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Ep 53:

“How to Manage Your Inner Critic Trolls”

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.

Welcome to episode 53. They don't say, you know, I'm 53 years old and they don't really celebrate a 53rd birthday like it's the 50th or 60th.

AJ Harper: Just in case you didn't know. I'm 51.

Mike Michalowicz: Today's episode, pardon me?

AJ Harper: I'm 51.

Mike Michalowicz: You're 51. Did you get a big celebration for 51?

AJ Harper: Hell no, wait. We did. I did. Because I kind of pooped out on the 50.

Mike Michalowicz: Oh, okay. Okay, that's why.

AJ Harper: I was kind of emotional about it. I don't think because of 50. I think just because life was hard. So my wife wanted to do a do over. And she took me on a surprise trip to Hudson, New York to this hotel I was dying to stay at called The Marper. The Maker. The Maker. During COVID, I had seen it, uh, because during COVID, all I did was watch like, um, Schitt's Creek and the Magnolia Network, which is an offshoot of HGTV.

And, um, they had this show about bespoke inns. I mean, this is, this is how desperate I was during COVID. I wasn't leaving the house. Let me watch a show about hotels. And what they look like, like this is pretty bad, but on it, they had one about The Maker in Hudson, New York. And I fell madly in love. It's very expensive. So it's definitely a treat, but she surprised me with a trip to Hudson. And we stayed at The Maker and we went antiquing and we went to bookstores and we went to dinner and we hung out with each other like grownups who don't have children. It was great.

Mike Michalowicz: Sounds like heaven. It was heaven. We'll get up right now.

AJ Harper: Oh my gosh.

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Mike Michalowicz: I wish some of our listeners did the same, right? So someone says something and I pull it up and go right to images on Google. I'm like, oh my god, look at this place.

AJ Harper: Well, I've never experienced treatment like they do like the way they do.

Mike Michalowicz: I don't like decadence, like they have a picture of the bar. It has a kind of old world feel from these pictures.

AJ Harper: And the rooms, they have, they're each in a different style. And there's one that's like the writers. I didn't get to have that one because it was booked, but there's one that's. Inspired by writers and, oh, this is so beautiful and they have a library and they just treat you like royalty. Royalty.

Mike Michalowicz: I was at a hotel, one of the kind of big names, so the Marriott or something, and this, I think it was in Kansas City. I was walking down the hallway and one of the doors was covered with book covers and it was all from the same author who was a local author in Kansas City. And above it was a sign that this, uh, were in honors such and such author.

AJ Harper: That's really cool. That's really cool.

Mike Michalowicz: Um, today's episode, we're talking about the inner critic, actually, it's a very personal thing I just want to share, but I do want to... Maybe we'll save it for the end. I have a thing about the breakfast club I want to share with you, but maybe we'll sneak into this. Well, my own version of emulating or recreating the breakfast club. (What?) I'll tell you. Do you want to hear it real quick?

AJ Harper: Yes! What are you talking about?

Mike Michalowicz: I think it's the best coming of age movie of all time. It's people that don't know each other. So I'm hosting a poker game tonight here at my house. It's only guys, but it's guys from my high school that I didn't know. Oh. I mean, I knew of, and they knew of me, but they didn't know each other. So it's the jock, it's the nerd, it's the, the, the burnout. Um, it's the weirdo. And we're all coming together. And we're like, let's do this grand experiment of, Uh, Breakfast Club in our fifties. So we'll see.

AJ Harper: I love that. That is, it is, I think the, the movie of our generation and in a, in a, in a generation that— Listen, I don't care what anybody says, the eighties, we had, we had that on lock the movies, the music, the TV. Period.

Mike Michalowicz: I feel that way. I totally feel that.

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AJ Harper: So choosing a quintessential 80s coming of age movie is actually hard when we had John Hughes.

So how do you choose between that and 16 Candles and Ferris and Some Kind of Wonderful and, um, Say Anything and, and, and? You can't anyway. Sorry. Just don't get me started on 80s.

Mike Michalowicz: So, yeah. So, when this is happening, maybe, maybe we'll go into a book.

AJ Harper: I'm excited. I bet it's going to be a story in one of your books.

Mike Michalowicz: And I do want to hear the Madeline Island update. Maybe we do it at the end. Because I really wanted to get into this, the inner critic troll. It's something I faced multiple occurrences and you know, maybe we can share as an anecdote in a second, but first let me introduce you with my colleague, my co-host, my friend, uh, you are listening to AJ Harper, author of *Write a Must-Read*.

It itself is *the* must-read for writing a must-read. Like this is the go-to book. So please get your copy now. Um, what I love AJ about you because you do this book is every ounce of your knowledge is here. There's nothing held back. It's purely of service. Of the reader. And that's, that's epitomizes who you are.

AJ Harper: Thank you. Um, I mean, I think I did hold some stuff back or it would have been about 5,000 pages, but I didn't, but I didn't, but I didn't hold back on, I didn't hold back on sharing what I do in my workshop or any of that. It's like, it's not going to take the workshop to find out the stuff's all in there.

