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Episode 71:

“Author Gear”

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.

AJ Harper: I can't believe those words just came out of your mouth. Why did you just say that?

Mike Michalowicz: I'm recording this. Just listen to AJ laughing.

AJ Harper: Oh no.

Mike Michalowicz: I asked AJ right before we hit record it. I said, can we talk about nudity a little bit?

AJ Harper: Well, yeah. Why would you say that?

Mike Michalowicz: I had a story. So there's a Michalowicz cousin's reunion every year.

And we went to Whitefish, Montana a few years ago, and we stayed at this beautiful little lodge, the lodge owner, uh, woman, came out. Um, there was just the Michalowicz family sitting there and I was in my, uh, bourbon serving. I don't drink really, but I do like to make cocktails for other people. So I was making old fashioned for everybody.

And so the owner comes out and I say to the owner, Hey, if you'd like, gladly make you one. And she said, yeah, I like one. I said, no problem. So I make it, I'm a little heavy handed on the servings. It tastes great, but it's filling. You know what I'm saying? Yeah. So she, she goes and she leaves her work and she comes back maybe a few minutes later.

She's like, this is pretty good. She goes, may I have another one? I'm like, Yeah, if you want. She takes it, comes back the third time.

AJ Harper: Oh, no.

Mike Michalowicz: Her blouse on one side had slipped down. I don't know how.

AJ Harper: Wait, hang on. You know kids listen.

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Mike Michalowicz: Yeah, I'm just saying.

AJ Harper: Okay.

Mike Michalowicz: Okay. Yeah. Thank you. Thank you. The part of her chest was exposed. Totally. I'm with my cousin.

AJ Harper: While you're standing there in front of her?

Mike Michalowicz: Oh, the whole family, the whole Michalowicz clan. And she goes, can I have another one?

AJ Harper: I don't think so! I don't think so!

Mike Michalowicz: I don't think so. That's exactly what happened. So, everyone looks at her. The men, I look at my cousin John and go, John, look at me. He looks at me, all the men, we all just lock eyes, we're staring at each other, all the women run to her, and they go, hey, I think we're done, and we want to show you, and they walk her out, and so, she leaves, everything's done, the family comes back together. We laugh about it.

AJ Harper: The men are like, we're all looking at each other. All we're doing is looking at each other.

Mike Michalowicz: They left for 10 minutes. They came back. We're still staring at each other. Like, just silence. We come back. You know, there's a little laughter about it and stuff. And we all, like, she must feel so embarrassed, so ashamed.

An hour later. Hey!

AJ Harper: No.

Mike Michalowicz: Yeah. Comes back in. Hey, is there one more round going around like, no, we're we're done. We're out. We're done. So, very funny. It's now in Michalowicz lore. Of course, lore. The last reunion there was discussions that we have a name for the whole situation, which I won't mention 'cause there's kids listening.

Today we're gonna talk about author gear. Was that a good transition?

AJ Harper: No. I mean, no, it wasn't. But what can you, how, how do you transition?

Mike Michalowicz: Um, yeah.

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AJ Harper: I mean, except to say, wear clothing.

Mike Michalowicz: We wear clothing. I'm in studio with AJ Harper, my writing partner, the cohost of our show here. Don't write this book. Don't write that book. Don't write this book either. And, um, there's two things I, I want to point out about you. When you get the giggles like you do now. You don't stop, and it's infectious. The second thing is when you say something's hot.

AJ Harper: Oh, God.

Mike Michalowicz: You're on fire. Like, when, you, you have two tells that you really are engaged. When, when you say, that is hot. I know we've written something extraordinary. And secondly, when you started to get the giggles. It's something that hits, hits a, there's a, there's a funny bone in you. It just hits.

AJ Harper: It's just that you said, can we talk about nudity a little bit? I can't even open my eyes right now because I'm going to start laughing.

Mike Michalowicz: You know,

AJ Harper: I just realized is when I say this is hot. It sounds like Paris Hilton. Do you remember that?

Mike Michalowicz: Did she say that?

AJ Harper: Yeah, she used to have a, she used to say, that's hot.

Mike Michalowicz: She's wildly successful. Someone's telling me wildly successful.

AJ Harper: On her own accord. On her own accord. Good for her. She just plays into the whole mythology around her.

Mike Michalowicz: Freaking smart.

AJ Harper: Did you also know that Marilyn Monroe was a super genius?

Mike Michalowicz: You mean like Mensa?

AJ Harper: Like, her IQ.

Mike Michalowicz: Ha! No, I did not know that. It's just she's played into it.

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AJ Harper: Yeah.

Mike Michalowicz: The smartest people.

AJ Harper: All right, so. None of this is anything remotely to do with our topic today.

Mike Michalowicz: Author gear.

AJ Harper: Author gear. Stuff. Stuff you carry around. Stuff you have. Stuff you need.

Mike Michalowicz: I, uh, I found that most of my writing is on airplanes because it's the longest consecutive time where I can stay focused and concentrated on something.

