

don't write *that* book!

Ep: 61

“The Biggest Barrier to an Author’s Success”

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.

This is the episode. So, God, I wish people were in the studio with us, you start soapboxing so hard on me. I got like, I started to get like a little nervous. You're like,

AJ Harper: Mike. Yeah.

Mike Michalowicz: This what people need to do.

AJ Harper: Yeah.

Mike Michalowicz: This is a rant. This is gonna be a rant from you. That's that people need to hear. Um, so I start, started Shushing you. And what you start doing is doing this little like. Maniacal laugh. I'm like, hold the back, hold this one back. 'Cause it's going to be a big one. We're gonna talk about the biggest barrier to an author success. And you said it in one sentence, I asked you explain it. And then you start soapboxing so hard on me.

I was like, this has to be revealed. Before we kick things off. We're in studio. We're trying to film a little TikTok videos. We have no camera. I got this one little handheld phone that I dropped three times already. Um, there's a, there's talk about getting cameras in here if you're up for it.

AJ Harper: Oh, sure.

Mike Michalowicz: So we can have video content because people want TikTokable bites of this now. So just, I mean,

AJ Harper: we should be recording the episodes and video video. We should be, I know.

Mike Michalowicz: So we're only 61 episodes in. We'll, we'll get there. We'll get there. We'll get there by episode a hundred, but I wish people could see the studio. It's it's part warehouse, uh,

AJ Harper: utility closet

don't write *that* book!

Mike Michalowicz: and part isolation chamber. Like the, one of those things you go into with a straight jacket, you know, that's what it feels like.

AJ Harper: We do have a nice view though.

Mike Michalowicz: We have a beautiful view. Oh, and part. Oven, I think, or freezer. It depends on the time of year.

AJ Harper: Depends on the season.

Mike Michalowicz: Thank you for joining us. This is episode 61 of Don't Write That Book. I'm joined in studio with my co writer, my co host, my good friend, AJ Harper, who, uh, came in last night after visiting her mom. We're now recording three episodes in a row. We just, last week's episode, I thought was just killer. It was a total break from our typical structure and was a live exploration of the book we're working on together,

AJ Harper: Which illustrated, I think to show how do you handle discoveries and pivots as you're writing.

Mike Michalowicz: Yeah. And which, which then feeds the circumstance we're in right now or the topic we're going to talk about is I, I, I just want you to explain it. I want you to start, start a soapboxing because I didn't really get it when you first said in the first sentence and I needed to be explained. So tell me, maybe we can start off.

What is, in your opinion, in your experience, the biggest barrier to an author's success?

AJ Harper: The biggest barrier—

Mike Michalowicz: Hold on, I gotta film this. This is like, this is such, such a juicy thing.

AJ Harper: So I used to think the biggest barrier was quitting, which I still think perseverance is the key to success in publishing, just sticking it out.

But the biggest barrier to your success as an author is wanting to be sure it will work before you even try it. That's it. That's the biggest barrier. And it is pervasive.

Mike Michalowicz: So because they don't know the answer to that, they just don't even start? They don't try?

AJ Harper: Well, no, I think people will still start, but I don't think they get the best book they can get.

don't write *that* book!

So. I see this, I've learned this over time through ghostwriting clients, but also now through teaching is where it's really clear to me that most of my job is trying to get people to just give it a shot, you know? I get questions all the time. Is this, do you think this would be a good story or is it too much me?

Should I do that? Should I open with, uh, research or should I do this? Should I have four stories? Should I have, or no stories? Is this the right concept? Is this in the right order? And I always say, well, let's find out. And it's that unwillingness to find out. The fear of that, I get it. I understand where it comes from.

But it's killing your author career. It's killing it.

Mike Michalowicz: Are you saying, authorship's like a lab?

AJ Harper: Yeah. I mean, we need to be willing to try the idea. It may not work. This is not death. There's... it's not. It's, it's okay, you know, for it to say, oh, I tried that. It didn't quite work. Whatever. Move on to the next thing. You don't have just one idea. The cool thing about any creative endeavor is that once you're in it, you, the ideas just will go poof. Ping, ping, ping. They just keep coming, coming, coming, coming. So it's not like this is your one trick pony. You're not a one trick pony. So just try the stuff. Maybe it's not going to work or maybe you need to reconfigure it.

