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Episode 40:

“Finding Your Author Voice”

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 ([00:16](#)):

Now I'm recording <laugh>. So if you just listened to this podcast, you have an amazing education, is what you just said. And it's true.

AJ Harper ([00:23](#)):

It's true, it's true. You can just, yeah. I went through the archives to figure out when you had told a certain story, so we, you wouldn't tell it three more times. <laugh> And I was looking at it. Oh man, this is, you know, just listen, listen straight through, and you'll get a lot of really good, realistic, creative, interesting information about publishing that. A lot of it I teach in a class or you teach in, like, you know. Yeah. It's a good resource.

Mike Michalowicz ([00:56](#)):

You just had, uh, one of our listeners, Wade Carpenter. Yeah. He signed up for your class. Um, I'm so excited. I gotta show you something. Brought it in. This is a product of yours.

AJ Harper ([01:06](#)):

Oh my God. Wait, I don't have this yet.

Mike Michalowicz ([01:08](#)):

What I'm showing her is Profit First for Photographers by Venus Michael.

AJ Harper ([01:11](#)):

Oh, you know, she called me this weekend

Mike Michalowicz ([01:14](#)):

By Venus Michaels. She, uh, launched, she sold first day, I want to say over a hundred units. And, uh, you know, she says, what's remarkable for a first time author, I'm like, first time author. Also derivative books. So it's very targeted. It's just for photographers. I'm like, if you move 250 in a week, rockstar, 500, unbelievable a thousand dollars, uh, a thousand units, um, my God. Like retire. Like, that's pretty remarkable for a derivative book. And I, uh, she sold at least a hundred in the first day. Her book was

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outranking. I was watching as outranking most just most books in general. Uh, it was a top, at least 4,000 on Amazon.

AJ Harper ([01:56](#)):

That's really good. I saw it at 9,000. And then I was got busy with other things.

Mike Michalowicz ([02:00](#)):

It's excellently written, um, great use of graphics.

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

Oh yeah. It's actually really, I'm looking at it now.

Mike Michalowicz ([02:07](#)):

Really well done.

AJ Harper ([02:08](#)):

You know what? She messaged me this morning and she said, can I share a win? Not this morning, this weekend. Can I share a win with you? Yeah. So I got on the phone with her. She told me this amazing story about a reader. She said multiple readers reach out to her already. Book's been out a week. Yeah. She had one reader reach out to her, and I'm gonna let her tell the story in her own time, but it was deeply emotional. It was profound. And it, what I loved about it was he wrote in his email to her exactly what she had hoped a reader would one day experience.

Mike Michalowicz ([02:48](#)):

And this is not someone she knew personally, I assume. No, just

AJ Harper ([02:50](#)):

Total stranger. Yeah.

Mike Michalowicz ([02:51](#)):

That's the impact of books. Uh, Venus, Michael nails the author voice in this.

AJ Harper ([02:56](#)):

She does. She's very, yeah.

Mike Michalowicz ([02:57](#)):

And that, so that, that kind of speaks to the topic today. That's not why I brought it in. Uh, this is my--

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

But thanks for showing this to me. Mine hasn't arrived. I always buy from my little indie bookstore shout out to Big Red books in Nyack, New York.

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

Oh, well, let's support them. Everyone listening in Go to, is it Big Red Books.com?

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

Okay. Now I dang it.

Mike Michalowicz ([03:17](#)):

All right, well, you can just, because I, you can Google Big Red Books at Nyack.

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

Yeah. You can also, I, can I just make a little plug for indie bookstores?

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

Of course.

AJ Harper ([03:25](#)):

Okay. So, indie bookstores, all authors need to be connected to their local bookstores. You have got to go meet these people. Start by just going in there, buying your stuff, go to their events, check their events page, show up for stuff. I try to be supportive of my local bookstore. I don't buy from Amazon unless I absolutely have to. You know, I need it immediately. I, I now am on a, um, email, first name basis with my little bookstore, um, Richie at Big Red Books. And I email him and say, these are what books I need.

Mike Michalowicz ([04:03](#)):

Love it.

AJ Harper ([04:03](#)):

And then he emails me back. The books are in, right now, I'm kind of late picking up my latest stack. But what I want to say about indie bookstores is they are what's holding up all, I mean, the big box stuff, they're, those big chains are failing.

AJ Harper ([04:18](#)):

It's these indie bookstores that are really holding it together. And they're the people that can get you good events and fun things, and they really care about local authors. But what you might not realize is they all have websites now. So back in the day, it would be a big deal for a little indie store to have their

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own website. That would be a heavy lift. But now, through bookshop.org, they all have them <laugh>. Yeah. So you can actually go online and order from your local bookstore. You don't even have to go in if that's inconvenient for you.

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

So go to bookshop.org.

AJ Harper ([04:49](#)):

Yep. Or, or even just your local bookstores website, because that's, they can, they're, they'll have online ordering there.

Mike Michalowicz ([04:56](#)):

Okay. I vow publicly and now recorded that I will start buying from a indie store. I, Amazon's so convenient. It is, it's so convenient that I bought Venus's book through Amazon. I buy most of my books through Amazon. Unless I'm at an airport, uh, then I buy. But those are big chains, nonetheless. And, and nothing against a big chain. No,

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

No. They're still of great service. I'm not saying you, you know, we're no one's gonna put Amazon outta business, but--

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

No. And, and I don't, I have nothing against Amazon. Um, by, do like the idea of supporting local bookstores, because they do bring in the authors. I spoke down at the, the Jersey Shore. There was a bookstore down there, A little point bookshop. And I just did a presentation down there. Well, here's what was interesting, and just to give the juxtaposition, uh, Monday I have a keynote to, uh, a franchise called sama. Um, this franchise organization also owns Mer MAs and these different ones, 2000 people. I'm, I'm keynoting to on Profit First. Uh, a month or two ago I spoke at this bookshop. Three, three people showed up. Yeah. It was one Profit First. Um, and I, I gave them every single detail on it. And it was obviously a far more intimate experience. People would ask questions, they could share their stories.

Mike Michalowicz ([06:13](#)):

It became a, a coffee talk conversation. And it was this bi-directional dialogue. Right. We where a keynote, you're just on stage and you hope someone lands with, with some ideas and runs with it. I, I think out those 2000 people, sadly a small percentage will actually implement what they learn. 'cause there was no dialogue, there was no specificity to them by these three people. Everyone had a custom plan for themselves. It's just really cool that they had access. There is something special about those small outlets. The second thing I want to share is the most difficult presentations are in front of very small groups. Uh, one to five to 10 people. Because you have to be engaged. These 2000 people, you

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know, they could be texting away, they could be listening passively or not listening at all. It's a more challenging presentation.