When I write somewhere else, I gotta do it in shorter sprints. The longest I can write consistently is about three hours straight before my head just starts hurting. I'm like, I got to take a break or an airplane. The biggest marathon I've pulled, I think it was like nine hours straight. I remember getting off an airplane once and the passenger next to me looks at me and goes, you just wrote the entire time, because I just sit there clicking, clicking, clicking, clicking and I'm like, That's a good point. I did. I don't know. There's this kind of time warp.

Plus, when you're in an airplane, I don't want to talk to the person next to me. They don't want to talk to me. You're confined to this space. There's no distraction. I turned the little TV off in front of me. I hate that thing. It's playing the same stupid, you know, message, whatever, over and over again.

And you just, you're, you can't look to your right. There's a person there. You can't look to your left. There's a person there. You just look forward. It's the best writing time for me. We're gonna talk about the gear. That we use to write. Do you mind starting us off and just kind of give me your breakdown of some of the stuff your must haves?

AJ Harper: To be clear, my gear is going to be almost nothing like your gear.

Mike Michalowicz: Where do you do the majority of your writing?

AJ Harper: So, on my desktop computer or my dining room table. And if I really need to just write and get away, the Nyack Public Library.

Mike Michalowicz: Okay, so that's your three primary spots.

AJ Harper: Yeah, well it's because for years I didn't have a home office. And we had a little one at home. I had to get the heck out. Oh, you know my favorite place I used to write? You can't go there anymore. They just stopped being open. But, in Nyack, there is this like Super

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8 motel that had an offshoot restaurant that I used to call the Copacabana because they had all these fake palm trees in there. And next to it, Is a club where they would have like salsa and latin dancing at night where people get so dressed up But you had to walk through this diner where it's just like pancakes, burgers.

Mike Michalowicz: Oh, that's so funny.

AJ Harper: right? You had to walk through in your salsa finery Through past bouncers that are standing at the door and I would go there almost every night because they would be open to like Two, three in the morning, because then the dancers would, people who were dancing would come in and get a, you know, stack of pancakes.

And they didn't care. It was virtually empty. If I sat in my booth for hours till one o'clock in the morning, they knew me. I wrote so many books at that place with the Latin dancing going on one side and a bunch of folks, you know, choking down French fries on the other side. That was heaven. That was heaven. I like to go to a place that's open late. Now that I'm in my fifties, that is not going to happen anymore.

Mike Michalowicz: Yeah.

AJ Harper: That's just, I need to be done at a certain hour. But I like to be away. I like a coffee shop. I like a, I used to also, there was a Irish bar. Actually, Nyack has about four Irish bars and I will talk to the, uh, owner and say, can I come in here just in the late afternoon?

I'm actually, is it okay? I'm not going to drink. I just,

Mike Michalowicz: that's so great. "Is it okay if I don't drink?"

AJ Harper: I just want to diet Coke and I want to sit at the bar with my laptop and I'm kind of going to stay here for a little while. So I don't want to take up too much space. Oh yeah, it's fine. So I would go all around to my little locations and I, it's really effective to just get up and I like being in a public space where there's the din of things happening around me, but I'm not engaged with it at all.

Mike Michalowicz: Yeah. And maybe we're gonna talk about that as part of our gear is that background, perhaps white noise, maybe. So your number one writing place is your... What most frequent

AJ Harper: Well it right now, it's my home office because I'm always doing I'm almost doing other things. So it would be inconvenient to leave or it's four o'clock, five o'clock in the morning, six o'clock.

Mike Michalowicz: Give me the breakdown on the gear that you have for your home office

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AJ Harper: Uh, I like a desktop computer with a very big screen.

Mike Michalowicz: PC or Mac?

AJ Harper: Always Mac.

Mike Michalowicz: Oh! Okay. And I'm like, always PC.

AJ Harper: No. Oh, heck no. Oh my gosh. Except for an iPhone. I don't, I don't even want to

Mike Michalowicz: Okay.

AJ Harper: Open, I don't even want to turn a PC on.

Mike Michalowicz: What's the reason for Mac over PC?

AJ Harper: Mac is just much more intuitive. I just, I just like the way it rolls and then also like how it integrates with everything else I own, including everything else my family owns.

Mike Michalowicz: Okay.

AJ Harper: Yeah.

Mike Michalowicz: So you have a PC. What kind of keyboard do you have?

AJ Harper: I have two. I have a regular and then I have, actually I have three. I have a regular, I have an aerodynamic, so that it's rounded. So if I'm experiencing any carpal tunnel,

Mike Michalowicz: Okay, so ergonomic.

AJ Harper: Sorry, aerodynamic.

Mike Michalowicz: It's live!

AJ Harper: No, I have an ergonomic, not aerodynamic. It could become aerodynamic if I tried. And then I have the one that I love that I haven't used that much yet, which I should probably get out, is, it sounds like a typewriter. My wife gave it to me. It's what I asked for for Christmas.

Mike Michalowicz: Does the keyboard itself make the audio?

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AJ Harper: Yeah, so it has the look of typewriter keys. It's a regular keyboard It looks like typewriter keys and it goes click click click click click click click. So it gives you that satisfying sound which if you grew up when we grew up we still use typewriters

Mike Michalowicz: That's interesting. Yeah.

