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Ep 51:

“Editing: Mapping the Reader Journey”

Mike Michalowicz: 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. Isn't that funny? So, uh, zoom or whatever, squashes clapping. I couldn't hear your clap. I heard your cough. Isn't that kind of ironic? If they can have the technology to squelch a clap, wouldn't they squelch like coughing, sneezing, clearing your throat? Ums?

AJ Harper: That's pretty sophisticated.

Mike Michalowicz: Yeah.

AJ Harper: But I did, I did learn the other day, you ever noticed how people will say to you on zoom, I'm sorry about this sound of my, the ambulance. I'm sorry about my dog.

Mike Michalowicz: You hear nothing.

AJ Harper: But you don't hear anything. So I finally, I was, I was teaching the other day and someone was saying the same thing. I'm really sorry about my dog, people. They said, we hear nothing. And then I asked, Hey, do they have technology that's drowning that out? And while I was teaching someone, Googled it. And they do. So Zoom. So that's fascinating to me.

Mike Michalowicz: It's fascinating. Uh, well, this episode is going to be fascinating for our listeners, too. We're going to talk about mapping the reader's journey. As a reminder, you are listening to Don't Write That Book Podcast. I am your host, Mike Michalowicz, along with my colleague, your co-host, AJ Harper, or I'm the co-host and she's the host.

I'm the author. And she's the host of *Write a Must-Read*. We are, if you haven't figured it out, doing this one remotely. AJ's feeling a little bit under the weather and, um, we decided to not have a super spreader podcast that she'd stay home, but also just to recover. From your illness. So I'm wishing you health, but just honored that you're giving a shot to be here.

We'll see how.

AJ Harper: it's just a cold, man. Just a cold, dude. But I don't, I don't sound the greatest. So apologies to listeners.

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Mike Michalowicz: Yeah, I'm sure they they'll tolerate it. Um, and thanks for sharing right before we kicked off the episode. I don't think we're recording yet that, um, the popularity of our show. It was really cool to hear that.

AJ Harper: It's so fun to hear from people. It's fun to hear from other podcasters. We love doing it.

Mike Michalowicz: We're doing it. This is fun. It's fun. It's fun. Talk about fun. I think this is a good way to kind of intro the concept of the reader journey and how you map it is, uh, with some regularity, I have people approach me and say that, uh, they felt the book was written specifically or exclusively for them.

And what's funny is sometimes... It happened, there's a guy named Daniel Green. He came to me. Just a few days ago, he was at a workshop and he said, uh, I don't know, I, and I think you, you may have heard this before, but it's worth saying when you wrote, and I don't remember what he specified in the book, he's like, that, that was my story.

He's like, you, you wrote this book just for me. You knew where I was, you know, the challenges facing and you made it relatable. Just thanks so much for writing the book for me. And the reality is he, he's not the first person to have said that it happens with some regularity and that's a beautiful thing, but I think maybe that I want to get your opinion.

Does that confirm that you've, you've hit the reader journey spot on?

AJ Harper: Yeah. I mean, the ultimate goal is that they will keep reading and finish the book. And if you're writing prescriptive nonfiction, it's also that they'll do all the things. I mean, that's, that's the ultimate goal. But, um, when you hear from a reader that you feel like the book, they feel the book was written for them.

Then, you know, it worked. What people don't realize is that's not magic or luck. It doesn't happen by accident. It happens with very specific consideration of the reader on every page.

Mike Michalowicz: It's funny, like, I think about movies and I think about a scene, maybe it's a rom com or something, where I just bust out laughing so loud because I'm like, yeah, that's exactly what goes down.

And then conversely, I've seen movies and like, it loses its credibility. When they show something like that's not how it is, particularly like I've seen movies about authors and they they'll have a scene about writing or something like that's, that's not how it works. And then for me, it loses its validity. But when they nail it, it enhances the validity.

I'm wondering when it comes to the reader journey, if the person can see themselves in that journey, if they think it was written exclusively for them, I can only assume, but may I'm

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wrong here, that it increases the consumption of your book, the value they see in your book, and so much more.

AJ Harper: Yeah, just they feel seen. It's the ultimate goal with prescriptive nonfiction is that almost any book actually, is that a reader feels seen. That's what you're talking about, though, that's about accuracy in that's a little different, but then the reader journey, especially in prescriptive nonfiction is taking people from where they are to where they want to be.