That doesn't mean that your idea is wrong or that you are not cut out for this. None of that matters. None of that is true. And I think we have this from school, honestly.

Mike Michalowicz: Lay it on me.

AJ Harper: Write wrong, good, bad, A paper, B paper, C paper, right? What's the formula? What's the template? What's the correct order of things? What are the instructions for this thing? You must have A topic sentence and four resources and they must be from this and... We're just following, and all that's important. I get it. But I think we're, um, we're scared to even try. And what I see with authors is that when they're looking for someone to tell them if they can. They're stifling the total magic

Mike Michalowicz: that can come.

AJ Harper: The total magic. Because you, you, you can write a book without trying all the things that you thought you wanted to try, but it won't be as good as the book that you would have written had you let yourself try it.

Mike Michalowicz: Some people say write for the garbage can. Is that

AJ Harper: Who says that?

don't write *that* book!

Mike Michalowicz: Some people I've heard that like just, just write to get it out.

AJ Harper: Oh, well, that's yeah, this is another this another way of saying and Lamont's um, SFD, which we won't say the S word, but um, blank first draft crappy first draft. Yeah, but I don't.

Mike Michalowicz: Is it that?

AJ Harper: No, I just I get that. I understand that's a mindset reframes that you can allow yourself to try.

Mike Michalowicz: Okay.

AJ Harper: But what if you... But I think sometimes when you say write for the garbage can, then you're not writing with intent.

Mike Michalowicz: Mm hmm Preach!

AJ Harper: So write with intent knowing that it may not work. Write with intent. Just try it. So this is this is what I see and it doesn't matter if I'm teaching people how to write a speech or I'm teaching people how to write a book. They will ask me a thousand questions. Can I do this? Can I do that? Should I do it this way or that way? Shrug, you know? You could?

Mike Michalowicz: They see you as a teacher, but that's perhaps even the title you use when you're teaching.

AJ Harper: Yes, not a coach, a teacher.

Mike Michalowicz: A teacher. And going back to that analogy of the ABC, pass, fail, follow the script or fail, is it inherent just to the nature of how you work with clients or how anyone seeks guidance is they want someone that's in front of them, the guru, to tell them the way and just want to accept that? And is it a way of deflecting responsibility? "If it doesn't go right, AJ is the one who said it goes."

AJ Harper: I don't think so.

Mike Michalowicz: Okay.

AJ Harper: I think people are, it's just really nerve wracking to write a book.

Mike Michalowicz: It is. Well, look, you heard, we did last week's episode. And you're like, Holy crap. This is not a Profit First book.

don't write *that* book!

AJ Harper: See, and I'm fine. I'm, I'm not.

Mike Michalowicz: You're embracing it.

AJ Harper: Yeah keep in mind that I For the last few months. Well, first of all for the last few months I've I'd recently wrapped top three book workshop my annual class, which is always a joy and like climbing Mount Everest. It's a gauntlet for my authors and it's a gauntlet for me, which is I do intentionally because of what we can produce in that time.

Mike Michalowicz: Yes

AJ Harper: So it, it is hard to do deep work on a book while I'm doing that, but I also wasn't hitting it. I was just like, uh, trying to write and just feeling like no mojo.

Mike Michalowicz: Mm-hmm .

AJ Harper: Just, no, but I don't really freak out about it because I will absolutely get the mojo by trying different things.

Mike Michalowicz: Mm-hmm .

AJ Harper: So, um. You know, we talked about in the last episode. Well, I didn't, I didn't nail the intro, even though I felt compelled to write the intro. See, that's the thing. Just, I felt compelled. Oh, I know what I'm gonna do.

Mike Michalowicz: Mm hmm.

AJ Harper: And I tried it, and then it was absolutely the wrong way.

Mike Michalowicz: Mm hmm.

AJ Harper: But, That's okay.

Mike Michalowicz: Yeah,

AJ Harper: Because it led to a new discovery and I realized it was in it was infiltrating other parts of the book the fact that I hadn't let go of Profit First.

Mike Michalowicz: Yeah

AJ Harper: in writing this book that which is inspired by Profit First.

don't write *that* book!

