

don't write *that* book!

Episode 75:

"The Great Trade Review Debate"

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. All right. On this episode, we're going to do the great trade review debate.

I think it's going to be ignorance versus knowledge and awareness. I'm the ignorance one. You are listening to. Don't write that book. My name is Mike Michalowicz. I'm joined in studio by my writing partner and great friend, AJ Harper. You know what I admire about you? You show up. And last night You must have got there, well, before I did, but, uh.

AJ Harper: No, we got here, I got, you were there when I got there.

Mike Michalowicz: Oh, did we arrive at the same time?

AJ Harper: I think I was, I got there about 3:45.

Mike Michalowicz: Okay, so, but you show up. Yeah. You show up for those events. Yes. This was an event put on by Trena and Jesse of Page Two. It was an author salon. Great name.

AJ Harper: It felt like a salon.

Mike Michalowicz: Yes, didn't it?

AJ Harper: Yeah, the vibe. The vibe of the place. The, the lighting.

Mike Michalowicz: The venue was remarkable.

AJ Harper: Yeah. At Holy Water. In way downtown.

Mike Michalowicz: Is it, just me, downtown is so much more frustrating to get to than midtown?

AJ Harper: Oh my god, it's so frustrating. It's so frustrating.

Mike Michalowicz: Do you drive or?

don't write *that* book!

AJ Harper: I normally do drive, but I had just taught a class and I thought, I couldn't figure out how time wise, I would get all the way downtown.

Mike Michalowicz: Yeah.

AJ Harper: to chambers from, cause I'm, when I, just for reference, everybody, when I come in, I'm only 20 miles from Manhattan. I crossed the GW bridge and then I'm at the tip of the tippy top,

Mike Michalowicz: The northern tip of...

AJ Harper: So, I got to go the whole way down to almost to the bottom.

Mike Michalowicz: Yeah.

AJ Harper: And in, in New York world, that's create like a block could take you 20 minutes. So I thought, and then I have to park and down there, you're not going to have the same. Parking garage situation you're gonna have in Midtown.

Mike Michalowicz: Right.

AJ Harper: So where you there's one on every block.

Mike Michalowicz: Right

AJ Harper: And I just did the math and I thought I'm gonna miss most of this if so, I hired a car.

Mike Michalowicz: Yeah, that's the way to do it.

AJ Harper: Well, I normally don't I'm too frugal to do that I drive in all the time.

Mike Michalowicz: Oh, I drove in, you know parking 65 bucks. I parked on Reed Street one block away. Thank God, because with the pouring rain that was coming down when I left at least it was pouring So it was a hop skip and jump to the car.

AJ Harper: Oh, you did find a place.

Mike Michalowicz: Yeah. But he little funny story and we got to dig into this is a I pull into the garage, and there's construction going on inside the garage, and the construction guys are waving me in. So I pull all the way in past the construction stuff. They're moving cones and stuff. And then I get in there, and the, uh, attendant's like, No! You can't park here! There's

don't write *that* book!

no spots! But you're already in. Yeah, I'm already in. And the construction guys start putting stuff back. So I'm like, the construction guys! He's like, they're idiots! I'm like, oh! They got me in.

AJ Harper: Here's my car.

Mike Michalowicz: Yeah, exactly. He's like, he goes, I'll take it and he parked it right in the front. Like the best spot.

AJ Harper: He just found a corner

Mike Michalowicz: and you know, it made everything nice. He nice as I threw him a couple of greens.

AJ Harper: Yeah, of course.

Mike Michalowicz: And he's like, Oh, everything's fine.

AJ Harper: Everything's fine. But yeah, it was way downtown.

Mike Michalowicz: And I'm going back into the city to meet with Macmillan today.

AJ Harper: I'm excited for you.

Mike Michalowicz: Yeah, yeah.

AJ Harper: For your new imprint.

Mike Michalowicz: For the new imprint,

AJ Harper: Simplified,

Mike Michalowicz: Simplified. And going in with, uh, Trena, I'm sorry, with Jesse, Trena was unable to make the trip and Felicia from the Page Two team.

AJ Harper: Isn't she great?

Mike Michalowicz: Amazing. I love her energy. I did say something shocking. This is a tip for our audience. They are introducing, they've introduced me to the sales team, VA video.

don't write *that* book!

So I went to Felicia, I said, I'd like to know how many salespeople there are. She goes, there's 150.

AJ Harper: Yeah.

Mike Michalowicz: I said, okay. I said, I'd like to send 150 videos. And she just looked at me. She was like, what? Like a deer in headlights kind of, uh, you can't do that. So, so she's a little bit taken aback. So I go to Jesse and said, Jesse, here's my idea. I want to send this individual video to each salesperson to thank them for supporting my book. She's like, no one's ever done that. Let's do it. I'm like, yeah, let's do it. She's like, I love it.

AJ Harper: I love that. You know, the class I was teaching before, the reason I had to take a car service is for my membership community. I'm teaching this three-part class on marketing. I, as you know, I've never claimed to be a marketing expert, but what I'm seeing is too much bad information out there for my students and my author members, and they're getting waylaid and they're going in the wrong direction and they're missing stuff and it's making me nuts.

Like I had two authors in February hit the USA Today bestseller list, Jen Kem and Dr. Sunita Sah. Super proud. And honestly, they should have been on the New York times bestseller list, but as we know, it's curated and complicated. But then in talking to both of them, I see some of the gaps in information about how a lot of stuff works and what could have been done.

