's just an assumption people make so they don't find their best stories. They think the stories have to be really dramatic, tragic. They think they have to have overcome some major thing in order to be somebody of, of interest. Right. Not true. Right. So you don't, it's not about a phoenix rising from the ashes every single time. It's it could be small moments, but if they're turning point moments where your behavior change, that's interesting.

**Mike Michalowicz** ([19:49](#)):

I want to add to avoid that believing a story needs to be a certain length. It doesn't need to be 10 paragraphs or a chapter. A story can be two lines. It can be interwoven.

**AJ Harper** ([20:00](#)):

Well, no, it has to have, it has to have a beginning, middle, and end, and stakes. To be a story, that would be hard for most people to pull off. And two, you can do it.

**Mike Michalowicz** ([20:10](#)):

Yeah.

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

Well, in two sentences.

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

You can do it in two sentences, and I'll give you the classic example one, there was two authors, I don't know who it was. You probably heard this story saying, can you write the most profound story in the fewest words? (Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>.) And the author said, "It's a want ad. Baby shoes for sal ; never used."

**AJ Harper** ([20:27](#)):

Hemingway, right?

**Mike Michalowicz** ([20:28](#)):

Yeah. But you can do it!

**AJ Harper** ([20:31](#)):

Well. Succinctly. You can do it. I just think this is actually a good point to say what's an anecdote versus a story. Yeah. An anecdote is an incident. Just a little aside. Right. About an incident, a small moment. Often it's an amusing anecdote or it's usually sometimes just an example. But a story has the beginning, middle, and end. It has the setup. It has the conflict in the middle. And it has a resolution. And it also, and this is the part people often forget, it has stakes. What is at stake for the main person in the story, the protagonist. If it's personal story, that's you. And if you don't, so what's at stake? If you don't get it what you want, if you don't do the thing, if you don't change what's at stake. And we omit stakes from stories, and we wrongly think that anecdotes are stories and we try to make too much of them. So it's important to know the distinction.

**Mike Michalowicz** ([21:30](#)):

I shared with you as we're writing *All In*, my father was actively dying during the writing the book. And I had a story that I tearfully shared with you, and you said, "I think we need to include that in the book. And more than I think we need to include in that book as an epilogue." What, what are the things you wish authors would do with their personal stories that maybe they're not doing?

**AJ Harper** ([21:55](#)):

I, well, there's, so, there's so, okay. <Laugh> Stakes is a big one.

**Mike Michalowicz** ([22:00](#)):

Yeah. I like that.

**AJ Harper** ([22:01](#)):

Being vulnerable, allowing yourself to be real. Remember when you draft a story, it's just you and the words. We put too much pressure on ourselves to have a first draft. That's great. We forget nobody has to read it. <Laugh>, it's just you in that moment. So letting yourself be vulnerable, you can always edit. The other thing I think is we tend to tell the story instead of show the story. So we don't give people the scene. We don't show those big turning point moments as a scene. We just talk about them. So we say, I, then I realized, but we actually aren't showing the moment of realization. Hmm. So it's, it's not as

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effective. We hear all the time show don't tell, but there's some simple things you can do. One is to use the really important dialogue. So it's not all the dialogue, but the, the big moments.

**AJ Harper (22:56):**

So let's use the piggy bank stories is a really good example of balancing, telling and showing. If you go look at that book, that story and *Profit First*, first of all, that took weeks to write. (Mm-Hmm. <Affirmative>). Just so we're really clear. (Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>.) And I think I had maybe two or three conversations with you to get it. So I had to keep asking you for things. If you look at the structure, it's set up the set up the problem, but it doesn't start with the piggy bank. It starts with you going on an ego trip.

**Mike Michalowicz (23:28):**

Right.