Mike Michalowicz Yes,

AJ Harper: and I'm not upset about that

Mike Michalowicz Right,

AJ Harper: you know what? I mean,

Mike Michalowicz right?

AJ Harper: But there's a... that's because I'm willing to try things that's because I'm willing to course correct. That's because I'm willing to say, okay It's not that it's this let me see what how that shakes out and I don't always know how I'm gonna do it I don't always know how I'm gonna figure it out What? This is not because I'm uber talented. This is just because I am willing to try. And it's also because I understand the editing process.

So I know that even if it isn't quite right, we will absolutely get there through a process of revision. And I think for books, that's really important. There's this belief that, um, well, I'm not. This might not work. Well, maybe it won't, but maybe it also will through the revision process. You're trying to make it work right out of the gate.

That's not actually how it happens.

Mike Michalowicz: What a great tip. You just said you're not uber talented, but I'm willing to try, which I think is the definition of being uber talented, that you. You have this ability to recognize it's not there yet. Iterate, iterate, iterate again.

AJ Harper: Yeah, just follow it. Follow the energy.

The worst thing you could do is cut off an idea that you had because you thought maybe this won't work. Or, or maybe, I've seen students say, I don't know if I can do that.

Mike Michalowicz: What are some of the formulas like people want from you? Like, oh, tell me, just answer this one for me. I knew this, I'd be good to go.

AJ Harper: What is exactly, what is my outline?

Mike Michalowicz: Okay, what does that mean?

AJ Harper: They want to know what goes where exactly and they want a template outline. And so I know, I know I put authors through their paces. I want them to write an outline that is based on their reader.

don't write *that* book!

Mike Michalowicz Right.

AJ Harper: So how can I really give them a template?

Mike Michalowicz Right, of course.

AJ Harper: So I can, I can give a template of flow for chapter one that I think works really well. But then after that, it's just all, it's just all you. I don't know what comes next. I can't tell you. How would I know? I'm not, I don't have intimate knowledge of your reader.

Mike Michalowicz: You do know when it's working and when it's not working.

AJ Harper: Yes.

Mike Michalowicz: But you have to They have to go through the process of discovering it on their own. You can't discover that for them.

AJ Harper: No, and I can show them. You know, in my class I do live edit, and that's really, really helpful, where I share screen with their work and then we're in a group format, and I will show them. Okay. This is maybe out of sequence Let's talk this out. So we'll do you know half an hour on each person's chapter and I'll say, okay, Let's see. What's the sequence here? What do we need to scoot, you know, or maybe a story isn't working. So let's cut out all that runway and exposition and let's start the story here and it's through observing me do it and in conversation with them that they, the lightbulb goes on. It's pretty hard to do that if all you're doing is leaving comments on their manuscript.

Mike Michalowicz: Yeah, yeah.

AJ Harper: You kind of have to do it together. And, um, what I observed in, the why I really wanted to do this episode is because of what I observed in my students. They get through about three, four weeks of that where they're looking at me do it and they're trying and they're talking and any idea is okay.

And we're just saying, Oh, what if we did it like this? And just the joy of that, uh, discovery process. And then, then they just start trying stuff. Then they just start saying, I didn't know if I could do that. So I have one student, Susan, she, she showed up to live edit and I was reading her chapter and the open just blew my mind. It was like a movie. I'm... Susan's a brilliant writer. She's, oh my gosh. She's such a great good writer, but it was totally different style, it's like Oh Susan. Where are you taking me?

Mike Michalowicz Yeah.

don't write *that* book!

AJ Harper: I'm not critical of that I'm just I want to see what she where's she going with this and then I when we were in live edit I commented on it. And I said, we're, this is so different.

And she said, yeah, I just, I was having so much fun. I just, I just wanted to see where that would take me. And she wrote this gorgeous cinematic scene, and I don't know exactly how it's going to end up in the book, but I know that it will in some capacity, but what matters more to me is that she wanted to try it.

And the same with another student of mine, Scott, he's actually writing, um, Fix This Next for real estate investing. Okay,

Mike Michalowicz: Yeah, yeah. Scott Todd?