And then I have other authors who are getting horrible information, even from their big five publishers who are not doing it in a nefarious way, but it's just, it's just not happening. It's not connecting. So the class I taught yesterday was on pre-order campaigns, but not Yes, a little bit about how to what you could do, but just to understand the industry and how important it is to use that time to get the attention of the sales team to get the attention of bookstores and everybody behind the scenes, and authors don't know it.

And so they don't know what to do, and by the time they might figure it out, if ever, it's too late. So I love that you're going to go do that. And the 150 videos is really important because you need a sales team to be cued into what you're doing so that they're going to think about your title. Among all the other titles, they've got so many titles they have to promote every season.

Mike Michalowicz: I'd like to dedicate an episode to the sales team because I really do not understand what they do. I think we have to do our deep dive research.

AJ Harper: I mean, I know a lot because I was a publisher.

Mike Michalowicz: Yeah. Great. Yeah. That's a good point. So let's mark that down as an episode of what the sales team has done. When I was with Penguin, they never educated me on that.

don't write *that* book!

AJ Harper: You probably didn't even know how many people were on the team or.

Mike Michalowicz: Didn't even know. I just knew there was a team and supposedly had office space. Somewhere. 'Cause we used to go into the building, uh, downtown Hudson. And, uh, you'd walk in there. Yeah. And Noah's like, not Noah, cause Kaushik is like, Oh yeah, they're over there somewhere.

AJ Harper: yeah, but it's just.

Mike Michalowicz: They seem like the bastard child, but yet they're the most important.

AJ Harper: The thing is that pitch that, that you authors are thinking about their book and say, pitching it to an agent or pitching it to a publisher and they think the pitching's done, but the pitching continues in that, as you know, your editor has to pitch technically to get approval from the publisher, but then they still have to pitch the sales team.

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

AJ Harper: Yeah. So it's not like the sales team is going to say no, that it's the acquisition has happened, but. The, you want the sales team to pay special attention.

Mike Michalowicz: I see.

AJ Harper: And so author, so that, you know, they'll, that's what those selling points are for. And they'll say, we're excited about this title.

And you have just a few minutes usually, um, per title to showcase. And the sales team is just writing down, writing down notes, notes, notes, notes, notes, notes. They're going to choose, okay, they're going to still try and get every title play, but there's some, they're going to put more effort into.

Mike Michalowicz: Yeah. And they get rewarded based upon a book's success, is what I learned from Jesse.

AJ Harper: Yeah. So, um, but you have to, um, I said this in the class the other day, Celeste Fine, a super agent, she was on a, I don't listen, apologies to JJ Virgin. I don't know JJ Virgin. I don't listen to the podcast, but I happened to listen to one with Celeste Fine, the agent, and she created, she talked about that time in pre orders as flex time. She calls it flex your time to flex, like flex your muscles. Because you have this window where you need to create buzz you need to get a bunch of pre-orders And you need to keep a steady stream of pre-orders so that the industry is saying who's this dude, or who's this person, right?

Mike Michalowicz: Yeah.

don't write *that* book!

AJ Harper: But authors don't even know they need to do it

Mike Michalowicz: Yeah,

AJ Harper: And then it, you need, you want them to be so psyched that they're amping you up, then they're going to bring you to important events and they're going to mention you more than they're going to suggest, "Let's up that print run." That just happened to one of my authors, Cara Poppitt, who's a page two author.

Mike Michalowicz: Oh, you were. Gosh, I didn't know you knew Cara. I didn't know she was Page Two.

AJ Harper: Yeah, she's from, she's my student. She a grad, she's an alum. I mean, you would be shocked how many of my students are at Page Two.

Mike Michalowicz: Wow.

AJ Harper: But Cara texted me two nights ago. She said, oh my gosh, all my efforts are working. Page Two, the sales team, which is Macmillan, who you're going to meet with today, just increased my, wanted me to increase my print run to 7,000. She's a brand new.

Mike Michalowicz: Oh, wow.

AJ Harper: She's a brand-new author.

Mike Michalowicz: What's her book title?

AJ Harper: Big Freakin' Change.

Mike Michalowicz: Yeah, nice.

AJ Harper: Yeah. So, I'm just saying. You know, we, people don't understand about that time and then it's too late.

Mike Michalowicz: Yeah. All right. Let's go.

AJ Harper: We just did a one 10th of a pre order episode.

Mike Michalowicz: I know. I love it actually. It was very interesting.

don't write *that* book!

AJ Harper: I'm just up and, you know, so that's why I decided for my membership to do these marketing deep dives just because I'm so mad.

Mike Michalowicz: Yeah. I love it when you get PO'd.

AJ Harper: I just want to say, please understand what's happening and then make your choice. You still don't want to flex, like Celeste Vine says. You still don't want to do a lot, you don't want to sell that many books. That's fine but be educated. Understand what the heck is happening, you know?

Mike Michalowicz: So today we're gonna talk about trade review.

AJ Harper: Which is part of flexing.

Mike Michalowicz: Which is part of flexing. Look at your pointing. Okay. You're watching the video. But first we got reader feedback from Tina. Let me read it as you have to give context. This was episode 63. We were talking about research and Tina said, so the takeaway is that reading the conclusion, which typically aren't unwieldy are as well as the abstract would be worthwhile.

AJ Harper: So thank you, Tina. Um, Tina, who calls herself, um, faithful fan forever. We love you, Tina. Tina had heard our research episode where I said, I like to read the abstract because you were saying you don't want to read through the whole research study. I say, I like reading the abstract. Mostly I do it to see if I'm going to use it or not, or if I'm interested in this, you know, she pointed out that something I didn't know, which is that the conclusion actually has the more accurate information than the abstract and we should be going to the end of the document and reading the conclusion, not just the abstract.