So understanding that transformation that happens over the course of a book, and then beyond that mapping, understanding progress, the incremental progress that readers make throughout your book. And the feelings and thoughts that come up for them, the resistance that comes up for them, so that you can address that and maybe also make some changes to make that transformational journey easier and more likely that they'll complete it.

Mike Michalowicz: Let's dig a little deeper into that. You mentioned the feeling. So I'm going to do maybe in reverse order, but what is the value of knowing how they feel?

AJ Harper: Well, because if they're, if they're resistant to what's happening with the book, they'll put it down. I mean, if you can, if a reader feels seen when they don't feel threatened by what you're doing. They don't feel stressed out by what you're doing, or if they do, you've acknowledged it. So then again, they feel seen, because a mere acknowledgement is enough sometimes to say, you know what? I know what I'm asking you to do right now is hard. And I get that. And you might be feeling this way. Or, I know what I've, what you've just figured out might be feel like a bucket of cold water on your head, or you might be feeling guilty because you didn't know this stuff earlier.

I get it. It's okay. You know, and you don't have to speak. It doesn't have to be cheesy. You know, I don't have to speak directly to them. There are other ways you can use storytelling, you can use examples and anecdotes, but when you aren't paying attention to what they might be feeling, then you might, then you have a problem.

Mike Michalowicz: You say you don't have to be cheesy and speak directly to them. Is, is that cheesy to speak directly to them? Or do you want to just have a right?

AJ Harper: Not necessarily. I'm just saying there's no default solution. So we're getting a little ahead of ourselves, but I came up with mapping the reader journey. Every tool I give authors is because I needed it.

Mike Michalowicz: Right.

AJ Harper: Because I, I just, you know, you know me really well. So I don't think you would be surprised to learn that I worried about readers when I was ghostwriting books.

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Mike Michalowicz: Yeah, of course

AJ Harper: Total strangers.

Mike Michalowicz: Yeah, you know, I know you would

AJ Harper: And I just thought oh my god. What are they? What what are they gonna think when they read this? Or, how bad would I feel if I read this for the first time and I never knew this? Or, how, how do they know this is working? I need to point it out. And just, you know, I think it was my own care for my client's readers that helped me realize, okay, I've got to figure this out. I can't just wing it and hope it lands. We can't just put a few encouraging words into a book and think that's enough.

Mike Michalowicz: Oh my God. If you could highlight a podcast, people need to highlight that one.

AJ Harper: We have to know what it's like to read our stuff because we're so disconnected from what it's like to be at the beginning. So, we forget. Maybe the things you're sharing are brand, it's brand-new information and what it's like to take that in. And if you're also asking people to do hard things, they're going to react to that. For you, maybe it's easy. We talked about this a bit in Doubts and Criticisms episode that we had a few episodes back.

AJ Harper: But this is a way for you to really think about, okay, Where, from where are they starting? What's their "you are here" on the map and what's the transformation, the destination at the end? But then also beyond that, what in each chapter, what's happening, right? What are they, what do they now understand? What are they now capable of? You, you need to point that out, you know? And then what are they confused about? And what are they worried about? And what are they pissed about? And what's hard.

And then once you can identify what's going on, you can think about if you want to address it and how that's how you're going to address it. But if you just present all your stuff and you don't think about what it's like to read the content and experience it and do the things, then you're more apt to lose them, but you're certainly not going to get that comment of, I think you wrote this book for me

Mike Michalowicz: Yeah, my quickest off ramp on a book is when it simply says you've got this or fight through it, but there's no empathy, maybe that that's what happens when you connect with people's feelings.

Um, so let's talk about the process. I'm curious. I get why it matters now. Um, do you start with the end in mind with the destination and then the, the go back to the here or how do you structure?

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AJ Harper: You start with the beginning. You have to have a very clear idea about where they're starting from. So most people, this is actually, it sounds easy. But in my experience, when I ask authors to do this, it takes them a few times, a few tries to get this right, because they're still thinking about them differently than what's really happening. It's like, they can't really get into the mindset of where the reader is starting from because they're so far ahead of it.

Um, so you have to be really clear. This is what's going on. This is what they're worried about. This is what they want. This is what they think is standing in their way. Um, this is what they think they're capable of doing. You gotta have all that baseline before you start, because that's going to shift.

And you need to be aware of when it shifts. So you start with, start at the beginning,

Mike Michalowicz: But how do you know what they're really feeling as opposed to what you think they may be feeling?

