

# don't write *that* book!

## Episode 66:

### Substantive Editing

**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 A. J. Harper. Now I'm gonna forget this. There used to be a television show called Sunday Morning.

Uh, this is back in the 80s.

**AJ Harper:** What do you mean? It's still on.

**Mike Michalowicz:** Is it seriously?

**AJ Harper:** On Channel 2, it used to be with Charles Kural.

**Mike Michalowicz:** Yes! That still exists?

**AJ Harper:** Yeah, I used to pretend he was my surrogate dad. No, I'm not kidding. Why? He just, I don't know, he was just kind. Yes. And you just felt like you could go over to his house and just Like, he'd, I don't know, you could fall asleep on the couch, and then you'd wake up and there would be a good meal, and then maybe later he would just, like, tell you a story, and I don't know.

I just liked the way he saw the world, and I watched him every Sunday morning growing up.

**Mike Michalowicz:** I may be conflating this. Was he typically sitting on a stool?

**AJ Harper:** Yeah.

**Mike Michalowicz:** Yeah.

**AJ Harper:** And then there was another Charles that came after him. What's his name?

**Mike Michalowicz:** I don't recall the names. Osgood. Uh, Charles Osgood. Okay.

**AJ Harper:** Now it's Jane Pauley.

**Mike Michalowicz:** I'm shocked it's still on.

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**AJ Harper:** It is, and you know, remember at the end when they have the nature part?

**Mike Michalowicz:** Yeah, yeah.

**AJ Harper:** Just recently it was, uh, the frozen Lake Superior, where

**Mike Michalowicz:** That must've been, this must be running 50 years.

**AJ Harper:** I mean, probably, considering how old we are.

**Mike Michalowicz:** I, because I grew up to it.

**AJ Harper:** Yeah, and remember the guy that would go around, um, Bill Geist, and he was the funny one, and he would go around and do these sort of visit these oddball things happening in oddball towns?

**Mike Michalowicz:** Okay, yeah, I remember the oddities, yes.

**AJ Harper:** Yeah. I love that. I don't

**Mike Michalowicz:** remember anyone's deep dives,

**AJ Harper:** like, like a 10-minute interview with someone or a 10 minute. So good. And always a focus on the arts at least one time in the episode.

**Mike Michalowicz:** Yes.

**AJ Harper:** Sorry. You just, I just was fangirling over it now. What did you, why did you want to talk about it?

**Mike Michalowicz:** Well, cause we're recording on a Sunday morning.

So AJ and I are here. We have some updates on the new book. I'm joined in studio by my business partner and cherished friend, AJ Harper. Um, Who just riff, actually, that's what I want to highlight about you is your ability to riff and to iterate these great ideas from something, and we do this in the book writing process.

I'll say, Oh, here's an idea and then you'll be like, yeah, and this cascade of awesomeness comes out. That's my introduction of you.

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**AJ Harper:** I can't believe the whole thing was just because it's Sunday. That's the only connection. Are you missing that show? You can have it back, you know. It's on.

**Mike Michalowicz:** As a child, I would remember Sunday. It was a very memorable part of the Sunday morning ritual. We go to church, um, and either it was before or after. It was before. It was before, right?

**AJ Harper:** Yeah, it was like 9 in the morning. It was early, yes.

**Mike Michalowicz:** Church would start at 10. And, you know, there was Seven channels back then?

**AJ Harper:** Yeah.

**Mike Michalowicz:** And so you just turn on, you know, PBS, or channel, they were on channel, I remember, four or seven.

**AJ Harper:** It's a, it's a CBS program.

**Mike Michalowicz:** Okay, so two, four, seven, whatever, whatever.

**AJ Harper:** I don't know, his voice, just so calming. I wanted it on every day. And then that, that, um, uh, theme music.

**Mike Michalowicz:** Yeah, I remember the theme music and I remember the logo with the sun. With the sun! The yellow, oranges.

**AJ Harper:** Yeah. It kind of, I stopped watching it.

**Mike Michalowicz:** I don't know, maybe I will again.

**AJ Harper:** But, uh, yeah, now it's Jane. It's Jane Pauly.

**Mike Michalowicz:** Okay.

**AJ Harper:** Uh, I'm gonna introduce my partner, Mike Michalowicz, who is the author of 11 books, 12 books, 11 business books, and one children's book, My Money Bunnies. I think, um, I'm noticing a big change in you, and I introduce you in that way.

I feel like you've become very more focused on personal growth in the last couple of years. Oh,

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**Mike Michalowicz:** interesting. Thank you.

**AJ Harper:** We've been having a lot of personal messages back and forth. Yeah. And I'm just noticing language changing. It seems like your priorities have shifted just a little bit. Oh,

**Mike Michalowicz:** interesting. Thank you.

**AJ Harper:** In an interesting way.

**Mike Michalowicz:** You know, I have a friend who said, maybe I should say it on the show, there's a moment in life where time becomes irrevocably more important than money.

**AJ Harper:** Mm.

**Mike Michalowicz:** And, um, he goes, once you're there, you're there. And I'm not saying I am. But I'm really starting to appreciate moments more and more

**AJ Harper:** Because death is approaching

**Mike Michalowicz:** Because death is approaching

**AJ Harper:** It's true, in your 50s and you're like, wait a minute.

**Mike Michalowicz:** Yeah. Yeah, and we had some dialogue recently around that like you have some very close personal experiences and it's like It just, you know,

**AJ Harper:** I mean, not to be a downer, but I just have noticed that I can track how to kind of, how, yeah. Interesting. You interesting. What you're talking about most is how I would put it.

Like what's I see, I see what you, what's interesting to you, the language you're using in communication. I don't know. I'm noticing it not in like a gross way, you know? Yeah. I get a little, yeah. Tired of people talking about personal growth as if they discovered it. ,

**Mike Michalowicz:** you're on fire this morning. Wow.

**AJ Harper:** It's, you brought, you brought me in on, we brought each other in. Yeah. On a Sunday.

**Mike Michalowicz:** and you have a nice energy this morning. That's good, because of what you've been through recently.