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

Yeah. And, you know, you don't even have to do a presentation. You could do a reading. You could totally, yeah. You can really mix it up. I want to encourage everybody to do it. You can also get, if you do a, a little, uh, launch at a bookstore, they'll love you for it. Yeah. Get a photographer. Have a photographer come. You'll have stuff for your asset bank, for your photos as an author forever. Your team, marketing team will be thrilled to have all that stuff. So it's not about, people will say, well, can you sell books at the... Yeah. Okay. But you, you do sell some, A lot of people will come in with their own books already. That's not the point. You know, you want to build these relationships with indie bookstores.

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

There, there's one thing I want to add, and we gotta get onto the topic today, which is finding your voice. I was talking to this book shop owner. Her name is Kelly. And, uh, the challenge she shared was, and it was happening, I was down there visiting with her. People come in and ask for donations constantly. I was there for a short two-hour window. And I think there was three people that came in and said, Hey, the local school needs money and so forth. There's this burden put on this bookshop to constantly donating. Right upstairs from her was like a wealth manager. You had to walk up a flight of steps. No one was going up there. Everyone walks in the bookshop. The wealth manager, perceivably is making a lot of money in this bookshop. She, she's devoted her life to this. And it ain't a money maker.

Mike Michalowicz ([08:19](#)):

But it's a contribution to her community. And so the burden's put on her. So it's unfair. The second thing is, she goes, authors come in here constantly and say, my book needs to be in your shop. It needs to be front and center. And these are authors who haven't necessarily written a good book. They just live in the community. And so they feel that the bookshop has an obligation back to her, which hurts her business if it isn't a, a book that sells or is desired. Um, it's just unfair, but it's reality. So I'm gonna buy from local bookshops.

AJ Harper ([08:48](#)):

Do you know where your lo closest bookstore is?

Mike Michalowicz ([08:52](#)):

Oh, Jesus. No.

AJ Harper ([08:52](#)):

Oh no. I put you on the spot. I

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Mike Michalowicz ([08:53](#)):

Know there, there's one that literally just opened up, uh, a week ago in this town. Boonton down Main Street. One block. I think it's called Black Rose or something.

AJ Harper ([09:02](#)):

Oh, I'm gonna go there.

Mike Michalowicz ([09:03](#)):

Yeah. It's really cute. Maybe, maybe after we finish up today, we can just say a walk down together. It's really cute. Um, and I'll talk to the owner, start going. I, I'll go there and say, Hey, what, why is my book not front and center? <laugh>.

AJ Harper ([09:16](#)):

<laugh>.

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

All right. So, uh, thanks for joining us today. This episode's about finding your office vo uh, author voice. Uh, I'm your host, Mike Michalowicz, with my colleague and your other host, AJ Harper. AJ I, based upon our conversation this morning, which we won't present here, just I get a little emotional. You're a remarkable mother. It's good to see. It's good to see you.

AJ Harper ([09:38](#)):

Thanks.

Mike Michalowicz ([09:39](#)):

Yeah. I wish, uh, oh,

AJ Harper ([09:40](#)):

Wow.

Mike Michalowicz ([09:42](#)):

Well, it's really a big deal because, uh, you see a lot of parents who don't step up for their kids the way you do. And, uh, you know, it's, it's almost divine that, uh, your son, the, the challenges he's faced and so forth, the way you step up for him, it's a grace. It's, it's divine that you're his mom. So.

AJ Harper ([10:03](#)):

Oh my gosh. I, I don't, I, you're, that's surprised me how emotional you are.

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

But yeah, I don't see it too much. You know, I've been blessed too. My parents have been, are remarkable. Um,

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

And your wife is a very good mom.

Mike Michalowicz ([10:16](#)):

And my, my wife's an amazing mother. It's funny. When I got married, this is not necessarily it 'cause how the guy-mind works, typically. Well, you like, oh, is she a good wife? And so forth. But in my back of my head, I was constantly saying, is she gonna be like my mother there, um, present for my future children? And, uh, she was devoted to that. And it was like, oh, wow. This is the, for me, the perfect spouse, the perfect partner. Um, but you don't see it often. I, I hear these stories of people that, uh, the parents aren't supportive or they're expectant of the children to be almost of service to them. And what you shared, I won't share the details, but I will share this. You said parenting is not a give-take. It's a give, give, give. Yes. I was like, my God, that's a book, that's an opening line.

AJ Harper ([11:04](#)):

Well, I'm not a parenting expert, but, Yeah. <laugh>. My wife is also an excellent mother. And I know, you know, people always say to me, um, how does that feel? Well, they don't say it to me as much as they did when he was really little, but they used to say, how does it feel sharing him with another mom. And I haven't known any other way. Because, you know, we made him together and with his father. And nothing freaky y'all. Nothing freaky <laugh>. No. Nothing freaky. But, you know, my wife, that's funny. Uh, she is the kind of mother that I couldn't be. Yeah. You know, so he has this like double, you know, he, I don't know that he fully appreciates it. Maybe when he is older he will. But there are things that she is as a mother that I, I've absolutely would fail at. So I'm lucky in that respect to be able to share that role. Thanks. That was really nice.

Mike Michalowicz ([12:05](#)):

I feel that I cry in front of you, a good cry, probably once every six months to a year. And you,

AJ Harper ([12:11](#)):

It's been picking up <laugh>,

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

It's been picking up. And you

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

<laugh>

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

And you are one of the best recipients of that. You don't squash person's emotion. You don't say, oh, it's okay. Or don't need to cry. You just, you sit, you're present. That's also another remarkable quality.

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

But that's you too, by the way. (Thank you.) And I also, I, uh, I feel like the more, the more the older we get and the longer we've been in this creative partnership, I feel like the more we have in common.

Mike Michalowicz ([12:37](#)):

Isn't that funny?

AJ Harper ([12:38](#)):

It's because we had nothing in common in the beginning,

Mike Michalowicz ([12:41](#)):

Or did we? We just didn't.

AJ Harper ([12:42](#)):

Maybe we just didn't know. Yeah. Maybe we just didn't know, because we weren't just, we weren't sharing as much.

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

I think you're right.