AJ Harper: Well, hopefully you have some interaction with folks, you know, I know authors pretty well. So when I wrote my book, there's common things that keep coming.

I'm not going to know exactly what. You know, um, Betty in Kansas is thinking about her book, but I know I can, I can wager that she's feeling a bunch of stuff that other authors feel. And I can't know her exact set of circumstances, but it's, there's, I mean, I've been doing this long enough that I hear the same stuff all the time.

So if you're not in that situation, you're the same, by the way, you hear from entrepreneurs all the time. You're paying attention and you, there's themes, right? They might be using different words, but they mean the same thing. If you don't know, you can just do some recall, you know? You can check, you can do polls, little mini surveys, you, um, you can speak to people who do know, do know those communities pretty well.

Um, you can do focus groups, you can go on Reddit, you can, there's so much, you know.

Mike Michalowicz: Yeah, you gotta immerse, immerse yourself in the community, right?

AJ Harper: Yeah, and so, just do a recon if you, if you don't have access and you don't have the knowledge. And it actually doesn't even take that long.

Mike Michalowicz: Do a recon, man! You ever see, like, uh, there's commercials, I'm sure it happens in reality where the opera singer sings and hits a certain pitch and all the glasses like shatter open, shatter. What you just shared just felt like that for a moment. I remember speaking with Michael Bungay Stanier, author of *The Coaching Habit*, among other things.

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And I asked him, and I think I shared this on a prior episode, you know, what makes a book a bestseller? And, uh, his assessment after saying, you know, if I knew I would all the time, but he's had him, he said, it's been his immersion in a community and understanding that community intimately. So now hearing that, I didn't get, it's probably innate now to be able to map the reader journey for him or at least so much better.

And I wonder if the relatability is, is the biggest thing. I wonder if the content in *The Coaching Habit* would have been just as good if he didn't have the community, but the relatability wouldn't have been there. I wonder if that's it.

AJ Harper: Maybe they don't want to dissuade people from writing books if they don't have a big community, you know?

Mike Michalowicz: No, no, I don't think that should be the point at all. I think there's ways to learn. Neil, last night you and I had a call. We did an interview of Amber Duggar. She's an expert in personal finance and business finance, and she was sharing anecdotes about her community. So through her, we learned about the Mennonite community and someone who left that community and needed help with finances.

We learned with someone who was, um, terminally ill and how he was resistant to focusing on money because it, at least the story we heard was if he had to worry about finalizing his finances, he had to accept that he was terminally ill. It was just, we heard a lot of these antidotes that gave a sense of the, the kind of the, the perceptions people have around money and the outside influences.

So I think. Even without necessarily having a community, um, of your own to your point, you can, you can find these people through these different outlets.

AJ Harper: Well, if you, okay, so what we did in interviewing Amber was collect anecdotes from her about her own community that then gave us insight into our readers, right?

Right. So. So. Okay. That's one thing you can do. You can also interview experts who do have deep roots in a certain community and get their take on things.

Mike Michalowicz: Yeah. And she shared something last night. I was like, oh, this, this is a powerful word, uh, and maybe we can use it in our book. She said, um, there's a stage where people have to go through the awful, right?

So you, you've had this, uh, epiphany or awareness that you want to, or intend to fix your finances, but you're in, in a stage where you're avoiding or ignoring in some cases. And to get to the other side of it, you have to go through the awful, she said. And I was like, ooh, that, that's a great way to, uh, express one version or one flavor of the emotion and feelings that a reader is going through.

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AJ Harper: Right. So then for me, when listening to Amber though, I'm thinking about the reader journey the entire time. So I'm thinking about if we're going to write about budgeting, how am I going to help them feel better about budgeting?

And how am I going to inspire them to do whatever we're asking them to do about budgeting? So while I'm listening to Amber talk, I'm listening for stories and insights. But I'm also listening to what does she know about people that we can translate then to be what, as I'm mapping our readers journey to make sure that we're attending to what's happening to them emotionally.

Mike Michalowicz: Okay. So it's interesting. You talked about two things there. There is, I want to make them feel better, but I also need to tend to where they are. So there's the intentions and then there's their reality. As you map the reader journey. Are you documenting or just in top and top of your mind? But are you always considering those two things, where do I want them to be? Emotionally, feeling wise, where are they likely at?

AJ Harper: Uh, yeah. So, I think it's important to know when do you do this, you know? So, I've experimented with this. You know what I just realized, Mike? We didn't do intros.

