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Episode 31:

Pain Versus Promise

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**.

Mike Michalowicz ([00:16](#)):

It's been a minute. Welcome to episode 31. Today we're going to talk about pain versus promise in your first chapter. I want to thank you for joining us for this episode. As you do for all episodes. We are your hosts. I am **Mike Michalowicz**, and I'm joined in studio by **AJ Harper**. The sneezing. My gosh.

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

That's nothing.

Mike Michalowicz ([00:35](#)):

It's inter, is it women who sneeze louder than men?

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

I don't know.

Mike Michalowicz ([00:39](#)):

My daughter rocks the house.

AJ Harper ([00:41](#)):

My neighbors can hear it across the street.

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

Is it intentional? Are you

AJ Harper ([00:46](#)):

Just No, it's genetic.

Mike Michalowicz ([00:49](#)):

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So my daughter, she'll go [imitates a lous sneeze] And I swear she's adding emphasis to it. I hope. 'cause we've been in public. Here's the test. We've been in public and she had to sneeze. And then it's more <inaudible>.

AJ Harper ([01:02](#)):

Well, you can kind of, you can tell it's come. I mean, it's, you can tell it. Yeah. Yeah. It's dangerous to, you know, block it completely. But you can kind of sometimes do something about it. But...

Mike Michalowicz ([01:13](#)):

Is that true or is that mythology to block it? 'cause you do feel that expansion of your chest. Like if you hold it?

AJ Harper ([01:17](#)):

I'm more worried about my brain.

Mike Michalowicz ([01:19](#)):

You think you'll have an aneurysm?

AJ Harper ([01:21](#)):

Yes. Seriously. If you really heard you, you heard me sneeze today, I would say that was like a four.

Mike Michalowicz ([01:27](#)):

That was a

AJ Harper ([01:27](#)):

Four? Yes.

Mike Michalowicz ([01:29](#)):

Wow. We're in a soundproof studio. <laugh>. I mean, look at it. There's this egg carton stuff everywhere. The temperatures oscillate from boiling to freezing, and which you think would temper sound, but that thing echoed through the hallways of this building.

AJ Harper ([01:45](#)):

It's nothing. Amazing. Yeah.

Mike Michalowicz ([01:46](#)):

Talking about echoing through the hallways, we're going to talk about pain versus promise in your title. I want to introduce my--

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AJ Harper ([01:52](#)):

No, we're not, we're not talking about that.

Mike Michalowicz ([01:54](#)):

Not in your title, my guy, because it says title in this. We're going to talk about pain versus promise. In your chapter

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

We're talking about chapter one. Everyone. Yeah. <laugh>.

Mike Michalowicz ([02:01](#)):

It says not the title. That's what got me going. And I first want to introduce you. Okay. This is a rehash, the past. I'm just so excited and I'm living vicariously through you.

AJ Harper ([02:12](#)):

You're going to talk about the,

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

Your dream. Yeah. You're just, just seeing your house being the...

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

I hope listeners aren't getting sick of hearing about it. But you're want to talk about it all the time.

Mike Michalowicz ([02:18](#)):

The time. <laugh>, I get so excited about. 'cause you were sent pictures and you were out there with your wife.

AJ Harper ([02:23](#)):

In, yeah. In April.

Mike Michalowicz ([02:24](#)):

In April.

AJ Harper ([02:26](#)):

Raining cats and dogs.

Mike Michalowicz ([02:27](#)):

Oh, was it?

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AJ Harper ([02:28](#)):

Yeah. So if you, if this is your first episode, my wife and I are building our dream home on Madeline Island in Lake Superior. And just so you know, this is 28 years in the making. Lots of saving. Itt is not, yeah. It really took a lot to get here.

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

And house construction's always more than you anticipate.

AJ Harper ([02:51](#)):

Oh my God. Right. I can't even talk about it. They double, but it's okay. Yeah, it's okay. It's, it's, yeah, it's okay. Raining cats and dogs.

Mike Michalowicz ([02:59](#)):

Okay.

AJ Harper ([03:01](#)):

And freezing.

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

How do you get to Madeline Island?

AJ Harper ([03:05](#)):

Oh, uh, well, you drive to Bayfield, Wisconsin. Well, unless you're in a boat. If you're in a boat, uh, you know, there's lots of ways.

Mike Michalowicz ([03:13](#)):

But across Lake. But if you're coming from here, New Jersey, you fly to what?

AJ Harper ([03:16](#)):

So you could either fly Detroit. No, you, I have no idea. You need them. You need some time in the Midwest, I think. Yeah, I do. I do. You're doing the typical East coast flyover type.

Mike Michalowicz ([03:26](#)):

What do, what do with Detroit? That's the only thing I can think of. Michigan.

AJ Harper ([03:29](#)):

No. You fly into either Minneapolis and you drive four and a half hours, or you fly, you transfer and take a flight to Duluth and then drive two hours. Either way.

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Mike Michalowicz ([03:39](#)):

Okay.

AJ Harper ([03:39](#)):

Yeah.

Mike Michalowicz ([03:39](#)):

Well, you rent a car. How am I going to get to I want to visit your home.

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

Yeah, you're going to come.

Mike Michalowicz ([03:44](#)):

So I'll fly to Duluth to rent a car.

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

If you insist. If you don't want to drive four and a half hours, then you can drive two hours. If you fly to Duluth and then you take a ferry in Bayfield, Wisconsin, you drive onto the ferry with your car. Lots of people get confused. They think I'm talking about the island in Michigan where you can't drive your car. Right. That's not this.

Mike Michalowicz ([04:05](#)):

Okay.

AJ Harper ([04:06](#)):

Yeah. And then, then you're there.

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

The only island I can think of before you can't drive your car is Martha's Vineyard.

AJ Harper ([04:12](#)):

No, it's Manitowoc, isn't it Mana? No,

Mike Michalowicz ([04:14](#)):

No. It's Martha's Vineyard.

AJ Harper ([04:16](#)):

No, Mackinac-Mackinac Island in, um, Michigan.

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Mike Michalowicz ([04:20](#)):

Oh. I'm saying the only island I know about. This way on the East Coast. <laugh>, you know, Nantucket, Martha's Island.

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

Martha's Vineyard,

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

<laugh>.

AJ Harper ([04:30](#)):

This isn't going well.

Mike Michalowicz ([04:32](#)):

This isn't going well. You're right. It's Martha's Vineyard. Oh my God. Let's stop talking. It's Martha's Islands.

AJ Harper ([04:36](#)):

I just wanted say the coolest thing. <laugh>, the coolest thing about this is not good. We haven't recorded in a couple months in shows.

Mike Michalowicz ([04:44](#)):

Clearly. Clearly

AJ Harper ([04:45](#)):

The coolest thing was despite the freezing in the, and the rain, we took these folding ch like lawn chairs that were in our garage. Because we already built the garage. And I, we sat inside the house. The house is framed up. And the walls, we, no, dry wall yet, but you could see where the rooms are. And we just moved the chairs from room to room.

Mike Michalowicz ([05:10](#)):

Oh. That's great.