AJ Harper ([12:48](#)):

Maybe that's it. But you are, you know, you are also a person who's an excellent parent. And you were also sharing right before we came on about how you're trying to show up for your son. (Yeah. Thank you.) I respect, I respect that in you, that you're not, um, put that you don't push to a very specific ideal. Right? I think this is really hard. And I see actually a lot of parents doing that. Thank you. You. That this is, this is my version of what a good kid is or what a productive human is. And so that's how you need to be. And you're just doing these little baby steps to be supportive.

Mike Michalowicz ([13:26](#)):

Thank you.

AJ Harper ([13:27](#)):

Yeah.

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Mike Michalowicz ([13:28](#)):

It's tough to restrain that. Because I see an ideal, but I realize it's an ideal for myself. Not for,

AJ Harper ([13:32](#)):

Don't you think parenting, if you do it right, is like this hardest, like, hardest thing. It's like some sort of like Buddhist, um, detachment practice. I don't know. I'm know that I'm on a, I'm definitely not great at it all the time.

Mike Michalowicz ([13:46](#)):

Um, so let's talk about the author voice. I'll start off with a little story. It is about college or a college, former college friend. We wrote Toilet paper Entrepreneur. I wrote Toilet Paper Entrepreneur. You, I then gave you the manuscript because I saw, I'm like, I can't. This is unreadable. And you worked with that and, and polished it up not to what we have done subsequently with Pumpkin Plan and so forth. Because I, I gave you something and I'm like, just fix this. And you got two days Pumpkin Plan and all these other books have been projects from inception together, right? But I got a call Toilet Paper Entrepreneur went on to sell over a hundred thousand units. It continues to sell today. Drips and drabs, but it sells. I got a call from someone who said, and I don't remember who it was, said I was reading this book and I'm like, this is just like this dude I knew in college, like verbatim, it sounds like him and so forth. And he goes, it's, he is like this guy Mike, the, the, from the fraternity. He was a fraternity brother. And then that brother run to the front of the page like, holy crap, it's Mike!

AJ Harper ([14:51](#)):

Mike! <Laugh>

Mike Michalowicz ([14:53](#)):

And it was, it was probably of all time the greatest compliment of, of being true to who I am. And, and presenting my voice consistently with that. And you have developed this unique ability of being able to capture voice and, and emulate it. So when we're working together and, and you take a piece of content that I've given you, and then you, you, you massage it, create it into a story. I read it. I'm like, that, that is my voice. Um, and I think a lot of authors ignore that necessity. I think they abandon it. And now it's kind of like, there's, there's the, the real me and then there's the author me, and, and they have two different voices. And there's this incongruity and I think that's problematic. Uh, and I see this in the professional world too. I see people show up to work saying, I have to present myself a certain way at work, but that's not really who I am. And I see people doing this as authors, and when there's this inauthenticity, there's this incongruity it, it's perceptible to the audience. There, there's an ick to it, I think.

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

Yeah. There may be. But it's also a missed opportunity to connect because that through voice is one of the ways that you connect with readers. So, you know, you're missing out in that respect, but your voice evolved.

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Mike Michalowicz ([16:11](#)):

Correct.

AJ Harper ([16:12](#)):

We've told this story before. In fact, if you want to deep dive into how you figured out that you were off base with who you thought your reader was and how to speak to that reader. It's episode five. I went and checked the archives. Understanding your ideal reader. There's a deep dive there into how that process worked and the conversations we had. And we talked about, uh, thinking about who you are really. And you weren't showing up fully. You were showing up as trying to attract the college, um, crowd.

Mike Michalowicz ([16:48](#)):

Correct.

AJ Harper ([16:49](#)):

But you were a lot of other things. So it wasn't totally you, it was a version of you. It was not inauthentic in the sense that it was false, but it wasn't really a whole picture. And then you also have to consider, are you gonna sustain that author voice across all books? We didn't have the conversation about voice until you told me I've got 25 books in me. And then I was like, okay. Whoa. You know, rewind. Are we doing this bathroom humor for 25 books? You know, we have to really think about how are you gonna show up consistently over all of those books.

Mike Michalowicz ([17:24](#)):

Yeah. Ironically, it was a, um, it, that bathroom humor I think was a extreme expression of a small part of me. I think that still, I think that humor is fun. Um, but it was, it was extreme. Um, that being said, that book did break into the market a unique way because of that. Because that was atypical in this space.

AJ Harper ([17:46](#)):

It wasn't just that though. It was also a lot of disruptive content.

Mike Michalowicz ([17:50](#)):

Exactly. Yeah. Totally. Totally. How do you find your voice? I mean, you already have it kind of, right? Your voice is your voice?

AJ Harper ([17:58](#)):

I don't think so. Okay. I think some people do and they know, but I think that the world kind of squashes it. Whether it's our English teacher reminding us about topic sentences or going into a corporate environment. And then there's a whole list of things that you can't do. And it's even worse for academics. They can't have personal anything in their work. Right. So you get conditioned. And so it

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influences your voice. So I would argue that I don't think you, everyone knows what it is. I think a lot of people don't because they've been beaten down or shaped-- Shaped is maybe a nicer way of saying it-- by circumstance people, the requirements of their job or profession.

Mike Michalowicz ([18:44](#)):

Is your speaking voice different than your writing voice?

AJ Harper ([18:48](#)):

Mine, personally?

Mike Michalowicz ([18:49](#)):

Yes. And holistically, everybody.

AJ Harper ([18:52](#)):

I mean, yes, it is. Because it's a different way of, it's a different form of expression. I think it can be very similar and people will often say, right, it sounds just like you. But it's not really how you talk. You're not putting together a perfect paragraph when you, when you speak, you know, but they're just looking for some phrasing, pacing that is similar. And you can replicate that in writing, but it's not identical. You're speaking voice and your writing voice are not identical.

Mike Michalowicz ([19:24](#)):

Are there little glimpses that we have as authors, maybe even prior to devoting ourselves to being authors of a writing voice? I'll give context. I remember this, this is back in the Eighties. I had a pen pal, Ryan Washburn, uh, family friends. The Washburns were friends with my parents. And they had a son, Ryan. And, uh, we were a couple years apart in school, but we, I see him regularly and, and go on play dates and stuff like that. And, uh, they went somewhere for a period of time. So my mom's like, oh, he's your pen pal. I'm like, oh, okay. I remember writing something once and I was young, you know, I was under, I was probably 10 years old. And I remember rereading what I just wrote, <laugh>. And in reflection, this is like decades later. Like, this is good stuff.