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**AJ Harper:** So, anyway, that's my introduction of you. Thank you. I liked seeing the evolution of you. That's a good thing of a friendship that's long. Yeah. It's getting to see things shift.

**Mike Michalowicz:** Agreed.

**AJ Harper:** Yeah. Let's uh,

**Mike Michalowicz:** Let's talk about just some book updates.

**AJ Harper:** Did you want to introduce me?

**Mike Michalowicz:** I did, I just said, you're the creativity. I said, I want the, I want to introduce you and I want to talk about your ability to riff. ,

**AJ Harper:** Oh that was the whole thing, was the riff thing? (laughs)

**Mike Michalowicz:** Yeah, and then you went back into Sunday morning. You're so into that show, you went back into it.

**AJ Harper:** Oh, I also, okay, just in case anyone's wondering, I wrote a book called Write a Must-Read.

**Mike Michalowicz:** Wow.

**AJ Harper:** Well, I've never plugged myself before like that.

**Mike Michalowicz:** Never. Never. I, I plug your book, uh,

**AJ Harper:** No, you do. You're such a plugger.

**Mike Michalowicz:** I'm a, this is a giddy Sunday morning. Okay. Okay. Let's go. Let's get into the show. Uh, I want to start with the book update. We've achieved the first major milestone. The manuscript is submitted.

You're actually still doing a couple more iterations because we are permitted to submit it, resubmit it effectively tomorrow morning.

**AJ Harper:** It's a little bit like, um, it's good, but not. It's like, psych! Yeah. It's like, you get that feeling of typing the words, Attached, please find the completed manuscript. There's no greater word than "completed manuscript."

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**Mike Michalowicz:** Yeah. We are delivering the manuscript three days after. Three weeks after the original, um, agreed upon submission. So what happens then is they came back, page two, And said, uh, the Editor. We had to do the substantive editing is no longer available.

That was Sarah. Kendra's available. Um, but has to finish a book and that's now affording us one more week. So you're doing a couple more things and somebody this afternoon, I think, right with the,

**AJ Harper:** It's two tomorrow

**Mike Michalowicz:** or tomorrow morning, you're going to do with some other passes or whatever.

**AJ Harper:** Yeah, I'm doing everything I can. We'll see how much I get to.

**Mike Michalowicz:** see how much again. And then you're going to submit it. And then, um, Kendra's going to run with it, um, and then they adjust the schedule going forward. The, the good news is we're still on schedule now for the publication date. There's been some back and forth. So, that's where we stand.

Okay, so today we're going to talk about substantial editing.

**AJ Harper:** Substantive.

**Mike Michalowicz:** Yeah, it's hard to say substantive. What exactly does substantive mean?

**AJ Harper:** So it's that first pass of editing to make sure your book actually works. It's the high level 30,000-foot view. Sometimes people will use the term developmental editing for that phase. Technically developmental is while you're writing it or before you're writing it, but we also sometimes lump it all together into that word.

Sometimes people use developmental when they mean developmental and substantive. But anyway, we're in substantive because the manuscript is complete. And then now, Kendra, who I'm actually thrilled with this development because I've always wanted to work with her.

**Mike Michalowicz:** Oh, you didn't work with her for your book?

**AJ Harper:** No, my editor was Amanda who's no longer with Page Two. And Kendra is their lead over there. And, uh, so she's the big editor cheese and I've had students who worked with her and just loved working with her. So I'm psyched. Good. Yeah. But what happens is Kendra then is going to say, this is working, this isn't working.

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She's going to look at continuity, flow, simplification, clarification, um, big, big picture stuff and that first pass. We will make the big shifts, whatever she asks us to do, if we agree with it. And then there'll be a second round of that. where we'll get into, she'll do more line edit type work. So first is the big picture and then it's looking at, okay, now I've got everything in line.

What are with small tweaks that we need to make to be clear? She's not copy editing. It's just making sure that. Everything is working and so that's usually two passes unless there's a problem Chapter or section in which case that might get another look.

**Mike Michalowicz:** Okay. Substantive. I'm ashamed that's just connecting... Does that mean substantial?

**AJ Harper:** Well, yeah, right.

**Mike Michalowicz:** Yeah. I've never

**AJ Harper:** I guess that was the obvious that I didn't say. Yeah, it's the big stuff, right?

**Mike Michalowicz:** Yeah,

**AJ Harper:** so when you get to copy edit, you're just polishing. So you've got to get the substantial edits done before you can move into the next phase.

**Mike Michalowicz:** Are, and I've heard of these circumstances. Have you experienced circumstances where the submission of a manuscript, either on the receiving end when you were a publisher, or a submission end, that the editor determines this is not even At the substantive stage.

**AJ Harper:** Hell yeah.

**Mike Michalowicz:** Okay. What, what, what's the, is there a distinguishing line? I Or can you give me a horror story?

**AJ Harper:** I have so many horror stories. You know, the term I used to use when I was a publisher when I would get a manuscript is, I would say, heavy lift. Okay. If it was gonna be a problem. I have, I've had manuscripts come in that were not done, and by not done, I mean like 20 percent of it still had to be written, or 40 percent.

**Mike Michalowicz:** So they were just notes in there, it wasn't

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**AJ Harper:** Yeah, I've had, um, I've had manuscripts that were so rough, like I would have to close, shut down my computer and just take deep breaths before I could open it again because I knew what was ahead of me. The thing about being an editor is you can kind of tell when Okay, I can, I can see how we can make this better and then it's, you know, that the author can do it, right?

But then you can also tell when you're going to give the author notes and they aren't going to be able to execute it. And then comes the, that's when the real horror story happens. When you realize if you want a good product in the end, you want a good book, you might be. Doing the work that the author needs to do which is of course not anything you would have experienced, Mike, because we just do it. But I have had to I am absolutely not naming names.

I have had to go in and actually wrestle a manuscript.