AJ Harper ([05:12](#)):

Froze our butts off. (I can imagine.) But the best thing, maybe not the best thing, one of the best things is my studio is going to be done in just a couple months.

Mike Michalowicz ([05:22](#)):

Kicking. It's kicking.

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AJ Harper ([05:23](#)):

So next summer, it's a

Mike Michalowicz ([05:24](#)):

Separate physical building. It's

AJ Harper ([05:26](#)):

A separate building. I'll have, uh, editing and writing retreats there for about 10 to 12 people. That's amazing. And I'll be starting them. We already built the calendar for next year. And that's so people will be able to come and be there with me five days.

Mike Michalowicz ([05:42](#)):

So technically, one of our listeners, if they apply for your program, might be a fit and come out there.

AJ Harper ([05:47](#)):

It's magical. And then of course, we're going to, you're going to, we're going to do our next book retreat up there.

Mike Michalowicz ([05:52](#)):

I'm in. I can't wait. And actually--

AJ Harper ([05:54](#)):

No more crappy Airbnbs.

Mike Michalowicz ([05:56](#)):

No more. No more. Thank God. We're actually working on our next book today. Start today. Yeah. Yeah. Um, I have some updates actually regarding Penguin I want to share with you. So that's my introduction of you. I'll introduce me and then we'll go on.

AJ Harper ([06:09](#)):

You want me to introduce you? We didn't really introduce, we just talked about my house <laugh> and sneezing. Yeah. Mike Michalowicz is the author of many beloved business books. Chief among them, *Profit First*. Thank you. But what you really need to know about Mike is that he is on a mission to eradicate entrepreneurial poverty. And that's not just a slogan. That's who he is.

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

It's the real deal.

AJ Harper ([06:36](#)):

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And in case you're wondering about me, <laugh>, I wrote a book called *Write a Must-Read*. And I wrote with Mike on his books, all his books, except the children's book, except

Mike Michalowicz ([06:46](#)):

My Money Bunnies.

AJ Harper ([06:47](#)):

Yeah. Since 2008.

Mike Michalowicz ([06:50](#)):

That's right. Isn't that unbelievable?

AJ Harper ([06:53](#)):

It's a long time.

Mike Michalowicz ([06:54](#)):

Oh my God. We have a couple updates. Uh, real, real quick Penguin. This is interesting. I, we shared the episode. Uh, we stepped in the studio. They called me that morning and we, we did the read. And they're like, we're done writing, we're done producing books or publishing books with you until you get this right.

AJ Harper ([07:09](#)):

Yeah. That's that big episode of work. Yeah, yeah,

Mike Michalowicz ([07:11](#)):

Yeah, yeah. Which is a favorite episode. One week later, one week later, they called and said, we'd like to do a project with you. This is the workbook.

AJ Harper ([07:19](#)):

Yeah. Which we're not doing.

Mike Michalowicz ([07:21](#)):

Yeah. Offered six-figure advance. And I said, nah, nah, nah. And then they upped it and upped it. So, but the royalties weren't, it wasn't the right structure. It was not the right thing to do at all, because they wanted to take the advance off of *Profit First*, which was weird.

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

Right. Yeah. So that basically means we don't get any money.

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Mike Michalowicz ([07:37](#)):

Yeah, yeah. Exactly.

AJ Harper ([07:38](#)):

Like... What?

Mike Michalowicz ([07:39](#)):

<laugh>. So, but what here, it was so weird. It was like a bipolar experience. I get a call and an email saying, we're done until you sell more. And then within seven days, we like to offer a six-figure advance. Just very bipolar. I wonder if that's indicative of what's going on with the industry.

AJ Harper ([07:56](#)):

I don't think so. I don't think we should. No one should ever read the tea leaves in publishing. Yeah. Yeah. It's unpredictable. And people, people have been saying print books were dead as long as I've been in the business. Yeah. And that's 19 years.

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

So we're going to start working on a new book, starting literally today after we're recording here. Uh, chapter one, we're going to have a discussion around it. You know, and that's what we're talking about today. We are going to be required, uh, by contract with Penguin for first right of refusal.

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

Is that your Penguin? It's not your Penguin News?

Mike Michalowicz ([08:26](#)):

No. My Penguin News is they came back six or seven days later and said we'd like to make an advance for our new

AJ Harper ([08:30](#)):

Oh. But not you, you don't have any other news?

Mike Michalowicz ([08:32](#)):

No, no other news.

AJ Harper ([08:33](#)):

Oh. Okay. I knew that news.

Mike Michalowicz ([08:35](#)):

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I know. But our listeners didn't. (Oh.) So I had some listeners call like, oh, it's so bad you're done with Penguin. It's been like, you know, months because these, these get published. These, uh, I get broadcast, if you will, sometimes months after we record it, they didn't get the contact. So that book came out. This was the fourth week I think, of the book being published, *All In*, where it dipped. Um, by the way, it's the, it's my second bestselling book Next to *Profit First*. What I'm, it's on a climb right now. I've got the most speaking gigs ever, even over *Profit First*, uh, based upon time in market. It's been, as of this recording five months. And I've gotten, I think, four major keynotes on it. Like, like the main stage keynote on *All In*. *Profit First* took a year before it started getting traction. So whatever,

AJ Harper ([09:24](#)):

Just listen. Uh, there's a, there's a storied tale, and that is when Penguin Random House at the time. Just Penguin. Yeah. Passed on *Profit First*. Yeah. So, whatever, you know, everything is nothing means that much. I mean, you don't assign too much meaning to this email or that email or that conversation. Yeah.

Mike Michalowicz ([09:44](#)):

Agreed. Alright, so we dig into the topping. We'll do the corrections corner at the end. Is that cool? You have a big correction with, uh, Indigo Girls.

AJ Harper ([09:51](#)):

It's just really quick. Do that in the time. Yeah. I just want to say that I shared one of my favorite lines from an Indigo Girls song, which was, "You'll never fly as the crow flies; get used to a country mile." But I said "road" and that's it. I need to correct that. Oh, thank you. Because if there are any diehards out there, Indigo Girls there, that's wrong.

Mike Michalowicz ([10:14](#)):

Lying. Go to your freezing cold home in Michigan.

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

It's, it's Wisconsin. But that's okay.

Mike Michalowicz ([10:21](#)):

What is up with me?

AJ Harper ([10:21](#)):

I don't think you, I think you need a Geography class.

Mike Michalowicz ([10:26](#)):

No, I, there's something going on with me. I, I'm just, I am askew. I do need geography. I heard Michigan, I heard Lake Superior. I heard Michigan. And then my mind stuck.

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

I did say the word Michigan.

Mike Michalowicz ([10:36](#)):

I guess that's why. Okay. Okay. So let's talk about the Pain versus Promise. Chapter One.

AJ Harper ([10:42](#)):

Let me set it up. Can I set it up? (Yep.) We've got two episodes on Chapter One. We're going to do this one first. And this one we're talking about tone and how you kind of get into a chapter. But I'd want to say about Chapter One is most people struggle with it. It will be the chapter you rewrite the most. It will give you the most fits, you know, and you have to get it right, because people don't finish books.