Mike Michalowicz: Do you know is the conclusion and the abstract authored by the same person?

AJ Harper: I don't know.

Mike Michalowicz: I almost wonder if the abstract is a third party and the conclusion is the author.

AJ Harper: I don't know.

Mike Michalowicz: Yeah,

AJ Harper: But Tina Thanks, that is great.

don't write *that* book!

Mike Michalowicz: Great tip, Tina!

AJ Harper: Love, thank you for sharing that.

Mike Michalowicz: Hey, Tina Are you gonna come to our live show that we're gonna do? We gotta get the numbers back up. Alright, so let's get into trade reviews. What the hell are they? You're about to take a sip of water, finally.

AJ Harper: Excuse me for a little cough.

Mike Michalowicz: Yeah. Actually, that was a piece of feedback we got too from a listener who said, uh, why don't you guys edit out the coughs? So every so often there's a cough or something, I gotta be on top of that.

AJ Harper: You know why, I've been, in October. I had—

Mike Michalowicz: It's both of us.

AJ Harper: It's, is it?

Mike Michalowicz: Yeah, I'm snorting and clearing and stuff and like...

AJ Harper: We got that feedback?

Mike Michalowicz: Yeah, someone's like, oh, I love your show. By the way, you can just clip those out. It wasn't critical

AJ Harper: Oh,

Mike Michalowicz: it was a good observation.

AJ Harper: Okay. Okay. Sorry for coughing.

Mike Michalowicz: What are trade reviews?

AJ Harper: Trade reviews are industry reviews, meaning it's not like what you would see and it's not an amazon review from a reader It's not... You know, a professional review from, say, the New York Times, or even someone's blog. It's reviews from industry trade journals, so the trade.

don't write *that* book!

So, Publisher's Weekly, Kirkus, American Library Journal, Booklist, Foreword. Those are some of them. And they are used internally. To alert, in the industry, alert other, you know, this is the new book that's coming out, this is the review of this book, and most people don't really, who are, the average person, the average reader doesn't know what that is, or what the significance is, but the industry does.

And so, a person in the industry can read the journal and see which books are coming and where they, if they're great, if they're not great. And especially those reviews that are starred reviews, that this is one to watch out for. And so, uh, I think authors, because they don't know, especially first-time authors don't really know about them, they miss an opportunity to get one of those trade reviews.

Mike Michalowicz: Who typically reads trade reviews?

AJ Harper: Everybody in the industry. Agents, publishers, uh, also foreign publishers, um, booksellers, librarians, huge librarians. They make a ton of buying decisions based on trade reviews.

Mike Michalowicz: Okay.

AJ Harper: Um.

Mike Michalowicz: I wonder if fellow authors read it. I don't read those.

AJ Harper: No, it's industry related, but you might if you were in a different role, you know,

Mike Michalowicz: Yeah

AJ Harper: Yeah, so it's so it's industry related, but it's an important part of the industry.

Mike Michalowicz: and what's the consideration they're making? Why are they reading them like the librarian? Why does the librarian read it?

AJ Harper: Well, they want to know about new books and they want to know about books that are of note and they want to be able to see if that book is worth getting for their ...

Mike Michalowicz: Community.

AJ Harper: Community. Yeah.

Mike Michalowicz: What's the difference between a trade review and you mentioned Amazon reviews?

don't write *that* book!

AJ Harper: Well, one's a reader review. But trade reviewers have specific requirements that they follow um, and they're professionals. That's what they do. So, an Amazon review can say, this sucks, you know. Yeah, yeah. They're not gonna say that.

Mike Michalowicz: Yeah.

AJ Harper: And Kirkus, you know, that's probably the— They're the mean, they're the meanest. No offense, Kirkus. Um, I would just say they're just hard. They're not gonna give they don't give them away. They don't just hand out a good review. A good review from them is sort of neutral.

Mike Michalowicz: Interesting.

AJ Harper: Yeah. I've only a few times seen some, like, really just gorgeous, like, this is the best. “And this is an exceptional work.” You know, kind of thing.

Mike Michalowicz: Do trade reviews specialize in book types? Fiction versus nonfiction?

AJ Harper: They do both.

Mike Michalowicz: Okay, all of them do both?

AJ Harper: Pretty much.

Mike Michalowicz: Okay, no, no one specializes in a particular genre?

AJ Harper: They, if they do, then it's a smaller journal that I'm not thinking about right now. So, not worth thinking about.

Mike Michalowicz: Yeah, okay. Um, and then, the consumers, just so I understand, of these trade reviews are using it to make buying decisions. Is there other decisions that are made around it? That you can think of?

AJ Harper: Well, if it's bookstores and librarians, it's buying decisions, but I mean when I was a publisher, I remember we got, the first two books that we published got star reviews from Publisher's Weekly for reference that's maybe 2 percent of all the books. So huge coup to get a starred review.

It totally took us aback. I was like, what is happening? How do we get the first two starred reviews? And, um, from that we had, um, two, let's see one publisher in France and then another publisher that emailed and said, Hey, uh, we saw this. We'd like to talk with you

don't write *that* book!

about what other titles you have because we're interested in possibly public. And that turned into a. Translation rights deal for multiple titles.

Mike Michalowicz: Oh, that's interesting. So they went publisher to publisher, not publisher to author title or author's book.

AJ Harper: It was a translation rights deal for multiple titles.