Mike Michalowicz: Oh my gosh. We'll do an outro then. How's that sound?

AJ Harper: We'll do an outro. But, um, so I was recently, um, I did my first editing retreat last week.

Mike Michalowicz: Oh, how was that? On Madeline Island.

AJ Harper: Yeah, I texted you some pics.

Mike Michalowicz: I know, I saw that. Oh, of people I did not see. I gotta look at my Oh, I think

AJ Harper: I just sent you a picture in my, um, studio that was all done and pretty.

Mike Michalowicz: Yes, I saw that. And, uh, I, I get so excited that I, I was like, I don't overwhelm her with another response of like, this is amazing. Cause at a certain point it starts losing its, uh, strength.

AJ Harper: I know you're just an exclamation guy.

Mike Michalowicz: I am an exclamation guy.

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AJ Harper: But last week, you know, a lot of what I do is, is can think about help reader authors think about what's going on with their readers. You know, we're very focused on. Okay. Our content and how it should be organized and presented and are we, is it any good and all of that, but a big part of what I do at Retreat, it's not the only thing by any means is guide authors through thinking about their reader's feelings, and what could they be and how does that shape the content? So, you can try mapping the reader journey where you're looking at the start, the destination, you're getting clarity about both ends, but you're also looking at each chapter in your outline and thinking about what you want them to feel, your intention.

You can do that at the outlining phase.

Mike Michalowicz: Okay.

AJ Harper: But you also need to consider what's actually happening, right? And that is easier to do. You can try and do it in the outlining phase, but it's easier to do in the editing phase. This is really an editing tool. So I've tried it before with students where I brought mapping the reader journey exercise to outlining, and it does actually help you refine the outline because you're setting your intention.

But there's a difference between what you want them to feel and what's actually going on. Yeah. And sometimes, again, authors get really tripped up on reader first, which is my shorthand for what I believe, as you know, that a book is for someone. It's, in practice, it's harder than you think to keep redirecting yourself over to them instead of what you want. Instead of what you hope will happen. Instead of what matters to you. And you just, it's, it's a, it's a, not tedious, but it is time consuming just going through and thinking, okay, if I heard this for the first time, what would I think? Yeah. Oh, I do this exercise and it's easy peasy for me, but what's it going to be like for them?

Or I just challenged every single thing that their family probably told them. I wonder what I need to do there. Or, hey, they really are making so much progress now. I should probably acknowledge that. And zero in on that feeling that they, I hope they're having, it's not always negative, right? It's like, hey, look at you, you know, you, you've totally made progress already.

So, um, but it's hard. We have to keep reminding ourselves to think about them, which isn't, it doesn't make us, bad, you know, it's not like we're selfish. We're just not used to it.

Mike Michalowicz: Interesting. Let me ask you something very specific. I'm curious, in certain times you may rile up your reader and they're resentful of you, the author.

I think of the doctor who says, I, I'm sorry to say this, but your spouse is going to pass. And the anger you feel and it's channeled at the person delivering the message that happens in books. That, is there a specific way to navigate that?

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AJ Harper: Sure. Well, I mean, first of all, the reason you map the reader journey is to be aware of it. And sometimes it means you have to change the content. Um, when we talked about doubts, and criticisms in that episode, it was, that's a really specific about pushback, but here's the thing when you map the reader journey, you realize that you might actually need to change the order of things or the way things are presented, um, based on how they're feeling.

If you think about it less about this micro of. Oh, I don't believe you about this, or I, I have self-doubt here, but more about this arc, the journey's arc, as if you, if you were to think about each chapter as having a feeling, and then if you, let's, this is an exercise I do sometimes, I did, I didn't do it this last retreat, but I do it sometimes, if you take, uh, colored index cards, and actually I should say, I learned this as a playwright from Melanie Marnich, Um, I took a class from her. So this was everything I do comes from fiction. Maybe that's why It works. It might be why it works.

Mike Michalowicz: That's what I'm thinking

AJ Harper: because everything I do is funneled through fiction. I mean even uh Even character development is how I came up with reader, the reader statement and all that.

Mike Michalowicz: Interesting

AJ Harper: Uh, just having a moment here private.

Mike Michalowicz: Yeah, the onions has been peeled a little bit.