So in that case, yes. Um, I, I usually try to come back with a comparable comment for you in the introduction, but I do want to say what it means to me that you get so excited about my success. It means a lot to me. You know, I, I only texted and I know we're going to talk about the, what happened on Madeline Island, but later.

But when I walked into my studio, one of my very first thoughts was, Oh my gosh, I can't wait to show this to Mike. And I only texted my nearest and dearest best buddies who come up to the island with me every year. They're my long time, many decades, personal friends and, uh, and you, you know, so who am I going to send this picture to?

And you were just, well, Mr. Exclamation point. That means a lot to me because, um, I don't often share what I'm excited about. So anyway, just

Mike Michalowicz: It's so important.

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AJ Harper: I really, you're, you're a hype. You're like a one-man hype band for any, anybody who you care about. You will hype up. Yeah. And not, and not in a calculated way. You are earnest in your hype.

Mike Michalowicz: Oh, yeah. I am.

AJ Harper: Yeah.

Mike Michalowicz: Thank you for that. One thing before we kick into the content today, we're recording this remotely. This is only an audio-based podcast, but I suspect people hear the change in the audio quality, so to speak. But I'm in my home office and you can see the bookshelf behind me, it says "read." It's a bookshelf I've been planning to have for years and had a custom cabinetry maker built, right? I don't know if I think there's a point to the right section. I'll do it this way. There's that collection books right there, right in the middle, the most important section, um, of the E are the only books I've had autographed and they're all first press. And right in there at the top or below there's *Blowback*, is *Write a Must-Read*. It's, it's, those are the most important books. Um, I've read that. I've also had the author's autograph and signs. Nice. That's where it's displayed. And I see it every day. Why that's the most significant spot is it's eye level and horizontal.

Um, it's the only spot that's exactly eye level for me. And it's horizontal so I can see every time. Other ones you have to make a little effort. This one, are kind of a no brainer. Alright, so we're going to talk about the inner critic troll. First, uh, I want you to share my experience with it because you get it from me.

It's, it's usually draft is done, it's in, and weeks before, I'm like, this is the best thing we've ever done. This is amazing. And then all of a sudden it hits me. It's like, I suck. This sucks. Everything sucks. Maybe she was given up. Why are we doing this? And I'll call you. And you know, it's coming. I'm like, I think this is a mistake and it can be so much better.

I don't know what it is. And it's, it's this give-up sensation. It reminds me of the cartoon figure of the person digging a, a diamond mine and digging and digging and digging and you see this big, long mine they've dug and they're feet away from striking and finding all the diamonds and the, the bubble coming out of their mouth says, we've dug a log enough, there's nothing here, let's turn around and give up.

That's what it feels like to me, at least my presentation.

AJ Harper: That's so interesting, because your memory of this is different than mine, because I actually wrote in the outline for this episode about asking you about your experience with trolls, because I feel like you hardly ever have it, and you do? I know you say that, I know you say that, but that conversation with you, you know, the

Mike Michalowicz: troll calls, you get them from me, I'm like,

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AJ Harper: eah, I do, but they're not that. What do we do with this result? But there, you don't, you hardly ever do it. It's maybe one time you are mostly psyched. You are most, unless you're not telling me, maybe you're not, are you telling me?

Mike Michalowicz: Maybe I'm not telling you?

AJ Harper: Is that maybe what's happening?

Mike Michalowicz: Maybe it's starting to get that emotion? You know, part of the emotional story. Now we're working on our newest book on personal finance and, uh, I'm like, I don't know if this is original enough. And so these are coming up or not.

AJ Harper: Oh yeah. That's it. That's so common. That is a very common troll is. It's been there, done that, troll. No one needs another one of these.

Mike Michalowicz: Do we afford ourselves enough time? It is a weird, it's just kind of these things work against each other. So one is, a deadline, end of December. That's only a few months away.

AJ Harper: No, it's first week of January, just so you know.

Mike Michalowicz: Oh, yeah, yeah. So I'm like, do we give ourselves enough time? And then, on the flip side, I say, if we don't get this out sooner, the opportunity may pass by, and we're not being in service. Maybe someone else comes out with an alternative.

AJ Harper: Oh.

Mike Michalowicz: Then is all worth it?

AJ Harper: Is it all worth it? Okay, so now you're sounding like one of my students. Okay, now you're-- Now you're doing it because --

Mike Michalowicz: You experience it?

AJ Harper: Um, yes. I just think I'm really, really, really good at managing it. I don't—I don't yeah, and that's the topic for today's I mean you notice how the title for this and I know we're not... This will be the title because it's management of trolls.

That's that's

Mike Michalowicz: yes

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AJ Harper: that's what I really want to get across and, I really want to share my inspiration for doing this episode, but I think I think I still have a bunch of trolls about fiction and the reason I still do is because I used to haven't been playing around in it much, you know, it's— You have to realize I'm writing and editing every single freaking day, you know, except, well, okay.