**Mike Michalowicz:** Basically, you become the author

**AJ Harper:** No, it's more like, I would call it like a book doctor.

**Mike Michalowicz:** Ha! Okay, how do you distinguish a book doctor from an editor in this case?

**AJ Harper:** I'm fixing it.

**Mike Michalowicz:** Okay.

**AJ Harper:** Myself.

**Mike Michalowicz:** So you're not making suggestions that they can fix, you're actually applying the fixes.

**AJ Harper:** Yeah, I mean, I don't start there. I try and help them, you know, a lot of times they can't problem solve, you know, it's especially with fiction where there's a lot of world building and maybe they lost the plot or they have too many characters and you just, or, they became too focused on the plot, and then there's no real theme or central question.

And so it's just one thing happening after another, and there's no deeper meaning. I've had to have conversations with authors who say, let's, can we please, let's, let's, I think this is the deeper meaning. And they're always like, Oh, it is? You wrote this whole thing. So there are horror stories where you realize that the authors Capabilities are not up to where they need to be to complete the project.

**Mike Michalowicz:** Yeah.



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**AJ Harper:** And that happens in nonfiction too. I've, I've had to, as an editor of nonfiction, I've also had to, it's only so far you can take some people. And so you just, if you want that to work, you just kind of have to do it.

**Mike Michalowicz:** When doing this substantive editing, does the editor have to have some degree of callous? Not the right word.

I want to share something that we went through in the most recent book. I wrote a story about the dust bowl and there's a certain point where a process you follow does not work and you have to change, and I made an analogy through the dust ball of old farming techniques and you respond and said, interesting, well written, not a fit.

Um, does the editor kind of get it?

**AJ Harper:** So you're saying that you thought that was callous?

**Mike Michalowicz:** No, I'm not saying that's not probably not the right word.

**AJ Harper:** No, I just want to check.

**Mike Michalowicz:** But do you have to have, do you, the editor, have to have, like, you, cause there's some empathy. It's like, oh, you're going to hurt their feelings.

**AJ Harper:** Oh, no, no, no, no, no, no, no, no, no, no.

**Mike Michalowicz:** You know it won't hurt my feelings.

**AJ Harper:** Well, I know it won't hurt your feelings, but I also know as an editor, the way I would leave you a note is different than how I would leave a note for a student, right? So it's more like. Um, considering, consider this and here's what could happen and what, what do you think the reader is going to feel if we do this?

And maybe, maybe let's move this down and, and, but keep in mind that the way I edit is I have a lot of conversations with my, because I'm also teaching. So, what happens in a substantive edit is we're going to get the Editorial letter back from Kendra. So now that's in an email with overarching things we have to address. And then she'll also have notes in the margins in the manuscript.

**Mike Michalowicz:** Yeah,

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**AJ Harper:** But it's not like she's gonna meet with us after she turns that in and then we'll have big discussions. We can if we ask. But that's not typical of walking through all these notes. You take the notes you read them yourself. You handle it, you turn it back in.

**Mike Michalowicz:** Yeah.

**AJ Harper:** But when I edit for my students, I'm having conversations with them. Because I'm trying to teach them why and how to get better at it. So, I'm much softer than say I would be with you.

**Mike Michalowicz:** Yeah. I love it. I love it. You're like

**AJ Harper:** But we have an established relationship.

**Mike Michalowicz:** But I, I, yeah

**AJ Harper:** But you do the same thing. You'll say this isn't

**Mike Michalowicz:** Yeah, repeats, don't like it.

**AJ Harper:** Yeah.

**Mike Michalowicz:** But that's what the editor I want to go through kind of the logistical elements, but first I want to understand the The main goal they have, they're not trying to make a perfect book, it sounds like, at this point.

They're trying to master the flow.

**AJ Harper:** Does it work? Like, is it actually doing the thing you promised to do?

**Mike Michalowicz:** Okay, is that the ultimate filter?

**AJ Harper:** Yeah, is this freaking working?

**Mike Michalowicz:** Does it work? Yeah. How long does this process take an editor to do the substantive edit?

**AJ Harper:** Okay, I mean, for, well, for frame of reference, since we're talking about the new book, we'll be done with substantive edits.

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They are starting on Monday. By, well, Tuesday she starts. By starting, that means she's starting. We're playing a game of tag.

**Mike Michalowicz:** Yeah.

**AJ Harper:** We don't have anything to do until she sends it back. But that whole process of tag will get us to the end of May. So today is So, she'll start January 28th. And then it will go February, March, April, May, four months.

**Mike Michalowicz:** The substantive edit, four months or four weeks?

**AJ Harper:** Four months.

**Mike Michalowicz:** Yeah, oh, with the iterative.

**AJ Harper:** The full, full monty of the double passes and the plain tag.

**Mike Michalowicz:** Yeah. Is that all, is four months all substantive? Yes. Or, okay.

**AJ Harper:** Yeah. And then when that's done is when you go into copy edit with a different editor and that's called production.

And the reason that your book doesn't move into production until that point is because you are not done making substantive edits that are gonna cause major shifts and that's why, when you finish the substantive process, your book is considered accepted by a traditional press So, you know when you read the contract, it's not when you turn it in.

It's when you finish that first round. That's before you get to copy edit, because then they know we made sure the book works. Now we'll give you, we'll say your book is accepted. This triggers the next part of your advance. There's, so it's all connected because they, you have to, they have to make sure this book is going to work. Then they'll move into all the other editing. That's just polish.

**Mike Michalowicz:** Yeah. So the substantive edit is when you say game a tag, the author delivers, delivers it to the editor. The editor works on it for, in this case, they're working on for four weeks, I think.

**AJ Harper:** It's just pretty typical.

**Mike Michalowicz:** Okay. Then it comes back to us. Due to scheduling now, we're condensed down, but not substantially. I think from four weeks to three weeks.

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**AJ Harper:** Yeah.

**Mike Michalowicz:** Right? Then we hand it back to her. Four weeks. We get it back. I think we have two weeks.

**AJ Harper:** Yeah.

**Mike Michalowicz:** And then --

**AJ Harper:** We don't need as much in the very last one because we're just looking at the smaller changes.

**Mike Michalowicz:** Okay. Okay, so that's, how many back and forths are there? Meaning, is it, does it have to be only two? Could there be more back and forths?