AJ Harper ([20:19](#)):

<laugh>

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

Like, there's a good story in there. And it was fun. It wasn't like, how are you, things are good. You ate a sandwich this morning, hope you're well. Like, it wasn't like, there was a little storytelling and light to it. And I was like, in reflection, that was the first glimmer of voice in writing. I, is there a way as we as authors, can we reflect back on our lives or detect moments? Does it present itself in certain ways, in emails when you're writing to a colleague?

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

Yeah, of course. That's all. Yes.

Mike Michalowicz ([20:49](#)):

But how do you find that? I mean, do, do you look back and look at your, all the emails you've written and say, Hey, I got some voice in there.

AJ Harper ([20:55](#)):

Sure, you could, but I, the way you really find your voice is you write it. You... Through writing. Okay.

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

So just, just do it. Just write.

AJ Harper ([21:05](#)):

Well, yes. There's a difference though between say, journaling or doing Julia Cameron's morning pages or stream of consciousness writing or whatever. I mean, I think writing with intent, meaning, I'm gonna write about this now I want to talk, discuss this theme. I want to answer this question. I want to tell this story. Have a purpose in what you're writing. And then as you write, you will start to find your voice. But it's a process of stripping away the unspoken rules that you have adopted. So you really have, everyone has them. I can't say this, I shouldn't do that. This is gonna be too much of me. I don't have enough of this or that. All that stuff is BS if you're trying to find your voice. So you know that the main way you find your voice is to write and to let yourself be, which is a, which is a process most people can't let go of all the self-judgment and criticism to find their voice.

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

It must be so difficult to distinguish between your natural voice and what you've been programmed to say. Is it, it's--

AJ Harper ([22:20](#)):

Not even what you've been programmed to say. It's more like what you're, how you're, how you're allowed to phrase things and what's, uh, there should never be a question of, is this right?

Mike Michalowicz ([22:30](#)):

Okay.

AJ Harper ([22:31](#)):

Did I, um, can I do this? Should I, all those questions when they come in, if you're thinking that, if you're wondering, Hmm, I don't know if I'm allowed to do this, or I don't know if I can do this, or, uh, should this be written in a different way? If you're starting to wonder those things when you're just looking for voice, it's a sign that you are being, you know, influenced.

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Mike Michalowicz ([22:55](#)):

Oh. That's great. That's great. Should I set a set of rules for myself? Like these are my voice rules.

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

Well, so one of the ways that I think is helpful, and I teach this in my class, and I did this with you that day when you told me about the 25 books--

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

You keep rubbing it in, 25 books. <laugh>.

AJ Harper ([23:13](#)):

Well, what I always tell people is, you still have 25. I don't, I know it'll never finish. How many, when does this end? Yeah. Uh, I feel like we're halfway through, but then no, there's still 25 more. Um, I don't know. I don't think we're gonna get there. If you keep, if you never--

Mike Michalowicz ([23:29](#)):

Maybe that's the ultimate win, is you're never done.

AJ Harper ([23:32](#)):

Yeah. But anyway, um, we talked about immutable laws. And I've since changed that and adapted that to immutable that that comes from your book. Yeah. We applied it to that. Yeah. But then I've added immutable characteristics. I

Mike Michalowicz ([23:47](#)):

Love that.

AJ Harper ([23:48](#)):

So that's basically voice how you want to come off, how you want to sound tone. Um, and so I think there's, uh, because we are so influenced and often aren't aware of how we've been shaped, sitting down and writing with intention, your list of characteristics that represent how you want to come off in the book is helpful because it's you setting an intention not influenced by others. So by sitting down and doing, and, and by the way, try and limit it to say three, sometimes--

Mike Michalowicz ([24:22](#)):

Three immutable characteristics?

AJ Harper ([24:23](#)):

Yeah. I mean, it's not a hard and fast rule, but I see people with nine things on their list. And really, we can't be all, we can't do all of that.

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Mike Michalowicz ([24:33](#)):

So would one, we, we use the term arm over the shoulder.

AJ Harper ([24:36](#)):

That's your main one.

Mike Michalowicz ([24:37](#)):

That's okay. And so my visualization of that is kinda like this bar scene. And there's someone sitting there with their martini, kind of head slumped down.

AJ Harper ([24:47](#)):

You didn't say martini for me. It's a beer.

Mike Michalowicz ([24:50](#)):

Uh, no. Oh yeah. For me, I'm drinking a beer. They, they're having a martini. It's that bad.

AJ Harper ([24:53](#)):

Okay. You tell me yours, I'm gonna tell you mine about arm over the shoulder.

Mike Michalowicz ([24:56](#)):

Oh, I want to hear it. So mine is it, it's as an indistinguishable character. Character. But I think it's a male sitting there slumped down. Um, there's no cigarette, but there should be a cigarette in their hand. Because that's kind of the, it's very involved. The posture of their hand is like that, that kind of crunch. Wow. Okay. Claw like hand. There's a martini in the kind of the, and they're just like, I, I give up, but I can't give up like this, this desperation of I have to continue, but I can't. And then it's, it's my arm over their shoulder saying, I get it. I've been there. Uh, we've got this. This is not your problem, it's our problem. And actually I can feel the emotion building right now. Like, that's how I see it. And then we walk through practical baby steps to, to start moving forward again. The first thing is, I say no more martinis. We're we're going to non-alcoholic beer, which is not my favorite thing. <laugh>.

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

N.A.

Mike Michalowicz ([25:50](#)):

Do, I have a picture. My daughter and I went away for a week together. I do an annual trip, went to Olympic National Park and we rented a cabin. And after we do a day hike, which we, there were monster hikes, she out hiked me. We come back and I drink one of my non-alcoholic Coronas. Well, by the end of this trip, I had 12 of 'em lined up on the window sill. And I took a picture of it and I said, <laugh>, I don't know if I should post this on social media, but I put, uh, I'm a qualified non-alcoholic.

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

Yeah, don't do that.

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

Yeah, I did. I didn't. But I was thinking about it.

AJ Harper ([26:19](#)):

But you were smart. I said, I don't know. I don't know. <laugh>.

Mike Michalowicz ([26:24](#)):

Alright, so what? That's my visual. What's yours?

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

Well, first of all it's Applebee's.

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

It's Apple <laugh>. That's amazing. That's amazing.

AJ Harper ([26:34](#)):

And it's also a bar, but it's that bar at Applebee's.

Mike Michalowicz ([26:37](#)):

Oh, the cheesy. Yeah.