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

Should you necessarily start writing Chapter One first?

AJ Harper ([11:16](#)):

You can. If you're inspired to do so, you should know what goes in Chapter One.

Mike Michalowicz ([11:21](#)):

Yeah. But, but is it, is it required in order to build out the other chapters? Or can you start in the middle?

AJ Harper ([11:27](#)):

You could start in the middle. I, I mean, I think when you're drafting, you should go where your energy is. Yeah. Yeah. Once you have the outline. That said, you're going to write chapter one, then you're going to write, let's say you get through the whole manuscript, you will go back to chapter one and redo a lot of it. And it's just because by the time you're done with the manuscript, you realize a lot of stuff

Mike Michalowicz ([11:47](#)):

When it comes to Chapter One, pain versus promise, is it simply leaning one way? Lean more into the pain, lean more into the promise?

AJ Harper ([11:55](#)):

Well, let's talk about what I mean by that. So the reason that I'm talking about, I wanted to talk about pain versus promise is because we need to connect with our reader right away. And one of the ways we can do that is through pain and want us through promise, specifically the pain that they can relate to about where they are right now. Or the promise, meaning what they really want, what they're hoping to get. Where a lot of prescriptive nonfiction authors go wrong is they don't consider the reader where they are. They make a lot of assumptions. So, let's say that you do know your reader pretty well. Now you just have to make a choice. Am I going to, that first connection, is it going to be about connecting to

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what's keeping them up at night in terms of pain? Or is it going to be about that thing they really want and they can both work? It's just, it's a tonal consideration.

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

I've read some books where the author just leans into their own story. That's their Chapter One.

AJ Harper ([13:00](#)):

Yeah. But you could, we, we use your story in every Chapter One. It's just that you're using a piece of it that connects to the reader's pain. So it's not about your life story. Like, for example, you just mentioned *All In*, the only part of your story we tell is the part that connects to the reader's pain about not being able to find great people on your team. So we're telling cherry picked periods of time. Cherry picked scenes. They're scenes. This is, maybe we need to just stop saying story because it's really about picking scenes. So these are the scenes from Mike's life that mirror the reader where they are. So when you also felt that same pain. You're not telling all of it. You don't need to.

Mike Michalowicz ([13:52](#)):

That's what I see other authors do. They just do a, it's a diatribe on their life's history. Their qualifications.

AJ Harper ([13:58](#)):

Yeah. It's a, it's a story dump.

Mike Michalowicz ([14:00](#)):

Story dump. Yeah.

AJ Harper ([14:01](#)):

Yeah. I, it's, they don't do it on per, they just don't know any other way to do it.

Mike Michalowicz ([14:05](#)):

Yeah. So meet the reader where they are.

AJ Harper ([14:08](#)):

Yes. Where they are. Not where you are.

Mike Michalowicz ([14:10](#)):

I love that. And do you necessarily, that's the second time I've used that word, have to use your own story as the author. (No.) Use any story

AJ Harper ([14:18](#)):

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You could.

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

Okay. So how do you choose what's a better open going into the pain or the promise?

AJ Harper ([14:28](#)):

Well, it just depends. For you, it's always pain. Yeah.

Mike Michalowicz ([14:32](#)):

And why do you, I I have a reason why we do that.

AJ Harper ([14:33](#)):

Well, share, share why you, why you do it. Because that's your choice. Yeah.

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

Because it's humbling, it's accessibility, it's equality. I think a lot of prescriptive authors in the nonfiction space, actually any prescriptive work will put themselves on a pedestal intentionally or otherwise. But then you're unapproachable. And so for the reader, it's like, um, yeah. Yeah. But, or you can author a person, but I can't. So what I want to do is genuinely express that you and I, everyone, we're just the same, just different parts path as a journey. And show that. I've also noticed that when comedians present to me, the most likable, funny comedy is self-deprecating humor. I was watching Jim Gaffigan do that, and just, it's not buffoonery, but just shows his own humble, uh, perspective of himself. It's like, "God, I love this guy." I don't know many, I take it back. There are comedians who put themselves out there as I'm, I'm better than thou, but this doesn't seem as approachable to me.

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

We connect with people when we feel like they understand us. (Right.) They've been, when they've been there. Yeah. Yeah.

Mike Michalowicz ([15:47](#)):

So, okay. Should we talk?

AJ Harper ([15:49](#)):

So for you it's pain. Yeah.

Mike Michalowicz ([15:50](#)):

Usually. Yeah. Guess every time.

AJ Harper ([15:52](#)):

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Yes, it is. Every time. And, and that's intentional and probably stay that way. And let's qualify pain. It doesn't have to be a tragedy. Pain just means my reader is feeling this. And I also once felt that. And so let me pull some scenes from that to show them that I once felt that. But then there's an art to it, because you want to bring it full circle so that you don't stay in pain. The whole rest of Chapter One. This is about the open.

Mike Michalowicz (16:23):

Let me ask you, how do you know what pain your customer, your reader is feeling? Most?

AJ Harper (16:29):

Well, you, that's all the work you need to do in the beginning when you do your books fundamentals. And if you, a lot of people know just because they're community, working with people all the time, but you can just survey them. You can ask. It's not, you know, it can take very little time to find out how they would describe what's going on.

Mike Michalowicz (16:46):

I was working and am working with an author named Melissa Dugalecki. She sells products, you know, online informational products. And she shared something that was obvious yet profound. She said, I sold the same class six or seven times with different titles, even though it's the exact same class, by asking my audience, what's the biggest challenge you're facing now? The biggest pain. And she goes, I look for the commonality in the moment. And she goes, this year, this is 2024, first quarter, she said, uh, she asked people what's the biggest challenge and was making kind of this, this, this five or 10% growth in her business. So she, her, she made the title getting the next 5%. The year prior was, um, finding new customers, which is part of her course. And she says how to land those customers. So it's the same course, different title. And it, to me it speaks like this is, is meet the customer where they are now, and they'll be attracted to the book. They'll be engaged.

AJ Harper (17:42):

Yeah. So you aren't going to be able to tweak that. You know, she can keep offering the same... Yeah. So you're looking for some universality there.

Mike Michalowicz (17:50):

Yeah, for sure. But my point is, at least she's identifying what the pain is now and speaks to that. Even though the end, it's the old sell them what they want, give them what they need. And I'm not saying this what this book specifically, but you are, you have to speak to what the customer is feeling. Otherwise they won't relate to you.

AJ Harper (18:08):

Yeah, absolutely. You have to know what that is. And once you do, then you can decide if you want to pull from painful parts of your life or someone else's that mirror your reader's life. And it's, again, these

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are scenes, you could do it with client stories, you could do it with your own story. You do it with your story. The famous one is the piggy bank. I like the Jersey Shore story.

Mike Michalowicz ([18:33](#)):

Oh, yeah, yeah,

AJ Harper ([18:34](#)):

Yeah.

Mike Michalowicz ([18:34](#)):

That's from *Clockwork*.