**AJ Harper:** There could be, but typically it's two.

**Mike Michalowicz:** Okay.

**AJ Harper:** And, you know, you don't want to delay the process. So.

**Mike Michalowicz:** Okay.

**AJ Harper:** If there's a big problem, we'll, they'll look at another component again.

Let me give you an example. We had um, for the, for Clockwork with Kaushik. Kaushik.

**Mike Michalowicz:** Kaushik, yeah.

**AJ Harper:** Kaushik.

**Mike Michalowicz:** I miss him.

**AJ Harper:** yeah.

**Mike Michalowicz:** I know

**AJ Harper:** So much. I love that guy. That was an unusual editor relationship too. Because we actually had a lot of meetings with him and face to face and he was down with working stuff out. So he was actually handling, that's a perfect example.

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He, he handled both developmental and substantive edits because we would go in and do a lot of development with him.

**Mike Michalowicz:** Yeah.

**AJ Harper:** We had to do a little We had one chapter that was, we had to do another round on, but not the whole thing. So that'll sometimes happen where, Hmm, this one isn't quite working. And so we'll look at just that again.

But it's rare that you would be going, say, three, four passes on the entire thing.

**Mike Michalowicz:** Yeah. So it's, it's rare that in Kaushik, Kaushik, uh, situation, we went into. Manhattan, and we were white boarding out concepts. An editor. That's a rarity.

**AJ Harper:** Very.

**Mike Michalowicz:** Um, yeah, it's very collaborative. My feeling, though, is when the book when the manuscript was done, we submitted it.

He was very clear of where we were headed because he was a co-creator of it and brought innovative concepts or simple concepts.

**AJ Harper:** What he did was he asked the right questions and that's really that's what I do as an editor, too, is I ask questions all the time because the editor can see where there are holes What's might be missing. Editors can see where you need to connect the dots, and by asking questions it reveals through the author's answer where maybe there's a sticking point, a lack of clarity. You know, so editors ask a lot of questions.

**Mike Michalowicz:** Do we, when we send the manuscript, I mean, Kendra has it, but you're going to do a little more polishing on it tomorrow, day after. Do we send it to our prereaders at that point too?

**AJ Harper:** I, I think we should at this on the 28th. Yeah. I wouldn't have said that last week.

**Mike Michalowicz:** And the prereaders, we're going to have maybe 10 we were talking about.

**AJ Harper:** Well, we need 20 to 25, so the 10 will read it.

**Mike Michalowicz:** Okay. Touche. Okay. Good. That's no problem. I have people.

**AJ Harper:** Oh, come on. You'll. Yeah. I mean, I'll take more. I'll take more. That's fine.

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**Mike Michalowicz:** Yeah. But at a certain point it's overwhelmed, right?

**AJ Harper:** Well, it's overwhelmed when you do the one where you want them to leave all these comments in the manuscript. I'll be frank. I can only read so much of that.

**Mike Michalowicz:** So you, yeah. But AI.

**AJ Harper:** I like, I like the answers to my questions.

**Mike Michalowicz:** Yeah.

**AJ Harper:** That's what I'm really looking for.

**Mike Michalowicz:** That's true. But with AI, it can assimilate all this.

**AJ Harper:** You know, you do you, and I'll

**Mike Michalowicz:** Oh, maybe we can do that. I did something in AI, on last week, which was really revealing. I'm, in my head, I want to know if there's a correlative effect in sales. With any of the books, does one book lead sales and the others. So I put in all of our historical data from Penguin, you know, there is book scan information and it says that there's a high correlation between increased Profit First sales and other book sales.

Like, uh, and it gives a factor, but other book sales don't drive. Profit First sales or other book sales. So if Clockwork sells it well for one month the books The other books don't sell well, but if profit first has a boost for a month all the other books lift.

**AJ Harper:** I mean, that's your that's your big book.

**Mike Michalowicz:** It's the big book, but it's interesting to see the data that it just assimilates it says this is the book that lifts everything. So logically market the crap out of Profit First, not the other books.

**AJ Harper:** Well, I have a I have a I have a prediction.

**Mike Michalowicz:** Yeah

**AJ Harper:** This new book

**Mike Michalowicz:** Yeah,

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**AJ Harper:** Once we get it, right Which we will.

I think it's going to be in the same I think you're going to have two heavy hitters. One is going to be Profit First and one is going to be this new book. Because they're about the same concept, just for different audiences. And I, I really feel that the reason Profit First works so well, aside from a lot of things, storytelling, tone, um, uh, doability, all of that, is the simplicity and the speed by which people feel relief.

**Mike Michalowicz:** Yes. I agree with that. Yeah.

**AJ Harper:** The speed. And I, if you look at any other book we've had, you can't get that speed. There's just too much to do.

**Mike Michalowicz:** Yeah.

**AJ Harper:** There's just too much to do. They're great books. And everyone should freaking read them. Oh my god, I know. They're so good. The reason Profit First flies off the shelves, and everyone talks about it, is because within a day of reading it,

**Mike Michalowicz:** Yeah, you're profitable.

**AJ Harper:** You, and then just the feeling.

**Mike Michalowicz:** Yeah.

**AJ Harper:** I think the feeling.

**Mike Michalowicz:** But you actually, you see the money in your bank account.

**AJ Harper:** You see the money. And talking to the people we interviewed for the new book, a few that I interviewed alone, the relief. So much of it was just relief.

**Mike Michalowicz:** Yeah.

**AJ Harper:** I just, I think about, um, Nicole, who we featured in the book briefly, who used to have this big shopping, online shopping thing.

Very common. Who doesn't? And how, since she started using your system, and I don't mean since, it's in months and months. I mean, almost immediately. She found a way to not give that up entirely. So she's not it's not like she's on some oh I cured myself from this problem No, she's still completely indulges in the feeling of that.

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**Mike Michalowicz:** Yeah,

**AJ Harper:** which is your whole point, but you know She in immediately could start this is gonna be staggering for someone on a fixed income Immediately started putting an extra 700 a month toward her mortgage.

