

# don't write *that* book!

## Episode 68:

### The List Every Author Needs

**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. How do you feel about doing three episodes a day?

Like when the third episode happens, are you feeling energy, like, oh, we have good momentum? Do you feel drained? Is there a common feeling?

**AJ Harper:** No, I like the, I think three's the, three's the sweet spot.

**Mike Michalowicz:** Yeah. I don't think I could do any more.

**AJ Harper:** No, four would be, no one would want to listen to that.

**Mike Michalowicz:** Four would be a bore.

**AJ Harper:** Four would be a bore, we would be tired. It would probably be seven minutes.

**Mike Michalowicz:** You know, one idea we have for the show, AJ and I during the break were kind of riffing, is maybe doing little mini segments between episodes. So a typical show of ours goes 40 minutes to maybe, maybe an hour. And what if we did a little 10-minute segments?

We'd love to hear that. Email us at hello at DWTBpodcast.com. So we can get your insights, or do you have other show ideas? You want topics you want us to talk about a little mini segments or vignettes. We were talking about the Desert Island question. Well, in this episode, we're gonna talk about the list every author needs those burning questions and chief concerns. We're gonna address those. I'm joined in studio with A. J. Harper, divine wisdom. I was thinking about the introduction of you where I was walking back with the cameras and, uh, you have like this divine wisdom. You've shared something you've said many times, and I kind of got and then it really got during the writing of this book.

You said, you're writing for the reader, uh, but you're also writing for yourself. It's really the transformation of yourself that will happen. And you have a concise way of saying that. And, well, you've, you've probably read it now. They're, they call it the Red Shoes, or the, the, the Red Bottom Shoes.

# don't write *that* book!

So, there's a story in there where my wife bought what's called Louis, no, Christian Louboutin.

**AJ Harper:** Louboutin.

**Mike Michalowicz:** Christian, which is different than Louis Vuitton. Which, she made very clear to me, and I had no clue they were different. And we, during a break in that writing period, we sat down for an hour and we had this whole conversation around perception of money.

It was a transformative experience in our relationship. Our relationship got stronger in another way because of understanding. And I'm like, In my head it's echoing, AJ says you write a book, it's really about the transformation of yourself. You will transform your reader.

**AJ Harper:** I mean that's your, you should go with that intent. And then in the process you'll transform yourself.

**Mike Michalowicz:** Exactly. It's this unexpected shift. And my wife and I are sitting there and we're both tearing up in connection and understanding and another level of appreciation. And I'm like, gosh, this is exactly what AJ said. You have this divine wisdom. That interestingly is not, and maybe this is human, absorbed right away.

Like, it's always been sitting there, but I didn't get it as much as I did two weeks ago.

**AJ Harper:** In context with that, I feel like I learned a lot about you in this book more than other books. Isn't that funny? Because you tell me stories all the time. We have so many stories that are in books, so many on the cutting room floor, some of them very Um, emotional, but boy, this is, there's, you have never gone deeper than in this new book that we just completed.

And I got to interview your wife for the book, which I did on my own and learned a lot about you. One of the things I learned about you that I actually kept really close to me the last few weeks was your wife saying how you have so much interest and caring about why she feels the way she feels, what's the source of it? Just trying you seek to understand.

**Mike Michalowicz:** Oh, thank you

**AJ Harper:** And I kept reminding myself of that. I learned that from her So I think people should know. And I, of course you seek to understand. You're an author.

**Mike Michalowicz:** Yeah.

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**AJ Harper:** See, that's the thing is, I think people feel like, I can be an author when, when I understand.

**Mike Michalowicz:** Mmm. What is that? Divine wisdom!

**AJ Harper:** So It's partially true. It's not like you want to just give somebody your diary and say there's my book,

**Mike Michalowicz:** right?

**AJ Harper:** But so we do want to share wisdom, results, things, proven strategies, la la la stories of triumph, but ultimately an author is seeking greater wisdom always. There's no magic moment when you cross a finish line and now you're worthy of being an author.

It's the doing and the seeking that makes you an author. And then you are, you seek to understand in a way that you can then convey to others. And I, I, I, anyway, I think it's remarkable about you.

**Mike Michalowicz:** Thanks for joining us for today's episode. This is going to be a really interesting deep dive. Thanks for that kind introduction, AJ.

Um, we're gonna talk about the list every author needs. I'm a little bit salivating over this because I think this is gonna be a download from you predominantly. I already have tons of questions, but maybe you can share what inspired this topic in the first place.

**AJ Harper:** I've been wanting to do this episode for a long time and we just didn't get around to it. And we're due for due for a craft episode. The list is, uh, burning questions and chief concerns. If you read my book or you're one of my students, you know that, you hear me beat that drum. It's the burning questions your reader has about the topic and or problem, which are often the same thing, that you're writing about and the concerns, worries, fears about it.

Distinctive lists, two different lists. It's part of the reader profile exercise I do in my book and with students and I think it's one of the most essential things that you need to do before you start writing your book.

**Mike Michalowicz:** Okay. So how do you get that list started?

**AJ Harper:** Well, first of all, I should say why I think this. When I was a ghost writer, I would ask, I, you know, this was, this is old days. I was mostly, I was mostly on the phone with people, right?

**Mike Michalowicz:** Right.

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**AJ Harper:** Rarely Skype. So, these were all books written over several two, three-hour phone conversations with folks. And in the beginning of a relationship with an author, I would say, well, tell, you know, tell me about your reader. And they would go off and tell me this whole thing.

But they couldn't really succinctly describe to me who their reader was. It would take them forever to get around to it. I didn't really have a clear view. It wasn't easily articulated. And Uh, they also didn't have a strong, a clear, succinct message. Everything was always sort of a walk around the block a few times.