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

That's from *Clockwork*. And we had to fight to have that be in the open. So Yeah. Or I did. <Laugh> Yeah. But you know, that is an example. That wasn't a tragedy. Piggy bank story is about you losing your, all your money. Yeah. Going hat in handy, your family. It's pretty tragic. Really difficult. Shame all that. But the Jersey Shore story is not Right. So it's not about, it's not to be, uh, you know, movie of the week level <laugh> pain. Right? It could just be, this is the frustration, right? Yeah. This is the thing I can't solve and the impact of it.

Mike Michalowicz ([19:13](#)):

But does it need to express the core pain that's being addressed and resolved throughout the entirety of the book? Does it speak to the essence of it? The heart?

AJ Harper ([19:21](#)):

Yeah. But where they are now.

Mike Michalowicz ([19:23](#)):

But where they are now. Yes. Yeah. Okay. What about the promise? What's that? What's that position?

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

So that's the dream. Yeah. So it's a story that shows the dream realized, shows some sort of personification of that, A scene of what life is like on the other side. And so, for example, I chose that for my book. ?

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

Write a Must-Read. Yeah.

AJ Harper ([19:46](#)):

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Yeah. I didn't want to have a pain story about how hard it is to write a book or about writer's block. Or about <laugh>, an author with too many books stacked up in their garage and it didn't work. I didn't want that. I wanted to show, this is what can happen when you put the reader first and write a truly remarkable must-read book. This is what can happen. And so I wrote a promise story tonally that was more me.

Mike Michalowicz ([20:17](#)):

I, of all the books we've done, the piggy bank story is the one that's discussed the most and, and is the most pivotal in setting my life's journey. But the one from *The Pumpkin Plan*, which is the, the old guy. Yeah. And Frank, my business mentor.

AJ Harper ([20:32](#)):

The one-up guy.

Mike Michalowicz ([20:33](#)):

The one-up guy. <Laugh> That, that wasn't Frank. It was the old guy, but kind of slapping me awake, saying, this is where your life's headed if you don't make a correction to your business now. Interestingly, and I think we're in a dedicated episode to speaking, we've had a lot of inquiries come in about, once I have my book, how can I monetize further? So I like to do episodes around that. So with speaking, these opening stories to the T, I use in every keynote too. And usually it's the opening story to my keynote. So there's significance there in that one nut story, which I don't necessarily say that part depends on the audience, <laugh>, but is the favorite story.

AJ Harper ([21:14](#)):

Oh Lord.

Mike Michalowicz ([21:15](#)):

People love it. Because, because they, they, they see the pain. If you continue to do what's not working, you're going to have a life that's not working the way you want it to be. Okay. Should we, uh, break down these stories? .

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

Yeah Well, I want to, I want to break down how we do Mike pain story. So this, this is, you can just take notes on this, man. 'cause this, this is how we do it almost every time. (Go baby. Go.) Okay. So there's a brief setup of the problem, right? So in *All In*, I really need a good employee. I don't have a lot of time. I am, oh, here's a good person. Right? Uh, and then it goes, it kind of goes downhill. So that's the story of Elliot, the guy who <laugh>, right? The guy who ends up with the, who golden handcuffs and then goes to a tropical island. And pretends there was a, it was a funeral.

Mike Michalowicz ([22:05](#)):

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Let me ask you this. They're all true stories. (Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>,) We consolidate down the elements of it. What liberty do we have as an author to add elements for cohesiveness of the story, but maybe they're fictional. Is that even permitted? What's your thoughts? Do we need to give all the details? How do we know what parts to include? What parts not to include?

AJ Harper ([22:23](#)):

You're, so, first of all, you don't want to include fictitious anything. Okay. Don't, you can embellish in a certain way, such as, um, not even that. Just tell the truth.

Mike Michalowicz ([22:38](#)):

Yeah.

AJ Harper ([22:40](#)):

If you don't have all the details right, that's okay. And you can just say, I don't, you know, I don't exactly remember the order of events. Yeah. And that's just don't, don't mess around too much.

Mike Michalowicz ([22:50](#)):

I'll, I'll give one embellishment we did with the Elliot story is when he called, he did call at one in the morning. The music was faint. But I wanted to emphasize that in my mind, it was very, you know, he had music playing in the background. He was clearly at a party. Uh, so I wanted to emphasize that.

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

Okay. That, that is not... That's fine. You just raised the volume on the music.

Mike Michalowicz ([23:08](#)):

That's what I'm saying. That's why I call it an embellishment because I think--

AJ Harper ([23:10](#)):

That that's fine, but you're not changing the, don't change the story. You didn't make up the phone call. (No, no. <laugh>,) That's, that's what I'm getting at. (Right.) The phone call happened. You just raised the volume on the music. Yes. That's fine for, that's, that's artistic license for sure. But don't add fictitious anything to your stories, how you choose which parts to tell are the parts where you have turning point moments. So when something shifts, it's a change, something happens that, that alters the course, right? Or something changes that shifts your thinking. Oh, usually it's both. And then when your thinking changes, your behavior changes. So we want those turning point moments. Not all the moments. And readers don't need you to fill in all the blanks. They need to know what happened in the midpoint.

AJ Harper ([24:06](#)):

You know? Yeah. They just need to get to those points. So again, we start up with a brief setup of the problem, which is usually our opening story. And then this is really helpful search for solutions. So you,

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Mike, okay, that didn't work out with Elliot. How am I going to get a team that cares about my company as much as I do? Right? So now you're going over the things you tried. Why this is effective in prescriptive nonfiction is your reader has probably tried one or all of those solutions as well. So now what you're doing is building rapport.

Mike Michalowicz ([24:43](#)):

Right.

AJ Harper ([24:44](#)):

And you're, and you're letting them off the hook because they might have a little lingering like, ah, that didn't work for me. What's wrong with me? (Right). But it also didn't work for you, Mike. (Right.) So now they're saying, yeah, that didn't work. God, what's wrong? You know? So now you're building rapport and letting them off the hook at the same time. All of this is intentional.

Mike Michalowicz ([25:04](#)):

Yes.

AJ Harper ([25:06](#)):

That then it's getting to a breaking point. So that didn't work and that didn't work, and that didn't work. Oh, why, why can't, you know? So you have to identify the breaking point.

Mike Michalowicz ([25:15](#)):

I remember the pinnacle moment is Elliot has me golden handcuffed. He is a unfit employee for the company. It's not working out. And I'm thinking, I've got to give this guy a raise to keep him. Right. So it's this kind of bipolar emotion of I can't stand him. He's not a fit. I gotta fire him in the best way. The best thing to do is give him a raise.

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

So your breaking point actually is after that in *All In*. Because you try a bunch of stuff after the Elliot story, we, we talked about like the, the dashboard of all the things that you try to do. (Yeah, yeah, yeah.) But your breaking, your real breaking point is when you realize (The grandma?) After you sell... No, it's after you sell your, your company. And you realize that you are the employee now.

Mike Michalowicz ([26:02](#)):

Oh, yes.

AJ Harper ([26:03](#)):

Yeah.

Mike Michalowicz ([26:04](#)):

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This is, so--

AJ Harper ([26:05](#)):

You were stuck in the Elliot story. I'm moving forward.