I don't usually work on Sundays and most Saturdays I don't, but it's writing season. So I will be writing on Saturdays and writing season sometimes. But because of that, I think I just have a lot more practice. So it doesn't really get to me, but it did get to me when I was trying to work on my novel last year.

And I'm very quickly, very quickly accepted defeat. Now I was, I, I, yes, but don't really think of the inner critic trolls the same way I used to. So, but it's interesting to me to hear yours because I, as I was planning this episode, I thought, what is Mike dealing with? Because I don't hear it from you that much.

Mike Michalowicz: Why do you call them trolls?

AJ Harper: So it's in my book. I share this in my book, but so I think people sometimes miss it. I had, back in the day, when I was, I was probably only about 17, 18 years old, maybe 19, I had one of those, talk about the '80s, one of those, um, troll dolls with the orange hair. Remember? It was, it only had—

Mike Michalowicz: It was on the pen, you'd spin it and the hair would explode.

AJ Harper: But unlike today, when there's a whole, like, multicolored troll extravaganza, we had just the one. With the orange hair and I don't remember how I got it. I, maybe someone gave it to me, but I remember sitting at my desk, and I had so much trouble with writer's block. And so I some I had this notion to personify the writer's block in the troll. And so I would stand it up right on my desk and then go through this ritual like athletes, right? Athletes do this.

“Oh, I'm going to do this five, five and a touch the locker five times. I'm going to do this, whatever, right? Everything has to line up perfectly.” I had this whole ritual and one of them was standing the troll up on my desk, right where I was writing and then knocking him off now and just flick him over.

Mike Michalowicz: That's a great ritual.

AJ Harper: And sometimes I would throw them in the garbage or whatever. And then I knew, even though I didn't understand what Steve Pressfield calls “Resistance,” and what he calls a law of the universe, meaning it's never going to go away like gravity, even though I didn't know that yet.

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Because at that time I was 19, 18 years old and I, his book wouldn't come out for another 10 years. I somehow knew to put him back right side up because we were going to do this battle again the next day. And I don't know how I knew it, but it was helpful to me. So I would just take that troll with me.

Sometimes I took it to coffee shops if I was going to ride in coffee shop and be like, take that orange hair, whatever I was doing. It was so silly, but I told the story in my class. The very first class I taught a Top Three Book Workshop and I just thought it was a throwaway, fun little story. Then my students started showing up to class with troll dolls.

And they all had different colors and they all did elaborate things to sort of keep them at bay. And it became a thing. So now it's like if you, now it actually has more meaning because if you think about it, when we think of trolls now in modern society, we think of them as internet trolls. Who leave you a stupid one star, um, that's incoherent or attack you in the comments with really hard, hateful things.

But I think we can equate it to it's like the inner critic is the troll in our mind. That you might encounter in a one-star review or in the comment section. And so that's why I call it that.

Mike Michalowicz: Yeah, John Bates, my speaking coach, calls it the monkey mind. I just had another idea. Steven Pressfield, I asked you in last week's episode if you'd invite me on the podcast. I want to step it up while we invite him to come in person and I will pay his lodging and travel. Um, I think we could have, if he is interested and willing, uh, his knowledge has to be captured and we could have an, a deep, deep dive with him. Um, and the undersell, if you will, or the downsell is then we can do it remote, but I'd love to see him in person.

So, hey, check this out. You've never seen this. I never even told you about this. So you can see part of the stack of books, and you can see the empty stack of other books, but this is a shelf, the vertical bookshelf. I would say what you're looking at is about three and a half feet, four feet tall of books.

These are all the books we've written, and all the translations I've been able to collect. There's actually more translations I have not collected. So this is all of our work and how it's distributed. But the thing you don't know is this. The on top of the final book that we've written or has been translated is this image.

Sure enough, this is this statue, if you will. It's Yoda. Baby Yoda. Eating a frog. He's eating a frog. And the reason I have this is this is my mnemonic where you're knocking over the troll. I'm saying this is the obligation and it's going to be painful and it's going to be eating a frog. But you can see he's almost in a peaceful state of how he's doing.

He's almost at joyous state.

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AJ Harper: He's blissed out. He's blissed out.

Mike Michalowicz: He's blissed out. Yeah. Yeah. So this sits on top of the last book, the last translation we've done. The other books above it are there for a reason that I'll, I'll explain at a different time. That compels me to say, we have to keep marching forward, the stack has to be filled up all the way.

AJ Harper: So that's a, that's a, um, you know, that's it, that's helping you to move forward and it's positive.

Mike Michalowicz: Right, so when I say, we gotta get by, like, this was a stupid bug, or any of those things I'm resisting, this helps me manage that troll. A sense of obligation and call.

AJ Harper: Yeah. I mean here's since we're doing show and tell it's a podcast, but and my students know this I have an entire jar now of troll dolls.