Mike Michalowicz: That's interesting. And then I'm just curious, how do you as the publisher negotiate that or address that with each author? Do you have to go to each one and say, do you accept you'd decline?

AJ Harper: Yeah. But. It depends on the contract; some publishers can just do it and they don't have to get author approval. We just gave, we just asked for author approval but we also one of the people who got the starred review got an email directly from a big five publisher and said hey, we'd like to come in and talk to us about publishing your next book with us.

Mike Michalowicz: Oh, that's great.

AJ Harper: So you see how I see how it's working, you know,

Mike Michalowicz: Yeah

AJ Harper: An agent might see a promising new author and try and snap, then they'll go see, do they have representation? Is there another deal coming down the pike? They can cross reference with, um, with the, with the other trades and the deals and see, does anybody representing this person or does the publisher have the second book deal?

If somebody's got an exciting career ahead of them, people want to know and they want to snap them up. So it's not just about the bookstores and the librarians.

Mike Michalowicz: So this is the debate versus ignorance or intelligence versus ignorance component, credibility. You say that trade reviews offer credibility And I want to know where it does and is there certain areas that maybe it doesn't? What's your thoughts?

AJ Harper: Well, the only reason it wouldn't, would be if you got a scathing, horrible review.

Mike Michalowicz: Well, yeah, it's credible, but it's just horrible credibility.

AJ Harper: Yeah, but think about it. You're, so let's say you're a new author, and then people don't know what to make of your book. They can read the, they can read this, the sales

don't write *that* book!

info, but it's sales info. This is an objective party that's saying, we read the book, this is what we think of it. So now, a person can decide, okay, yeah, I think we want to stock that, or we want to get this for our patrons, or whatever.

Mike Michalowicz: But do you think the end reader is influenced by it?

AJ Harper: I think the end reader could be influenced by it if you get a pull quote and you put it on the cover.

Mike Michalowicz: Okay. Okay, so there you go. There you go. They may not know the source, like an end reader wouldn't know Kirkus or Publisher's Weekly.

AJ Harper: No, but they recognize it like a movie poster, right?

Mike Michalowicz: Yes.

AJ Harper: And it's the pull quote, you're technically not allowed to take the whole review and post it. You're only allowed to use pull quotes.

Mike Michalowicz: Oh, I didn't know that.

AJ Harper: You can share it, say, a link to it. But you can't copy paste.

Mike Michalowicz: Interesting.

AJ Harper: Yeah, you're not allowed to. But you can pull a line. And, um, then that's called a pull quote, and it can go on your cover. So, we have those two books that got starred reviews. That Star, which is 2%. I mean, I'm talking out of tens of thousands of books, only 2 percent getting that star.

That star, it's red, and they only do one. It's one star or nothing. The Red Star and then pull quote and then Publisher's Weekly on the cover. You bet. You bet.

Mike Michalowicz: The greatest movie of all time was the Masters of Disguise or the Master of Disguise by Dana Carvey. Not. It was horrible.

AJ Harper: And. But I, you're so weird. I, I would, you could have had me going. Yeah. I would be like, Oh yeah, he thinks that's great.

Mike Michalowicz: It's a horrible movie. And could there, I'm just wondering, 'cause I think some of these are manipulated. Could a reviewer for the movie, for example, say this movie is great. Period. Not, you know, and then could they do a pull quote?

don't write *that* book!

AJ Harper: Sure.

Mike Michalowicz: That's because I think some movies have done that. I've seen some horrible movies. Do you see that in books?

AJ Harper: Sure. In the movies is a "... Unbelievable."

Mike Michalowicz: This made it to the theaters. Unbelievable.

AJ Harper: I mean, the literary world doesn't quite, um, isn't that...

Mike Michalowicz: isn't that manipulative?

AJ Harper: I don't think so.

Mike Michalowicz: Okay. But you can, but you can take segments or frames of it, you can pull.

AJ Harper: It's, it's, it's, um, really suspect if you see dot, dot, dot, one word. It's not like magnetic poetry or something where you can just manipulate it like that. No, you take, you take a sentence, you take, and they know you're going to do it. So they've kind of got them in there.

Mike Michalowicz: I gotcha. I gotcha. And I guess this is where I've struggled with, The necessity for trade reviews. I'm, this is not the right thing. I'm myopically focused on the reader only.

AJ Harper: Yeah.

Mike Michalowicz: And now I'm realizing this conversation is there is a, a layer between the author and the reader that's influencing exposure to the book in the first place.

AJ Harper: A hundred percent. Yeah. Discoverability baby.

Mike Michalowicz: Okay. Um, I think you're 3-0 or 4-0 in debates now.

AJ Harper: I mean, this wasn't... It literally wasn't a debate. It's technically a debate because you did dis—I remember I told you multiple times, Can you please bug Penguin to see if you can get a trade review?

Mike Michalowicz: Yeah, I'm like, It's not worth it, AJ! Stop calling me at 4 in the morning!

don't write *that* book!

AJ Harper: Um And you are, you're very much an ROI on the, you know, B2C sales.

Mike Michalowicz: Yeah.

AJ Harper: But there is a whole world happening behind the scenes with the industry and we can't ignore it.

Mike Michalowicz: Yeah. This actually came up in last night's conversation with the Author Salon.

AJ Harper: Yeah.

Mike Michalowicz: Who was saying across from you, Barbara, was that her name? Italian woman.

AJ Harper: Oh, no. Roseann.

Mike Michalowicz: Roseann.

AJ Harper: I'm telling you, that is one to watch. Roseann Coppana Hodge. Coppana Hodge.