Mike Michalowicz ([26:08](#)):

Yeah. Yeah. So that's when Robert Half International. Yes. I'm sitting there and this guy's screaming at me. I'm like, oh my God, this is a mirror of exactly what I did to Elliot.

AJ Harper ([26:17](#)):

Right. So that's when you realize, oh, okay. I was the problem. And then that leads to core message. So it's a story can have, that takes place over years. But we're not telling the whole, all the years, just this is Elliot then tried to do a bunch of solutions and then eventually went on to do another business and sell it. And only then did you realize (Yes.) The core message the truth. Right?

Mike Michalowicz ([26:47](#)):

One more question. The breaking point and that realization or revelation, does that usually happen at the same time? Are they synchronized or can the breaking point be in the past in reflection of that breaking point? That the realization?

AJ Harper ([27:01](#)):

Well, a breaking point could be when you start to take some action or, and or it could be right before you realize core message. But the point I'm making is that you don't have to fill in that whole, that would've that was what, eight years? (Yes.) Yeah. I mean, we're not going to tell you eight, eight years.

Mike Michalowicz ([27:16](#)):

We just, we drove right to it.

AJ Harper ([27:17](#)):

The point is that it took you all that time to realize, and you only realized it when you were on the other side of the desk. Then change can happen. So that's always the <laugh> that's... You know, in, in *Clockwork* it's slightly different in that you have this big revelation while you're on the beach. (Right.) So you go to the Jersey Shore, you're telling this very relatable story any entrepreneur can relate to. I'm going to do all my work before my family vacation. So that I don't, but that doesn't ever work. Right. Even though you're pulling all-nighters. Something happens where you have to bring the laptop to the family vacation and you tell yourself you're only going to do this much. And soon enough you're working through the vacation. In that story, your wife sees how stressed you are, says you need to go for a walk on the beach, and it's on the beach that you have the realization, right. Because you see all these people with their million multimillion dollar beach houses, on their laptops.

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Mike Michalowicz ([28:22](#)):

Yeah. I remember that moment distinctly. I can actually still visualize it.

AJ Harper ([28:25](#)):

And that was the turning point for you when something had to change. Yep. Then I, then you go about dismantling the stuff that led you to that, which is pro about productivity and so forth. But basically it's the same, it's the same scenario. Same formula for all of these pain stories is you need to get to that revelation point. And *All In*, it takes a little longer in piggy bank. It's within like a couple years is the span? (Yeah.) It just kind of depends. But the point is, I was where you are. I tried a bunch of stuff, none of that worked. Here's when I realized it and then I was able to make a change. Yeah. Because now I understood x, and X is core message. And that's how you use a pain story in Chapter One.

Mike Michalowicz ([29:14](#)):

I love it. And through and through that journey, the readers is saying, oh my gosh, I've experienced this too. Therefore you get me. I'll also tell you that for me just to write a story, I could never do this. It's the dialogue we have about it. Because you, you understand and know how to deploy these milestones or markers along the way, which I don't naturally get. So I know a lot of these stories, we go back and forth and you keep on digging. You're like, well, well what did it feel like? And, and I'm like,

AJ Harper ([29:44](#)):

Because we're looking for the scene. Yeah. I think you're better. We are way better at pulling it now. I can, yeah. You know what I'm trying to get at? Let me just make sure I don't miss this. I'm sorry. Yeah. In a pain story, you do need an epilogue. You need an after. (Okay.) In Chapter One.

Mike Michalowicz ([30:02](#)):

The resolution.

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

So now you have promise.

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

Okay.

AJ Harper ([30:05](#)):

So now you can fast forward. Because remember you had the revelation. Yeah. Which is core message. At some point before you close the chapter, you need to say things are better. (Right.) In *All In*, since we've been using that example, the *All In* is a way fast forward, and it's just a small moment where Amy Carelli comes in with her family. (Yes.) And they are carrying boxes of books. Yes. And that's because she took it upon herself to solve a problem you didn't even know about. And her whole family got in on it,

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which is what the reader ultimately wants, is employees who care about your company as much as you do. So that is the epilogue. It comes at the end of the chapter. And that's where the promise sits.

Mike Michalowicz ([30:49](#)):

Is it, is the right word "dichotomy?" Is it, is it a before and after That is distinctly different. Is it that binary? Elliot versus...

AJ Harper ([30:57](#)):

Yes. It's that binary. Yeah. Because now it's the thing the reader wants. So for you it's first, it's what they feel now. And then you still need to say, this is possible. Now, where I think a lot of authors get confused is, well, what about everything that happened in between? (Right.) That's the whole rest of the book.

Mike Michalowicz ([31:15](#)):

Yeah, it's the rest of the book. Yeah.

AJ Harper ([31:17](#)):

The cool thing about that, this way of organizing it is once you set that up, your audience has these bookends. Oh, okay. Elliot and then Amy. It's a lot of years in between, but they have that in their mind. And so as you move through the book, you can pull from anywhere you want in your journey because they have those bookends.

Mike Michalowicz ([31:39](#)):

Can you leave some of these stories? Can you leave cliffhangers? (Yeah.) So you call back to them.

AJ Harper ([31:44](#)):

Of course. But in the, in Chapter One, you, you do want to give them some sense of a promise.

Mike Michalowicz ([31:49](#)):

Yeah. Some form of resolution. Right? (Yeah.) You know, Malcolm Gladwell, I love his work. He, I noticed consistently leaves these Cliffhangers and they're, they're questions. So he'll explain a whole scenario, a whole setup. Uh, Bomber Mafia, I think is, I can't remember all the titles now, but Bomber Mafia. And he says, you know what if carpet bombing blah, blah, blah, blah, carpet bombing. And then he says, but what if that was the worst move ever question mark. It's like, what?

AJ Harper ([32:12](#)):

Yeah. Yeah. An open-ended.

Mike Michalowicz ([32:14](#)):

You're like, what? Yeah. I just bought, he gets you hook line sinker. And then he, he's,

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AJ Harper ([32:18](#)):

Yeah. He's great at that. You could also carry your whole story through with it unresolved. That's requires a lot of artistry. Yeah. And so I'm just trying to give folks an easier way at it.

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

Okay. You chose a promise story,

AJ Harper ([32:35](#)):

Right. So I'm, yeah. So for me, I, as I just said earlier, I, tonally pain, starting with pain just didn't, I don't know. This is not me. Yeah. So I didn't go with that. I went with a promise story. And my promise story is what can happen when you write a book that is a must-read, a true must-read that people love so much. Mm-Hmm. <affirmative> and tell everyone about. So I told the story, um, it's not, it is I'm in the story, but it's really about Steve Pressfield. It's how, and I put deliberately put certain things in how I bought, paid for his class within minutes without considering the cost, my schedule.

Mike Michalowicz ([33:20](#)):

You didn't consult your spouse.

AJ Harper ([33:20](#)):

Commitments to my spouse.

Mike Michalowicz ([33:21](#)):

I remember. Yeah. I remember that.