AJ Harper ([26:39](#)):

Yeah. That's where I see you. Yeah. Sitting drinking beers and just a little cocktail napkin. And that's where you're, you're just like writing down some basics for some dude who really wants to quit their job or is struggling with their struggling with their business. Yeah. Or whatever.

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

First of all, it's Applebee's. That's the best line ever. That's an open to a book also. <Laugh>

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

Well, it's true. Yeah. That's what I think when I think of Arm Over the Shoulder. And that's a, that's a characteristic. It's not the only characteristic. I think another characteristic for you is encouraging. Um, for me it would be the distinction encouraging is different than say for me, which is nurturing. It's a little bit of, a little bit of a different vibe. And, um, you know, when I did my own characteristics, some of them overlapped and, and immutable laws, some of them overlapped with yours. But when you,

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Mike Michalowicz ([27:38](#)):

Which is probably our connection as, as partners.

AJ Harper ([27:41](#)):

Yes. You know, but I think if you sit down as an author and you say, okay, this is, this is me. And you can even back up say, I don't know who I, you know, I don't really even know how to write those three things down. You can do an exercise where you ask the people that are close to you, especially colleagues, I think are helpful to describe you in a few words and look for the patterns. And that way you can see, and that's how I discovered nurturing. It was because Jeff Shaw asked me to do that exercise. Jeff Shaw, author of Lingo, which is fantastic.

Mike Michalowicz ([28:14](#)):

A fantastic book.

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

That isn't the, everyone should get Lingo <laugh>.

Mike Michalowicz ([28:17](#)):

It's one of those like, what do they say? The underrated books or whatever. It, it, it's, it's the one that I wish everyone would read.

AJ Harper ([28:23](#)):

Yeah. I learned so much from Lingo. I'm still using it today. Yeah. I, IU in fact, I use it on a regular basis.

Mike Michalowicz ([28:30](#)):

It's a badass title. It's a badass title.

AJ Harper ([28:33](#)):

And he also wrote the self-employed life. Yep. Which is, I'm also used. Anyway, Jeff Shaw said to me, why don't you do this exercise where you find out, this was when I was trying to figure out what my web more like copy Yeah. For marketing, trying to figure out how to do that. Not easy for a ghostwriter to shift into copy for marketing. It's actually two different sets of skills. And he said, had me go through this exercise. And it, uh, overwhelmingly came back with all these people saying some version of nurturing. Like, what are you talking about? I thought I was the no BS girl?

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

Yeah. <laugh>

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

You know, and I am, but not in an, in your face kind of way. I'm always nurturing and I didn't appreciate it. So I think it can be helpful to back up a minute, ask people to tell you, then set your intention. And then here's the thing. As you're writing, you won't nail that. But it's just good for you to have that in the, in the forefront. Really. You're gonna refine voice and make sure that, that your manuscript really sings in edits. So you can use those immutable characteristics as a guiding point in edits to say, okay, let's say it's gonna be arm over the shoulder encouraging. Let me go through and make sure. And I do that with your manuscript.

Mike Michalowicz ([29:58](#)):

Yeah. Well, I remember, I shouldn't remember. Every time we do a, uh, a call about edits, you review the immutable characteristics. And I don't know if it's intentional. We just say, Hey, we're, as a reminder, we have to make sure that every sentence passes this test effectively.

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

Yeah. And it's not like every sentence is arm over the shoulder. That would be, you would be like, okay, really <laugh>, I don't need that much. Take your arm off my shoulder, buddy.

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

Exactly. Um, it's called Creep.

AJ Harper ([30:23](#)):

But it's, but I've, I've actually said to you multiple times Yeah. How have the edits, you'll text me. How are the edits going? Yeah, that's You're always doing. How's it going? Yeah. You're like a little puppy.

Mike Michalowicz ([30:34](#)):

Like Yeah, I know, I know,

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

I know what's going on. How's, what's happening? You feel good about it? Um, <laugh>, but I'll say I still have to do arm over the shoulder.. And, you know, you know, yeah. Most of the time now I'm just doing it in the writing. This is a, I don't remember 15 year process. I don't know how long we've been doing this. I I can pretty much automatically do it, but I still do the arm over the shoulder pass just to make sure that I did it. But also that there's nothing that's, uh, the antithesis of that. I don't want to go, I don't want any content in your book that would be harm harmful in a way to, that that would be the

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

Yeah. I assume a pandering pedestal, those type of things would be harmful.

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

Yeah. Anything that would put you above.

Mike Michalowicz ([31:21](#)):

Correct.

AJ Harper ([31:22](#)):

Because it's supposed to be you on the level. And by the way, y'all, this is not contrived. I'm positive Mike has said in Applebee's with a cocktail napkin and tried to help somebody <laugh>. Like, this is, yeah. This is just how it is. Yeah. It's totally,

Mike Michalowicz ([31:36](#)):

I did meet my wife at a Fridays, at a bar at a Fridays <laugh>, so it's pretty close.

AJ Harper ([31:40](#)):

Okay.

Mike Michalowicz ([31:41](#)):

Um, the voice must sustain through all books. But it's more than just the books, right? I mean...

AJ Harper ([31:47](#)):

Yeah. It's, it's how you show up on podcasts. It's how you show up in speaking in your marketing copy. It's everywhere.

Mike Michalowicz ([31:53](#)):

Yeah. It's, it's in emails and which means it has to be truly who you are. You can't fake it all the time. Everywhere.

AJ Harper ([32:02](#)):

No.

Mike Michalowicz ([32:03](#)):

Yeah. So it's gotta be consistent with you. Um, what it, what do you do? And we started already talking about this, but there's, there's certain books I admire, for example, uh, you know, I love the Malcolm Gladwell series. And I'm like, oh, I just love that. I want to be more like that. Does that start tainting the voice, the, the, the immutable characteristics? If I try to emulate someone else? Or, or can I embrace styles and integrate?

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

Um, I mean, you should always be playing with, you know, you should, you don't ever want to be in a fixed state creatively, but he needs to be authentically you. You're never gonna be, you have to accept it. You're not gonna be Malcolm Gladwell. Yeah. But <laugh>. But I think what you like about him is some stylistic things that are not about voice. And you like how he does--

Mike Michalowicz ([32:54](#)):

That's true.

AJ Harper ([32:54](#)):

Tease. You like how he builds tension. You, you know, um, there's some other stuff you like, you, you like how you weave in concepts and research and storytelling. You like the way he does it. There's, that's a lot of structural stuff. It's not so much voice.