AJ Harper: Yeah, Scott Todd. So he also, like, I'm just, you know, he wrote a call to greatness. It had me, first of all, you're gonna love it. He had me in tears. And also laughing. And, um, There's a grandpa in it. So I'm always, I'm always loving that people, when people... It's my soft spot, but he didn't necessarily know how it was going to work, but he said he had learned from me. I, if it doesn't work, it's okay. I can change it or I can kill it. And. It sounds so simple.

“Well, of course. Right, AJ.” I get that. But then why do I hear constantly, Can I do this? Is this right? Is this good or bad? This is, this is the main barrier to authors succeeding.

Mike Michalowicz: You're measuring as you're moving along.

AJ Harper: You are judging the, you want to know if it will work before you'll even try it. You are intellectualizing the creative process.

Mike Michalowicz: Oh, that's the line I've been looking for.

AJ Harper: You're supposed to be just giving it a shot.

Mike Michalowicz: You're intellectualizing the creative process.

AJ Harper: Is this right? Is this the right way? I don't know. You know what I mean? Like, we will find out. But the beauty of it is, if you have done all that developmental work, so, So, okay, let me back up. Let me back myself up. Let's say you don't have a solid core message, and you aren't 100 percent clear on your reader, and you don't have a deliverable promise, then all the mess of trying is hard.

Because you might end up with a giant, giant, you know, um, tangled chain that you can't untangle. But if you do now, this is my reader, this is my core message, this is my deliverable promise, which are the book, the fundamentals, then you're free.

don't write *that* book!

You're free. Because you have a filter and a test. You can say, Okay. Does this connect with my reader? Does this help me support core message? Does this help me deliver on the promise? And if the answer is no, then you can chuck it. The rest of it is just making it better through revisions. You might not tell the best story at first, but that doesn't mean it won't get better over revision.

And so you're cutting yourself off from all of the juice that makes a book great. Fantastic.

Mike Michalowicz: This reminds me a little bit of our mutual friend, your business partner, Michael Port. And he teaches at Heroic Public Speaking. I don't know if he still uses this line, but he says there's rules to presentations, to speaking.

He goes, you gotta abide by the rules until you're good enough to break the rules. Does he still say some version of that? I may have bastardized it.

AJ Harper: No, he, he does say that. And then there's an, that's kind of an old adage. That's his version of it. But he also says something that's even more important. He says, choose early, choose often.

Mike Michalowicz: Okay. What's he mean by that?

AJ Harper: Try it.

Mike Michalowicz: Yeah.

AJ Harper: Make a choice. All writing is a, all writing is a process of decision making. So am I going to do this or that or this other thing or this other thing? Choose something. And move on. Then choose another thing. Maybe it's not going to work. Keep choosing. What I see is people just wandering around, afraid to write anything down.

Intellectualizing. Wanting to know that it's the right thing before they'll take a chance on it. So they're not choosing.

Mike Michalowicz: Yeah, just, just choose, man. Just choose it. That's the new Nike, uh tagline. Just choose it.

AJ Harper: See, this is foreign to you because you are willing to try stuff.

Mike Michalowicz: Yeah, right.

AJ Harper: You send me some stuff and you always say, you know, maybe this won't work.

don't write *that* book!

You always say, I did this story. Maybe it's not going to work. Cut it down to whatever you want to cut it down to.

Mike Michalowicz: Or throw it out.

AJ Harper: Or throw it out. And you're cool with it.

Mike Michalowicz: Totally. Well, this is an interesting thing. And that comes from the office. I was throwing out ideas and some of my colleagues took it as, this is desire or fact.

I'm like, no, these are just, this is just my brain, uh, hemorrhaging out crazy ideas. Um, with Michael Port, if I, sorry, this is a repeat of this story. I went down for one of their events. He asked me to speak at the event to demonstrate speaking skills. So yeah. So he's teaching the class. So I arrived early and watching and he goes, I just want everyone to remember, never turn your back to the audience.

Oh yeah, you... did tell I you this?

AJ Harper: That's okay, tell it again.

Mike Michalowicz: Have I told on this show though?

AJ Harper: I don't know, just tell it again.

Mike Michalowicz: So, never turn your back to the audience. So, okay, I'm like, okay, that's what I'm going to do now. You know, that's because I'm such a nudger. So I go up, I start presenting, and then I'm like, I got to write something on the board.