Mike Michalowicz: Coppana Hodge.

AJ Harper: I've been saying Co-PAN-na and then she said Co-PAH-na Hodge last night. I was like, okay, I say Coppana Hodge. I have to retrain myself. I adore her and watch out. She's gonna.

Mike Michalowicz: What a great energy. She shared something interesting, I was making note of it, is, it was really about, uh, um, reciprocity. She's like, I go out of my way to support, not just B2C, my readers, but B2B. And she goes, and then sometimes you can call in a favor. And then she went all Italian, it was kind of funny.

AJ Harper: Oh, she went Italian.

Mike Michalowicz: Yeah.

AJ Harper: I, she said, I'm Italian. I hang onto my favors. She told us one of, well, she held on for 10 years.

Mike Michalowicz: Yeah. Yeah. It was kind of interesting. It was kind of interesting.

don't write *that* book!

AJ Harper: And she was like, and you will sign it. I'm not going to say what it was.

Mike Michalowicz: I'm not going to say what it was either. And you see some of the authors go, uh, there was two awkward moments. One was that the other one was when I talked about the author's exchange, there was one author sitting across from me. I just thought it was funny how I bought the domain authors exchange. And how it could be author sex change. Like literally it's the same thing.

AJ Harper: Yes.

Mike Michalowicz: And it was, I'm like, oh, isn't this funny? This one guy is like, just looked down and he's like, oh God, and shaking his head.

AJ Harper: Well, I think you have different, um, personalities.

Mike Michalowicz: Yeah, it was just very funny. So there were two awkward moments. Of course, I triggered one of them. How do you get a trade review?

AJ Harper: Okay, so here's the thing. If you are traditionally published, your publisher needs to submit it on your behalf.

Mike Michalowicz: Okay.

AJ Harper: Okay, here's the thing. They don't, the thing they don't tell you is that they don't automatically send it. It's not like they're saying, oh, we're gonna do this is why I'm telling you I want it. I was like bugging you. "Can you please check with your editor and see if they submitted the dang thing?"

Mike Michalowicz: Yeah, I failed us.

AJ Harper: That's okay. That's okay Um, I want you to get it for the next book. I almost said the title. I want you to get it for the January book

Mike Michalowicz: Yeah, yeah, I think we have said the title. Nope. Nope, you are pointy today.

AJ Harper: We said the last title.

Mike Michalowicz: Yes, we did.

AJ Harper: No, we have not. When are you gonna announce the title?

don't write *that* book!

Mike Michalowicz: I don't know.

AJ Harper: Okay at any rate, uh, I want you to get it because it's a new readership. And I think it's gonna be way more Uh, I think more libraries and bookstores are going to automatically want it.

Mike Michalowicz: I am in.

AJ Harper: Because it's not a business book, which has those, those sections don't have as many books in them in bookstores.

Mike Michalowicz: Yeah, which is peculiar. So the traditional publisher, um, I have to make a request saying I want to get,

AJ Harper: I recommend you do because they're not even going to talk to you about it. They make the decision because here's the thing. Let's say you submit to Publisher's Weekly that Publisher's Weekly does not automatically review it.

They decide. It's an editorial decision.

Mike Michalowicz: Yeah.

AJ Harper: And so they might say no.

Mike Michalowicz: I see.

AJ Harper: And they, if they have a book that they absolutely need the review, right? They're going to say, well, Mike's book sell just fine.

Mike Michalowicz: Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Okay.

AJ Harper: We don't need a review for Mike's book.

Mike Michalowicz: Yeah.

AJ Harper: So they're not even going to submit it.

Mike Michalowicz: Interesting.

AJ Harper: So I just, all I tell authors is let's have a conversation don't leave that into this mysterious void where you don't know what they're doing. And so if you have a top tier

don't write *that* book!

hybrid that has trade distribution, they'll probably submit it on your behalf, too. But again, you need to ask

Mike Michalowicz: Okay. Yeah,

AJ Harper: So you can't you can't do it on your own if you're traditionally published.

Mike Michalowicz: Okay. What about hybrid? Does it work differently?

AJ Harper: You need to ask.

Mike Michalowicz: Same thing.

AJ Harper: Yeah, and then sometimes they'll charge you for it. So here's the deal. It's free to traditional publishers. And top tier hybrid with trade, you know, they can also submit on your behalf. It's free for them. Self-published authors actually have to pay for them.

Mike Michalowicz: Interesting.

AJ Harper: But you could as a self-published or hybrid published author guarantee reviews by just paying for or negotiate that in your hybrid contract.

Mike Michalowicz: That's almost what I'm thinking. Like does the self-published author have an advantage here? Because if you submit it, you pay, they have to do it.

AJ Harper: Yeah, they don't have to give you a good one.

Mike Michalowicz: No, no, no, but they're obligated to do it.

AJ Harper: Correct You're paying for this and now it's you're paying for a service.

Mike Michalowicz: Can they decline you use request you pay? So you're hearing

AJ Harper: I mean, I probably there is a probably a weird clause for some weirdo that submitted something totally horrible or whatever. I mean, I'm sure they're not gonna review pornography.

Mike Michalowicz: Yeah. But I, as a self-published author, I just want to be 100 percent clear on this. I've written a book. I can go to the reviews services and say, I like this to be reviewed. Here's my 100 or whatever. Do you know what the fee is?

don't write *that* book!

AJ Harper: They vary. Kirkus is steep. It's about 700.

Mike Michalowicz: Okay.

AJ Harper: But then after that, it's, that's the highest.