AJ Harper: My favorite gift ever was my electric Smith Corona that my mom gave me. So I have three.

Mike Michalowicz: Okay. Let me, uh, I'm just going to run my points through it for these two, these devices. So your office, your primary writing, mine's an airplane, but when I'm writing in the office, PC dual monitor, one is my writing monitor. One's my research monitor. And those two run in parallel, so I can just jump back and forth.

AJ Harper: It's so interesting how you do that because I, I get so stressed out when there's two monitors. I don't know what I'm doing, where's the mouse going?

Mike Michalowicz: Well, the mouse is fluid, it goes right across.

AJ Harper: I know, it's just, it's disconcerting.

Mike Michalowicz: I do enlarge the mouse, I have a very, like, the guy is blind is a bat sized mouse.

Uh huh. I just find it easy because I can locate it very quickly. Um, the Keyboard I use is a very specific one. It's called a Kinesis or Kinesis Advantage 2. It's an ergonomic keyboard, but it is bizarre. It looks space alien. The, the hands are almost like they're sideways.

AJ Harper: Yeah.

Mike Michalowicz: And they're so far separated you can't cross one hand to the other. So your right hand can only do one half the keyboard and your left hand. It took me about three months to get used to it, but it's so natural. Um, I did get carpal tunnel syndrome once, and this is actually another tip. There's a book, I'm going to pull it up on Amazon while we're talking, that transformed my life.

It did small, what's called Fascia Movement, very micro movements. It restored, I'm a hundred percent free of carpal tunnel syndrome, which was excruciating.

AJ Harper: It is excruciating. I don't have it anymore either, but it's very bad. But listen, Mike, if you learned proper, did you ever learn proper typing?

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Mike Michalowicz: No.

AJ Harper: So. It would have taken you less time to do the ergonomic because you are not supposed to your right hand is supposed to do certain keys and your left hand is supposed to do certain keys. And so when you learn proper finger placement as a typist. Then your hands don't go. You don't go.

Mike Michalowicz: Yeah. So this kinesis keyboard forces that I never went over either way. I knew I took typing in high school. Like they actually taught us to type. So your, your left finger, it's hard to visualize it. It was on the a, the right on the S. I can't remember, but it sits there. There's a little nubs there in the keyboard is your finger placement.

And so I don't cross over. It twists your hands in a way or moves your hands in a way that's very comfortable. The book is called Conquering Carpal Tunnel Syndrome and Other Repetitive Strain Injuries, um, written in 1996, a self-care program. This book was the best 15 bucks I spent in my life. It's on, it, it solved carpal tunnel.

Okay. So we got your.

AJ Harper: That's some of my gear.

Mike Michalowicz: Some of your gear. Yeah, so we got your monitor. We got your keyboard.

AJ Harper: Mm hmm.

Mike Michalowicz: Do you still handwrite? What do you recommend for that?

AJ Harper: On my desk I have probably four different journals of different size and in notebooks. So I have a yellow legal pad, which I always have. That's old school because I used to borrow them from my dad.

Mike Michalowicz: Yeah,

AJ Harper: So I just like having them I have a spiral bound, big, like, sketchpad level. Cause sometimes I need that where I can fold it over. And then I have several that are journal-journals that are, the binding is different and I have to have all those 'cause it kind of depends on how, if I want to feel constrained or not.

Mike Michalowicz: Okay.

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AJ Harper: And so I will do a lot of free writing, list making, idea generating, but writing by hand.

Mike Michalowicz: So, and what, what's your go to pen?

AJ Harper: Um...

Mike Michalowicz: Or pencil?

AJ Harper: Oh, not, not a pen. No pencils.

Mike Michalowicz: Okay. Pens.

AJ Harper: I'm not that picky about it. So, so I'll take whatever it doesn't, I'll just use whatever.

Mike Michalowicz: So I use a mechanical pencil or a regular pen. I don't care. One trick I found for myself is I will use a Sharpie pen, you know, like a marker to draw out, um, charts and stuff like that. I'm going to put in the book because it, because it's a thicker line, it forces you to bring about simplicity. Words have to be short because it'll bleed in and over.

So, I also use a yellow pad. It's just easier on the eyes. Sometimes a white pad with a sharpie. And so I actually, this morning, I was just coming over thinking about this episode. I was like, oh yeah, there's all this stuff I did just yesterday on thinking out concepts for the new book. And it forces simplification.

Um, what about audio? Do you, do you do anything for that when you're writing?

AJ Harper: Yeah, I mean I have the different, well first let me also say that what else is on my desk? Oh yeah,

Mike Michalowicz: yeah. Let's keep going.

AJ Harper: Probably about 15 packs of Post-it Notes in all different colors.

Mike Michalowicz: Yeah, me too!

AJ Harper: Plus, uh, if, flags. So, I'll often use the post it flags. Just to remember what pages that I need to look at. But I also have my index cards. And a little box where I store them. Cause I'll put index card ideas for things on index cards.

Mike Michalowicz: Oh, I don't use index cards. That's pretty cool.

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AJ Harper: Yeah, and I keep a little system for that. Okay. And, uh, so those things are all I need all that stuff.