Which isn't helpful for me because I need a compass. I need a beacon. I can't, I have to write to something, towards something.

**Mike Michalowicz:** Do you see that person in your mind as you're writing?

**AJ Harper:** It's not a person in particular. I'm actually very against the whole write to an avatar thing. I don't think it's that specific.

I think it's very, uh, I think it's a group of people who share a desire and common barrier. But that group of people could be um, any sort of circumstance.

**Mike Michalowicz:** Yeah, diverse demographics.

**AJ Harper:** Yeah, completely. It could be somebody who's 20 or 50. It could be... So many times. I have people who come to me and say I'm writing this book for women who, women who, it's a lot of women who.

And I respect that and love that and I think it's fine that you want to serve that demographic. But I will eventually say, why not also men? I'm not trying to tell you what to do, it's a question. And they invariably say, well, and if they don't have a good answer, then it's really not, shouldn't be excluding men.

But people get it in their head that they have to have this very specific, drives a, drives a Toyota, listens to heavy metal, didn't go to college, loves her mom, didn't know her dad, has two kids, would like to have four, like way too much, way too much. We don't need to know that. We don't need a name. We don't need a name for the person we're writing to.

We're writing to a group of people who want something. They have a shared goal or desire, vision, and a shared problem. The perception of what stands in the way of getting to that. And if you, that's all you need. That's honestly it. But I couldn't get my ghostwriting clients to articulate this. It just, it just seemed impossible.

# don't write *that* book!

**Mike Michalowicz:** I lean towards visualization so much. Do you visualize, so now I'm saying, oh, you're not talking to a person. Could it be a small group of people? Or do you actually visualize it or are you just ...?

**AJ Harper:** You're writing to a person in the book, in the tone, so it feels like a conversation.

**Mike Michalowicz:** But to write to this group, are you kind of seeing a group in your head, or do you not see that? Because maybe not everyone thinks in visuals. I can't help but seeing King Arthur's round table and there's this diverse group of people around it.

**AJ Harper:** I mean, (laughs)

**Mike Michalowicz:** I just can't help it. And I'm wearing a crown and I got this long beard. No, I'm kidding. But quick side story, King Arthur's table was round, at least how the mythology goes, so that everyone had an equal seat. There was no head of the table. So I see a round table, but Is that normal? Is that just a weirdo that I'm being?

**AJ Harper:** I don't... That's a loaded question. I think it's you. I think it's you want to put people in the round. That's how your brain is doing it. That's fine if you want to think like that. I don't.

**Mike Michalowicz:** You don't. How do you do it? How does your brain do it?

**AJ Harper:** I know, uh, so you have to remember I come from a theater background where I'm used to developing characters. So, the way that you really know a character is what do they want and what stands in their way. And you think about the external conflict and the internal conflict that keeps them from the thing they want.

You think about what are their flaws. What's keeping that, you know? So, I don't think about it as a specific person, though. I just think about, okay, if that's true, if I want this and I think I have this problem, what is that, what's going to come up for me? And I don't need more. I think it's a trap to get caught up to writing to one person.

I think you write as if you're having a conversation with a person who has that goal and problem. (Gotcha). But not, you know, Joe who drives a Dodge.

**Mike Michalowicz:** Listening to heavy metal, dropout college. Do you write down this list and it, it's almost like, uh, some, some back matter to producing your book?

**AJ Harper:** Yeah. So the reader profile is the first step in the process because you have to get to know the reader pretty well and then what you have in common with them.

**Mike Michalowicz:** Mm hmm.

# don't write *that* book!

**AJ Harper:** So this is where we get to burning questions and chief concerns. So even if you can't yet articulate the problem, the desire, all of that, you can at least get to, these are my big questions around it. Questions meaning practical things. How do I do this? What happens if this such and such and then fears and concern.

I'm afraid that this might happen. I'm worried about this. Within that could be the main problem or the perceived barrier. So starting with what are your... What are your reader's biggest burning questions and chief concerns is an easy way for you to start to get at how do they perceive the problem, what do they really want, what's really going on.

So just, sometimes it's too loaded to come up with the big problem and the big goal right away. So if you start with burning questions, chief concerns, sometimes it's embedded in there. And I came up with the idea because I was talking with someone on the phone, I can still see where I was sitting. I didn't have an office in my old house.

I was sitting on our bed and I was talking with someone and I wanted to bang my head against the wall because I kept asking for some clarity from this author. No clarity. Finally, I said, I got out a notebook and I said, all right, I just, I just want you to right now give me the top questions people ask you and I'm writing to, okay, now what are the things they're really worried about? Let's, let's do that. Let's do, let's just give me the list. Just give me the list.

And that was just this moment of, I don't know where it came from in me, but I thought, Oh, if I could do something, if I have that, just give me that. And that's how, honestly, it all started where I started to put together my own way of articulating who the reader was.

Um, because I just, uh, I, I don't, I, it wasn't working.

**Mike Michalowicz:** It sounds like a moment of exasperation.

**AJ Harper:** It wasn't a moment of exasperation that led to having a list that is honestly one of the best things you could do.

**Mike Michalowicz:** That's interesting. I find that happens too when, when we get frustrated that we're trying to teach or share something that's not coming out all of a sudden the solution just comes out, it's like, this is what I'm asking for! We simplify it when we present it to the person so can the author... What does the author always know these things and if they don't know these burning questions?

They don't know this list. Do they have to get more intimate with who they're serving first before writing the book?

**AJ Harper:** Yeah, but it doesn't have to be that complicated. So if you're already serving people, you probably have frequently asked questions and embedded in the questions are the

# don't write *that* book!

fears and concerns because sometimes people are asking questions that really are about what they're worried about and less tactical.