Mike Michalowicz: This is look at that, dude I didn't see it in there.

AJ Harper: That's this so for the listeners. This is a big jar. It's like you might hold flour Um something in and it's hundreds of multicolored hair, tiny, tiny troll dolls In here because I it reminds me that It's not one. It's an army. Then they're all going to say different things.

It's not one troll. It's an army. Anytime that you decide you're going to make something from nothing. It's almost like... You know, the bugle is called, and the army Assembles and like, okay, um, Mike and AJ are writing another book. Let's go. Let's go. Let's go! You know, it's like that everybody assemble everybody gets called up because it's gonna be all kinds of trolls and I like to define two versions.

There's the kind of you suck trolls Which is, you know, you're terrible at this. Who's going to want to read this? You're a terrible writer. For me, that would sound like you're not funny. You're boring. Um, you're too precious. Um, these are the things I worry about. The tone of how I write.

Mike Michalowicz: Yeah. Yes.

AJ Harper: Those, those are my big trolls. They might be different for other people. For you, you might, I don't want to sound like the guru. I don't want to sound arrogant. Right. So it's kind of specific to what your own drama is in your head. But those are kind of almost easier to manage than the worst offenders who actually win. More than the you suck trolls are what I call reasonable shoulder trolls.

They actually had someone draw me a picture of one once because they were so they kind of like charmed by it, but I call them reasonable. They sit on your shoulder and I call them

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reasonable because they say in a really nice voice, all sorts of reasonable reasons why you should not write that thing.

And they make really good sense. So they'll say things like, you haven't really had a break in so long. You haven't had a day off in so long, or you have not produced enough billable hours. You really need to get on that. You haven't talked to your mom in like two weeks. First, have a conversation with her.

Listen, mom matters, billable hours matter, rest matters. But what happens is the reasonable shoulder troll just keeps telling you that stuff. You know, you didn't do the dishes. They're still sitting in the sink. You should probably get those done. Then you can write. And so before you know it, the little voice that sounds reasonable and also is rooted in truth convinces you not to write that day.

And then they, the next day they say, well, you know what you didn't write yesterday. So. We know one more day isn't going to matter and eventually those days stack up until finally a you suck troll comes in and says, see? You can't hack it. You're not writing. You didn't write for five days. You didn't write for two weeks. What makes you think you can do this?

And it's like, the reasonable shoulder troll is just like, Insidious is just doing these little tiny baby steps.

Mike Michalowicz: Little drips.

AJ Harper: And it makes perfect sense. And it sounds nice. He's in a calm voice and convinces you until finally the you suck people can come in and take you totally down.

Mike Michalowicz: Oh my God.

AJ Harper: And, and it's, it's, this is this, those are the worst. You have to be wary of the reasonable shoulder trolls.

Mike Michalowicz: To me, it's like exercise. So it's funny, like I exercise regularly. And so people will ask me, Oh, you like to exercise? I can't think of a single time I've been exercising, saying, Oh, I've been interested or enjoying the activity. Afterwards I feel great. Uh, and then the overall momentum, I feel great, but in the moment, so I found is the only way to stick with it is if it's the first thing in the morning and telling myself that I cannot, I will not provide myself to do anything else until I get the workout in. And that's not, that's not perfect, but it's, it was a radical improvement.

I used to think I could do it in a day. And reasonable troll would always have something else to insert. We need to get this done. Yeah, it still happens. So there'll be a day in the morning I

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miss it. So this morning we started very early at seven eyes up at five 30. Um, and just had to get ready for the day and so forth.

So the workout just wasn't realistic. And so then my mind's like, well, I'll get to it later today. I can't fathom that that'll actually happen. Um, so it's not like you squash a troll and it never comes back. I think I need to build coping mechanisms, strategies where regardless of what the troll is gonna say, I still do it.

And for me, it's two things. It's first, when it comes to writing, first thing in the morning, and I haven't done sprints in a long time, I gotta get back to that. Because or but there's another time it's on airplanes. When I'm on an airplane, I don't get the internet. I just sit there and write and I got I actually say you those questions.

I want to make sure you got all those things from Madison last week. Did you see those by the way?

AJ Harper: Got 'em.

Mike Michalowicz: Got 'em. I got Sunday night or I'm sorry Tuesday of next week. I'm often on tons of plane trips and I'm, I'm ready to write. So I wonder if part of the, this troll control is to have these predefined periods where you block out in such a way that the troll can't present itself, that when that reasonable excuse comes up, you can't leverage it. For me, it's airplanes.

AJ Harper: Yeah, that's a strategy for sure. I think it's needing to back up a little and talk about why I said management and my inspiration for this episode. I was in, you mentioned writing sprints. I have a writing sprint community that is a membership community. Anybody can join and we meet at 9am and 4pm Eastern to write for an hour. And one of the people in the sprint community said, um, you know, can you help me with dealing with the inner critic trolls? She was having, um, really worrying that there's so many other books, just like what you said earlier, hers was the same. There's so many other books to talk about this.