Mike Michalowicz: Is there an advantage to say it was just reviewed by Kirkus, regardless if the review is positive or negative? Just stating?

AJ Harper: I mean, I don't think a reader would.

Mike Michalowicz: Yeah. Reader wouldn't care.

AJ Harper: No.

Mike Michalowicz: And the industry maybe not wouldn't care either.

AJ Harper: Sure. They would. Sure. They will.

Mike Michalowicz: I mean the value if it was rate if it was reviewed, well, I mean positively but this the fact you were reviewed Does that give you a leg?

AJ Harper: I think so because I think I'm always of the belief that oh This is a legit author that understands how this industry works

Mike Michalowicz: So I wonder as a self published author if if it's worth the investment It is.

Then you just notify all the libraries saying, Hey, this was Kirkus reviewed. Well, they're

AJ Harper: also getting it. So American Library Journal, that's one of them. Booklist is from, um, the American Library Association. That's two different trade journals. Um, that they know, believe me, and they're reading publishers. They're reading all this stuff. This is what they geek out about. They're reading all this stuff.

Mike Michalowicz: I wonder if there's a librarian that just sits there and just takes a shortcut and says, Well, it was Kirkus Reviewed. I'll just put it in the catalog here. And if it wasn't, screw it. Like, I wonder if that person exists. And you need to see how that was, uh, that was either male or female voice. You couldn't tell. Yes, exactly.

AJ Harper: Okay. I don't know. I don't know. I'm just, I'm just, they're reading it to see what they want to purchase.

don't write *that* book!

Mike Michalowicz: How many reviews does Kirkus do on every issue?

AJ Harper: Oh, you know what? That info I don't know. I'm sure it's readily available.

Mike Michalowicz: Okay. I mean, is it your, your guess is a few, a handful, is it dozens, is it hundreds?

AJ Harper: Um, it just depends. So there's going to be a separate section for the ones where they, um, you know, these sort of indie books that you're paying for. But I should know this. I didn't, I should have brought this, but it's, it, they get, if, if you're talking about the traditional publishers submitting and then, you know, not a lot of them are not chosen.

I mean, they're getting, I, you know, probably over a hundred thousand or more. I'll see. Submissions and hardly. Publishing any and you want to know another cool thing important about doing this?

Mike Michalowicz: Yeah,

AJ Harper: so if you're a starred review or in Publisher's Weekly, you're gonna be in their best of annual issue because you're one of the starred reviews. If you're... Or you might be in a preview fall preview spring preview, even if it's not a starred review. If you're, uh, a Foreword, which is, represents, uh, indie and self-published authors, hybrid published authors, not represents, but publishes reviews for that group, Foreword, also has a major book prize, and they're, I know for a fact, favoring some that have been reviewed by Forward.

So, you see, it's just got a chain reaction of goodness.

Mike Michalowicz: So, our producer just gave us the information. Here it is. Kirkus Reviews, uh, publishes 24 issues annually.

AJ Harper: Yeah.

Mike Michalowicz: So, there you go. Reviewing over 10,000 titles per year, this equates to an average of 417 book reviews per issue.

AJ Harper: Right, but think about how many they get.

Mike Michalowicz: Oh, I, I, it's unbelievable.

AJ Harper: Yeah.

don't write *that* book!

Mike Michalowicz: I think there's 10,000 titles that come out every week. It feels like probably more now. Um, okay. So with our new book, we have submitted the manuscript. Uh, we actually just got the feedback from our editor. You got the memo...

AJ Harper: Two days ago.

Mike Michalowicz: Two days ago. You're digging into it.

Uh, when in the process do we go for the trade review?

AJ Harper: You need a galley. So after. The uncorrected proof that's that typeset version. And most of them now will accept digital galleys. They used to only, but a car, a carcass is actually one. You have to mail two copies. Okay. So you just, so you just have to be, you have to do that, but you have to do it far enough in advance.

And this is where people get screwed up.

Mike Michalowicz: Okay. So—

AJ Harper: they have very strict submission deadlines.

Mike Michalowicz: Okay. So I should really be talking with. Page two at this point and we should be prepared.

AJ Harper: Where are you submitting it? I want you to submit here, here and here.

Mike Michalowicz: Yeah. Okay.

AJ Harper: I would say Kirkus, Publisher's Weekly, Book list. Foreword

Mike Michalowicz: Blue Ink was one you listed earlier.

AJ Harper: Yeah, you could get, I don't, I don't think you need it, but I don't think as many people are paying attention to Blue Ink.

Mike Michalowicz: When I see Jesse today, we go in front of Macmillan. I'm going to stop the press and say, question for you, Jesse,

AJ Harper: Don't do that.

don't write *that* book!

Mike Michalowicz: The big reveal of the imprint. And I ruined it with this. Of course I wouldn't. Um, what can you do with a trade review once—

AJ Harper: Can I just go back to the timing thing? Yeah, I just want to make sure I'm letting people know forward. It's like six months out, you guys. Okay, so, this is why we have to take our time. And people miss this stuff. Kirkus is, I think, five months. Publisher's Weekly, I think, is four to five months. And it's not from the actual publication date. So, let me give you an example. Um, If your release date is on the 15th of the month,

Mike Michalowicz: Mm hmm.

AJ Harper: And there's a four-month advance requirement deadline, it goes from the first. So people sometimes make a mistake and they do it four months from the release date. So, um, any other day besides the first, you have to get it in before the first.

Mike Michalowicz: Okay.

AJ Harper: So there's no, Oh, but it's four months from the 23rd. It's four months from the 19th. No, you're late.