And so you can usually grab them from what people email you about or ask you on a, on a zoom call or whatever. I mean, you know them, most people know them. (Yeah.) Okay. If you don't, or if you aren't sure, You can go get them. There's a, there's a number of ways and it doesn't even have to take that long.

**Mike Michalowicz:** Like surveying?

**AJ Harper:** So yeah, and you could do a survey to your group. You could ask someone you know who has access to the type of reader you're looking for to send the survey on your behalf.

**Mike Michalowicz:** Oh, that's cool.

**AJ Harper:** Um, I would keep it really simple with just, you know, what are your biggest, you know, is this something you want or is this a problem that you have?

What are your biggest questions around that? What are your biggest fears around that?

**Mike Michalowicz:** Hmm.

**AJ Harper:** Starting with desire is really helpful instead of the problem, but you could do both.

**Mike Michalowicz:** Why is it easier to start with the desire?

**AJ Harper:** It's interesting to see what people think is keeping them from it.

**Mike Michalowicz:** Okay.

**AJ Harper:** Right, I got so do you want to be a published author?

**Mike Michalowicz:** I do but...

**AJ Harper:** What are your biggest concerns about that? What do you worry about? What do you what are your biggest questions? What are your things you wonder about?

**Mike Michalowicz:** I don't have experience, I've never done this before.

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**AJ Harper:** I mean, I know right away what the big fear is because I hear it all the time. So if you hear stuff all the time, write it down. The key with burning questions and chief concerns is not to impose yourself in it. It's to use the language people would use.

**Mike Michalowicz:** Okay, so you're kind of going on to what to do with this list. You're, do you, are you looking for frequency of certain words when you say language?

**AJ Harper:** Yeah. So you, so go get the actual language is a good start and see where it comes from. You could also just do a post on social media if you think your readers are somewhere near there, or even if they're not Facebook, LinkedIn, wherever you hang out.

And ask that simple question and tell people they can put it in the comments, or they can DM you. If you really want to get into it, you could also say, Hey, I want to get 20 people on a Zoom call and just ask this question, get a discussion going. And that's deeper. But honestly, it could be as simple as just social media.

**Mike Michalowicz:** You ever see people, like, the language I use actually is inaccurate. This is probably gonna be a bad analogy, but uh, aspiring authors say my biggest fear is finding a publisher, but they're actually talking about retail stores and they're like, the biggest fear I have is like, I need to find a publisher because I want on the front of every shelf at the store and I don't think Barnes and Nobles will receive me, thinking Barnes and Nobles is a publisher.

Do you ever see people just their ignorance is there? They're confused about the industry, but they're using a certain terminology. Does that make sense and how do you address that?

**AJ Harper:** Well, that's, I mean, here's the thing. It doesn't matter if they're using the wrong words. You have to know the words they would use. Here's the reason.

**Mike Michalowicz:** Okay, so you still use their words and say this is what you think.

**AJ Harper:** You don't correct them. You don't correct them.

**Mike Michalowicz:** Uh huh.

**AJ Harper:** You just gather. What are they saying?

**Mike Michalowicz:** Yeah.

**AJ Harper:** What are they thinking? What are they wondering about? What are they worried about? That's all, that's all the exercise is.



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And then it, and then it helps you to have clarity about what's going on with them. And then the list really becomes a power move. Because there's about 80 different things you can do with it. But chief among them is using the language they recognize in the book and later in the marketing in using the words they would use. Where we go wrong, where we disconnect is when we decide for them what they want, what they should want, what the real problem is, not the problem they think it is, and we lead with that stuff instead of leading with what they think.

We can always correct them in the book. You can always say Barnes & Noble is not a publisher. But that's later.

**Mike Michalowicz:** You can't start with that.

**AJ Harper:** No.

**Mike Michalowicz:** So you start with connection, and I guess that builds the trust that you were meeting them where they're at.

**AJ Harper:** Yeah. I've always said the reader needs to see themselves on the page.

What better way for them to see themselves on the page if the exact thought they had is literally written there?

**Mike Michalowicz:** I hope someone listening to this episode just wrote that down. The reader needs to see themselves on the page. This page or the page. Um,

**AJ Harper:** But can I say one more cool thing? People don't know where they can get the language.

**Mike Michalowicz:** So you can say a million cool.

**AJ Harper:** You ever read those articles to say, Oh, you know, 200 people were surveyed at the body blonde. They said, X, Y, Z associations and different also polling groups, research groups collect this stuff all the time. So you can get the actual things they say. From some of these survey reports that are already done, that have already happened.

**Mike Michalowicz:** So where do you find them?

**AJ Harper:** Just Google. You know, Google, you know, survey about statistics about survey about X.

**Mike Michalowicz:** Oh, that's cool.

# don't write *that* book!

**AJ Harper:** And then the other place is Reddit.

**Mike Michalowicz:** Reddit, why Reddit? I love Reddit.

**AJ Harper:** So you actually turned me on to it because I had like a death fear of it. I remember saying to my son when he was younger, Never go on Reddit. Because just there was all this weird manipulation and conspiracy stuff happening. But actually it's a great place to see the big questions people are asking and wondering about because the questions are right there in the headers. And also to see the common responses to things about what people are wondering about and dealing with.

**Mike Michalowicz:** So Reddit has this upvote, downvote toggle. So what I found is trolling still happens and the community at large pushes that troll down and they disappear and the real answer, I'm sorry, the answer that resonates with most people gets upvoted. So you don't even have to be a textual contributor. I mean, you don't have to type in your response. You can just render opinion by agreeing or disagreeing.