AJ Harper: Well, anyway, Melanie Marnich You might not know who she is. She's a playwright. She was a writer on Big Love um and some other shows She taught a class in her apartment, and I took it and she had us take multicolored index cards You And then for each scene in our play, she had us choose a color for an emotion, you know, so you would identify green means this or red means anger or whatever, right?

And then instead of actually even noting what's even going on, she just had us make an outline of the trajectory of each scene, but just in feeling colors. And then we had to lay it all out on our dining room table and we could see, wow, I am, I have just put these people on a freaking rollercoaster. Maybe that arc is not going to work.

Speaker 3: Interesting.

AJ Harper: Right? Maybe that. We can't have that. It shouldn't look like the stock exchange, right? Like maybe it needs to have a more predictable arc. But it got, it got, all it, all it did for me was like, wow, okay, let me rethink this a little bit. Do I have a missing scene? Do—what do I need to do to get them there?

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Is it too much of a leap from joy to rage? You know what I mean? And the thing is you can apply that to the reader journey as well So I'm think thinking more about like feelings in big strokes, as opposed to what we talked about with doubts and criticisms More like wow, I'm just yanking them over here to this other feeling What do I need to do? Is there maybe a buffer chapter? So at retreat This last week I had some oh my gosh amazing. Oh, I just can't wait to talk to you about it. It was the most amazing thing ever.

Mike Michalowicz: Yeah, really

AJ Harper: and it's not like I haven't done retreat before. But the difference is two things one. It was on my property So it's just magic but two it was five days instead of three and that was actually better because I wasn't cramming. You know what I mean?

Mike Michalowicz: Oh, I see. So less intense. In fact. Yeah.

AJ Harper: Yeah. But what happened was people could see through the feelings. Okay, we didn't do that colored index cards, but they could we still did a feelings exercise. They could see, "Oh, wait, I actually I need something in there. That's too abrupt or I need to move this. I don't want them to feel that way at that time," because then you're looking at your intention and like, wow, I am dragging them. You know, let me see what I can do about it. Is that really how I want them to feel at the start? Is that really how I want them to feel at the end? You know, if you don't do it, you. You absolutely will miss something, not because you're a bad writer, but because you didn't think about it. Does that make sense?

Mike Michalowicz: Oh my god, does it make sense?

AJ Harper: So it's more like those big strokes, Mike, the big feelings, as opposed to this exact doubt, this exact Pushback.

Mike Michalowicz: Yeah. It's those jolts and jostles that, that really shake people.

And can you make it a smoother journey? But sometimes a big fast dip is thrilling or a stratospheric climb.

AJ Harper: You want that. Is my point is intention versus reality, right? Do you want, okay, here's what's probably going on with them. Is that what you want?

Mike Michalowicz: I work with John Bates, who you know for my speaking engagements and what's unique about him as a speaking coach is I'll fly out to Salt Lake City where he's based out of. We go to his facility, his offices, and it's a hard speech to deliver because it's me speaking to one guy, John, just listening. But we, we write the speech together. It's similar to yours. It's a multi-day journey. He doesn't three days, maybe five. And one of the most important exercises is the emotional journey of the listener.

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AJ Harper: The audience, yeah.

Mike Michalowicz: Audience and most, most presentations are 45 minutes to 60 minutes and make them laugh, make them cry. Move them is, is the goal. Um, and they have to experience all those emotions. What was so interesting, and I'm just paraphrasing, but he says, if you keep on the high the whole time, there is that there's no emotional release. It's like, you're always having exclamation marks in your texts, Mike. Um, conversely, because if you have them down the whole time, there's no relief.

So they have to go through these transformations and to your point, where, where are you meeting them now? Where are they, where is the audience likely right now? And where, what's your intention to take them there? And, and what's their feelings throughout? Um, and it's interesting, we'll insert a joke or something.

For comic relief during a stressful period. So we talk about if it's the Profit First presentation, we'll talk about the managing debt. And then that's, that typically we'll get a reader down because most people have debt and now they're facing a hard reality and then hit it with a joke just to give relief. And then start giving them direction or support on the methods to get out of it. But it was that emotional relief they need first, otherwise they can't hear the steps to get out.

AJ Harper: Yeah. So it's the, the reader journey is the transformation itself, but also what it feels like to be on that journey.

Mike Michalowicz: Tell me in *Write a Must-Read*, which I got to say it again. If a listener has not read this book, stop listening to the podcast, hit that big pause button or that little pause button, but you can barely touch it because your fingers moving around your screen. And, and, and go to Amazon or wherever your favorite bookstore is, if I prefer an indie, and pick up *Write a Must-Read*.