I turn my back to the audience, and I let it stay like that for a bit. And then I turn over my shoulder back at the audience. I say I know Michael said never turn your back to the audience. And then I waved my hands around my butt. I said unless you got this going. Right? So the audience laughed and Michael did like that slow clap.

AJ Harper: I can see it

Mike Michalowicz: He's like he pulls me said he goes that was brilliant. He goes that's exactly how you break the rules. That's exactly how you break the rules and I was willing to try I also just feel safe like that now is a test for the next audience and for the next audience. You told me Two episodes or three episodes back about the tooth fairy story and you're like, Oh my God, you can do Santa Claus. Like you, so I'm trying, I've tried it already twice.

AJ Harper: Oh you have? What happened?

don't write *that* book!

Mike Michalowicz: The first one delivered awkwardly and it just didn't land.

AJ Harper: Okay.

Mike Michalowicz: The second one someone's like, that's funny. Like there was a little giggle. I'm like, I don't have the delivery, right? But you got a giggle.

AJ Harper: You got a giggle. Yeah.

Mike Michalowicz: And I don't know. It's going to work. I will do it again. I haven't mainstaged it. So I try it in small little outlets. Yeah. Uh, yesterday I was doing an interview last night in Australia, 50, 60 people and I'm like, Oh, Santa Claus. And that was the giggle. And I was like, okay, we got something. Um, let's see.

Let me just look at our notes here. Is there anything else you want to share on your pedestal there, your soapbox about this?

AJ Harper: I'm ready to keep talking about it. I'm still on the pedestal.

Mike Michalowicz: Well, keep going then. What else you want to talk about?

AJ Harper: Well, I want to I think that it's fine I want to just qualify it's okay to use templates and frameworks and formulas for things to help you get started. But I don't I don't want people to be afraid veering off from it.

One of the things I hear a lot whether it's teaching Speech writing mastery for Heroic or teaching my program is once they get an outline, they say, is it okay? It's like there's a little whisper. Is it okay if I'm not quite following the outline? Yes!

Mike Michalowicz: Yeah,

AJ Harper: So the outline is there to help you write efficiently and with clarity, but it's not a box, right?

Or it is a box, but it's not a box you can't get out of

Mike Michalowicz: okay,

AJ Harper: so there I don't know this fear of doing it wrong is, is really the problem.

Mike Michalowicz: Yeah.

don't write *that* book!

AJ Harper: It's the fear of doing it wrong, but there isn't a wrong if you're writing for the reader. So if you can get those fundamentals nailed, if you can spend time just feeling really good, I know my reader, I know what I want to say, and I know what I want to say is going to shift their perspective.

And I, I know this is a promise I can deliver, Then allow yourself some freedom to explore that. And so, I have a few students, uh, who, again, who just finished my course, uh, my program, and um, uh, only when they had written half the book did they realize a few things that they couldn't have realized before in the outline stage.

So the outline stage can get us to the point where we can write efficiently and with clarity and get ourselves, um, get our content down. You have to write to the revelation sometimes. You have to write to the revelation.

Mike Michalowicz: So I'm like, I hope you are writing that down. Write to the revelation. It's a book title.

AJ Harper: It's like you can't, you can't, you're not gonna have the revelation before you write it. You're gonna have to get in the muck and then it will come to you and it's no words are wasted. So, that's just part of the process. I wish I could get people fired up when they hit a new idea or a, like we talked about last week, a pivot or a new discovery where that actually is exciting because, uh, it's new information about how you should be moving forward.

This need to have it all buttoned down. Before you'll take a chance on yourself is the thing that is keeping you from all the dreams you have. And you, we've all read books that feel flat, a little stilted. we want more. There's no juice. There's no fire. There's no, um, there's no love. There's, it's just missing all that.

It's because that author was just following within staying in the box. And, and there's nothing, again, there's nothing wrong with trying a template, but it should allow you then to break free from the template if you need to. So if I could get more authors to just say, Hey, what if I did that and just try it?

That would, that would be make my entire. Life. So when my students are finally saying, Hey, I don't know if this is going to work, but I gave it a shot. I'm like, bless. We, we've reached the point where you're no longer asking me how many stories go in a chapter. How many stories go with a teaching point?