She's writing a book about stress or to help people with stress management. Um, why should this matter? Why should this count? And this is a, and she also, uh, preempted it by saying she'd actually had some really good writing days, lots of flow, which is hard to come by. And still, the troll was messing with her and saying, who's going to read this?

There's enough books on this topic, who cares? And she asked for my help and, and that's when I gave her a bunch of strategies for management. So it's important to understand that that resistance that Steve Pressfield talks about in *The War of Art*. That absolutely transformed my life, and I wouldn't be here today had I not learned that from them.

Helped me see that, just like I knocked over the troll on my desk and put him back up again for the other day, that we have to understand that we want to eradicate them, we want to kill

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them, we want to make them gone, but that's unrealistic because they're zombies. They will come back the next day from the dead and start all over again.

And the problem is if you think that you should be able to kill them, and this is very key, if you think you should, then you start to think there's something wrong with me. That I think like this and I feel this way still or again, and then that actually gives them more ammunition. So it's better if you just say, you know what?

It's management, not killing. Like, I can't, like, all I can do is manage and have the expectation that you will see the trolls again. Then you're going to be less hard on yourself. When they show up because if you keep thinking why can't I get over this? That contributes to all of your angst and contributes to all that evidence that maybe you shouldn't be doing this. Maybe you're not cut out for authorship.

Obviously other authors can handle this or they aren't dealing with this. They freaking are yes, they are. They're just maybe better at managing.

Mike Michalowicz: You guys say like the first step is recovery and acknowledging you have a problem.

AJ Harper: Surrender. It's exactly right. That you are. It's the first step, it is actually surrender that you are powerless.

Mike Michalowicz: Oh, there you go. Over the addiction. Okay.

AJ Harper: Yeah. So then it would be powerless over the trolls. That'll work. I don't think, I think it's more like accept that they exist.

Mike Michalowicz: Acceptance.

AJ Harper: Yeah, and that they're coming back. But I don't think you're powerless.

Mike Michalowicz: Yeah, I agree with that. It's indefinite powerlessness.

Acceptance and that I can manage it. Now I wonder if you can almost embrace it.

AJ Harper: Yeah, that's what I do.

Mike Michalowicz: I remember, um, uh, Thomas Edison, uh, I'm reading his biography now and, and, but they also have the satisfactory and he's fabled for saying this, that every failure he had was simply a way not to do it. I think we put a frame around it and the resistance that we give ourselves can be simply the test of commitment.

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Like this is the ultimate test. It's, it shows my devotion to this. And we can leverage you that way that I am devoted because I am seeing through the lessons. Do you have other strategies?

AJ Harper: But hang on now, I want to counter that because some days you can't. So I don't want you to get in the head that if you succumb to resistance one day, that means you're not committed.

I think that there will be days when you can manage it well, and there will be days when you can't. And A key component of, of managing trolls is forgiveness. I, you know, I really struggle with my weight and I have a lot of trolls around my weight. So bear with me when I explain this, a game changer for me was understanding that I was doing more damage to my, how much, how many calories I was taking in or whenever I was or wasn't doing by shaming myself for not having a perfect day.

And that that's actually the thing that's causing people to fall off is because if they make one little mistake, they just toss it all right. Well, I ruined my diet. Yeah. And also everyone, my diet. So who cares about the rest of the day? I had pancakes this morning and I'm not supposed to have it. So F the day.

I'll just, yeah, so we can't be so rigid with ourselves. We have to have forgiveness. I think it's, it's honestly probably the most effective troll management tool is to just say, okay, it's fine. The trolls won today. That means nothing. It doesn't speak to my intelligence. It has nothing to do with my book idea.

It has nothing to do with the success of this book. It has nothing to do with my commitment. It has nothing to do with anything. We'll, we'll, we'll fight this battle again tomorrow, and I think we, we have to aggregate this.

Mike Michalowicz: Thank you for that clarity. Tell me, so we talk about strategies. First thing in the morning, you're knocking trolls over.

You got the troll jar. I got Yoda here on top of my books. Do you have other strategies?

AJ Harper: Tons. Tons.

Mike Michalowicz: I want all of them. I want all.

AJ Harper: Okay. So the main thing is don't, don't resist that. So. If you say, I'm not gonna do, you know, the trolls don't exist, I'm gonna pretend like you're not here. Um, I'm just going to affirm you away.

I'm gonna do all my affirmations. Trolls don't care. I think what you have to do is just acknowledge them. Um, what I say is, take the note. So Citral says. This is worrying. I just

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said, thank you. I'm... Noted. Noted. And you could, you could actually write it on a post it, and you try to, you know, pretend like they're wrong or they don't exist. It just gets stronger. I know I sound weird because I'm personifying inner critic, but my experience is if I take the note and sometimes I'll put it directly in the manuscript while I'm writing. So, Good morning.