**AJ Harper:** Yeah,

**Mike Michalowicz:** It's a really powerful tool.

**AJ Harper:** But you can also see what are people wondering about?

**Mike Michalowicz:** Yeah. Yeah. And so, so if you're doing research on a subject, personal finance, you can go and read it and start researching personal finance and see what people are talking about in that space.

**AJ Harper:** What are the top questions? What are the top discussions?

**Mike Michalowicz:** Yeah.

**AJ Harper:** Those top discussions are what's on people's minds.

**Mike Michalowicz:** How do you, so that's one way of determining the biggest problem. If you do a traditional survey, are you just looking for frequencies? Is that determined the biggest problem?

**AJ Harper:** Yeah, just similar phrasing, similar meaning. Uh, yeah.

**Mike Michalowicz:** How do you, how do you use the list to come up with different teaching points?

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**AJ Harper:** Yeah, so that's one of the main things you can do that people don't realize. Teaching points, so we're clear, is something that you want the reader to learn or understand. Sometimes it's a correction of something, a new way of thinking, that helps you get them to what you promise in the book.

So for example, in my book, one of the, a common, uh, teaching point people will say back to me is the first draft is just math. I, that's the teaching point of mine, which basically means we're going to focus on the math, the quantity of getting those words out versus the quality of those words.

And it's a new way of thinking of, it's just math. We're just doing the numbers. We're not going to worry about if any of this is any good. We're just getting these words on the page. That's a teaching point, right? So you could come up with teaching points. Very easily. You could, and by the way, you could have people also ask me how many teaching points go in a book?

I don't know. It's whatever number needs to be to get people from where they are to the promised destination. But if you're wondering, I don't know what my teaching points are. You do know you just haven't articulated it yet. An easy way to come up with them is to take that list of burning questions and answer them.

Then take the list of questions, uh, concerns and address them. What do you say when somebody says, I'm so worried no one is going to want to read what I have to say? Or what do you say about I don't know the best path for publishing?

**Mike Michalowicz:** Hmm!

**AJ Harper:** Right? Can I get a publishing deal if I don't have..? Oh, here's a question I get all the time.

It's always phrased the same. Should I self-publish or traditional publish?

**Mike Michalowicz:** Yeah, right.

**AJ Harper:** And I always correct people and say that's not an either/or proposition, right? So then that would be a teaching point. It's not a matter of choosing between self-publishing and traditional. When you're choosing a publishing path, it's about your own set of priorities.

So now I've given a teaching point related to a question I get all the time. So you can go through your whole list, which is why you want a long one, you want to get as many questions and concerns as you can get and then just make yourself answer everything. And it won't all be succinct like that to start, but it'll get you going to say, okay, uh, now you've got all this content. So that's one of the things you can do with it.

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**Mike Michalowicz:** So, chief concerns versus teachable moments or problem. How do you distinguish those?

**AJ Harper:** What do you mean? A teaching point is a teachable moment.

**Mike Michalowicz:** Well, I was thinking, yeah, and just my mind, how I think I heard you was that some people voice concerns where they need more of support. This is normal. You've got this. And other ones

**AJ Harper:** Oh, yeah. But there's still, there's still a lesson that helps you to stop worrying.

**Mike Michalowicz:** Yeah. Okay.

**AJ Harper:** Do you know what I mean?

**Mike Michalowicz:** Yeah. Yeah. Okay.

**AJ Harper:** Like, for example, um, how can I make sure nobody steals my work? You'd be shocked how many times I hear that.

**Mike Michalowicz:** I'm not shocked because I had that same fear when I was starting out.

**AJ Harper:** But it's such a beginner fear.

**Mike Michalowicz:** It's such a beginner fear.

**AJ Harper:** So, you know, obviously the answer is you can't. And my, what I, my teaching point would be it requires so much effort to get a book written, edited, published, and marketed that a person who would want to steal your stuff would have to be one in a million to have that kind of stamina.

**Mike Michalowicz:** Yeah.

**AJ Harper:** So don't worry about it.

**Mike Michalowicz:** Yes, it's a rarity.

**AJ Harper:** Yeah, and if it, and then sometimes it happens and there's, you know, we move on, but I, I just, I want to reorient people away from thinking that it's not like somebody's going to steal it. If they steal it and put it on their blog and no one reads it, what the hell do you?

# don't write *that* book!

Doesn't matter anyway. You don't care. But to actually take your book idea, write the book, edit the book. Get a deal for the book and then market it and have anyone read it. It's a monumental effort and most people aren't going to go to that trouble. So that's, yeah, that's a fear. I'm not giving them encouragement though.

I'm just correcting because they don't realize the truth is that would, that people aren't going to invest that much time in it.

**Mike Michalowicz:** What else can we do with this list? Keep me going here.

**AJ Harper:** So, uh, once you have the list, of course, again, this is mostly about connection, right? Because you want to write to the things they're worried about, not the things you think they should be thinking about.

Right? It's, this is how we do, we write a book for someone. They need to feel like, how does this person know what I'm thinking? How does this person know what I'm wondering about? I can't believe, do they, have they read my diary?

**Mike Michalowicz:** And I get those emails, you know, I get an email now every 20 minutes or so from a reader 24, around the clock and that's the exact words I some people use.

Oh my God. You read my mind.

**AJ Harper:** Mike. That's on purpose.

**Mike Michalowicz:** I know it is. I know it is what's so Amazing is, um, I shouldn't say amazing, but the reality is when they say that, they say you get me and therefore I will give you my trust.

**AJ Harper:** That's it. That is it! It's that reader transformation sequence and it's It's, we just, we get so fixated on writing our book and selling our book and the whole thing is about building that relationship with the reader.

**Mike Michalowicz:** Yeah.

**AJ Harper:** The whole thing. And one of the ways you do it is with this list. Um, so you can also, by the way, take those questions and you don't, they don't have to be exactly verbatim, but close enough. And if you really want the reader to feel seen on the page and grab their attention, you could use them for chapter titles, uh, section titles.