In your book, AJ, where are you meeting the reader emotionally, where are they ending, but also what's your intentions for them?

AJ Harper: Thank you for asking. Um, so they are coming in, all, first of all, all, all readers of prescriptive nonfiction come in with a healthy mix of hope and skepticism.

Mike Michalowicz: Yeah.

AJ Harper: Um, my, my pal Andrea Lee likes to say they have one foot on the gas and one foot on the brake at the same time.

But I think, um, the, the feeling most authors have is kind of like this cautious excitement. You know, because they're going to create something like a book. That's an exciting place to

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be. But also feeling like maybe that's actually going to be really hard for them. They still have all of that, um, nonsense in their head about whether it's worth pursuing, but mostly it's excitement, you know, to create something new.

I think that what I care about is they, at the beginning, do they feel like they could write a must-read? Because I want to get the, most of them don't. I want to get them to the end where they feel like, yep, I can do it. I can do it. That's my, that's my goal is that they feel capable of doing that. And they feel like they have a chance, you know, because we can't obviously promise that they absolutely will.

There's too many factors there at play, too many variables. But I want them to feel that they can. And so that's where I'm trying to get them to is this feeling of confidence, of feeling optimistic, feeling hopeful, and that skepticism is gone.

Mike Michalowicz: It's powerful to end it with you got a chance as opposed to you will do this because then it's an overpromise. And I think that can be, it can be a deflating moment.

AJ Harper: Yeah, I mean, pretty much the entire book, I'm managing their expectations throughout the whole thing, because I know that the world will give them constant confirmation that they shouldn't be doing it. And so, I need to get in there and manage their expectations through the whole thing so that they aren't dealing with so-called evidence that they shouldn't be doing it. Because if I just keep taking down their expectations, Then over time, over the course of reading the book, they'll realize, Oh, okay. Yep. I can do it. I have a chance. But if there's too much at stake and it's too much of an over-promise and that can never be fulfilled, then it just becomes evidence that they can't.

But there are places in the book where I knew their emotions were going to get them. That they were going to potentially say, this is too much. I can't. And that comes, I knew exactly where they were.

Mike Michalowicz: Well, give me the how for that. How did you know exactly where they were going to be?

AJ Harper: Just again, it's from knowing the reader. And so it's from my interactions with folks. So, um, when they have to sit down and write their draft, that is the daunting task. So I didn't, I didn't write, you know, a big rally, meaning that's my word for you can do it. You know, of course I don't write it like that, but...

Mike Michalowicz: Or say it like that.

AJ Harper: I mean, I can write a good rally. I wrote self-help for 10 years, man. I can write a good rally, um, but I wrote a story, right? So, um, but it's called the odds are in your favor is one of them. And it's just a little story about my mom. And I'll get emotional about it if I talk about it too much because I just saw her after the retreat I went to visit her at the nursing

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home. It's just a little story about sitting in my mom's Honda when I was a kid waiting for the car to warm up and I was feeling despondent because someone had told me how are you going to have a career as a writer? That's a one in a million chance. And I thought I can't I can't beat those odds.

And my mom broke it down in her true fashion She just did all the math and she just kept breaking it down until I had a one in ten thousand chance. And she was doing this while we were waiting for the car to warm up And I just told that little story that I remembered that made me feel like okay, I could maybe do this. And I just—that's how I tended to my readers feeling like maybe also they weren't going to be able to pull it out So we can do, we can do that.

I also had a second place Where they knew I knew they would give up. And that is when I tell them they have 17 editing passes. I mean, that's my methodology. And sometimes I think people are really overwhelmed by having to do that. I find it, I find it comforting to have the checklist, but sometimes people like, what, that's a lot.

Um, so I also wrote a story for that. And that one was a deeply personal story about how I had to turn in my book late. Because of all of the challenges, including having the TIA and I wrote, um, it's called, it's a one little story called "Life happens and so will your book." And it's just, I just was vulnerable and talked about how, yeah, okay, it might take longer than you think, but it's okay, you know, and just talked about my own issues with having to turn something in late because here I am writing for authors and I had to turn a book about writing in late, you know? So I give you these examples because I first, I had to know what was happening, happening with their emotion and how, how I wanted to address that then, you know, and I also thinking of mapping the reader journey for right on my street, I yanked a whole chapter on test drives because I thought they are going to freak out. They're going to be like overload of just... their brains are just going to completely overload and they're going to feel like there's no way I can do this because it just adds a whole 'nother letter layer and I knew that they would end up feeling like they weren't ready to write.