Mike Michalowicz ([33:10](#)):

You know, one thing I'm most, uh, complimented on, I mean, that's the right choice of words, but regularly, people say, Mike, I read your books. And then they pause and say, well, I didn't read it. I got on Audible. And then they say, those readings on Audible are the best I've ever heard. And I think the reason people feel that way is that is my voice. So when reading it, I'm, I'm living it.

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

Can you imagine if you had something, if you had to, first of all, can you imagine if you had to do that bathroom humor every time you went into, I

Mike Michalowicz ([33:44](#)):

Put a bullet in my mouth.

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

Or if you had just like a drone, you know, if, let's say you had caved to expectations about formality and tone or, you know, um, not sharing very much about your personal self, or if you had just caved to all of these expectations that have been imprinted on you, or cave to that thought of, in order for me to be credible, I need to come off as all-knowing. Which is a big one. This is a big one, y'all.

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

Don't be all-knowing.

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

Don't do that. But imagine if you went into the studio and you had to read that, then

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Mike Michalowicz ([34:21](#)):

Yeah. It's, it feels icky. And imagine me going in and reading Blink or another Malcolm Gladwell book, me reading it. It's just, it wouldn't work. And that's,

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

Well, you would probably be going, oh my God, this is so cool.

Mike Michalowicz ([34:33](#)):

He's a genius.

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

<laugh>

Mike Michalowicz ([34:35](#)):

Start crying again. And, um, that's why I think professional voices fail in audio. Uh, we have a episode that we talk about audible books, but professional voices, they don't understand your voice. They have a voice, but they don't understand your voice. Um, quick story. I talked with a, uh, an author. I'd never, actually, this is ironic. I did speak with him before. Joseph Nguyen. Um, he wrote a book, don't Believe Everything You Think.

AJ Harper ([35:04](#)):

Oh, interesting.

Mike Michalowicz ([35:05](#)):

700,000 copies sold. Wow. Just struck a deal. Actually, I'm not gonna say what it is. 'cause we, we spoke with him privately, and I can't, I'm not sure if this was confidential, so I'm not gonna share, but struck a, a, a new deal. He originally reached out to Pen with Purpose. We spoke with Adayla and Adayla said, I don't think we're a fit for you, uh, and what you're looking to do the next stage. And, uh, when I spoke with him, he's like, you know, that was such a good conversation and I appreciate that I wasn't a fit. What he has is a perfect fit for him. And this guy is exploding as an author. He's coming down to Don Miller's place August 1st and second. We're recording this on the 17th of July. So this, the event will have already happened. He's coming down to it. But here's what I want to share with you. I spoke with him for a good half hour on the phone this past week when I was on vacation, ironically. And I just purchased his book and started reading it. And like, this is this, this is the guy, Hmm. Within words, it was interesting. I didn't read the book and then listen to him. I spoke to him first and then heard the book. I'm like, this is the guy that I'd argue is why this book is crushing it. It is,

AJ Harper ([36:11](#)):

it's a big factor.

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

So him--

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

And also voice, it can be the reason why, if you don't have a clear and distinctive voice, it can be a reason why you don't get picked up for by a publisher. Because publisher's not how important it is.

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

Is it possible not to have a voice?

AJ Harper ([36:26](#)):

Well, no. Everyone does. Okay. But I don't think everybody is, understands what it is or how to do it. And again, it's just because, it's just because you are hampered by the way, the, the, the rules and expectations of others. And you may not be aware of it. That's, that's really what's happening. You don't trust it. That's the thing. You don't trust it. So you're just trying to follow what someone told you would be a good idea. At one point.

Mike Michalowicz ([36:53](#)):

When, uh, when I do some television stuff, um, one of the techniques is you, you doubled the energy because the TV media actually flattens it. So when you walk in as an example for one scene, you walk in and say, Hey, it's nice to meet you. You don't say it that way. You're like, Hey, it's a real pleasure to meet you. And, uh, I don't know how this gonna come across in audio, but when coming across in video, the video dampers it and it actually comes across as a normal energy. Is that true in writing? Do do we need to amplify? Our elements?

AJ Harper ([37:27](#)):

No. No. Not at all.

AJ Harper ([37:30](#)):

<laugh> Just, I trying to just put in, no emphatic no.

Mike Michalowicz ([37:34](#)):

There. Well, that was painful. Um, is it, if you, if you don't know what your voice is, are there some ways to start expressing it? Discovering it? I know you said just right, but is there,

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

Well, right. With intention. Right. So not just, I'm gonna write about whatever today, but write, try to write the story. Try to write the, the rant. Try to try to write something intentional. I think it's also helpful to write about what really matters to you, and to get into those places where you get real hyped

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up. So if you want to get me hyped up, talk about all these charlatans in publishing. Yeah. If you want to get me hyped up, your hands

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

Already started to swinging. You're getting Italian in front of me. <laugh>

AJ Harper ([38:18](#)):

Talk about authors who don't market their books. Yeah. You know, I mean to, I, I'm, if you want to get hyped up, I've got a lot of topics. So that's one way that you can kind of get into your, a version of your voice. Because when we get heated about something we care about, so I'm not talking about being airing grievances to be, to be clear. I'm talking about, oh, I really care about this and I wish people knew this. You know, I think you can find your way into it. It might feel like, I can't write a whole book like a manifesto, although many books have been written like that. Yes. Um, but it's good energy for you because when you're heated like that, you kind of forget all those rules that we just talked about. So if I, I, if I have an author who's say, coming from c-suite and then <laugh>, everything sounds exactly like whatever report they gave to the board directors or academic where there's literally zero personality <laugh>. I will say, give me the manifesto. Write it. Write it. Now what are you, you know, if you, if you could just get up on your pedestal and rant in the street about this, what would it be? And I'm just looking for ways to unlock it. So that's, that's a, a way for you to start doing so right. About something you care about, so that, that, that what you care about, just drones out and edges out all of that unspoken, um, all those unspoken things that keep you in a box

Mike Michalowicz ([40:01](#)):

As such a good tip there. I was reading in Psychology Today, I, I love this magazine that in a heightened state, either like positive emotion or negative emotion, we default back to our natural wiring. It's exactly what you're saying is that when we are in these energized states, that our natural voice is more likely to present itself, our natural wiring.

AJ Harper ([40:23](#)):

Yeah. So put yourself into that state.

Mike Michalowicz ([40:24](#)):

Yeah. Intentionally do it.