And then I also, I don't have it up right now, but I typically have also a little cork board with visual images of something that for something I'm going to work on next. And then behind me, I have a board. It's a glass, write board.

Mike Michalowicz: Oh yeah.

AJ Harper: And I put my outline for my book and post its up on it.

Mike Michalowicz: Oh, that's great.

AJ Harper: So, Those are things that I use that are really helpful and important to me. And if I'm walking, if I'm taking, if I'm out and about, it's a Mac laptop. And then I will bring also one of the journals, pens, and probably post its with me in my bag.

Mike Michalowicz: Okay. Yeah. I want to talk about your travel gear and depth in a second.

So let's finish the office. My office, I also have, I originally had a cork board you put against the wall. And it was like a stuck to the wall with whatever sticky adhesive horrible. It was peeled off. I found this buying a pre-assembled framed cork board and mounting that to the wall permanently with, you know, by screwing it in so much better, I will have up their deadline, some tracking deadlines right in there and I'll have some key ideas.

So we just talked about a new idea. I'll put that on the cork board with a sticky note and put a pin into it with, Oh, not a dreams and wants account. We should have what is your big dream account or whatever. So I'll put up there as my reminder. Uh, music is important to me. I have tinnitus and uh, if there's silence, I'll just hear ringing.

If there's people talking in the background, it becomes distracting. Classical music has been a great tool. The only problem is I am so familiar with classical music now, I know it melody by melody, and I noticed I'm tracking. So when Vivaldi comes on, Four Seasons, I can do it note for note, and that's why I stop listening to Vivaldi when I'm writing.

I do it as my end of book celebration. The last words I'll write and I'll play Four Seasons Vivaldi. Um, so now I've moved to instrumental. Like, there's tons of instrumental stuff out there. So I'll do, uh, jazz instrumental or acoustic instrumental. Melodies I don't know. And that is a nice background noise.

I have a, uh, Bose headset, um, which is the sound silencer, which is really ideal for traveling, but sometimes I'll use that when I'm at home and there's other noise, but the poor man's lapser

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is you can buy earplugs for 10 cents, stick them in your ear and just deadens the noise and you have just the music in the background.

Um, on my desk, um, I also have a Pomodoro sprint. I don't use the tomato, but I'll put a sprint timer, and I learned this basically from the sprint groups, moving in short sprints is very helpful. If I don't do it, um, I'll just keep going until I hit exhaustion. Now in the most recent kind of marathon, I was going to three hours, but I was cognizant that once I hit a three-hour mark, I started feeling the exhaustion. I, I better stop.

AJ Harper: Like the 3.3 rule from John Briggs. Yeah.

Mike Michalowicz: Oh, amazing. That's right. So there's a recovery period, but I'll use that. Um, the application we didn't talk about use word. Don't use Google docs. Microsoft word. And I had one situation. My computer's giving me problems. I went to Google docs and effed up everything.

I sent it over to you and you're like, what the hell's going on? Yeah. Work in Word. It is the platform. Editors. Word is the standard.

AJ Harper: There's no point in avoiding it. You might as well, so I always set up, if I'm, when I'm starting a manuscript, I set up the whole manuscript. In one doc, and I use, I work in that, and I don't, I might send you a different chapter that I copy paste into another doc, but I'm working on that one doc, and it's formatted correctly, set up properly from the get, so that there's no messing around, and I keep it clean like that the whole time. And I'm particular granted, I do have legit OCD. So that might be part of what's happening, but I also tell my students, you have to submit it in the standard format using Microsoft Word. This is not an option. It's not optional. It's not preferred. It's actually what you need to do. So just do it.

Don't, you know, you're going to make yourself crazy. If you have to convert everything later.

Mike Michalowicz: I have a sure S H U R E microphone. Um, you can use a Yeti.

AJ Harper: I have a Yeti.

Mike Michalowicz: I get, there's lots of, yeah, I do a lot of dictation. So just to get ideas out for me, just to, just to talk. It's easier than typing out because the speed of it and then I used to script and I'm sure it'll be better tools out there soon.

I just put the audio in there and it transcribes the whole thing. When we do interviews of people, we record it on, um, zoom, we can upload the zoom photo video into the script and it gives you the entire transcript. And so I do this with my, uh, audio for myself. I'll just say, oh, there's an idea about, um.

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The dust bowl and I would say, and I have the whole thing captured in five minutes where typing the equivalent reply. Take me 20 minutes, I think.

AJ Harper: Yeah.

Mike Michalowicz: So—

AJ Harper: For me, typing is part of thinking so everybody's different.

Mike Michalowicz: Yeah, yeah, exactly.

AJ Harper: So I would, I have a technique that I came up with when I still thought writer's block was a thing and it isn't, but it's as, it's a silliest little hack, but it used to get me going.

So what I would do with my, that electric Smith Corona, I would take a magazine. I remember when we used to read magazines and I would put it, prop it up and choose an article and I would start typing the article that someone else wrote and within about 10 minutes. Now, I was ready to do my own work because the simple act of typing put me into writing mode.

And so then I would start to get my own ideas and I would keep typing. So there's something for me about the muscle memory.