**Mike Michalowicz:** Yeah,

**AJ Harper:** like that's real Like that's you know, and then there's story after story like that. Yeah, that's why my gut. My gut, I never know what's going to happen with one of your books also because I'm not that involved in your marketing.

The last time I was, was pumpkin plan, but I have a very strong feeling about this. I just have a gut, especially if you were a little off track right now, but, and because we're talking about marketing, but my instinct is if you look at the amount of effort you put into Profit First and the amount of effort you put into the other books, you'll also see that you have put, you gotta have put 100 times more effort into promoting Profit First.

**Mike Michalowicz:** Yeah, right. Of course,

**AJ Harper:** you've got to do that for the new one. It can't be like this book comes out and then now you're on to the next one.

**Mike Michalowicz:** Yeah.

**AJ Harper:** Book 13.

**Mike Michalowicz:** Yeah.

**AJ Harper:** 'Cause this one needs that same level of like nurture.

**Mike Michalowicz:** Yeah.

**AJ Harper:** Cause I honestly think it's going to be ridiculous.

**Mike Michalowicz:** I concur. I think it's a huge book. Um, anyway, just had to say that. No, thank you. So could I, now that Kendra is going to be going through the manuscript, can the author work on it while they're editing?

**AJ Harper:** So, it's really tag. You could work on a section, but then you're going to have to redo things because you have to track changes.



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So, it's not like you have to keep using the same document that you're saving. You're redoing a resave with a different date or initials or something. But, you're staying in that one core document and tracking all changes that Kendra makes and all changes that we make.

**Mike Michalowicz:** Okay, it's one Word document now going back and forth.

**AJ Harper:** Pass the baton.

**Mike Michalowicz:** So if you, if you work on it in parallel, you got to basically save it separately to insert it in the returned

**AJ Harper:** You'd have to manually insert it. And technically there are combined features in Word, but I wouldn't mess with that stuff. Oh my God, I'm so nervous about all those things. What you could do, let's say you had a story you wanted to add.

You could write the story and then just plop that in. But if you had surgical edits, I call them, where you're doing every other word needs to change or a few lines. Just wait. Just hang tough. Make yourself notes about what you want to do. Make a list.

**Mike Michalowicz:** I had a scare while writing the new book, I was pulling 12 hour, 12 hour writing days. So I was working three, three hour block four times a day for five consecutive days. 660 hours of writing. Krista was like, you're losing your mind. I was the whole time. It's fine. Actually, I felt empowered until... I, I don't know if you ever had, I know you've had this, I'm writing for a three-hour block and I'm about to finish writing word and my screen just goes black and I'm like, what the hell happened?

And the machine starts rebooting. I'm like, holy cow. Right? So the sweat starts coming down, open Word. There's nothing. So then I pull up the document. I lost three hours of work and I'm, I go to Krista and I'm almost in tears. I'm like, I want to give up and this was only halfway through that whole sprint.

I'm like, I, I can't, I can't sustain this. I just, just screaming at the world. I go back down and word says, auto recover on the screen. I'm like, what I got to lose, click on it. Three words missing. That was it. The last three words, like it was, everything was there. Oh, thank God. Have you have you...

**AJ Harper:** Have I ever what are you talking about?

**Mike Michalowicz:** Have you ever this week? I guess

**AJ Harper:** Come on First of all the crash first of all,

**Mike Michalowicz:** oh my god

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**AJ Harper:** Six days of writing 12 hours a day. I don't want to dismiss your feelings I don't want to make you feel like it wasn't horrible for you, but it's pretty much just my life. That's pretty much it. And when I was a ghostwriter Mike, seriously, like you, I, I can't, you would, you would, you would be crushed under the,

**Mike Michalowicz:** The energy burn is more than extra like lifting weights. Oh my, it was so hard.

**AJ Harper:** The mental bandwidth. Yes. Welcome to my world. You have a, you have a taste of it. That's, I've, I've pulled that stuff on your books. I've had, I've had to do stuff. Sometimes our publisher asks us for crazy stuff.

**Mike Michalowicz:** I

**AJ Harper:** don't know if you remember one time I had to do a turnaround on a final proofread in 24 hours, not because of anything we did.

**Mike Michalowicz:** Oh.

**AJ Harper:** It was a Penguin request. Oh,

**Mike Michalowicz:** I do vaguely remember, yes. I do remember.

**AJ Harper:** I was literally making pasta coffee at 2 o'clock in the morning. So yes, I understand your world, and something I didn't tell you, I'm revealing for the first time on this podcast, I lost a f-ton of words of the current book in the fall.

**Mike Michalowicz:** Oh, really?

**AJ Harper:** Like a lot.

**Mike Michalowicz:** What was, did a computer crash?

**AJ Harper:** No, I, when I say lost, I mean, like a dang gremlin, little freaking fairy

**Mike Michalowicz:** Can't locate it.

**AJ Harper:** I I... Still don't know where it is and I label everything perfectly. I save everything. I also do this weird makes, I'm very like, yeah, Gen X about it. I will also send myself files via email because I'm like, at least it's in my Gmail.

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It's a cloud somewhere. Yeah. Um, I remember speaking to my wife and I sat in a shellshocked for like an hour just staring at the wall. She's like, are you gonna stop staring at the wall? I was like, how? How? How can this be? But it was also at a time when, you know, this book I had, it was, to me, it was really hard for me in the fall. I had, and honestly, up until pretty recently, I just didn't have my mojo.

**Mike Michalowicz:** Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.

**AJ Harper:** It was, I think it was switching audiences.

**Mike Michalowicz:** Yeah.

**AJ Harper:** It messed with me in such a big way.

**Mike Michalowicz:** Interesting.

**AJ Harper:** And then we weren't spending a lot of time together this fall.

**Mike Michalowicz:** Yeah.

**AJ Harper:** Which also messed with me.

**Mike Michalowicz:** Yeah, we should do more of those trips.

**AJ Harper:** That, well, even just, um, face to face.

**Mike Michalowicz:** Zooms, even.

**AJ Harper:** We did a ton of zooms on every other book or phone calls. And this time it was like, it felt like, um, pumpkin, it felt like before. When we, we were so good at collaborating, we weren't doing much collaborating. And so, combine that with feeling that, so I was like, alright, well, I'm just gonna take it as a sign from the universe that, that I need to just start, I need to just redo it. So, but yeah, I didn't mention that to you.