AJ Harper ([40:25](#)):

You can also do it through, if you record yourself talking, and then you can go clean up the transcript and you'll start to see, I mean, when I'm working with students or when I was a ghost writer, I did this. But now when I'm working with students in their, in their editing, I can start to see patterns of phrasing and pacing and I can see little glimpses of them. You know. So I'll say, okay, more this, more that, more this. And I sort of apply that ear that I had as a ghostwriter to their work to help them find it. But it's

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basically, you start to see, um, your, it's your take on things. It's your sides, it's your, um, are you sardonic? Are you silly? Are you, um, do you like a dad joke?

AJ Harper ([41:14](#)):

You know, I mean, you start to see these playful things or, um, strong viewpoints as people let go. And the, the real culprit, the real thing that's blocking everybody is just this unwillingness to believe that the first draft can be just dreck <laugh>, you know? Yeah. You have to be willing to play around in it. So writing with intention about something you care about will unlock it, but then you have to say it. Tell yourself, this is, I mean, everyone says this, this I am this. Anne Lamott coined the phrase, everyone says it, write the first draft. And I hope they don't bleep that because it's an actual term. <laugh>. The SFD.

Mike Michalowicz ([42:00](#)):

Oh, really? Yes. first draft <laugh>.

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

But the thing is, it, I, I think people think that's a great idea to do the SFD, but I don't think they really commit to it. <laugh>.

Mike Michalowicz ([42:11](#)):

I agree.

AJ Harper ([42:11](#)):

And, and that's, you have to be willing to play. You have to be willing to, to accept that it might not be awesome. In fact, it won't be. All these fears that you have about your ability as a writer are the things that are keeping you from your natural voice. All of it. So, but let the first draft live, let it breathe, let it be what it needs to be, because you can work on voice in edits. The expectation that you are gonna nail voice on the first draft is totally unrealistic. And over time you'll get there. But, uh, all this, this nonsense noise from other people about what you should write and then from yourself about how good you should be on the first draft, is, is just a barrier to slipping into who you are.

Mike Michalowicz ([42:59](#)):

What does it mean to the reader? Like when you, the author or in your natural voice, how, how does that affect the reader?

AJ Harper ([43:07](#)):

Well, then they feel they know you.

Mike Michalowicz ([43:09](#)):

They can, it can also polarize, right? Some readers can say this, this person ain't for me.

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

Um, for sure. I mean, some people do that intentionally.

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

Yeah.

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

I wouldn't, I would wonder if they really are though, if they're just trying to get a rise out of people.

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

That's interesting. Yeah. What their motive is. Yeah. Yeah. But, but it's, there's certain authors, I read the books, I'm like, this is content is not for me.

AJ Harper ([43:33](#)):

Oh, well, I mean, you might be responding to say, arrogance or... There are, there are certain things that would be a turn off for you.

Mike Michalowicz ([43:39](#)):

But I think it's true. Wouldn't it be for all of us? Don't we like people who are like us? Don't we have a natural magnetism toward similarities?

AJ Harper ([43:48](#)):

Yeah. There's some things that people kind of across the board love though, you know? Um, being humble. We love it when people are transparent. We love it when people break the fourth wall. We love it when people show, you know, have, um, dark humor.

Mike Michalowicz ([44:05](#)):

What's breaking the fourth wall?

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

It would be like, let's say you, you weren't sure you wanted to say something in your book if it would be okay to say, but you know, you really need to say it. So instead of wrestling with yourself about the decision, you would break the fourth wall and say to the reader in the text, I really wasn't sure about sharing this.

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

Oh, interesting.

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

Because I was, I knew it might be controversial, but I just, I had to do it because this is why that would be breaking the fourth wall. So instead of saying, Ugh, I don't know if I can just say, Ugh, I didn't know if I should in the text.

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

Interesting.

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

So now-- you're almost

Mike Michalowicz ([44:45](#)):

You're almost reflecting on your consideration of writing in the writing itself.

AJ Harper ([44:48](#)):

This is a very, I'm actually gonna talk about that when we talk about credibility. It's a, it's a really specific tool I teach, and most people are like, I didn't know I could do that. And again, it comes to, what, what can I do? What should I do? We have to stop that.

Mike Michalowicz ([45:05](#)):

You, you lost your voice, uh, in your own work, I believe. Tell me, tell me that story.

AJ Harper ([45:12](#)):

Um, well I think I talked about it a little bit when we were talking about writer's block and that episode, but if you've been a ghost writer writing <laugh> dozens of books for 10 years and assuming other people's personalities, I, I don't know. I lost it completely. I didn't, I, that's part of why I quit.

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

Is it because you're ab- almost absorbing (Yes.) These other voices?

AJ Harper ([45:39](#)):

Yeah. It's really tough. I've talked to other ghost writers since about it, and it's a real thing that happens.

Mike Michalowicz ([45:46](#)):

Okay. Is there voices that kind of repulsed you? I mean, that's too strong of a word or repelled you and you were obligated out of your work to still do that voice and

AJ Harper ([45:58](#)):

You mean the bathroom humor that you were talking <laugh>?

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Mike Michalowicz ([46:00](#)):

Well, anyone's you walked,

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

You walked right into it.

Mike Michalowicz ([46:05](#)):

Oh my God.

AJ Harper ([46:06](#)):

Yeah. In fact, I do remember sitting in my little tiny office with your manuscript Yeah. And cursing to my wife. Like, what in the, I I can't believe I have to write about this potty stuff.

Mike Michalowicz ([46:17](#)):

My God. And you stuck with me. Yeah. Did you see something through it? Like, you're like, there's, there's something more to this dude. Like, why would you stick with that?

AJ Harper ([46:26](#)):

Oh, that's a deep, you've never asked me that.

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

I never thought about it.

AJ Harper ([46:30](#)):

Um.

Mike Michalowicz ([46:32](#)):

This is a deep call to, uh, conversation today.

AJ Harper ([46:34](#)):

I think. Well, you were very enthusiastic. I, I mean, very practically speaking, I love that I could come and talk to you in person.

Mike Michalowicz ([46:42](#)):

Yeah, me too.

AJ Harper ([46:43](#)):

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I love that. So many of my clients were, I was on this pre-Zoom, so I was on the phone with them. Yes. Uh, no, I don't know. I felt something, I felt like you, I don't know. There was something there. I kind of wanted to keep seeing what would be there for us to work on.

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

So by ghostwriting for myself and other folks, you started to lose your own voice. Yeah. It, it sounds like

AJ Harper ([47:10](#)):

Toilet. Gone.

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

So all this stuff. So then how do you get your voice back? How did you get your voice back? And, and we still work together, which is a different voice than your voice. That's my voice versus your voice.