How many teaching points are too much for a chapter? How long should my chapter be? How many like, uh, you know, yes, there are some guidance, there's some guidance, but what does your reader need? It's always the answer. So, for example, let me take the two, the question I get a lot. How many stories should I have for, for a teaching, do I need a story for every teaching point?

don't write *that* book!

Not necessarily, right? If it's a simple teaching point like, um, well, uh, choose early, choose often is a teaching point. We just did some Michael Ports teaching point. Um, pretty easy to explain what that means, right? Do I need a story there? Not necessarily, but I just said right, right to the revelation that might take an example, right?

I might need a couple stories that show how that works because maybe that teaching point is a new idea or maybe that teaching point challenges someone. Um, certainly saying, Um, do not intellectualize your content before you try it or do not wait to see if your content is right before you'll give it a chance requires several stories to, to, for comprehension, to help them understand, but also to prove them that it proved to them that it's true.

But a simple teaching point mate probably doesn't need one. So again, it's no formula. In the sense that you have to decide, is my reader going to have a hard time with this? Or If not, I probably don't need a story there, but is this going to challenge who they are? Is it going to be hard for them to understand?

Is it going to, um, bring stuff up for them emotionally? Okay, maybe, maybe I need to do some work there with teaching points or, or with stories and research or whatever. So it's not as simple as saying, give me one story for each teaching point.

Mike Michalowicz Yeah.

AJ Harper: Or. Odd numbered teaching, you know, it just doesn't work like that because it loses its texture.

Mike Michalowicz: It just becomes scripted about you're working in a box.

AJ Harper: Yeah. Like if you read those books where it's like, here's a teaching point, here's a story, here's a teaching point, here's a story, here's, here's this, an example, this example, this example, it's all just perfectly symmetrical.

Mike Michalowicz Yes.

AJ Harper: Um, I, I just want to just, I just want to toss it in the garbage.

Mike Michalowicz: I think of, uh, art like paintings and so forth and how society, society goes through these phases, there's the, these different periods where all art's the same and then one person breaks it, changes it, and now there's a modernization of art and then it happens again. And you see this in all forms of artistry in music.

My favorite guitarist, this guy, Buckethead. He's my new, He's redefining how guitars are played. There's all this emulation. So if you go back in time, there was the, say, uh, Um, Chuck Berry guitar style and a lot of people doing it and then the Beatles redefine it and then

don't write *that* book!

you have like an Eddie Van Halen and now you have this guy Buckethead and, and everyone moves in that... should be: points to me.

You should be: points to me. I'm filming, I'm filming you. Yeah. You're like, this is amazing stuff. So there is these phases, but then one person, challenges the standard and it redefines the standard and there's a shift toward it. Do you feel that's an opportunity in books? It's, it's artistry. Are we just copying what everyone else is doing, assuming?

AJ Harper: Yes, we're doing that.

Mike Michalowicz: But no one wants to be the first to do it. No one wants to be the, I shouldn't say no one.

AJ Harper: Some ideas are worth copying. Yeah. It's just, don't, don't go on automatic with this, you know? Make some decisions based on what makes sense for your reader.

Mike Michalowicz Yeah.

AJ Harper: You know? Like, have confidence, have confidence in the fact that you know them well enough that you can discern if this is going to work or not.

Mike Michalowicz: In our notes here, you refer to a few books, and I just didn't understand the context, um, Liz?

AJ Harper: Oh, I gotta tell you what can happen.

Mike Michalowicz: Yeah, talk to me.

AJ Harper: So, I ha, I don't know if, if, um, listeners will be aware of this, but in her book, Big Magic, Liz Gilbert, who wrote, uh, Eat, Pray, Love, most famously, in Big Magic, she tells the story about how she had this idea, um, About, uh, a character who, uh, from the Midwest, who, goes to, I think it was, oh yeah, it's a Minnesota woman who goes to the Amazon and she detailed this whole novel that she was going to write and she set it aside.

Um, and then she went to lunch with Ann Patchett and Ann Patchett is, uh, known for a lot, a lot of books and, uh, namely, uh, let me see. I brought it down here. Oh yeah. The one that I thought people would know was Bel Canto, but if you don't read fiction, you might not know Ann Patchett, but very successful author.