Mike Michalowicz: Thank you for that.

AJ Harper: Learned that the hard way as a publisher.

Mike Michalowicz: So let's go on to a, once you do have a trade review, we talked about some ways that it, it spreads. But us as the author, are there ways we can leverage it?

AJ Harper: Yeah. So the easiest and simplest is the pull quote that's on the cover of the pull quote that you use for your social media. You put on your website, you can add it to your sell sheet for corresponding with bookstores. You can, um, incorporate it into all of your marketing.

Mike Michalowicz: Okay. So you said people in the, pull quote on the front of the book, back of the book. Um, one thing I do as a speaker to as I have a bullet list when people are introducing me, uh, is that something you put in your bio?

AJ Harper: If you get a start review, you should.

Mike Michalowicz: Okay.

AJ Harper: Not always, but um, it's very, it's actually so rare, that—

don't write *that* book!

Mike Michalowicz: To get one. Okay. So it is a big deal.

AJ Harper: Yeah. I mean, I wouldn't put it in a bio that was only three sentences long.

Mike Michalowicz: Yeah.

AJ Harper: Do you know what I mean? A longer bio, though.

Mike Michalowicz: Yeah. Um, what if you get a negative one?

AJ Harper: Oh,

Mike Michalowicz: tears you down. Okay.

AJ Harper: So here's the cool thing about being a self-published author and paying for it or hybrid and paying for it. You can pull it. You can say, I don't want you to run that.

Mike Michalowicz: So I just want to be a hundred percent clear. I can buy.

AJ Harper: You can get the review.

Mike Michalowicz: Yep. They submit it to me first?

AJ Harper: Yes.

Mike Michalowicz: Before the rest of the world sees it? Oh my gosh. And then you don't like it. And you're like, ask it. Did you, this is just a little flash that came to me. Did you have a circumstance where you had an author who got a review and it was actually positive, but they read it as a negative?

AJ Harper: A circumstance? Listen to me. This is what happens to me all the time. And I know I've got authors listening that probably did this. So I love you and I'm going to just call you out just a little bit.

How many times I get an email, "I just got my review and I'm feeling horrible. I think, please tell me if I should yank it." And then I go, okay. I never brace myself because I know it's wrong. I just know it's wrong. I go in and I read the review and I'm like, what are you talking about? This is good. It's just something I don't know what's wrong. I don't know what's happening. I think it's like we white out or something

Mike Michalowicz: Yeah,

don't write *that* book!

AJ Harper: I think authors are looking and they find two words.

Mike Michalowicz: Yeah, that's exactly right. That's exactly what it is

AJ Harper: And they it's usually neutral or it's just a small thing, you know, and on balance with the whole thing like something that they... A lot of times, especially Kirkus, we'll be looking for ways things can appeal to multiple audiences and so they might notice something like, or they'll say, this would be a good fit for blah blah blah, but then in your mind you're thinking, but why isn't it a good fit for everybody? And why didn't they say that?

And then I think we have this idea that the review should say, this is a masterpiece. But the, so I'll read the review, and I'll be just doubting, and be like, What are you talking about? This is great! Especially from a Kirkus, because they're like, No offense Kirkus, but y'all, You are stingy.

Mike Michalowicz: Critical Kirkus.

AJ Harper: So when they get a nice review from them, that maybe it's not going, Amazing! Exclamation! Like, they're not going to use exclamation points. Believe me. I'm like, this is like a rave. This is like the, this is like the best it gets, but the authors can't see it. They just, they are, how many times, and Laura can attest to this because they always, they always send it to Laura, too, who's my Dean of Students, and they're like, I'm, I don't know if I should publish this.

I'm going to yank it. And then we both look at it and we're like, what in the hell? It's so good.

Mike Michalowicz: Yeah. I think we are.

AJ Harper: Believe me, you would know if it was a scathing review.

Mike Michalowicz: Yeah, it would be just burn

AJ Harper: it in there very they're very formal about it, right? Like it's not gonna feel like, it's not gonna feel like Roseanne Coppina Hodge said it like, you know in an Italian kind of New York way, it's gonna be very poised and

Mike Michalowicz: Yeah,

AJ Harper: you know, But it's gonna be like don't buy this,

don't write *that* book!

Mike Michalowicz: you know, I see that Kirkus review says our review this book is, "Well. We can't say the word so we're gonna say it rhymed with Mustang but starts with a diss Or something like that." Like, they, they come at you indirectly, punch you in the gut.

AJ Harper: That's how, that would be how you would do it. That would be how you would review it.

Mike Michalowicz: Dismusting. Dismusting.

AJ Harper: No, it would be like this, um, uh, Well, one of them says, "recommended for" Right? So it would just simply say, "not recommended."

Mike Michalowicz: for no, not recommended period.

AJ Harper: That's a burn.

Mike Michalowicz: That's a burn. That's a Kirkus burn.

AJ Harper: That's a Kirkus burn.

Mike Michalowicz: Yeah.

AJ Harper: But see, what happens is they think it's bad, and they're, it's like, they can't even see that it's so good.

Mike Michalowicz: Oh, that's so interesting.

AJ Harper: Yeah, and I'm just like, this is great! Shout it from the rooftops! You know? Hallelujah! Look what you did!

Mike Michalowicz: I think we are 10 times more sensitive to criticism than compliment.

AJ Harper: For sure. And I don't even think we're have reading comprehension sometimes when that happens. Like, did you read it?

Mike Michalowicz: Yeah.

AJ Harper: Have someone read it to you, you know? Like, what if it's... Have someone you love read it to you and see if it sounds different.

don't write *that* book!