**AJ Harper (23:29):**

And, but you, there's a lot of telling in the beginning about investing in companies and your kind of ego. But then we do zoom in on a scene that best exemplifies your ego and arrogance, which is when you went to buy the cars. And your wife says, "Are you sure we can afford this?" It didn't have the whole conversation with the salesperson. No. It just had this quite one thing from her. Then there's some more telling to move the story forward summarizing. Right? And then we have another scene that we show, which is you getting news from your accountant. So it's only the dialogue from the accountant that moves the story forward. Then finally we get to the big moment, piggy bank, and now it's a longer scene because now there's emotion in this. So instead of saying what happened, we show you coming into the house how you felt in your body, what you were thinking, what you said, and the most important dialogue of all, "I lost everything." And the second most important dialogue, which is why people remember the story, which is your daughter saying, we're going to make it, or here go.

**Mike Michalowicz (24:50):**

She's, "I'll provide for the family."

**AJ Harper (24:52):**

Now here we go. Yeah. But so that isn't goals study that there's pull, like zoom in moments and zoom out moments. Yep. So zoom in is showing and zoom out is telling.

**Mike Michalowicz (25:04):**

There's anchoring too with imagery.

**AJ Harper (25:06):**

Yeah. So that's the other thing I do. And I call it visual anchors. And so the piggy bank is the visual anchor. Also there are cars, were a visual anchor. Yep. But the main one is piggy bank. And that's why nobody says, oh, I love that Valentine's Day story. I love that. Range Rover story. Those are, they don't say that. It's, there's a reason because we took the time to describe, remember I even asked you what color is the

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piggy bank? Was it beat up? Was there tape on it? Yeah. So we describe it why that visual anchor works so well in that personal story is because of the description of the piggy bank, not the dining room and the wallpaper and the, this just, just the piggy bank. Right? And combined with an emotional anchor. (Right.) Emotion, the emotional anchor is shame.

**Mike Michalowicz** ([25:58](#)):

Right.

**AJ Harper** ([25:59](#)):

That one's, that one's the killer. Yeah. Right. Yeah. Shame and piggy bank makes that hands down the most important story you have. So if you can incorporate visual and emotional anchors into a story you, you have a greater chance for recall and connection

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

Translates to powerful speaking opportunities, too. So when I speak, I always share that story. And when you, when you can write a great story, you can also present a great story. (Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>.) Are there details you want to share about fast forwarding, focusing on the readers?

**AJ Harper** ([26:35](#)):

We did, we did talk about fast forwarding. So, you know that's for if you're going to share details about other people. So, you know, I had I have a story about my son Jack in my Call to Greatness in my book. And I got his permission to—

**Mike Michalowicz** ([26:54](#)):

Which is, I think you're in the epilogue too, is with the basketball coach with Jack.

**AJ Harper** ([27:02](#)):

Well, it's mostly about Jack, but there's some. But I disguise the basketball coach's name.

**Mike Michalowicz** ([27:06](#)):

Yeah. You didn't say the name. So I'm curious if it, do you need to get everyone's permission? (No.) Okay. And if you don't, you disguise the name. You just said this, the coach.

**AJ Harper** ([27:16](#)):

You can tell your story of your experience. You get to tell the story. Just be careful if you're going to show somebody in a negative light that you think really think twice. because you can't stop anybody from suing you. And really just ask yourself, do the fast forward thing. Do I need this? Do I need to show this person this way?

**Mike Michalowicz** ([27:34](#)):

Oh, right. So the fast forward is the five years. Where are your child's, where are...

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**AJ Harper** ([27:38](#)):

Your children going to? And then, but because, but this, I really want to make this point. If it's someone you love and care about, get their permission because it can cause problems. So even though my story is positive and shows my son in a great light, I would never have published it if he said, no.

**Mike Michalowicz** ([27:53](#)):

Smart,

**AJ Harper** ([27:54](#)):

Because he is my son. I don't need, I care more about that relationship. So we have to always remember that.

**Mike Michalowicz** ([27:59](#)):

Opening story of *Profit First*, Debbie Horovich crying. We're on stage presenting. And, and she comes during a commercial break and starts crying about her financial situation. I spoke with her, I said, you know, I want to include your story with your permission. This will expose people to understanding it's okay to be stuck in the struggle, but I'm okay with you saying no. And she said, "I demand that you do this." And that became a transformative moment too. We include that in the book. We said that not only did Debbie, that I get permission, she required the story, as much as you can. That's included because other people need to be exposed to this.