Mike Michalowicz: Sure.

AJ Harper: So I like doing my own typing.

Mike Michalowicz: I gotta share a story with our audience. I remember looking at a keyboard once. I'm pretty sure it was yours. And I'm like, there's no letters on this. Like you've used it. And if I remember correctly and tell me this with someone else, some of the keys didn't even work anymore. Like you push I and it come out like six and you're like, Oh, I, and you started adjusting your writing to accommodate this keyboard.

AJ Harper: Yeah. I mean, you know, recently, uh, I, you know, my friend Sam. He was over at our house a lot helping us. And he said, I was away. Um, and he was, he said, I'm at your house. Can I, can I use the, your computer, your desktop? I said, sure. And then when I came home, he said, I don't understand. Your whole profession is writing,

Mike Michalowicz: Right?

AJ Harper: And that computer is so ancient. I don't understand what you're doing. What are you doing? Why don't you have the latest things? 'Cause it works fine. It works fine for what

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I needed to do. And I don't want to mess around, and I'm going to run that thing to the ground, you know?

Mike Michalowicz: Yeah. I like that with cars, with technology, that would drive me crazy.

AJ Harper: I think the getting the latest and greatest can be a real distraction. We need to just get our work done.

Mike Michalowicz: That's true.

AJ Harper: And if it's, if it's working, who cares? And I always, whenever I go into the Apple store, I say, okay, I'm on Zoom a lot. And then I use Word every day. All day.

Mike Michalowicz: Yeah.

AJ Harper: And that's kinda it. So don't sell me the big whatever, whatever. You know what I mean? I, I don't need this super whatever, all your bells and whistles. I'm on Word and I'm on Zoom.

Mike Michalowicz: Yeah.

AJ Harper: And that's kinda it.

Mike Michalowicz: That's all I need.

AJ Harper: So, I don't need to update until it be, but I will actually, I probably wrote for like six months with missing keys on that keyboard.

Mike Michalowicz: Do you have any thoughts? For someone that's on a super tight budget, like Open Office, it's free.

AJ Harper: Yeah. I'm, there are some limitations in terms of once you get into transferring back and forth,

Mike Michalowicz: Yeah.

AJ Harper: You know, but I, I just want people to know that Microsoft 365, you can get an account, I think it's like 8 a month. So you don't have to spend hundreds of dollars up front like we used to when we had to get the software and then it came in the CD ROM and then you had to update it in the next year.

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You can just get Microsoft 365 and I realize it's 8 a month, which maybe is pricey for some folks, but it comes with more storage than you could possibly ever use. And most people don't realize it does.

Mike Michalowicz: Stores online.

AJ Harper: Yeah. So. There's so many perks to it that I think it's a no brainer to get it if you're an author.

Mike Michalowicz: What's your hydration kind of eating systems. Do you have anything available? Because when, when you're cranking, I ain't leaving that area. I'm just going, going, going, but.

AJ Harper: Well, you have to get up. I mean, first of all, I take dance breaks.

Mike Michalowicz: So I actually write standing. I forgot to mention this. I have a standing desk.

AJ Harper: So I don't, I, I sit, but, um, I'm such a cheapo. I go into YouTube during my dance breaks and I find like, I'll just Google like hip hop dance break or whatever dance break. And then there's this bajillion free videos to watch. And I get up and try and follow the dumb dance lately. I've been trying to learn TikTok dances just for my own enjoyment.

Mike Michalowicz: Oh, that's fun. That's cool.

Mike Michalowicz: Just you gotta, you gotta move around a little bit. Um, but I will tell you my hydration technique is 20 years old.

Mike Michalowicz: What is it?

AJ Harper: I have a big ugly, you've seen me drink out of it. I have a big ugly holds 36 ounces of water. Um, Like almost like Rubbermaid or like this the that like you could run over and it probably wouldn't break hospital cup. It has like the aspergum handle color.

Mike Michalowicz: Okay.

AJ Harper: It's so ugly The writing used to say st Joseph's Hospital and it no longer has that and that was from when my son was born and I was in the hospital and I let the nurses let me to have it.

Mike Michalowicz: Yeah.

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AJ Harper: So I call it my Jack cup because that's my Jack cup.

Mike Michalowicz: I've seen you with it.

AJ Harper: It's bigger than my head.

Mike Michalowicz: It's huge.

AJ Harper: Yeah. And I just fill that up. I make sure I do like two or three of those a day.

Mike Michalowicz: I, uh, I like to have a hot tea, um, with me. So one thing I used for a long time until it broke was an ember mug I don't know if you've seen these it's a mug that has a heating element in it.

AJ Harper: Oh, yeah

Mike Michalowicz: So it keeps your tea or whatever your warm drink warm. I think it has a cooling type thing alternatively I'll keep a big thing of water next to me to just Sipping away at it and nuts. So almonds or something like that, like raw almonds or something like that, just to keep a little bit of food available, but it's easy. Uh, it doesn't mess up your fingers. It's dry and you pop in your mouth, and you can keep on typing.

AJ Harper: Yeah, I don't, I don't usually eat till I'm done working.