John Briggs did that in The 3. 3 Rule. That was my suggestion. So, uh, how do I know if my book is any good? Could be a chapter title. Yeah. Right? How do I make sure, how do I keep

# don't write *that* book!

my family, like, what do I do about paying down debt? Could be a chapter title in the book. By the way, we have to change all our chapter titles.

**Mike Michalowicz:** Yeah, it needs clean up.

**AJ Harper:** Oh no, like we need completely new chapter titles.

**Mike Michalowicz:** Oh, so you're saying a gutting, yeah.

**AJ Harper:** Yeah, we need to slash, slash and burn.

**Mike Michalowicz:** I was so intensely writing, I didn't look at it beyond

**AJ Harper:** Slash and burn.

**Mike Michalowicz:** Okay.

**AJ Harper:** It was just utilitarian before.

**Mike Michalowicz:** I understand that.

**AJ Harper:** It's, yeah, but, I mean, that's one way we could go, by the way.

**Mike Michalowicz:** Yeah, we can go back to all the chief concerns.

**AJ Harper:** It could be the question or fear, and that itself could be the chapter title.

**Mike Michalowicz:** Yeah.

**AJ Harper:** I do that sometimes with section titles. So it's a really, uh, effective tool. Plus then it becomes the, the, here's another thing you can do with the list. You can use it as an editing filter.

So now you're going into editing, you come back to your list, and you say, did I answer this? Did I address this? Have I covered this stuff? So, cause you might have forgotten.

**Mike Michalowicz:** So in that case, If you do that manually, do you go through all the questions that you have and then as you skim through the entire book those questions are in your mind and they pop out or do you do one question at a time and skim the book?

# don't write *that* book!

**AJ Harper:** Listen, by the time you're done writing it, you could look at your list of concerns and questions and you'll know.

**Mike Michalowicz:** You'll just know instinctually. Like, oh, I didn't.

**AJ Harper:** I didn't mention that. Okay, let me, let me deal with that. And you may feel like, you know what, I don't think I want to mention that.

Like, for example, if we're, again, we've been talking about a book on publishing or writing, people give me a lot of marketing questions and I didn't write about marketing in my book.

That was my choice.

**Mike Michalowicz:** Yeah.

**AJ Harper:** Because this is not a, We cannot, I'm not writing the Encyclopedia Britannica on, you know, so you can still say, I get that that's your question or concern. I don't choose to address it, but you do have to make a choice if that's going to be for the tradeoff. Um, and then the other thing you can do with the list is, oh my God, first of all, you could use the list in marketing, just the questions.

Because if I, if it's a question in their voice, then they say, yeah, I, I want to know the answer to that. Right. Really simple. Or I feel that if it's a worry or concern, but you could. Aside from using it in just marketing, you could create content for it, just little posts that help you in the lead up to the book.

It doesn't have to be complicated to come up with this stuff. That's why I say this list is gold, gold, gold, gold.

**Mike Michalowicz:** And do you actually keep it printed out in front of you, this list or?

**AJ Harper:** No, I just do it one time, but I revisit it all the time.

**Mike Michalowicz:** Gotcha.

**AJ Harper:** Yeah.

**Mike Michalowicz:** Okay. In our notes here, you got stuff in bold. Does that mean like that's the big important critical things you wanted to share?

**AJ Harper:** Well, I put it in bold because I think people get a little too stuck with this.

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**Mike Michalowicz:** Okay.

**AJ Harper:** Before, if you, you probably know more than you realize. So just set a, set a timer for 10 minutes and for the full 10 minutes write question, question, question, question, question.

**Mike Michalowicz:** All the questions that they would be asking. In their voice.

**AJ Harper:** As best you can.

**Mike Michalowicz:** Yeah.

**AJ Harper:** And then do another 10 minutes for concerns. You'll be surprised what you come up with. But when you're trying to be precise or precious about it or overthink it. It's harder. If you just take out the self censor by using a timer and going as fast as you can, you'll come up with a bunch of stuff.

**Mike Michalowicz:** It is interesting, kind of like an FAQ for a website or something. It seems like on any individual topic, there seems to be maybe 15, at most 20 distinct questions people have before I hear them repeated. Maybe different words, but There's not that many questions. It's not like there's hundreds of questions around a topic, it seems.

**AJ Harper:** No. And it was, it's challenging for this current book that we're writing because the, they're different.

**Mike Michalowicz:** Than our historical books. Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, for sure.

**AJ Harper:** Yeah. So relying on the surveys, relying on, uh, interviews and really listening carefully has been helpful for me.

**Mike Michalowicz:** I think what was really helpful was Rachel Werner. Remember her? She was Delivering the, the, we formally made for money process to people, but also is a personal finance coach and her, um, explanation of the reader's challenges, concerns, worries. She said something and we put in the book, um, I don't want to be the parent. And what she was saying is that there's one person that takes... Let me just flip this, uh, camera here. She said there was one person who takes responsibility for the money. So if you and I were married and you were taking responsibility for the money that you would sometimes play a parent role and I'm playing the child role. So I come to you and say, Hey, can I go out with the guys this weekend?

And then you have to say yes or no, kind of like kind of a lollipop. And so there was this, this relationship where you're resentful that you have to do that.



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**AJ Harper:** Yeah.

**Mike Michalowicz:** And I'm resentful that you're not an equal partner. And yet there was this inequality intentionally of who's responsible for finances.

Someone's just taking the lead on it. That was such a great question is, am I being apparent here? It was, it was some phrasing that came up over and over again. So I guess when, Asking, but also observing is interviewing other experts, not just the end consumer of this stuff you're writing, but the, but the other experts can give insights onto the reader's language and feelings.