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

Right. So that was your personal story and she was the main star of it though. (She was, yeah.) And she's actually gone on. She loves to talk about it. She talks about being in that book all the time.

**Mike Michalowicz** ([28:47](#)):

She's grown a business from it!

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

Yeah. She's <laugh>.

**Mike Michalowicz** ([28:49](#)):

She's smart.

**AJ Harper** ([28:49](#)):

Most people are pretty good with it if long as you're respectful.

**Mike Michalowicz** ([28:53](#)):

She was so smart how she leveraged it and packaged it, presented it, and she used it as one of her humble moments that has built connection for her. Just freaking smart.

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**AJ Harper** ([29:04](#)):

If I could say one thing before we close. Yeah. I just, I think I hear all the time from authors is I don't want to be too much.

**Mike Michalowicz** ([29:10](#)):

Okay.

**AJ Harper** ([29:11](#)):

I was just in my writing sprint community and one of my authors was worried about that and she's writing a memoir and she was worried about being too much. And I said, just <laugh> just, she's wonderful, but this is, she's not alone. Everyone worries about it. I don't want to be too much, too much me. I just encourage everybody to share as much as they can. And then in editing you can pull back if needed. Especially, and a good editor will tell you, "Hey, let's streamline this. Hey, I think you have too many of these things." It's very often though the opposite is true. You don't have enough.

**Mike Michalowicz** ([29:48](#)):

I've noticed that in life too. When I meet with people, most people reserve so much as very surface. There, there are a couple people you run into, you're like, oh my God. Cut off the story. But that's one out of a hundred, a hundred people you never connect with. (Yeah.) It's interesting how that presents itself in books. Yes. Anything else you wanted to share before we wrapped up?

**AJ Harper** ([30:09](#)):

No, just, just write it and try it. Just try it.

**Mike Michalowicz** ([30:13](#)):

I'll give one final tip. What I do is when a story comes up, I will try to capture as quickly as possible. Usually in my little note taker, I use One Note from Microsoft I think it is. And I'll be like, oh, this is a funny story. I, or interesting story or profound moment. And I don't know how I'll use it, but I will likely use it one time. So here's one of the stories I just captured. I don't know, I'm not sure if I shared on enough podcast already, but this was only a few weeks ago, so I'm sure I didn't, I'm in Bend, Oregon. I'm with an Uber driver, not an Uber driver, a limo driver. And he's driving me back to the airport and we start up a dialogue and I'm like, oh, you must get a lot of vacationers and stuff.

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

You probably never get celebrities out here. It's like, oh, you'd be surprised. I get quite a few celebrities. And I said, oh, who? He's like, well, some of them I'm contractually obligated. I can't tell you I'm their regular driver and they don't want to be known they're here. But Lionel Richie was here and some other people, they were filming the show, the Voice or something. I'm like, holy cow, that must be so amazing. You must kind of lose your mind. And he said it was a great sentence. He goes, no. He goes, "They are ordinary people with extraordinary careers." And he goes, that is what so many people don't understand. These are not extraordinary people. We're all ordinary people. They just have an extraordinary job. I'm



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like, that is gold. It's, I quickly wrote it down. Yeah. I have the story. And I don't know one day that may come into play 10 years from now or not, but constantly capture those stories.

**AJ Harper** ([31:42](#)):

Yeah, absolutely.

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

Okay, we just finished this episode of Don't Write that book. We invite you two to get the free materials, all that content, all the good stuff. You can sign up for our email list too, so we can keep you abreast of stuff that's going on. Who knows, maybe one day we'll record this live in front of a group of people in, in an audience or something. So go to [dw.tb.podcast.com](http://dw.tb.podcast.com) and please do subscribe. Also, we'd be really honored if you rate and review the show. That helps us and make sure you subscribe to this show. It just helps a lot. And any questions, comments, thoughts, concerns, email us at [hello@dwbpodcast.com](mailto:hello@dwbpodcast.com). Both AJ and I get that so you can reach out to us collectively or individually. That same email address. Thanks for joining us today. We are looking forward to seeing you on the next episode. We hope you're getting tons of value and is transforming your journey as an author and as the reminder. Don't write that book. Write this one.