Mike Michalowicz: Oh, this guy, I just got to keep on something. Um, so, okay. So we talked about that. We have, uh, lighting. What, what do you do for lighting? Is that important to you?

AJ Harper: I like natural light or really low light.

Mike Michalowicz: Okay. Yeah, I'll do the same. That's interesting. Exact same thing. I want the window open. So I have some light coming in. Um, so I get some natural light, but otherwise I'll, I'll dim the room.

AJ Harper: Mhm.

Mike Michalowicz: My office is my primary, my secondary, which actually I enjoy to just to change up the space is right outside my office. We have a small, uh, seated sitting area.

It's really dim and dark in there and there's a little fireplace and I'll sit there. And just be cranking away when you're not at your desk. And now we're mobile, you ain't carrying that Mac with you. What do you use to type and work?

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AJ Harper: No, I do. I do. If I have to, I'll take the laptop with me.

Mike Michalowicz: Oh, I'm sorry. When you're at your desk, it's the laptop too.

AJ Harper: No, I have a desktop.

Mike Michalowicz: Yeah. Desktop. Okay. So you go into the laptop. Okay.

AJ Harper: So yeah, my laptop, but then I also can edit. I'm holding my iPhone up right now.

Mike Michalowicz: You edit on your iPhone?

AJ Harper: I have done this. So if I have a number of apps, I have the dock app and, uh, Dropbox and some different things. And so I will, there's stuff I've edited that you didn't know I was editing. I was sitting on my phone doing it.

Mike Michalowicz: Wow.

AJ Harper: Yeah.

Mike Michalowicz: I found for mobility. Having a keyboard is extraordinarily important to me, especially ergonomic. I found this has been a game changer for me. There's, there's three elements. One is it's called iClever. It's an iClever. Uh, that's one word, ergonomic foldable keyboard. It folds down to an oversized wallet. It pops open, but in an ergonomic style, so it's a bent keyboard and it Bluetooth's to your device.

AJ Harper: Hmm.

Mike Michalowicz: Now I use an iPad. Now, I've had, I also have an iPad that has a, uh, an attachable keyboard, which is great. I do. You can use it in my lap, but when I'm flying, I will mount the. Um, iPad on the seat in front of me now, the air, I fly United all the time. United does not have many of these mounts, more modern airplanes. It seems has a mount for your iPad or iPhone so you can watch movies. I have a thing, this is the next product you should check out.

It's called the, uh, Flight Flap. And, um. It's an airplane tablet holder. What you do, it's, it's, um, it's just some kind of metal material wrapped in a foam and it can, you can fold it any way you want and snake into the seat in front of you. Um, so you'll find a way to Mount it. And then the bottom of it, you bend it and it holds your monitor.

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So now my monitor is ergonomically at my eye level that I can pull down the seat. Um, tray for my flight and instead of having anything packed on there, we're trying to type. I just put my little foldable keyboard there. There's enough room for my tea and my water and snacks and sitting there and I'm typing away.

It is the best setup in the world. So that's the two things I use when I go mobile all the time.

AJ Harper: I'm gonna print out my stuff and throw it in my messenger bag. So, one of the key author gear is to make sure that you have a bag that you can slide in a laptop, but also a full manuscript.

Mike Michalowicz: Okay.

AJ Harper: So whenever I'm purchasing anything that I'm gonna bring with me on the plane or just around, it has to hold a laptop, but also a couple manuscripts.

Mike Michalowicz: Okay.

AJ Harper: Full manuscripts. And otherwise, I'm not getting it.

Mike Michalowicz: Wow. So, okay, so you're, you're going old school.

AJ Harper: I, I, so I'm, you're not gonna ever see me writing on the plane, but you might see me editing on the plane.

Mike Michalowicz: Okay.

AJ Harper: If I'm writing on the plane, it's on my iPhone, but mostly I'm gonna print stuff out and I'm gonna bring my pens and highlighters and my little Post its and then I sit and I hold it in my lap. The actual paper. This is very gratifying to me.

Mike Michalowicz: I bring the third thing I bring when it comes to mobility as a monitor stand for my iPad so when I... This is not far for the airplane. But once I go to between flights and I'm sitting now in in the chairs there, have my lap, my next crunch. I don't want to do that.

I will find they often have standing areas. I'll find a standing area and then I'll have a mount for my keyboard that brings it up to eye level again. So I don't have it sitting on the table. I put my full dock keyboard and I'm going again. I can't remember the exact brand I have, but if you look for like tablet floor stand, you'll find these versions.

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They make mobile versions so you can fold it up, put it in your backpack. And I have a big backpack, but this way I'm there. I've had people come up to me like, dude, that's so smart. What is that? Why? You know, And, and I give them that tip. So use that. What about power on the road? You need the, all the cables and stuff.

I found out a little secret. They have these USB, uh, hubs, I guess, where you plug into an outlet and there's like four ports you can plug in. What I noticed is when you plug it in, I would be charging my iPhone. And then on the next one, I charge my watch and the next one I'd be connected to my iPad. I look over my phone and like, it's not charging anymore.