AJ Harper ([33:23](#)):

Got in trouble for it. And then I told the, and the reason why is because he had changed my life. So I was willing to do whatever. Yeah. And then I told the story of trying to get the courage up to talk to him about that while I watched a woman hand over her copy of *The War of Art*. And I told, described in detail what her book looked like was a freaking mess.

Mike Michalowicz ([33:52](#)):

Sticky nose bent corners.

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

Yeah. It, I, it was like she had accidentally dropped it in the bathtub 'cause it had like, swelled up, you know? I love it. To me, this is like the best, like, I mean, form of art that I was, you know, that was a well loved book. Yeah. So she handed that over for him to sign. This is, this is what my reader wants. My reader's not writing a transactional book. They're just not, they're not just trying to check off a thing on their list. They're not just trying to get higher speaking fees. They want that.

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

So is that part of the promise story is that the reader is injecting themselves into that story? They see themselves as Stephen Pressfield.

AJ Harper ([34:37](#)):

Yeah. They see, just like they see themselves in the pain story, they see themselves in the promise story. I want that.

Mike Michalowicz ([34:43](#)):

Your character in that chapter is the reader of Stephen Pressfield, a fan. So basically the reader of your book sees you as the fan of them.

AJ Harper ([34:54](#)):

Wait, what?

Mike Michalowicz ([34:55](#)):

They see themselves as Stephen Pressfield. Yes. They see you as a fan of them. That's what your character's playing. You, you, you, you buy the ticket, you get head down there. Uh, you emerge selecting a seat. You normally like to sit in the back and, and then approaching him and all those things. As I was reading that book, I'm like, wow, I could, if I do this, I could have a book like Steve Pressfield. And I could have a fan like AJ.

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

Yes. That I understand you. Yes. (Yeah.) That's the whole point of, that's why I was exactly crafted for that purpose. It's a 100% true story. And I deliberately put in imagery, chose the exact dialogue that was true. (Yeah.) To show the reader what could happen for them knowing what they want.

Mike Michalowicz ([35:38](#)):

Maybe I'm digging too deep, but subconsciously, as I'm reading your book, I'm like, AJ's my fan. And maybe I'm reading too much into it, but that's how that chapter was positioned.

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

The, it's to show you when you write a book that is truly life-changing for your reader, this is what happens. It's beyond saying you got a book done. Yeah. So I wanted to make, to exemplify that this is not, well, let's write a bestseller. No. Let's write something that's so meaningful to people that they <laugh> that they will do anything to come see you.

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

Steven Pressfield ultimately endorsed your book.

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AJ Harper ([36:15](#)):

He did.

Mike Michalowicz ([36:16](#)):

Uh, I don't recall now if that's one of the stories in there, too. I think it's not. (No.) Okay. Because I remember I always, on the cover...

AJ Harper ([36:22](#)):

It happened after I wrote it. Yeah.

Mike Michalowicz ([36:24](#)):

Okay. <laugh>. Well, yeah. But you can always go back and change and update, edit.

AJ Harper ([36:28](#)):

Yeah. Now not at that point. Yeah.

Mike Michalowicz ([36:30](#)):

Okay. Okay.

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

He, he read that story.

Mike Michalowicz ([36:34](#)):

He read it?

AJ Harper ([36:35](#)):

Yeah. He would not endorse it without reading it. I have a whole getting him to him to endorse it. Oh my gosh. We have to do a whole episode on endorsements, because...

Mike Michalowicz ([36:45](#)):

I thought we did one on endorsements. (Did we already do one?) I don't know if we haven't. We, if we haven't,

AJ Harper ([36:49](#)):

We're going to do one. But I moved Heaven and Earth. I had something like 48 hours to get him a galley when one did not exist.

Mike Michalowicz ([36:59](#)):

Did you print it yourself?

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AJ Harper ([37:00](#)):

No. I know a guy.

Mike Michalowicz ([37:02](#)):

<laugh>. Well, that means you printed it yourself.

AJ Harper ([37:04](#)):

No, I had a guy. Well, yeah, I, I paid a guy that I know from my old publishing days, but it was a miracle that it, I was it. But yeah, he wouldn't do it. And he doesn't read digital. So I had to get him a

Mike Michalowicz ([37:18](#)):

Print, FedEx the whole thing. Bound Bound.

AJ Harper ([37:21](#)):

That's a Yeah. True. He wanted an actual galley. And my publisher wasn't ready to do galleys. Thankfully, I've been a publisher. Yeah. So I was able to say, gimme this file, gimme that file. Called my guy in, uh, Wisconsin, <laugh> and, uh, overnighted it to Malibu, California.

Mike Michalowicz ([37:41](#)):

Oh my gosh. Yeah. We, we have to, if we haven't already dedicated episode to, uh, endorsements.

AJ Harper ([37:45](#)):

All right. So that, that promise story is, was right for me. Yeah. But a pain story could have worked as well. It just wouldn't have been AJ.

Mike Michalowicz ([37:57](#)):

Do you need to give people relief regardless of what you do? If you start the promise story? Do you have to show them? That's the promise. Do show them the struggle then after that. And if you start with pain, do you have to go into the promise? I I know you said at the end of that chapter, but I know in a good movie, for example, there's the ups and downs, there's the emotional volatility. Do, do we need that too, to have that kind of counterbalance?

AJ Harper ([38:21](#)):

I mean, I think, I don't really think about it like that, honestly. I just think about acknowledging the reader. I mean, I, you know, we can get stuck in all sorts of beats and formulas about ups and downs and arcs and climax and all that stuff. But honestly, at least in prescriptive nonfiction, let's just keep thinking about the reader. Yeah. It an, it answers every question you have. What do they need now? What do they need now? So for me, I knew I just needed to keep them rallied in that chapter. And there's a lot of pain in the book, but it comes later.

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Mike Michalowicz ([38:56](#)):

Uh, let's talk about humor and the use of it.

AJ Harper ([38:58](#)):

Yeah. I think this is important.

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

Okay. Is it appropriate? I mean, I, I don't, when I'm talking about my daughter volunteering in the piggy bank in that moment, I want people to feel that I'm not going to make light of it.

AJ Harper ([39:08](#)):

No. But I actually, the piggy bank story has humorous moments. Like when you are making fun of yourself buying a bunch of ridiculous cars.

Mike Michalowicz ([39:17](#)):

Right.

AJ Harper ([39:18](#)):

You know, and you are making fun of your ego. With all of the angel investing you did that went belly up. Right? So that when you do get to the moment where your hat in hand, then you can, you're downshifting and there's no humor there. But there is humor in your other pain stories for sure.

Mike Michalowicz ([39:38](#)):

And humor gives, gives a little bit of, uh, relief in an intense moment.

AJ Harper ([39:43](#)):

Yeah. You're not making light of it, you're just Well, part of it is we're Gen X, so this is, might be different for other generations, but part of what we do is self-deprecating humor. We've always been, one of my students, um, Sloane Nichols is actually writing a book for Gen Xers, and she says, one of our survival skills is gallows humor.

Mike Michalowicz ([40:06](#)):

Oh, there you go.