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

Yeah. When I first started writing my book, I realized how bad it was.

Mike Michalowicz ([47:24](#)):

<laugh>. What was the SFD?

AJ Harper ([47:27](#)):

No, I realized how bad, how I didn't have.

Mike Michalowicz ([47:29](#)):

Oh, your situations.

AJ Harper ([47:30](#)):

I didn't know my voice.

Mike Michalowicz ([47:31](#)):

How'd you re-find it?

AJ Harper ([47:32](#)):

I mean, it was sort of like a combination of kind of me and then some Mike iss. And, because at that point I had only been writing with you for a number of years. Yes. I, I just wrote through it. And it's just the advice. I know it's probably irritating to hear this just right. Uh, but it is actually true. I had those immutable characteristics, which I had already determined and I just, I slowly, I just allowed myself to write a bunch of dreck. Just this. I actually have, you know, having big cap all caps. Because see, I'm a believer that that voice in your head that tells you this is boring. This is terrible.

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Mike Michalowicz ([48:17](#)):

Yeah.

AJ Harper ([48:18](#)):

Yeah. I actually write it into the manuscript while I'm doing it.

Mike Michalowicz ([48:22](#)):

You write that, that feeling and you write, this is boring.

AJ Harper ([48:26](#)):

I put it in brackets in all caps. Like I'm shouting at myself. I did.

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

This is new to me.

AJ Harper ([48:30](#)):

So I don't do it with your stuff. I just do it with my stuff. Well, no, actually I do do it with your stuff. You just don't see it because I will take it out before I send it to you.

Mike Michalowicz ([48:39](#)):

<laugh>, I have to like, use the reverse thing where you can pull back edits that were deleted <laugh> and see this.

AJ Harper ([48:44](#)):

I'm too smart for you.

Mike Michalowicz ([48:45](#)):

Oh, that's right. 'cause you do all these techniques, you'll, you'll strip out the metadata somehow.

AJ Harper ([48:50](#)):

Mm. <laugh>.

Mike Michalowicz ([48:52](#)):

I wish. Oh my god, I wish this was on video. That face, you just made it.

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

Well, how do you think I was so stealth as a ghost writer when people had to send manuscripts to their publisher and they didn't want to know.

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Mike Michalowicz ([49:03](#)):

You were ripping all that stuff out.

AJ Harper ([49:04](#)):

Yes. <laugh>. All right. But anyway, I put in, I don't shy away from, I'm not one of those people that's like, let's just be positive. Yeah. I am an inherently positive person. But I'm just like, okay, look, I'm not gonna fight this voice. I just put in <laugh> all caps in brackets. This is boring. Don't fix this <laugh>. This is who wants to listen to this. Yeah. And I just leave it. Because when you, I just leave it on the page and it's out on my head. So I'm not actually going to stress over it. Because I wrote it down then when I go back. So it allows me to keep going. Allows me to keep moving because I brilliant. I haven't named it brilliant. I left it there. Then when I come back, I can look at it and say, okay, well is it, maybe it was. Big effing deal. You can fix it.

Mike Michalowicz ([49:57](#)):

That is gold.

AJ Harper ([49:59](#)):

That's what I, I put all the abusive stuff that runs through my head with those inner critic trolls. And I just, and in all caps, I'm just shouting it.

Mike Michalowicz ([50:08](#)):

It's great. Because you, you release it, you acknowledge it. Yeah. And the thought move on. There's a technique and we probably shared it in a prior episode, but I think it's worth highlighting again. You shared it or Laura, your colleague Laura Stone shared it when you're looking for a word, but you can't think what the word is.

AJ Harper ([50:24](#)):

Oh, this is something. Yeah.

Mike Michalowicz ([50:24](#)):

So how do you do it?

AJ Harper ([50:25](#)):

This is just, this is not anything that's new, but a journalist would always put tk.

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

Oh, what's that stand for?

don't write *that* book!

AJ Harper ([50:33](#)):

It's, it doesn't stand for anything. It's just unusual that you would have that two consonants next to each other. So you can search. Well, I mean it does stand for, you're going to put it, yeah, there's some, you gotta fill in the blank. And journalists, you can correct me if there's an actual definition I'm not aware of. But my, what I was, what I was told when I first started out is it, if you can, you can search for it and find it easily, because you're not gonna find words that have tk, you know? Yeah. So I often would use Elephant. Um, but Laura uses LAURALAURA, and it's in all caps. So when instead of looking up a word or a statistic or trying to come up with something, even if you aren't sure how you want to say it, she'll just put Laura. Laura. And then she comes back later. We all do this all minus <laugh>. The way I do it is in brackets. Something, something about this <laugh>. Oh, that's smart. And it's always two somethings.

Mike Michalowicz ([51:37](#)):

So if you see something, something, you know that it's something you have to go back to.

AJ Harper ([51:40](#)):

I go, I just, I put it in brackets though, so I can easily separate it from the other text. So between that and the abuse I'm throwing in brackets, <laugh>, it's a lot of brackets and shouting in my document. But, but over time, what happened was I started to see glimpses of me. I just started to see glimpses of me. And then I was able to, I was able, now I'm totally in my voice. But it was very hard. It, it, there's just, so if you've trained yourself to be corporate or academic or hold back on something, you have to be patient with yourself until, until you can see those glimpses.

Mike Michalowicz ([52:22](#)):

The thing to underline for me was write through it. Yes. And now you given techniques to do it. Uh, we gotta wrap things up. I do want to share, uh, next week we're gonna be talking about your qualifications to write a book. I think it's a big challenge that authors have is, am I really qualified to do this? Or other people have already done this, so why should I? And how do you navigate that? We hope you love today's episode. Um, we would love to get your feedback. Go to [dwtb podcast.com](#). You get free materials. You can join our email list. We're getting regular emails from folks. We love that it lights us up. It encourages us to keep doing this and we can answer your questions and for God's sake, get the book. How? Yes. Write a Write a Must-Read Yes, because it shows you how to Write a Must-Read, Write a Must-Read. Um, you'll not only learn how to write a masterful book, you'll discover AJ's voice and, and perhaps in that process you'll discover your own. You can also email us at hello@dwtbpodcast.com. Oh, I didn't tell you. I gotta tell you in the next, next episode, what I did with your book, Write a Must-Read. And, um, thanks for joining us. We look forward to seeing you on next week's episode. And as always, here's the big reminder. Don't write that book. Write the greatest book you can.