So I had initially had it in my outline and when I mapped the reader journey, I was like, I gotta yank that because where it's going to take them emotionally, I can't have them go there. And I tried a bunch of steps like, okay, maybe I'll move it over here. Maybe I'll move it down there. And eventually I was like, okay, it's out.

So those are some examples.

Mike Michalowicz: I'm thinking of a, uh, I hope I attributed this to the right historical figure. I think it was Benjamin Franklin, who, when there was a major, major consideration, would do a pro/cons list, and it brought this balanced perspective. And what I'm hearing in the reader's journey is there needs to be this balanced perspective.

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When I first was considering being an author, I had effectively committed to it, but I was asking other authors. The first folks I talked to, the majority of folks I talked to were basically, are you crazy? Now, the majority people I spoke to had never been an author themselves. They were just, you know, their opinion was, you're crazy.

So I found a great question to ask was, tell me about your own journey doing this. And when someone didn't have that journey, I disqualified their response. But then I spoke to some authors who said, it's been a major struggle. And then I talked to one author. It was, it was Tim Ferriss who said this has been a major success.

I wonder if I only heard one side if I would have been overly optimistic and not understand the realities of what could come. If I just listened to the Tim type side or the other side where if I only heard the struggles if I would abandon it. It sounds like the, the intentions where we want to get someone to go, maybe in this case is the Tim side, but the relatability and the emotional elements, uh, of the potential struggle.

Are the other side of the authors. It sounds like you have to have this balance.

AJ Harper: Honestly, it's just considering their, yeah, yes. And it's, it's as simple as, and we, you might think listening, I don't know how to map the reader journey, but all it is, is looking at what you're sharing with them and considering them. That's it.

Mike Michalowicz: You're the master of reader feedback. Um, I love how you not just do it cause we've done it together so many times, but then how you consolidate. All the reader feedback. How can you use reader feedback to confirm or to not confirm that your reader journey is working?

AJ Harper: So, you know, in my book, I have a feedback whole chapter on this. But I didn't, I changed something in that sense. I think if you really want to track their journey, you need to do a prequestionnaire. So let's say you line up all your people who are going to be your readers. And before you give them the manuscript, you have them do a short survey that's mostly about what they believe about themselves and their capabilities.

Right. And it's also helpful to know what are they hoping to learn from the book, that sort of thing. That's also good. But mostly it's to kind of suss out if they've that hope and skepticism part. This is what I hope I'm getting out of it, but this is what I'm nervous about and what do I feel capable of doing so that you can then, once they're done reading the book, they do the rest of the questions and you come back around to now what do you feel capable of doing?

Because ultimately, the transformation can't just be knowledge, it has to be understanding that you can now do something, at least with prescriptive nonfiction. We have to feel like, okay, I got a better handle on this, or I know how to do this, or, um, um, I have relief, or whatever it is, whatever the point of the book is.

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So if you have the, I think you need to do a prequestionnaire. In fact, we should probably do a prequestionnaire for our new book, because in really big time,

Mike Michalowicz: Yeah, you know, I'm slipping up and sharing the title occasionally too, in our interviews. Now I got to restrain from doing that. Um, in our show notes, did you make a slip up here?

You called Steven Pressfield, Steve Pressfield, or are you two like buddies now? Like,

AJ Harper: Hey, Steve, Stevie, I do call him Steve now.

Mike Michalowicz: Oh.

AJ Harper: I haven't talked to him in a long time. It's not like we're buddies that talk all the time. But he did. And he did talk to me as Steve and he ends his emails as Steve.

Mike Michalowicz: That's amazing. What's the update you have? Or the epiphany. I think it was.

AJ Harper: Oh, so you know, remember I told it just, just, I said, I did that. Those two stories about the, um, the odds are in your favor and one about being white. I had learned from Steve at his event that there's a point in the hero's journey, Joseph Campbell's hero's journey where the protagonist missed.

Has the epiphany, right? So we, that's part, that's always, I didn't want that part from Steve. That's part of the hero's journey. What I learned from Steve was that it's actually when we think of it as when we have divine wisdom that like, well, you, Oh, the part of the clouds part. But he said, it's not that actually it's the lifting of the veil.