Designed that when there's different load variances on it, they can't adapt and they just pick the most recent one plugged in So I was like, oh my god I think I'm charging my laptop or my iPad to buy use and it's draining while I'm working away and panics ensues There's different adapters And make sure you look at it on on the web that usually have a outlet plug in Like a traditional extension cord kind of plugs into the wall and then it goes to a multi hub and they're designed for changing the power frequency based on what's plugged in and those devices. It's a little bulkier and bigger. Everything's being charged simultaneously. I learned that the hard way when my iPad was just burned out and I couldn't use it anymore because I wasn't actually charging. So just note that I have redundancy, every cable I've backed up. So I think I don't even know the ports anymore. Lightning. Is that what it's called? I got two lightning cables. I got a USB C or something. I got two of those.

I cannot afford to be on the road and I lose a cable and I got to go on hunt on the hunt for a cable.

AJ Harper: You know, I mean, I think the difference between us is that I'm not traveling like you travel. And so when I travel, I just want to bring my print out. I don't want to actually be on my computer. I don't actually want to be on it. I really am only bringing the laptop because if I have to do a zoom call or a meeting.

Mike Michalowicz: Okay.

AJ Harper: And I just want a break. I'm on my desktop computer so much. I'm writing so much. I'm reading so much.

Mike Michalowicz: Yeah.

AJ Harper: There's, I need, I need that tactile experience. It's too much digital world.

Mike Michalowicz: Okay.

AJ Harper: But I'm also not traveling like you travel.

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Mike Michalowicz: Yeah. I need that. And I need it to be fluid, and I just found it to work extremely well. The next item you need to have is if you're using a laptop, um, or iPad or anything when traveling and there's among other people get a screen. Um, it's not a screen protector, but it's a, uh, It does not allow people to see your screen if they're not sitting right in front of it. Um, a screen filter, I guess, is what it's called. They're relatively, quote unquote, inexpensive. I think I paid 25 for it. But what's interesting is someone can't lean over and see what you're working on.

And this is not just for writing. This is for anything you're doing. You don't want other people looking at your screen. So, definitely get that. Um, I'm just going through my bag real quick. If there's anything else I have in there. Oh, and get a great backpack itself.

AJ Harper: Like you need a good bag.

Mike Michalowicz: You need a good bag. My wife got me one. I can't remember what was called the E something. And, uh, it was cool. It was nice. It was such a great gift of hers, but it was too small for what I needed. So I went on and there's, there's a million backpacks out there and they're like, You know, these fancy ones, hundreds of dollars, I found one for 30 bucks.

It's a dream. It's a no name brand, AKA it's not a brand. It works perfectly. It attaches to my suitcase like that. So when I'm walking through the airport, I don't have to. Um, carry two pieces. They just connect together. Um, it has adequate storage. The feature I like the most is the backpack folds open like a clamshell fully and you can extract your stuff out very quickly.

The other one's open partially and you're kind of wedging things in and out. That was frustrating. I always have those legal pads with me too. So, so I can do some writing, uh, on the plane and Oh, the one thing I found for noise cancellation, I had the. The earbud ones. Cause I was like, Oh, that's smaller.

It's more mobile. They'd fall out of my ear. They get uncomfortable. I went back to just using a full headset and it's just comfortable and it works the distance carry magnifying glasses with me. Um, so as opposed to prescription glasses, just the ones that one and a half exit so I can read what I'm writing.

Um, that's another piece of gear I have.

AJ Harper: I'm going to throw something out there that might surprise you.

Mike Michalowicz: Yeah.

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AJ Harper: I think, uh, if you're an author and you start to talk with people about how you're an author, instead of having a business card, have a postcard book. So when I had my publishing company, we did a ton of postcards and it was actually really effective.

So traditional postcard size, one side is the front cover of your book. The backside is a traditional postcard and the left-hand side might have information about the book or, um, uh, just something really simple, but there's still an opportunity for you to write on it if you want to. So people are less likely to throw those out.

Nobody's using business cards anymore. Having the cover helps people remember what it is. So when we used to do Book Expo or American Library Association, any of those places, we would have postcards for every book, but then authors, we'd have them carry around their postcards as well.

Mike Michalowicz: That's brilliant.

AJ Harper: And just have, throw a few in your bag.

Mike Michalowicz: I've, I, we did an interview. Remember the cup stacking guys? I met them on an airplane. I was on a flight. They looked over. I was typing and I go, Oh, what are you typing? You're typing so much. I'm like, I'm an author. Like, what do you do? They say, Oh, we own a business.

I'm like, my God. And, uh, interviewed them a little bit on the plane and then got their information. Um, so yeah, have a way to collect and give information is a great idea. There was a pilot, um, when it came to customer service, the coolest pilot I've ever seen came out, explained the journey, but he went and he shook hands with every single passenger.

I've never seen a pilot do that before we took off. He said, I just want to welcome you on board. I'm your captain. I want to welcome you on board. Everyone. Um, and then when he got to the, some of the rows, he's like, I just wanted to say hi to this row. I'm your captain. So it wasn't like it took forever. Um, I'm like, I'm going to interview this guy.

So I, on the way back, I said, Hey, I'm an author, by the way, just by saying you're an author. People are like, my God,

AJ Harper: I know I'm an author because it's such a, it seems so mysterious to most people.