I just write, this is boring in brackets and then I just keep going. I took the note and, um, I don't take it personally anymore because I know it has nothing to do with me. It is absolutely not personal to me. And again, I learned that from Steve Pressfield, that we think that this resistance, this voice is personal, but it's absolutely not.

So I just take the note. I say, thank you. Moving on. Um, and here's the thing. It might be boring, right? And I said, it might actually be true. In which case I say, so what, because if it's boring, I can fix it. I guarantee you that I have horribly boring. Sections in write a must read in earlier draft and I definitely have in brackets, "This is boring."

Mike Michalowicz: So the control is almost an editor. What I'm hearing is you're not allowing it to captivate the moment to own the moment you release it by tracking it.

AJ Harper: But it's something you go back to take the note, jot it down Then when you go back later, I put mine in brackets. You could do whatever.

Okay You can decide do I need to look at that or not? Is it legit? Okay If not, fine, move on. And I think people don't have enough experience with trying to make a manuscript better. So that might work for me because I do know it can get better. But I still think taking the note is important. It's kind of like, it's like taking the air out of the intensity of it.

Um, another, another thing is I gave this advice to the person who I was working on a book about stress. Um, I said, think of your inner critic trolls as annoying coworkers. So think of them as, you know, if you're, back in the day when we all worked in offices, all of us, I mean, some of us still do, but a lot of us don't.

Those really super annoying coworkers that just you know, they talk too loud by you. They they give you annoying they talk for 50 minutes about their hobby that they did that weekend. They are gossipy. They're whatever like there's just oh, you can't wait until they leave you Just start thinking of them like that Like there's a reason why I say coworkers because they're showing up because you're working.

Mike Michalowicz: So when the trolls show up. Oh, that's a really interesting framing. I like that.

AJ Harper: Yeah, they're there because you're doing something. So, stop thinking of trolls as evidence that you shouldn't be writing a book. Think of them as proof that you're on to something.

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Mike Michalowicz: Oh, that's so good, AJ.

AJ Harper: Because if they weren't there, you wouldn't be working. Like, it would be something else. So, it's like, oh, we're all reporting, you know, like, think of it like that. That's good. That's good that they're there because their whole reason for being there is that you're making something from nothing.

Mike Michalowicz: And so funny, I think that commercial back in the day, it was a camel in an office environment and it goes, Mike, Mike, Mike, Mike, Mike, Mike, my own name.

And I'm like, Oh, that camel has become the troll for me where it's trying to draw my attention and distract me. I've never framed that way. Oh, therefore, it must be in the office. I'm working.

AJ Harper: Coworkers. Coworkers, and they have a different agenda and yours is yours, that's fine. But their work, they're only there because you're doing something.

I think it's also important to understand what, you know, where do trolls flourish and when, and part of it is, I think the more authors understand publishing, the more authors understand the craft, the easier it is for them to just take the note because. The challenge is there's so much, so much misinformation and disinformation about publishing that we will, the trolls can use it as evidence.

So for example, if you believe that you just put your book up on Amazon and it will sell and it doesn't. Then first of all, that's wrong, right? But you didn't know, right? And then you don't sell. Then you say, see, the trolls can say, yeah, that was folly. You shouldn't have done that. You obviously shouldn't have written a book.

Well, really what's going on was you didn't understand that there's a process. We're getting a book to market. That's an extreme example, but it's actually based in reality. I once had did a favor for Kim Yancy of E-women and spoke to a friend of his. Um, and they'd written a children's book, uh, he and his wife, and they just put it up on Amazon.

And I so felt for them as they didn't know, they didn't know that they actually had to do some, they thought if it just showed up, if it starts to sell broke my heart, that situation, because they had, you know, such so many positive things they wanted to do with it, but the same goes with, um, If you don't know, for example, um, on an early, uh, last episode, we talked about TikTok and I mentioned I have that YouTube video about all the red flags that editors have when they are acquisitions editors, when they're looking at manuscripts.

What if you didn't know about the red flags and then you set, keep sending your manuscript out and it has a bunch of red flags? But you don't know. So now the troll can say, see, you're not a good writer. You're not a good writer because you're just going to keep getting rejected. That's why I think, uh, if you're serious about authorship, you need knowledge.

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You need to educate yourself about the industry, about the craft so that you don't keep seeing evidence everywhere that you suck. You know what I mean? So I think, I think knowledge is really, really, really, really important.

Mike Michalowicz: Listen to Don't Write That Book podcast. Listen. Yeah.

AJ Harper: Listen to the podcast so you can have— It's real though, because we're honest here. We're gonna say, that didn't work. This works. This is how hard it is. If you tell yourself this is why write a book in 30 days. Really, it's one of the many reasons why it really pisses me off because first of all, I don't think you can write a must read in 30 days. I think you need a lot of development and a lot of editing, and people dunno.

Well, let's say you don't. You believe it. And you write your book in 30 days, and then you think it's ready to go. But you find out that you still have months of editing. What'd you do? Because that's normal. But you didn't know. So now you think you're not a good writer. Do you know what I'm saying?