And so they're at lunch, they're friends. And, uh, she tells her about this, she tells Ann Patchett, this is the book, um, that I, you know, I kind of think I'm going to pick this back up again, and, um, Ann Patchett, Has the sinking feeling because she's writing a book about a woman from Minnesota who's going to the Amazon.

don't write *that* book!

Literally, it's the book.

Mike Michalowicz: Oh, no.

AJ Harper: It's the book.

Mike Michalowicz: Yeah.

AJ Harper: And so Ann Patchett wrote, uh, State of Wonder. That is the book.

Mike Michalowicz: Okay.

AJ Harper: There is a belief, this is a little woo woo, but I hope it scares the crap out of you. If you're afraid, if you're afraid to try. That when you get the idea and you sit on it, that that idea is actually in the collective unconscious. And that it will, if it doesn't, if you don't do it, it will find a new home.

Mike Michalowicz: Oh, that's interesting.

AJ Harper: And so Liz Gilbert set that book aside and that book wanted to come into being and found Ann Patchett and she wrote it.

Mike Michalowicz: Interesting.

AJ Harper: And I've actually experienced this. It does. It goes like, I have experienced having an idea and then And I know other people who are listening have probably experienced this, too. Having an idea and then all of a sudden you see it's there.

Mike Michalowicz: Yeah.

AJ Harper: It's on a shelf or someone tells you, Oh, this is what I'm working on. It's because, and I know it sounds woo woo, and no, I cannot back it with science. If you don't take that idea, I do believe it will get done.

Mike Michalowicz: It's gotta get out.

AJ Harper: Someone's gonna get it. It's not theft. Ann Patchett had no idea they were at lunch and she's like, Oh no, how did we end up with...

Mike Michalowicz: I wonder how they reconciled that conversation?

don't write *that* book!

AJ Harper: Well, I mean, I think Liz Gilbert knows. Liz Gilbert knows. Like you can't sit on the book. You have to get it done. I, for example, I have a book that I've been wanting to write for 21 years, 21. I will not be shocked if all of a sudden--

Mike Michalowicz: It's out.

AJ Harper: It's out and I have to come to terms, I know that. It's like a ticking clock. What's the cure for it? Trying it. Trying it, because that's actually the worst, the worst thing is when you wait so long to make those choices and to give it a shot, that someone else ran with it.

And not because they even knew you. It's just, the idea will find a home. The idea will find a home.

Mike Michalowicz: Someone's got to do it. Why not you?

AJ Harper: Why not you?

Mike Michalowicz: Profit First. I can't tell you how many people have come to me, A. J. and said that was my idea. So I mean, countless times now, like I was, I knew this, I was doing this. I needed to teach it. Almost like pissed at me. I'm like, yeah, me too. And that's why I wrote it.

AJ Harper: They didn't know you. It's not like you were.

Mike Michalowicz: I don't know who these people are. They don't know who I am. And they said, well, I read it like word for word. Like, this is what I had to do. I'm like, yeah, I felt the same way. That's why, why I did it. And I'm not trying to be a dick about it. But get it out there. The world is starving for that creation.

AJ Harper: Yeah. And I think if more people understood that the revision process,

Mike Michalowicz: Yeah.

AJ Harper: You know, that is really it is that I can, I can throw stuff against the wall because I know that it'll either work or it won't. And through the revision process, I'll figure it out and it'll be fine. And that confidence is what's lacking.

Mike Michalowicz: Yeah.

AJ Harper: And I wish I could. The only, I think the only reason that my students are able to do it is because they're seeing it. If you as a listener could just, all you could just say is write a post it that says AJ says it will be fine.

don't write *that* book!

Just write yourself a little post it. AJ says it will be fine. And if that's just anything, just to be able to get, Uh, get it down on paper, because then we can make it better. I mean, I've written stuff, real stinkers. There's something I really wanted in my book, it was about this recurring dream I have. Ever since I was a kid, I would have, it's kind of horrifying, but I would have this dream where I lost, I had, somehow had a baby.

Mike Michalowicz Okay,

AJ Harper: I'm like not giving birth, but I had like... the baby existed.

Mike Michalowicz: Yeah,

AJ Harper: And then I would lose the baby, Yeah,

Mike Michalowicz: Lose as in pass away or lose like misplace?