Mike Michalowicz: It is. I'm an author. And I would love to, uh, perhaps interview and give me his card. So his name was solid. He then landed a plane on, I'm kidding. I'm kidding. I'm kidding. Um, yeah. Any other gear we need to talk about? We covered a lot.

AJ Harper: No, I mean, uh, don't get caught up in the gear is all I would say.

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Mike Michalowicz: Yeah.

AJ Harper: Like, do whatever is working for you.

Mike Michalowicz: Totally.

AJ Harper: And don't feel like you have to have something special or expensive or the latest anything.

Mike Michalowicz: Yeah.

AJ Harper: Is what I would say.

Mike Michalowicz: Yeah. I just find that as long as there's comfort, so it's even how I dress, I'll make sure that I'm dressing comfortably. Um, I will also, uh, have, Resting pads or something for my, my wrists and stuff like that. They make some pads. It's just whatever brings that comfort about

AJ Harper: A good chair, man. We forgot to say that.

Mike Michalowicz: Yeah. Good chair,

AJ Harper: A good chair.

Mike Michalowicz: That's good. What chair do you use? Anything special?

AJ Harper: So I had this crazy expensive, which is not like me chair. that I, um, much love and research had been put into it by my wonderful, wonderful, wonderful right-hand Laura Stone. Unfortunately, when it arrived, I really hated it. It was no, she did exactly what I wanted. It should have been fine.

Mike Michalowicz: It just didn't work.

AJ Harper: And so, you know, I just finally decided I would go on Wayfair and I just found one on Wayfair that. I can't remember the name of, but it's interesting because I got the same chair in a different color for my studio up on Madeline Island.

And Zoë Bird was up there for about 11 days working on her poetry manuscript. And she's like, can I go to your studio and stay in your apartment and lay out all my, my whole manuscript on your table?

Mike Michalowicz: Yeah.

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AJ Harper: It's like, yes. And send me pictures. It just thrills me to see artists going up there to use the studio. I love it. But she texted me. She said, where'd you get this chair?

Mike Michalowicz: She loved it.

AJ Harper: She loved the chair, which surprised me because it's kind of like a executive, like girly executive chair. And, um, no, she said, I have to have this chair. So, but my chair is not better than any, you know, it's just whatever you, I needed specific things.

I need, I need one that can, um, that's very sturdy. I need one that the arms can go up and down so that I can have arms or not have arms. I need a high back so I can lean back and, you know, there's just, but that's me. So when I—

Mike Michalowicz: It's gotta be for you.

AJ Harper: Yeah.

Mike Michalowicz: I remind me, I have a, even here, I have vertical mouse, um, 'cause it's ergonomic.

It's been superior. I moved when I had carpal tunnel syndrome to left-handed. So this is the only right-handed mouse I have is right here. I use left-handed mouse. Um, the brand to get is Logitech is the meaty full one. There's lots of like knockoff ones. They're just so light. It's actually harder to navigate the screen.

So Logitech has a type, in Logitech vertical mouse. You'll find it somewhere. And I do the wireless as much as possible.

AJ Harper: The thing I want to also say to everyone is always look for the library to go work.

Mike Michalowicz: Why is that?

AJ Harper: It's quiet.

Mike Michalowicz: Yeah.

AJ Harper: The research librarians will help you find anything. And, uh, just being in around the books is a good, is a good place to be probably one of the best places to write in the entire world is the New York public library. The one right adjacent to Bryant Park.

Mike Michalowicz: Oh, I should do it.

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AJ Harper: You should go. I used to go all the time because when I would come into the city for whatever to see clients or something, Grand Central Station is not far from that library and that's my station. And so before I would get on the train, I would go work in the library.

And there's a, what is it called? I think it's called the Rose Room. I'm gonna get it wrong. I'm gonna But it's the most magical place with wooden, long wooden tables and then the little, um, library lamps, um, on every single table. And it's a full, it's a huge, massive room and everybody's writing.

Mike Michalowicz: Oh, that's cool. I love that. Um, all right, we got to wrap up. Um, I hope our listeners, you got tons of stuff out of this. Some ideas, maybe you're Googling right now what you should buy or not. Uh, next week we're a lot of stuff is accurate and you've nailed it. If you don't own A. J. 's book, get a copy now. I gotta make sure I insert this in the beginning.

My fear right now, A. J. 's people are like, I'm gonna skip this part. This is like the most important part. Get A. J. 's book, *Write a Must-Read*. Check out ajharper.com. You've got to go to Madeline Island, a personal work experience with A. J. It is nothing short of extraordinary. Um, okay. Next week, we're gonna talk about due diligence.

And if you want to get more information about our show here, go to dwtbpodcast.com. That's our domain. We've got free resources for you. You can email us at hello at dwtbpodcast.com. Hey, just cheer us along. I would just love for you to say. AJ, Mike, I love the show, or I hate it, but just tell us you're listening in, that gets us excited.

Share your story, any questions you have, stuff you want to hear us talk about. And as a reminder, gosh darn it, don't write that book. Write the greatest book you can.