Mike Michalowicz: Yeah, the misinformation.

AJ Harper: Yeah, the misinformation and disinformation is totally the troll's friend. Because now you're just going to buy into all of it as ever, and you are, you will quickly default to finding the evidence that confirms that you are not good at this.

Mike Michalowicz: A friend of mine once said, because so many people fall in love, fall for and love comfortable truths and avoid, I'm sorry, I'm messing up.

He said they fall for and love comfortable lies. And avoid hard truths and it's interesting how easy it is to buy into the and I know there's nothing gets you more riled up than someone saying book in 30 days, book in a box.

AJ Harper: Well, there's many reasons. There's many reasons why, but I think if it's so demoralizing and disheartening when you realize the road is longer than you saw it and the terrain is harder than you saw it and you start to internalize it and think, well, it must be me.

And I think if you just knew, then you could manage it, you could say, okay, yeah, it's hard today. That's fine. I've got 200 more hard days ahead of me, you know, versus saying, wow, this is so hard. Something must be wrong with me, or I'm not cut out for it. But if you knew. This is how hard it's gonna be, then you could manage it, you know,

Mike Michalowicz: I want to interject one of my strategies.

I know you got more, but I cut some this different camera. I know again, people aren't watching, but the reason is there is my life's purpose says eradicate on trail poverty on the

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wall access to the camera. And the reason I have that up there is it's The ultimate gravitational pull for what I feel compelled to do, and no matter what the struggle may be, whatever the misdirection, the self-criticism, the resistance, the troll is, when I see this, and I have it in every workspace that I am, it's a radically optimal poverty, I can acknowledge and say, yeah, I feel the resistance, but I have to do this.

It's almost like, apologizing to myself or the troll, um, but saying, I hear you, but I have to do this. So that reminder of a calling for me has been just a great tool to. Move forward and keep moving forward.

AJ Harper: Yeah.

Mike Michalowicz: Is there some other strategy?

AJ Harper: Well, yeah, that's, I actually have a whole section in my book called reader first is a troll killer. Because.

Mike Michalowicz: Oh, it's so interesting because you talk about reader first.

AJ Harper: Yeah. And it's a troll killer.

Mike Michalowicz: So why is it a troll killer?

AJ Harper: Because when you, when you focus on service, it's very easy to manage the troll. It's very easy to, their voices grow quiet because your whole folk, trolls are focused on you. You aren't good at this. You shouldn't be doing this. You don't have what it takes. No one's going to want to read your book, but by focusing on your reader first and being of service, just as you've described, then it's not, they have nothing to say because

Mike Michalowicz: I love that. Yeah. Because I think of the greatest way to elevate yourself is to be of service to others.

Inevitably it is. And I think is we can criticize ourselves to the, to the end of the year, but when we're of service to someone else, we don't, Criticize them when we're being of service. We're thinking they need this so I can help them. Or maybe I can give them a little edge forward. And we, when we focus on them and not us, that's what the eradicate entrepreneurial poverty does for me.

It alleviates that criticism.

AJ Harper: Yeah, 100%. I think, um, that is huge. I also think a test drive is really helpful just in practical. We talked about misinformation and disinformation. Um, that's what's coming in. That's affecting you. You need to get new content coming in. So in addition to

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educating yourself, listening to this podcast, I recommend meeting Jane Friedman, who's gives you really honest.

She is the most knowledgeable about publishing. There's lots of things you can do, um, to get accurate information and get better content coming in. That can offset it, but also a test drive. So a test drive, we've only talked about this a little bit, but I actually have a little standalone course called test drive your content.

And I created it because where I want for authors of prescriptive nonfiction is to, uh, make sure that their content actually works for readers. And so there's a way that you can test the content specifically for, Use in the book. And, um, this actually builds your confidence then. So you have new information coming in where you're saying, well, no, I do know it works because I just did a test drive.

And I think that that's Extremely important. I have a student, uh, alum, Sonya Hopson, and she's been working on her book. And one of the things I advise her to do is a little mini retreat in her home. That's a kind of test drive specifically geared toward getting the information she needed. About her concepts, her methodology from people in real time, and I cannot tell you, in fact, I just met with her this week, which is why she's on my mind.

She said, thank you again for telling me to do the test drive. It gave her so much confidence about the work she was doing in the book, but when you're out there just writing about it and you haven't tested it on people. It's very easy for the inner critic trolls to say, you don't know if this works, no one's going to do this.

If you have evidence from doing it, it's much easier, so bring better information in to manage those trolls. Test drive is a great way, and there's lots of ways to do test drives.

Mike Michalowicz: That's to build a community. You've heard perhaps the mean if we have it on the wish place 40 or 50, uh, authors of the last meeting.