It's the lifting of delusion. And it's where you, the protagonist, Realizes that they've kind of been kidding themselves. So This was a revelation to me when I when he just want to explain this and when I saw him at an event in Nashville because I was like, what do you mean? It's not divine wisdom? Like I just could I couldn't wrap my and then I thought about it and thought about it because your reader is the hero.

You're not the hero. So if your reader is the hero the protagonist in the hero's journey, then there's going to be a moment where they lift the veil. And they say, Oh my God, I've been kidding myself. And that epiphany, you have to, as an author, know where that is in the book. Because when a reader feels like that's when that hope goes in the tank and the skepticism is high, and they say, Ugh, why did I think I could write a book?

Or why did I think I could be in a profitable business? I'm totally, I was kidding myself. I absolutely can't do this. And your job as the author is to know where it is, number one, and

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then give them a way forward to get them out of that so that they can take that. Feeling and go forward in the hero's journey.

They take that new knowledge, which now is okay. Well, maybe I was deluding myself, but what can I do? Right? What, what, what is true? How can I go forward? They take that into what the final battle in the hero's journey. But you have to know, where is it and what can you do to help them keep going?

Mike Michalowicz: We got to dedicate an episode to this, the veil, because when you first explained it to me and you've explained it to me in the past, I still didn't understand the way you just shared it.

I thought the veil was the epiphany is revealed, the divine knowledge is revealed. And then after that becomes the veil gets lifted and that you realize what I believe in the past. It's the abandoning of the past and the appreciation of the future. But what I just heard is the veil has to be lifted for you to see the epiphany.

AJ Harper: You have to stop kidding yourself.

Mike Michalowicz: You have to stop kidding yourself. Oh, we got to dedicate an episode to it because this becomes a whole new episode.

AJ Harper: Okay, I'll dedicate a whole episode to it because in subsequent communication, like I've seen Steve say the opposite now. So maybe I need to email him and say, um, listen, we had a whole interview about this. And now you said something else. So maybe we need to email him and say, Okay, we've got to clear this up.

Mike Michalowicz: Let me step it up one notch higher. Yeah. I would like you to ask him if he'd be willing to be our first, maybe only ever guest.

AJ Harper: Maybe the only guest we ever have.

Mike Michalowicz: Yeah, because this is such a profound topic. We I would like to hear from the person who revealed it to you, and I'd love to have a dialogue around that. So would you be willing to ask him if he wants to come on? Okay. And a little awkward because like, Hey Steve, thanks for joining us. I'm like, Hi Steven. And then those two names will never become synonymous or will never connect.

AJ Harper: I, I, I signed up to do this event with him and I couldn't go.

Mike Michalowicz: Yeah, I know. I know. I know. But, but interestingly, the prior one, there was nothing that was going to stop you, period. And you were nothing.

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AJ Harper: I decided that I valued my health more than—

Mike Michalowicz: You had to, you had to.

AJ Harper: But anyway, all right, I'll email him.

Mike Michalowicz: I okay, it's recorded. It's on tape.

AJ Harper: What else?

Mike Michalowicz: Was there any other details you wanted to do before we wrap up today's episode?

AJ Harper: No, it's just I hope what your takeaway from this conversation is just It gets as simple as let me think about them. Let me look at what I wrote. Let me look at the trajectory and say, Hmm, what is, what's going on with my reader because of what I wrote?

And does this make sense? It doesn't have to be a complicated process. It's just a little time consuming. So block off a Saturday afternoon and get your outline out and get your manuscript out and just think about that. You are ahead of millions of authors just by thinking about them in this respect. So even if you don't know what to do about it, the consideration puts you in a league of your own.

Mike Michalowicz: Since we didn't do an intro, we said we'd do an outro. I want you to know you just heard from my writing partner and my friend, AJ Harper. I'll tell you something about her that you may not know was the absolute truth. She shows up every single time. Even when she's sick, period.

AJ Harper: Samesies.

Mike Michalowicz: Yeah, hopefully, uh, I don't like getting sick, but, uh, yeah, we're always there.

AJ Harper: Yeah. We're always there.

Mike Michalowicz: Next week, we're gonna talk about Amazon ads and maybe a little bit of a debate, but maybe, maybe not. And perhaps the alternative that you're not considering that I have quantifiable data is the most impactful way to sell books. It's TikTok. Yeah, I said it. And we're going to talk about it next week.

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