AJ Harper: No, like literally can't find the baby Okay, and I would be frantic. Yeah, and it would usually be tied to somebody I was probably dating at the time like that person was responsible for losing the baby or a like a Some a professional or something. I was doing professionally and I kept having these dreams about losing the baby. And then someone who does dream interpretation and y'all can write in if you do a better job than this person did, but said the baby's your creative work and you're not paying attention to it. And so you need to pay attention to the baby. So I wrote this whole thing about like don't drop the baby or don't lose the baby or something like that. This whole long thing for my books like this is gonna be great.

Mike Michalowicz: Yeah,

AJ Harper: and then...

Mike Michalowicz: You know just was that your did you realize once it was created didn't fit or was the editor that has held you?

AJ Harper: um I think I mentioned it, I think I showed an early version to Laura Stone, and she's so, you should never put your staff in a position to give you feedback on something like that. But I, maybe not, you know, um,

Mike Michalowicz: That's funny.

AJ Harper: Uh, yeah, I think my editor did say something and I had to yank it.

Mike Michalowicz: I think the power in that is you released it to the world.

don't write *that* book!

Maybe the world won't see it, but it's out. Like, you don't have to

AJ Harper: Well, I did put it in deleted content.

Mike Michalowicz: Oh, there you go. So there's still value to it in that regard. But, but nonetheless, your mind was allowed to release it, process it. Document it, so the mind can work on the next thing.

AJ Harper: Yeah, I was sure. I was like, Oh, you know what? This is going to be a great story.

Mike Michalowicz: Yeah.

AJ Harper: To help people see that they should nurture their creative selves. And I thought, yes, it's going to work great. And then, in fact, it didn't work great.

Mike Michalowicz: Yeah.

AJ Harper: And that's fine. But maybe it's going to end up in something else I write someday.

Mike Michalowicz: And if it doesn't, that's fine too.

AJ Harper: And it also doesn't matter. It's not, it's not time wasted.

Mike Michalowicz: It's not. That's, I think that's the underlying lesson here is this, this, I wonder if the search for getting it right, so to speak, is because we don't want to waste time because we want to follow script. We want to pass the teacher's test. And the reality is just get it out, test, experiment, play as a laboratory that you're in.

AJ Harper: Yeah, absolutely. Especially if you've gone through, gone, taken the time to really understand the book you're writing and the reader you're writing it for.

Mike Michalowicz: Are you, uh, ready to step off your soapbox?

AJ Harper: Yes. If I just, I just, listeners, please just, this is my message to you. There's something you've been wanting to write that you've been afraid to start.

And I hope that you will start it after hearing this, that you will just. Give it a shot. The thing that you think, I don't think I'm talented enough to write it, smart enough to write it, sophisticated enough to write it, experienced enough to write it. I hope that you will just set that aside and sketch it out.

don't write *that* book!

Mike Michalowicz: Next week, we're going to talk about overcoming the second book, Slump. Please go visit our website. It's DWTBpodcast. com. If you haven't gone there yet, this is your opportunity. Cool pictures of me and you, AJ, up there. Cool content to download for free. You can join our email list. You can, you can. Contact us too.

There's a link, but you can just email us directly at hello at DWTB podcast. com. Hey, get AJ's book, right? It must read. If you, if you don't have it, my God, get the book. In fact, I'm going to start my fourth reading of your book. Probably, uh, probably while I'm in Hawaii. I guess it's like a good movie. Like every time you read it, you find something new.

When I say reading, I like to listen to it on audio. There's certain stories in there. Like the basketball coach. I don't know. Why? But every time I hear it, I discover a little something new. It is a little more empowering. I go through the techniques and processes again. Like, Oh, I don't know. It's so that's the book you need to read.

Check out AJ's writer's lab also. Um, and guess what? We got an imprint. Um, we're working with authors. It's called simplified. It's through Page Two. So if you're interested in that, you can email us at podcast. com. Adela from our team, we'll get back to you on that one. Um, oh, and please rate and review our show.

Because that's how we get the word out there. Thanks for joining us next week. We'll talk about overcoming that second book slump with you. In the meantime, as a reminder, do not, do not write that book. Write the greatest book you can.