**AJ Harper:** Sure. Yeah. But I mean, I still think that I had to go look at what people are wondering about, you know, in terms of personal finance. You can also, by the way, look at book reviews. It's the other end of it, but sometimes people will tell a little bit of their story in there.

**Mike Michalowicz:** Yes.

**AJ Harper:** Yeah.

**Mike Michalowicz:** Yeah, that's actually a great idea. You can extract tons of reviews.

**AJ Harper:** Yeah. I mean, I think the thing that I saw in terms of personal finance that we really did lean in hard to is I just saw so much shame.

**Mike Michalowicz:** Yeah,

**AJ Harper:** I saw a lot of emotion. I mean, there are tactical questions, of course, but there's just so much shame.

**Mike Michalowicz:** Yeah, I saw that cognitive dissidence and the need to resolve it.

So there's a sense of shame. And so then the justification comes about because how can you sustain that shame that I can't handle the money even though I'm supposed to be good at. So then there's the justification, which was, well, I wasn't raised properly. I didn't get the education. Um, I'm not good at this.

There was a way to resolve. Not being good with money that sustained not being good with money.

**AJ Harper:** Yeah. Yeah, I think that's an example of I want you to stay Mike and the question and the concern because you're quick to solve it and understand it.

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**Mike Michalowicz:** Mm hmm.

**AJ Harper:** Just like we talked about you seek to understand what the reader just needs you to see them

**Mike Michalowicz:** Yeah, that's so funny. So in a relationship, uh, I can't remember who shared this. It was an author who said, when having a conversation, ask in your mind or even ask the person, do you want to be heard or do you want to be helped? Yeah. And, and maybe this is, maybe this is more of a guy thing. It's definitely more of a me thing.

**AJ Harper:** It's a guy thing.

**Mike Michalowicz:** Yeah. Result to help. So Chris and I had a argument. Well, it devolved to an argument. This is just last, uh, Last week, she goes, the shower, uh, is not working. I said, oh, okay. I said, can you call Phil and, um, Tony? Those are the plumber guys. She goes, you're not hearing me. The shower's not working.

And so I kind of look around. What are you feeling? You're being bunked. I know. I'm like, okay. And she continues on. She goes, maybe the whole shower needs to be replaced. Maybe it's the piping. Maybe it's this. Maybe it's that. We got to renovate the bathroom at some point because it's rich. And all this stuff.

And so I'm looking around and I'm like, yeah, it's all true. And I said, and then now I'm like scared. I'm like, call Phil and Tony. She's like, you're not. And then, and then it devolved and she gets pissed.

**AJ Harper:** What did she want?

**Mike Michalowicz:** To call Phil and Tony. That's the irony is. What she wanted to be was heard. Her frustrations with the showers, what she

**AJ Harper:** She wanted to say that she wanted to be heard, Oh, that's terrible.

**Mike Michalowicz:** And I went to the fix. That was the mistake I made instantly.

**AJ Harper:** How frustrating.

**Mike Michalowicz:** Yeah, she wants to know how frustrated she wants me to hear how frustrating it is. And I said, the solution is to call the plumber, right? She knows that is the technical solution, but she's wanted to express the emotion behind it.

And I wasn't receiving that.

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**AJ Harper:** Right, because to her, it feels like a snowball of things that are about to go wrong. And there's a lot going on. Yeah, there's a history of frustration, and all

**Mike Michalowicz:** these consequences of it. And just wanted to let it out. And what I was doing was squashing her from laying out, Let's go, let's go solve the problem.

Call Phil and Tony.

**AJ Harper:** Yeah.

**Mike Michalowicz:** Um, so, what's funny about that at the end of the dispute, was, we're both, while technically that is the step to take, that's correct, she's accurate in that she wants to release. So we're both right, there's no wrong or right here.

**AJ Harper:** Right.

**Mike Michalowicz:** But there was conflict. And I think that's what we do with our reader.

When, when we jump to the solution without letting them express or acknowledge, They're emotional.

**AJ Harper:** Right. So I'm, so you want to go right to how they are also justifying their shame and perpetuates and the fix and, and what's the psychology behind it. And I'm actually more apt to be like, look, I see you.

**Mike Michalowicz:** Let them be.

**AJ Harper:** That's terrible. Like I'm more apt to put on the page. What a drag. Like that shame, what it feels like to carry that around. I always say impact, impact of the problem. I say this a lot at Heroic with speeches. We forget, we say the problem, we forget to address the impact. What's that like on, okay, so I have this problem, I have shame around Monday, money.

How does it feel? When you have shame when your kids are asking you because they want to go on a field trip and you can't afford it. Or at the end of the year when you realize that you're in deep, you didn't meet any of your goals. Or when your friends are surpassing you and going on more trips or buying houses or doing things like that.

When you look at how your bank account dwindled because of a spending choice. The shame, what does it feel like? How does it feel in your body? You're carrying it around. What don't you say because of the shame? What events do you avoid because of the shame? That's what I want to Highlight in a book because that is the human experience and if we move too fast past Acknowledging the impact then we miss an opportunity for connection. So the

# don't write *that* book!

questions and concerns are clues like this stuff's bugging me I this is this haunting me or I don't know the answer.

I'm nervous about this and just acknowledging God That's rough, man. I see what your commute is like every day Because you hate your freaking job, but we're so quick to talking about how we can love it again And the thing is, we just need to talk about how that 37 minutes is the worst of your life, you know?