**Mike Michalowicz:** I had no idea.

**AJ Harper:** Well, I thought you would lose, I thought you would have a panic attack.

**Mike Michalowicz:** I probably would, I actually probably would have. Thank you for saving me from that.

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**AJ Harper:** I mean, I just gave you more panic

**Mike Michalowicz:** attacks, but. How can the Author get the most out of the substantive edit? So we're going to get it back. How do we extract the most value out of it?

**AJ Harper:** So, I mean, okay, I will say, I have to just differentiate, we're, we're, we know what we're doing here, so we're going to get the notes back, you and I will have a discussion about the notes, we're both going to look at them, then we usually decide, is there anything we really disagree with, because most of it is, yeah, well, let's just go do that.

But if there's anything we really don't think we want to do, then we have to decide that that's, we're not going to do it. Typically, I will go through first and address everything I can. And then I always leave you notes and say to do for you to handle. But to get the most of it is to just be open to what the editor is saying and not see it as any criticism at all.

It's just feedback. It's just information. If they're not getting it, that's not a reflection on you as a person. It just means you might need to rephrase things. If they have an insight, it's worth listening to. It also doesn't mean that they're right every time. So, but it's just staying open to it. And then also, giving yourself space, what I always tell my students, read every single stinking comment.

Read the entire editorial letter. Go through the whole manuscript. Don't start working on it. Just read everything and then shut it down for a day.

**Mike Michalowicz:** Great tip.

**AJ Harper:** Do not start just taking every note into your brain. And then the next day you can start. Or at a minimum, if you're in a hurry, at least take a long walk.

Because when you come back, the note won't look the same as it did the first time. Even me, I'm used to getting, I'm used to severe criticism. I might get my hackles up over a comment that the next day seems perfectly reasonable to me. So you just don't write in that initial state of feeling confronted.

**Mike Michalowicz:** I remember, uh, Noah, our editor at Penguin, the most recent one, saying, This has already been said, don't repeat it.

And I think the editor does not know the audience like the author. (No.) And it's like, Oh, no, the audience needs to hear this. There are certain messages they need to hear over and over again. And then we would go back, I go back and say, No, this has to stay. And he'd say, Oh, okay.

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**AJ Harper:** Yeah. This is the, this is the secret about editors, y'all. Okay. We just want you to know why you're doing it.

**Mike Michalowicz:** Right.

**AJ Harper:** Like, you know, the worst thing you could do as an author, the most unprepared you could be is to not know your reader. If you know your reader well, then you can say to your editor, Actually, we need to repeat it a few times because what we know about the reader is X, Y, Z.

Or, the thing that we repeated, by the way, was the encouragement. That's what Noah wanted us to cut. Because we had already encouraged them one time, that's good enough. And editors are prone to simplify no repetition. Right? So, Or unless it's needed for clarity. But we know that Underdog entrepreneurs need a little more encouragement in places and so, but if we didn't know that then we would just follow what the editor says.

So this is why it's imperative that you know your reader really well so you can say, well this is why I did this. So a note I often leave as an editor is, do you need this? And so it's an open question. And if my students, my authors can't say, they should be able to say, yes I need it because.

**Mike Michalowicz:** Yeah.

**AJ Harper:** But if they say, well, I guess I don't, then bye, you know, so it's the editor's job to challenge you in that way, but it's your job to make sure you understand what the reader needs. You should know why you're, why you wrote what you wrote.

**Mike Michalowicz:** There's a saying, killing darlings or killing.

**AJ Harper:** Don't say it. You always say it.

**Mike Michalowicz:** Killing darlings.

**AJ Harper:** Yeah.

**Mike Michalowicz:** Sacred cows. I was gonna say.

**AJ Harper:** No, you are. Yes. Not what you say.

**Mike Michalowicz:** No, I know. I know. I know. I was gonna say the B word. Um, but getting rid of content you love, that's a tough thing because when I love something so much, I

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think it's a value. It's a bias, right? I think it's a value to the reader, but whatever. I have a emotional affinity toward it.

The editor says there's no value. How do you, do you have a rule set to distinguish that the editor is, is actually being of service to the reader and we're being distracted by a unfounded love for something or they don't get it.

**AJ Harper:** Like, it's, it's just case-by-case basis. There's no, but I think that question, do you need this is the question.

So even if, if the editor doesn't ask you to ask yourself, so if they say, I don't think you need this here or cut this, this is too much. Unfortunately, I've, I've seen authors have editors who just went in and cut for them without asking. Big sections, which is, is too confronting for a new author.

**Mike Michalowicz:** Oh, the editor's wiped out sections.

Just slashed it. Yeah.

**AJ Harper:** Uh, that's really hard. That's a bad start to a relationship.

**Mike Michalowicz:** Yeah.

**AJ Harper:** But if you're, if that happens, or if their suggestion is to cut something big, just pause and ask yourself that question.

**Mike Michalowicz:** Mmm.

**AJ Harper:** Do I need this? And if you can't defend it, need is the word, not want.

**Mike Michalowicz:** Yeah.

**AJ Harper:** Not: do I love this thing I wrote? Meaning, when you say, do I need this, it's does my reader need this? Do I need this that to finish that sentence is do I need this to deliver on the promise? That's really what it's shorthand for do I need this story about the dust bowl to deliver on the promise? No, I just really it was really good. By the way.

I was transfixed reading it.

**Mike Michalowicz:** Yeah,

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**AJ Harper:** but we had why did I say? Let's cut it. We had two very dark stories and the dust bowl is pretty dark.

**Mike Michalowicz:** Yeah,

**AJ Harper:** and so then we had three dark stories. And it was just on balance too much.

**Mike Michalowicz:** Yeah, you said it was unbalanced and you said basically this point's already been made elsewhere. Yes. I was like, oh, that's, that's perfect.