AJ Harper ([40:08](#)):

And that we just gravitate toward it. Yeah. We just naturally say, oh God, what a douche about ourselves. Do you know what I mean? Yeah. That's just who we are. Other people might not be as comfortable with that. (Yeah.) But I think that is a natural place, and I think it's generally received well.

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Mike Michalowicz ([40:23](#)):

Yeah. I, I don't think people say, oh God, he really is a jerk for saying that prop first. I'm doing a keynote this weekend on, um, Saturday to a chiropractic association. There'll be a thousand people there. I, I will tell you the joke that I'll take that in the house. It's, it's, it's from the book translated the piggy bank moment. I talk about leading up to that, the arrogance of buying all the cars, the bigger house. We got a place out in Hawaii to go on sabbatical, and I'm investing all these companies, and I'm like, I looked up in the Webster dictionary, what is the word? Is there a word for someone that admittedly is arrogant and ignorant? I don't know what the hell I'm doing as an angel investor. I said, there is a word. I couldn't believe it.

AJ Harper ([41:00](#)):

It's: <inaudible>.

Mike Michalowicz ([41:01](#)):

And it, it takes on the house every single time. And you're like, I'm a dick. It's also in the speech. It's this transformative moment. It's like, this is accessible stuff. This guy doesn't see himself as superior. Yeah,

AJ Harper ([41:13](#)):

For

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

Sure. This is going to work for me. So I, I land that joke usually within the first 10 to 15 minutes of the presentation. And then the next 60 minutes, it's a 75 minute presentation is so much more accessible to folks. Can humor go awry though? I mean, if you make something as an offensive joke, no question.

AJ Harper ([41:29](#)):

Who has instant, instant awry <laugh>? Yes. A joke at someone else's expense. Right. Never, never, um, a culturally insensitive joke. (Right.) Just don't do them. It's just, there's no point.

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

I think the coolest thing we did in our book with a joke was the, I can't drive 55 joke where I'm talking about getting pulled over by a police officer while playing Sammy Hagar's, "I can't drive 55." And then we say, I appreciate and understand that for me, being pulled off by a police officer, um, is a different experience than someone of color. And that was such a powerful thing to share, because I have had readers write up to me, say, you're the first white author ever to recognize or speak to that. Thank you for acknowledging that.

AJ Harper ([42:15](#)):

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Yeah. And honestly, all you did was acknowledge another person's experience. You're not saying anything right or wrong. (No.) It wasn't even political. It was just, I understand. I don't have the same experience.

Mike Michalowicz ([42:28](#)):

I don't have. Yeah. So I think it just acknowledging.

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

So you were able to tell the joke that way. The joke (Correct.) didn't come off offensive as I don't think it would've been offensive. I think the term would've been tone deaf.

Mike Michalowicz ([42:38](#)):

Or insensitive. Yeah. Right.

AJ Harper ([42:40](#)):

Yeah. Or privilege. (Yeah.) Whatever. But it didn't, you could tell the joke. Yeah. And then acknowledge another person's experience, which I think is helpful. But, you know, people are always, I want this, I didn't plan to say this, but if I can, of course you may. People always ask me, well, how can I be funnier? Where, how can I do funny? And here's the thing, that's the easiest way, which is this self-deprecating stuff. Okay. So, uh, we think it's funny when we are sharing a common frustration. So if you can take the thing that we're all dealing with and make it funny by just saying, Ugh, you know, can you believe we all have to do this? You will instantly get a laugh. Because in that instance, laughter is recognition. Right. So you <laugh> so you, for example, uh, on the beach or you with your laptop and whatever. That's so relatable. Every everyone knows what that--

Mike Michalowicz ([43:42](#)):

Bouncing our knees.

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

Everyone knows what that is. So there are moments that your reader is experiencing that you experience that almost everyone does to some extent. And if you can list them, talk about them, make fun of them, then they're going to laugh because they also... It's that shared experience that's, that's low stakes. It doesn't work with, you know, super high stakes. But that's an easy way to bring humor in, is in relatable frustrations.

Mike Michalowicz ([44:12](#)):

When it comes to finding stories, I know my customer has a certain pain or experience they've gone through, or they want to have a certain outcome, the promise. Maybe I don't have a story myself. How do I find the other stories that are out there that would be a match? Do I have to start interviewing people? Do I hop in?

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

Have to know, you have to know exactly what you want. Yeah. So you want to say, okay, I need a, I need a story that mirrors how my reader feels right now. And so as long as you know, I'm looking for that, then you can either interview to find it or just start paying attention. Yep. Your mind is going to find it. If you have clarity about what you want. Then you might be watching tv listening to a podcast like this, or reading or something. And it will come to you because you know exactly what you want. So that's the main thing, is to just have the clarity and then start being open. You know, could be your clients, could be colleagues, could be friends, or family could be a stranger.

Mike Michalowicz ([45:16](#)):

One of the talents of the many you have is we prepare an outline and you'll say exactly that. We need a story that, that exemplifies X, Y, Z. It's very clear. And I'll come back and say, oh, I have one. You're like, not there yet. It's, it needs to have more of this or that. And you are able to extract these extraordinary stories. And to your point, they often come out, out, quote unquote, nowhere. I'm just, yeah. I'm like, oh, yeah, there's the story. Or we find one in the paper. One of my favorite, actually, I think this is my favorite, the best book we've ever written. And my favorite story used was *All In*. *All In* is hands down, is the best book we've ever written. And I'm hearing that back from readers too. The Baltimore Museum. So I found this story of...

AJ Harper ([46:00](#)):

I think some of our, if you've, if you've binged all the episodes, you've heard this before, but.

Mike Michalowicz ([46:04](#)):

Okay. I'm sorry.

AJ Harper ([46:05](#)):

No, that's okay. Tell it. I just want to acknowledge that if you flip it,

Mike Michalowicz ([46:08](#)):

<laugh> Yeah. This could be a repeat.

AJ Harper ([46:09](#)):

It is your fave.

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

I found the story in Russia a while back, and I archived it because it was such a bizarre story. Someone hired specifically to do a job of securing and protecting art and then destroys it. And you're like, this is a great story, but you're like, it, it doesn't have that balance. It needs kind of the other side. That was the, that was almost like a pain story. But things go awry. What's the promise story? And I don't know how you found it.

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AJ Harper ([46:35](#)):

It was the, on the news.

Mike Michalowicz ([46:37](#)):

Just by chance.

AJ Harper ([46:37](#)):

Well, because I knew what I was, because that's in my brain. And I have to find that.

Mike Michalowicz ([46:41](#)):

So you found the Baltimore Museum of Art. You found the story of these guards that were embraced, uh, in a way to become curators of the museum and, and they were able to express themselves fully. You found a story. You said, you gotta look at this. I read this. I'm like, my gosh, I called the Baltimore Museum. We, we get this interview. We, I don't... Did we interview any of the guards? We interviewed two of the curators.

AJ Harper ([47:05](#)):

No, we didn't, we didn't interview any of the guard of the guards. We interviewed a board person on the board who created the program. (Okay.) And another person on staff. Those

Mike Michalowicz ([47:12](#)):

Stories exist. It was such a perfect juxtaposition. It was such a perfect compliment. We've never done that prior in the book. D-does, does that store exist for all things or that's just a miracle

AJ Harper ([47:20](#)):

Moment? I mean, that's happened before in other books where I've found something that connects.