This is what you don't know. Chris Calvo and I have been having an active dialogue about starting a subgroup of maybe 5 to 10 authors, max, and with the objective of elevating ideas. So Christy working on a new book. I'm not gonna share what he's working on, but he's working on a new book. The idea is we all come together and for a period of time during that face-to-face meeting is, Christy could talk about his book in every automatic room.

Our job is to elevate him, not, not rah rah, maybe elevate the idea and as we work on our projects to get their feedback. Um, so a community is, is powerful and, and they can get you. Through those trolls and those roadblocks you face and maybe give you the alternative path. Maybe we think we got to keep banging our head against until the wall breaks and these other authors just say, Oh, step on our shoulders and walk over the wall.

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AJ Harper: That's that community is huge. That's why I have the sprint community. That's why when I teach my workshop, it's an ed group environment. I strive to create a home for authors, a community, because writing is really lonely, and when you're in the cave, the inner critic trolls are really happy, because you have to manage it on your own, but when you're in community, you don't have to manage it on your own.

Mike Michalowicz: How do people join your home?

AJ Harper: Oh, well,

Mike Michalowicz: Give me the thing so they can join the sprint.

AJ Harper: Easiest ways. You can just go to ajharper.com and, uh, you can link to the sprint community. Um, I'm really, uh, proud of the fact that while there is a fee for the, uh, there's a set fee for the membership, there's also a pay what you can option.

So there's no, I don't, I didn't want anybody to have to ask me for a discount. So you can you do what you want to do. I have people who pay full price for it, and I have people who pay me very little, and I don't distinguish between those people. So if anybody is looking for community, that's a great way to get start.

Get started. That doesn't cost a lot.

Mike Michalowicz: I love it. AJ has your back. Um, any other questions? Things on this topic, your inner critics troll.

AJ Harper: Yeah, we just, I just think, um, let's not, let's not forget how this started, which was some humor. Have a little, have a little fun with it. Don't, you know, it's everyone's dealing with it.

You're not alone and find your own thing. Uh, Carole Mahoney, who wrote *Buyer First*, she's one of my alums. Uh, she just, she decided she didn't like the trolls everybody was getting in class and she bought a pack of little stuffed poop, poop emojis. Like they're like little stuffed animals, you know, like you would stuffed animals, but they look like poop emojis and they all different faces.

And she would just, um, throw them across the room while she was writing. She had a whole big old box of them. Do you? That's not what I would do. But it's what made Carole laugh and made it work for Carole.

Mike Michalowicz: Yeah, you find, find your thing. You'll come across it. You'll see it in other people's journeys themselves.

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You can take ideas, share ideas, expand on ideas. That's why being in the community is so important. Um, I have an update. So I, I texted Andrea when we were on break now. So we typically two, maybe three sessions in a broadcast in subsequent weeks. So last week's episode reported an hour ago. Uh, I shared the TikTok.

We started off new. I came around, they got cameras, 13, 15,000. The number we said today, uh, it is 19.8 thousand. So 19.8, 800 views and growing, but slowed down. I thought we hit about 20, 000 yesterday. And, um, so this indicates that the TikTok surge for this video is from my perspective, may now be dwindling.

Um, but Andrea is staying on top of it. The book rank hasn't updated yet, so it still sits at 591. So what we're going to do now is correlate, does the book sales continue to sustain or even improve for a period of time? Is there a laggard effect basically? TikTok explodes and what's the time frame from it hitting into a buying book?

Do they buy in that second or do they buy hours later? I have an assumption it's in that second. But we'll see as we, we monitor this, um, next week, we're going to talk about page one, desire, connecting as a reader where they are in terms of what they want, not what you think they want. And this kind of corresponds to the last episode we did about that emotional journey as the wants AJ, thanks for doing this.

You fought through a cold to do three episodes. We didn't think we'd be able to make one. I don't know if you've been drinking some magical tea, but your voice held out.

AJ Harper: It did. I'm happy we got it done.

Mike Michalowicz: So, uh, thank you for our listeners. And we really hope this is serving you deeply.

We are really honored that you stick with us through the entire episodes and we love the feedback we're getting. I want to inspire you to keep that feedback from your way. You can email us at hello at dwtbpodcast. com. They look for our team watching that, but she does share with AJ and myself. You can sign up for AJ's writer's lab.

You can join the spreads. We also have Endless Purpose where we're representing authors. So if you have any questions about those things, we'd love to answer that and support you. You can go to our website, which is dwtbpodcast. com. Get our free materials and join our email list. I'm really interested in doing a first ever for me and I think for AJ of a live show.

Maybe we get Steven Pressfield there. These are big hopes and dreams. But to make it a reality, we have to see there's demand. So if you would be willing to fly to wherever we are, probably the East Coast, Uh, be there for a day, pay a ticket fee so we can offset our costs and just dive deep into not writing that book, but writing the book that you can, then tell us about

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it and email us at [hello at dwtvpodcast.com](mailto:hello@dwtvpodcast.com) and that's how we conclude the show. As a reminder, don't write that book, write the greatest book you can.