**Mike Michalowicz:** Krista, um, and I, we share, I've shared the most about our experience with Money Together ever. Actually, most about our family ever in this new book. And one of the stories is we, I noticed over time, if we were shopping together as a couple, we get to the cash register. And just before the purchase was made, and in this, in some cases it'd be stuff that she accumulated, and she gave it to me and I was going up and then I'm pulling out the wallet she could have equally and she'd walk away

**AJ Harper:** Smoke. She's gone.

**Mike Michalowicz:** Yeah. And it was the weirdest thing. So I'm sitting there with like a, like a bra in my hand and I'm abandoned. Like literally we've been in like, you know, women were at the mall or at a clothing store. And here I am with a women's underwear making the purchase. And like, I got no wife around me.

I'm like, this is, yeah. Weird. And I feel like these pervy looks at me like, Who's this? Is this like his own collection?

**AJ Harper:** Which would be fine.

**Mike Michalowicz:** Which would be fine. Which is fine. Which is fine. But I felt judgment. And then the purchase would be done. And just as the bag was being put back in my hand, and the receipt was in my hand, all of a sudden she'd reappear.

**AJ Harper:** Yeah.

**Mike Michalowicz:** Like this phantom. And then he grabbed the bag and wore off. This is such a peculiar thing. When I finally listened, really listened, and you listened because you interviewed her separately too, which we had to do separately just because there's that spousal relationship. The story came out of shame, so when, and I get so upset about this, but she grew up under really impossible positions, uh, childhood experiences, which a lot of people do.

But I can't relate to, because I haven't been there. But when her mom would go food shopping, they were subsidized. Um, she shared another story that's not in the book. I'll give you in a second. Sometimes, and many times, they couldn't pay for the groceries they just

# don't write *that* book!

accumulated. And then the shame of having to go back in the store and put items back on the shelf until you got under the number, she said was just devastating. She shared another story that came out of this, and this is how a book transforms you. We were sitting talking about this, and she goes, uh, In school, cause she didn't have any lunch money. When you came to school, the kids that would get a subsidized lunch had to go into a separate line.

**AJ Harper:** Yeah.

**Mike Michalowicz:** And she was, there was so much shame. She goes by the third time, she decided never to eat lunch again. And she would, she would just not eat lunch. So the only. Opportunity for a healthy quote unquote healthy meal at school was skipped because the shame is that great.

**AJ Harper:** Yeah.

**Mike Michalowicz:** that's when I started to understand, oh my god, if I just listened to that backstory, I'd get it.

**AJ Harper:** Yeah, so actually she and I bonded over that on the call because I had to say I had the same thing about cash registers Isn't that funny?

**Mike Michalowicz:** Really?

**AJ Harper:** Yeah. And I even said to her, I said, you remember, because we were also the same age, so I said to her, yeah, you remember, um, when you, the checks on the wall behind the register of the bad checks, she's like, yes, I bet you don't even, I bet you didn't even notice a mic. (No.) So if your parents write a bad check.

It would get up on the back wall, so you, I would always be nervous to even go up and see the cash register because what if my mom's, and it, my mom, we were just didn't have any money. It's not like my mom was a bad person, it's just she did, she did her best, but not only did I have to put stuff back, not only was I worried about that, just like, Krista, I was also worried that they weren't going to accept the check or the card would be declined or something and sometimes the check would be on the back wall for the whole world to see.

**Mike Michalowicz:** Is there, so they knew this person's passed bad checks, watch out.

**AJ Harper:** Yes, and then everybody can, but everybody can see it.

**Mike Michalowicz:** Yeah, it's public, yeah.

# don't write *that* book!

**AJ Harper:** Yeah, so I totally related to her about that and that's an example of a story that is going to touch a lot of people because I, I had the same fear. It took me until even just maybe even just like 10 years ago to not feel nervous when I go to the counter.

**Mike Michalowicz:** It's such a ingrained visceral feeling.

**AJ Harper:** Even though I knew I had the money.

**Mike Michalowicz:** Yeah. Oh, Kristen knows, too. So, going back to the Christian Louboutin shoes, I do a callback in the book, when I'm writing that story, of that welling emotion and she started to feel it. These are \$800 shoes. For her, it's absurd. For me, it's absurd.

**AJ Harper:** It would be for me, too. Yeah.

**Mike Michalowicz:** Contextually, yeah. But this was also a dream. It was like me buying my Dodge Viper. This was a fulfillment of one day when I've arrived. I'll have these red bottom shoes. And she's in line by herself. And she starts to feel this emotion. But then she starts to realize it isn't the same emotion.

That is the emotion of I can actually do this. This is joyful. Um This is rewarding myself. And so she starts welling up with tears and shaking, not because she's living through that trauma again. She still recognizes it. They'll never go away, but the energy is now being channeled in a new way of self-care and self-love and she decides when the, when the person says, can I put it in the bag? She goes, no, I'm going to put it on my feet. And she walks out of the store.

**AJ Harper:** Oh, that's right. But see, if you start with burning questions and chief concerns, you can get at some of this stuff. You can find the, Oh, you're getting emotional right now. .

**Mike Michalowicz:** Yeah. Yeah.

**AJ Harper:** Oh, I love that. It's so nice. It's so nice when people care about their long-term spouse.

**Mike Michalowicz:** Oh, yeah. Long term spouse. Yeah. Yeah. Well, yes. And, um, it goes back to what you're saying is we have to hear our reader.

**AJ Harper:** We do.

**Mike Michalowicz:** By using their language. Because it is a one-way communication. It's written text. Or an audio to the person, but you can still hear them by doing this list, the burning questions.

# don't write *that* book!

**AJ Harper:** Yeah. And so the way you address them could be directly, but it could just be through a story without ever saying it to them directly. It could be through a story about the cash registers.

**Mike Michalowicz:** Yeah, exactly.

**AJ Harper:** You know, if a person is, you know, wondering about how do I deal with the shame? How do I get over money trauma from when I was a kid?