**AJ Harper:** But you can put it in deleted content. Exactly.

**Mike Michalowicz:** That's what I was gonna say. So for me, the sense, the potential sense of loss is offset by saying, oh, we have something as bonus content now. Yeah. The deleted content and readers love that voyeuristic stuff. What's the stuff that didn't make it? Went to the chopping floor?

**AJ Harper:** I would argue too, I think I put in the note to you, why don't you turn this into an article?

**Mike Michalowicz:** Yeah, or right, it could be a blog post.

**AJ Harper:** No, I mean like, why don't you get this a decent article in some sort of finance magazine?

**Mike Michalowicz:** That's a good idea actually. That's a great idea.

**AJ Harper:** I mean it was so well written, it was tight.

**Mike Michalowicz:** Yeah.

**AJ Harper:** I would just do some work to it and then bring forward core message into it, and I would get that going.

**Mike Michalowicz:** You know what made that tighter as I was writing that? So I'm writing, writing, basketball. I started going down these paths of like, give me a person's name. So I'm doing research. I find this guy, Jim Bob, who went through this.

But because there was this time pressure. I was like, F it. I don't have time to research something that would have taken me six hours. It's like researching, reading to get a little, because I didn't have time. I had to make it tighter. The lack of time in some ways served us, served me.

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**AJ Harper:** I think it's good to have spurts like that where you're forcing yourself to do a lot in a short period of time because it cuts away rabbit hole adventures and also self-censoring.

**Mike Michalowicz:** Yeah. Um, what if you outright disagree with the editor? What if they say, this, this really needs to be cut, and you say, it really needs to stay? Is there a standoff? Do you always, do you have the override as being the author?

**AJ Harper:** It's usually not a standoff. Usually the editor is going to acquiesce unless it's totally egregious. I mean, let's be real. If it's going to be something that's going to get you in hot water. And cause, um, and the books gonna not only will the book not sell because of it, but it caused a bad reputation for the, for you as an author and certainly the press or, or, or if it's something that is going to be cause a legal issue.

Yeah, they're, that's not happening. They're going to be put their foot down. Um, it has to be very, if an editor is pushing that hard with you, Saying you absolutely must listen to me, you probably should listen. Yeah, there's something there. Because they know. And you're just, you're just being myopic about it.

**Mike Michalowicz:** Do you ever, are there indicators or red flags that you have a bad editor? Like, this person just is not capable?

**AJ Harper:** Yeah.

**Mike Michalowicz:** What are they?

**AJ Harper:** Formulaic, where they've just decided that to follow certain, that everything must be a certain way versus really thinking about the reader. And you can kind of tell when Yeah.

Or when they overwrite you, so they go in on the first round of substantive and just start writing, rewriting you in sections without asking. I always ask, you know, um, and then, uh, the biggest red flag of all, changing your voice, changing your voice.

**Mike Michalowicz:** If they change your voice, that's a good point.

**AJ Harper:** I had an, I had an author who showed me editorial comments or notes, uh, rewrites and comments. It, the tone switched from the author's natural tone and the tone they had decided to have. So that's another tip, by the way. Don't go into this expecting editors to solve all this for you.

**Mike Michalowicz:** Yeah.



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**AJ Harper:** You should know how you want to come across and who your reader is and what you're trying to do. Don't let them fill in those important gaps for you.

But. They overrode this person's voice so that all of a sudden they sounded like some sort of like chicklet author, which is fine if that's your jam, but it wasn't my author's jam. I'm like, who's this? This is, what is this? Sounds nothing like you. That is a horrible thing to do to an author you're supposed to be helping them bring it out I I guess sometimes off editors can be also harsh, but I think I'm immune to it. So I don't always notice

**Mike Michalowicz:** Mmm.

**AJ Harper:** You know author, editors that tend to be more plain, especially older editors younger editors might have more Cushion, okay a little more soft approach. Yeah, but I'm used to Cut, period, you know, right.

**Mike Michalowicz:** Gets the point across succinctly.

**AJ Harper:** Yeah,

**Mike Michalowicz:** tUm, we had a horrible editorial experience with an author, Melissa Dukolecki. We're representing her, uh, with a small publishing outlet. It was horrible. The editor came back with basically. zero comments. I don't think it was edited.

And there are circumstances where you can say this publisher is failing to meet the quality expectation that we've agreed upon. And we actually pulled from that publishing contract. They had to then produce all the fees that they incurred up to that point, which was nothing. Uh, and then we moved to a new publisher and the book is far superior.

So you can get out if it's an extreme circumstance.

**AJ Harper:** Yeah, I, you know, I'm thinking of one of my horror, one of my author horror stories. I probably need permission to share.

**Mike Michalowicz:** Yeah, maybe during the break and then we can on the next episode you can.

**AJ Harper:** Yeah, I want to say this. Not every editor is great, you know, it's exactly in, it's a crap shoot.

You don't know who you're getting. There's also a, a certain savviness that editors need to have, and they a little, they need to be, they need to understand. I don't, I feel like a lot of bad editors are people who are just following. A rote process versus, it's not inspired. Yeah, it's not inspired. It's not inspired, you know?

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Like, where's the magic? And they don't connect the dots and they can't see. I don't know. It's hard, it's hard to do that. There, there isn't a lot of training. It's an apprenticeship model, you know? Yeah. So you're learning as you come up. Like, for example, on All In, you remember, Noah actually didn't do

**Mike Michalowicz:** It was very little editing.

**AJ Harper:** Because he was training a junior editor. That's what was happening.

**Mike Michalowicz:** Oh, I didn't realize that.

**AJ Harper:** Oh, yeah, it's an apprenticeship model.

**Mike Michalowicz:** Okay

**AJ Harper:** So they bring up an editor

**Mike Michalowicz:** Now I remember, now I remember yeah,

**AJ Harper:** so they bring up an editor and then Noah's overseeing that and then before it comes to us, and so that's how that editor is learning.