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

But that was such, such a per a museum to museum, same timeframe.

AJ Harper ([47:29](#)):

This is why you're obsessed with this story. It was unbelievable. But listen, it can ha-- Look, that happens when you have clarity. And you know, okay, I'm looking for this. And then you just keep, you just keep that open, you know? (Yeah.) And then you can spot it when it shows up.

Mike Michalowicz ([47:46](#)):

Okay. Uh,

AJ Harper ([47:49](#)):

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Sometimes, sometimes you get lucky.

Mike Michalowicz ([47:50](#)):

Sometimes <laugh>. Yeah. That was a lightning and a bottle to

AJ Harper ([47:53](#)):

Me. And if we had not found the Baltimore story, what would've happened is that, that story about the painting would've just been an anecdote.

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

Right.

AJ Harper ([48:02](#)):

It would not have been in the introduction. (Right.) And it might have not been in the book at all, but if it would've been in the book, it would've been an anecdote about how bad it would've been a joke. You know what? It would've been a joke.

Mike Michalowicz ([48:15](#)):

Yeah. It would've been a joke. It would've been a joke. I do want to talk about a slight embellishment. 'cause we had a dialogue with Penguin about this. We... Uh, Alexander Valie, I think that was his name, was the guard. He draws eyes on this thing called, um, Three Figures, with a ballpoint pen is the true story.

AJ Harper ([48:33](#)):

We wanted it to be a Sharpie

Mike Michalowicz ([48:34](#)):

Sharpie. A Sharpie. Yeah. A sharpie. Because it tied back to another story where we used a Sharpie where I, you know. And so then Penguin said he actually used a ballpoint pen. Are you sure you want to say Sharpie? And we said, we need to do this embellishment, because it ties back to the core story, and it's truthful. Because pe because we explain he use ballpoint pen, but we use the word Sharpie.

AJ Harper ([48:57](#)):

Yeah. We use both.

Mike Michalowicz ([48:58](#)):

And people love it. People love it. And so I use that in the presentation too. I use a Sharpie and it just, it just works so well.

AJ Harper ([49:06](#)):

don't write *that* book!

Yeah. Also, because in a book, if you imagine drawing something in ballpoint pen versus a Sharpie, it doesn't have this, (it doesn't come across. Yeah.) Yeah. But really, he did draw big black eyes.

Mike Michalowicz ([49:16](#)):

It's unbelievable.

AJ Harper ([49:17](#)):

I mean, think about it. That was a ballpoint pen. He has been drawing for a long time.

Mike Michalowicz ([49:23](#)):

Unbelievable.

AJ Harper ([49:23](#)):

Where was everybody?

Mike Michalowicz ([49:25](#)):

I know

AJ Harper ([49:25](#)):

You can't draw big black eyes with a ballpoint pen in a minute.

Mike Michalowicz ([49:29](#)):

He secured the room. He is like, no one in this room for the

AJ Harper ([49:31](#)):

<laugh>

Mike Michalowicz ([49:31](#)):

For the next hour. Anything else you want to share on this topic?

AJ Harper ([49:34](#)):

No, I think just, uh, well, actually, yes. The last I would say is don't, you don't have to decide right now. So if you're, oh, what should it be? Pain versus promise? Yeah. Just try. Just try. Let me try it. Let me try. Here's a pain story. Let me see how that goes. Oh, okay. Let me try a promise story. All right. Let me see how that goes because you can change your mind.

Mike Michalowicz ([49:54](#)):

I want to remind our listeners, you have the best book in the industry in the space. It's *Write a Must-Read*. You also have a workshop. What's the workshop that people could join up, sign up for?

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AJ Harper ([50:03](#)):

I teach a workshop once a year, top three book workshop in the fall. And I also throughout the year, do an editing workshop, which is six weeks. I go through the methodology in my book. But I think it's important to understand that you can join that workshop even when you just have a couple chapters. Because it's about... Less about, you know, making the book polished. It's not really, really, it's about understanding what works for a reader. So it's that six-week process of really thinking through, is this the right way to sequence things? Is this working? . What's missing? How can I make this more accessible to my readers? That sort of thing. It's making it a Page Turner.

Mike Michalowicz ([50:47](#)):

People, I'm telling you, go to her workshop and maybe take a trip out to Wisconsin via Michigan to her home for a retreat.

AJ Harper ([50:55](#)):

<laugh> You could, you could, I guess, get in a boat in, I'm trying to figure out how in Michigan

Mike Michalowicz ([51:01](#)):

Could a kayak, you could kayak your ass off.

AJ Harper ([51:02](#)):

Don't do that. You know why?

Mike Michalowicz ([51:05](#)):

People passed away, I'm sure.

AJ Harper ([51:06](#)):

Yes. Yeah. Lake Superior.

Mike Michalowicz ([51:08](#)):

It's an ocean, effectively,

AJ Harper ([51:09](#)):

She's, Yys, she is. She's got feelings. <laugh>

Mike Michalowicz ([51:12](#)):

She's got feelings. Hey, also, if you want to check out Pen With Purpose, we are helping represent authors and market their books. Um, I want to share one final anecdote. Alan Dibb is the author of, uh, One Page Marketing Plan. Very successful marketing book. Just came out with a new book called Lean

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Marketing. Definitely Get it. So I, he called me yesterday. He's like, dude, your podcast is awesome. I'm like,

AJ Harper (51:35):

Oh, oh, that's so nice.

Mike Michalowicz (51:37):

Oh, you're listening to it? He's like, yeah, I binge on it. He loves Don't Write That Book. And this guy is, this dude is accomplished. So, uh, thanks Alan. If you're listening to this episode.

AJ Harper (51:46):

Oh, speaking of that, Michael Bungay Stanger also sent me a message.

Mike Michalowicz (51:53):

Oh He's listening in? (Yeah.) These are all the marketing authorities. Well, he's more than that, but gosh.

AJ Harper (51:55):

Oh no, he's a great, I mean, these are great writers.

Mike Michalowicz (51:59):

Yeah.

AJ Harper (52:00):

Great, great writers. Yeah, I was very touched.

Mike Michalowicz (52:02):

Yeah. I'm going to see Michael and Alan both, uh, this summer down at, uh, Don Miller's house. We're having a little event together. Um, so thanks dudes for listening. Yeah, that's awesome. Hey, we want to invite you to get all the free materials we're hearing from a lot of readers. Uh, some topic ideas came in about, for example, products after you've written a book. So we'll dedicate podcasts to that. Any suggestions, any thoughts you have, you can email us at hello@dwtbpodcast.com. You can visit our website, of course, at dwtbpodcast.com. That's, don't write that book podcast.com. We have lot resources there for you. You can get in touch with me and AJ and who knows, maybe we will have a shout out to you like we did for Alan and Michael at the end of the next episode. Thanks again for joining us today. We hope you learned a lot and had some fun. We are looking forward to seeing you on the next episode, and as always, don't write that book. Write this one.