No matter what I do, no matter how much I earn, I'm still afraid. Well, If that question came up, then the story from your wife would address it and help them feel seen without necessarily having to say, I see you. It just works.

**Mike Michalowicz:** Anything else to share on this subject?

**AJ Harper:** No, just y'all do it. Just do it. Just set the freaking timer.

**Mike Michalowicz:** Our next episode, we're going to talk about, uh, our book progress update. Uh, we'll also talk about building the marketing plan. I have another. Question for you, not for this, but for maybe a little mini episode. What if we have something that we want to share that's not in the domain of our expertise? I'll give you the exact example.

I'm learning guitar. I, to comprehend a technique of soloing, navigating the fretboard, I took a concept that's very simple already. And like, Oh, there's an even simpler way to do this. And so I'm doing it and it's helping me and I'm like, Oh, it's not documented anywhere. Like no one's shared it. So I just want to share it.

Um, but I'm, I'm not an author on guitar ship, nor do I ever aspire to be. So my question is, if you have this moment of inspiration and it's something you, you feel compelled to share it, it's easy to say, just share it. But we also have this talent of being an author. Is there an outlet for that? Is there a way to contribute it?

Um, that's crazy. I know.

**AJ Harper:** I, I feel like that's, uh, uh, sounds like it's like a TikTok video and one. Let it be there.

**Mike Michalowicz:** Maybe it is. Yeah. Maybe it is.

**AJ Harper:** Wherever video, whatever, end up wherever we land.

**Mike Michalowicz:** Yeah. Just to get it out. Um, I thought maybe that's a little mini episode.

# don't write *that* book!

**AJ Harper:** Sure.

**Mike Michalowicz:** All right. Um, We haven't covered a couple of critical things, and I, and just hold on one second, do not fast forward through this, because some people think, oh my god, he's going to talk about AJ's book.

Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, I'm going to talk about AJ's book, but don't fast forward through this. Oh, I can skip it 30 seconds, then rewind 15 seconds. Don't do it. Get the book. I'm so surprised We have some uber fans like bingers who have not bought Write a Must-Read. I'm like, what's your problem, bro. It's usually guys.

Well, I, you know, I prefer listening, get an audio, but get, get, Write a Must-Read still in print and, and, and. Um, have that Bible sitting on your shelf. It is the must-read book for anyone who is exploring authorship or serious about it or anywhere in between. Right. It must read by AJ Harper. It's at your favorite bookstore right now.

Also sign up for her workshops, [ajharper.com](http://ajharper.com) is the place to go. She's doing a trip to Madeline Island. I'm going out there. I would love another one if I can maybe tag along to. To go and just write. I got to get out of the house and write. The airplanes work well, I just want to spend 12 hour days four or five days in a row prepared?

**AJ Harper:** You know what? My friends, my BFF, Zoe Bird, who, you know, she's a copy editor, but we've been friends since we were kids. She texted me, um, like at the end of December and she said, Hey, uh, can I go up to your place for like a week?

**Mike Michalowicz:** Yeah.

**AJ Harper:** She said, I want to, I've got, she's got a publisher for her poetry collection, which I'm so proud of her. She said, I just, I want to lay all of my manuscript out on the long table and just be up there for a week. And can I bring my dog? And of course, like instant, yes. We have an apartment up there above the garage, which is very nice. And then we have the studios done so you could leave the apartment and go be in the studio all day.

She sent me a picture. She ended up staying longer than a week. She ended up saying like 12 days, which is her and her dog and her manuscript and nature. And probably our builders who were in the house. Yeah, she sent me a picture of the most beautiful thing Which was she spread her whole manuscript out on this really long table that I had commissioned. Like there's nothing like she said it was life changing for her.

**Mike Michalowicz:** I bet.

**AJ Harper:** To just be In just to be away and get that writing time done. I



# don't write *that* book!

**Mike Michalowicz:** It's a total immersion.

**AJ Harper:** It's a total immersion. That's why I built the studio.

**Mike Michalowicz:** Yeah. I may ask, maybe I can rent your space too. It's the same thing.

**AJ Harper:** Just come on down. There's no, there's no renting man.

**Mike Michalowicz:** Well, I'm just thinking that, uh, a place just to do just one task.

**AJ Harper:** Come on down. You can stay in the apartment. Maybe some other

**Mike Michalowicz:** authors that want to do it too. Um, I also have this kind of this fantasy of Of this eclectic mix of authors, no one in the same space, just going to write and then sitting around the fire,

**AJ Harper:** Chilling,

**Mike Michalowicz:** Pit, and just talking about life. Um, well, you're doing the editing days up at your, at your retreat center.

**AJ Harper:** Yes. I don't know how many spots are left, but yeah, we'll see.

**Mike Michalowicz:** I'm telling you, life changing, ajharper.com. We also have an imprint called simplified. Uh, I started an imprint along with Page Two. If you are an entrepreneur author, meaning you write for entrepreneurs, we'd love to have a conversation with you.

You got to be an all in author that we're not looking for people that are like, Oh, I want to write a book. No, you're an all in author. This is your life's endeavor, and you want to work in concert with other authors. Uh, we may have the imprint for you. Any questions, comments, feedback. We'd love to hear it.

It's at Hello at [dwtbpodcast.com](http://dwtbpodcast.com) to get hold of us. We got some interesting reader feedback. We've given some shout outs. We want to give out some more. So tell us about your successes to go to our website, [dwtbpodcast.com](http://dwtbpodcast.com) to get our free materials and to join our email list. That way you never miss a single episode.

Plus all the bonus materials that we send out when we do send them out. Thanks again for joining us today. We are looking forward to seeing you next week. As a reminder, don't write that book, right? The greatest book you can.