**Mike Michalowicz:** They're not taking a class, right? The editor's not

**AJ Harper:** Ha I don't know what Penguin Random House's training is for editors. I can't speak to that. But I know that that model, what's gonna happen to you is you're learning from that person. But then what about, what if that person's not a good editor? Not saying that's no one. No one's a great editor. It's just... It's flawed. It's the industry, unsurprisingly, is flawed. And so just like there are standout authors, there are standout editors. I mean, there are rockstar editors that everybody wants to work with. For a reason.

**Mike Michalowicz:** Yeah.

**AJ Harper:** Because they make the book better.

**Mike Michalowicz:** When considering an editor, you can ask, what books have you edited in the past?

**AJ Harper:** Yeah.

**Mike Michalowicz:** You should.

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**AJ Harper:** Yeah, and you can also get a clue about how editors roll by looking at acknowledgments. Is it just a perfunctory, I want to thank my editor at blah, blah, blah, and these other ten people.

**Mike Michalowicz:** Yeah.

**AJ Harper:** Or is it, “Thank you so much. You really helped me make the book better” or whatever. You can kind of tell if it's just, and if they don't think they're an editor at all, run. Because that's a petty move designed to stick the knife in them and obviously it didn't go well.

**Mike Michalowicz:** Uh, any other comments on substantive editing?

**AJ Harper:** No, just, um, put your best foot forward, you know, do, why are we taking this, you know, I'm going home after this and I'm going to go work on the book some more. I want to not work on the book some more on Sunday, but I'm going to do it because there's a few things we didn't get, it's complete, but there's a few things I wanted to do that I didn't have a chance to do because that's out of respect for Kendra.

And I, I say respect your editor by doing everything you know you can. I always tell my students, do everything you know you need to do. There's stuff that you don't know yet, and that's your editor's job to tell you. But if you know, I didn't get to that, get to that.

**Mike Michalowicz:** That's great. Yeah, don't give it to them.

Then. Oh, it's beautiful. I have some interesting updates and then we'll talk about next week's episode I believe there's a mass exodus going on or at least it started from traditional publishing and now that we're with a hybrid. Maybe this is a cognitive bias. But there's... I've talked now to I think the three authors in the last month that are leaving a major Publishing outlet to go to a hybrid model. And these are people are very established.

Um, and there's a news report recently that Seth Godin's left again, and he was with Portfolio, same imprint we were with to, to do something on his own. Um, uh, what's his name? James Clear started, um, Author Equity. He started a firm, but I got a call from two major authors, uh, last in the last week to ask about my imprint and a consideration of moving over.

And these are very established authors. So there's something going on. Um, we have an imprint at Page Two called Simplified, if you're an entrepreneurial author and you have a profound concept that you want to get out there and you think, uh, the hybrid model is an option for you. We should, we should definitely touch base.

You can reach to us through this program. And if you haven't read, Write a Must-Read, read Write a Must-Read. So you can write them.

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**AJ Harper:** Can I say just one more thing?

**Mike Michalowicz:** Yeah.

**AJ Harper:** I just want to mention that, uh, I still do have slots. I have about, I think 30 percent left slots for my editing retreats. That are starting in June.

I have one in June, July, August, and October. I don't, I have to look up to see which one is sold out. I only take eight students at a time, but if you really want to whip your manuscript into shape to prepare for substantive edits, that's, that's where I act, I worked as a substantive editor, developmental editor during that time.

**Mike Michalowicz:** Are those at, uh, Madeline Island? They're at Madeline Island. Oh my God.

**AJ Harper:** Yeah. So it's for a week. It's a very deep dive, very focused, and it's me actually reading your stuff, also group learning, profound experience. And uh, I do have some slots open so you can go to [ajharper.com](http://ajharper.com) and uh, and book a retreat.

**Mike Michalowicz:** You got to do it. I'm coming up there in May.

**AJ Harper:** I know. I've got on the calendar. I've already been thinking about it.

**Mike Michalowicz:** Um, I want to also share a couple of things I discovered and maybe we can maybe dedicate a show to this. Um, In the work I was doing on the new book, um, I use that dictate option in Word, which was great just to capture.

So when I wrote, we'll use the Dust Bowl story, I just dictated, dictated, dictated, and it was this big glump of stuff. Got out quickly. Then I threw it into ChatGPT and said, summarize this with bullet points. And it just, it consolidated down and I had something to work with. So, I found that a very effective way instead of just writing my thoughts, I could speak them way quicker, capture it, summarize it, and then go back and edit it with the interviews.

We did. I used to Script, which is a translator. So I took, uh, interview with, um, who's interviewed. I go through, Oh, Kelly Ruta and put it, that was like an hour interview, put it into script. It did the whole transcription put in chat GPT. I said, I need from Kelly. I'm writing about, um, worries we have around money, for example.

And it went through the transcripts and said, here's the lines that she talks about that big efficiency tool. So there you have

**AJ Harper:** Very different than my approach.

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**Mike Michalowicz:** I'm sure. I'm sure. I just wanted to share. Those are the things I found that worked for me.

**AJ Harper:** Yeah.

**Mike Michalowicz:** Uh, if you want to share your approach, you can. Otherwise, we can save it for a more detailed episode.

**AJ Harper:** I say let's move on with this and get on, get on with the day. Yeah. Let people move on.

**Mike Michalowicz:** Yeah. Okay. Um, call to action for you. Please check out our website. It's DWTBpodcast.com. We have free materials there and you can sign up for our email list. We're getting more and more subscribers.

If you want to contact myself or AJ, the fastest, quickest way is hello at dwtbpodcast.com. You can go to ajharper.com. Check out all the editorial work she's doing. And if you haven't bought that book, right? I must read yet. My God. And if you haven't bought 10 copies, what's what's wrong? Buy them, give them one to your editor.

Give, give them to your entire team. So everyone knows what you're doing as an author and can work in synchronicity with you. My name is Mike Michalowicz. You heard from me and AJ Harper. Thanks for joining us today. And don't forget this. Always remember, don't write that book, write the greatest book you can.