But if it really is bad and you don't want it. If you paid for it, you can kill it. If your traditional publisher submitted it, they can't kill it.

Mike Michalowicz: It's so fascinating. Self-pubs, one for the self-pub team.

AJ Harper: One for the self pubs. Yeah, you have to pay, but you have more power.

Mike Michalowicz: Yeah, you're in control.

AJ Harper: One caveat is we have, uh, so, um, with my publishing company, occasionally they got a fact wrong.

Mike Michalowicz: Oh, interesting.

AJ Harper: And so you can request, so our marketing director would go back to them and say, We need you to make this factual correction.

Mike Michalowicz: Any other stuff on this topic of trade reviews?

AJ Harper: I just want to say that, uh, we have to, um, muster up the courage to do it. And we have to plan, you put it in your timeline, you know? Oh, another factor. If you're self-published, here's another cool thing. You don't have to adhere to those deadlines.

Mike Michalowicz: Really?

AJ Harper: Yes.

Mike Michalowicz: Could you do it post publication?

AJ Harper: Yes. Now you wouldn't have the pull quote on the, if you got, if a miracle happened and you got a starred review post release, it would be reason enough for you to change the cover.

Mike Michalowicz: My gosh.

AJ Harper: But, um, It's still good to do, you know, but as you know, this industry is all about front list books that are about to come out books that recently came out. So, it doesn't have as much effect if you delay, but you can always do it.

Mike Michalowicz: Yeah. And maybe I would debate you on this. The industry is about front list. I don't know if that's the right approach to books.

don't write *that* book!

AJ Harper: I know, but I'm just right right now. We're just talking about when the industry is paying attention to you.

Mike Michalowicz: Understood. But I think it's self-pub. I think it's two oh self-pub now because I could re Invigorate a book.

AJ Harper: You could, you could, I mean it would be funny if you tried to get a Review now for like

Mike Michalowicz: a 1999 book

AJ Harper: or like Surge.

Mike Michalowicz: Wouldn't that be great?

AJ Harper: Surge?

Mike Michalowicz: Wouldn't that be fun just to submit it?

AJ Harper: I mean, you could kill it if you didn't like it.

Mike Michalowicz: Yeah, but, but would it even, I matter, wonder what they would say.

AJ Harper: Do you know how old this is? we, we might find out.

Mike Michalowicz: Would that be the great review? Kirkus is, "You know how old, this is?"

AJ Harper: I wonder if they even have a caveat there, like a fine print of if it's this old you can't do it.

Mike Michalowicz: That would just be so funny. Do you know how old this is? That's the review

AJ Harper: But wait, I want to point out, you know, Kasey Compton. Uh, with Penned with Purpose, her book...

Mike Michalowicz: In Search of You.

AJ Harper: You know, she didn't get the trade reviews and I saw her go get them. So I think she's, I think she submitted on her own after the fact.

don't write *that* book!

Mike Michalowicz: Okay. She had a lot of family challenges at the time. And so she, we're going through a process of rebooting the book. It's such a good book and it didn't get, it didn't get the momentum. We

AJ Harper: It's a brilliant, unusual. Stand alone work of art, but I just want to point out she has a traditional publisher.

And so I wonder...

Mike Michalowicz: yeah Ben Bella,

AJ Harper: so I might the question I have then is should maybe ask her can text her later Did she decide on... I assumed that she decided on her own to submit?

Mike Michalowicz: Yeah, that's a great question

AJ Harper: 'Cause I saw it come in later.

Mike Michalowicz: I don't know. Uh, I want to give an update on our progress. Something's interesting. We had a call with the editor after Kendra. Kendra. She, she was actually not, she hadn't completed the book, but she said, she said it motivated, it motivated me to take action. And she goes, this is rare. I want to get your feedback. I heard it from one person yesterday. Um, was it Pam?

It was Pamela Slim who was at the event. I love Pam Slim.

AJ Harper: Pam Slim's great.

Mike Michalowicz: She's such a good human.

AJ Harper: Three, three-time author.

Mike Michalowicz: She wrote a book, uh, is it called Breakaway from Cubicle Nation? Um, Escape. Escape. That was her first book.

AJ Harper: Escape from Cubicle Nation.

Mike Michalowicz: She wrote that book and she said her editor, who brought that book in, read the manuscript and quit their job. She did it because of the book. Isn't that amazing? How often do you hear stuff like that where the someone editing the book is so moved by the book they take action?

don't write *that* book!

AJ Harper: Do you not remember what happened with um, I think it was Pumpkin Plan.

Mike Michalowicz: It was with one of their book We got some feedback. It was Pumpkin plan. It wasn't the editor.

AJ Harper: It was the copy editor

Mike Michalowicz: Copy editor .

AJ Harper: We got emails. Yes, a letter. Yeah about the fine book and how it motivated him to XYZ about his business, yeah

Mike Michalowicz: Yeah. But you, in your experience, it feels like that's a rarity and is that a sign of good things or that's just you landing with one

AJ Harper: No, it's a sign of good things because if, as an editor, and I am one, you, you know, you kind of, it's not that you don't care about the projects, but you're thinking about it and you're kind of doing a lot of it, you know? So, to be motivated to get up and do something.

Mike Michalowicz: Yeah.

AJ Harper: Now, I, I'm motivated a lot though by my students work, you know? Yeah. But I think I have deep relationships with them, so every book that my student does is profoundly life altering for me.

Mike Michalowicz: Another thing that came back from Kendra, I think I saw this, is she moved the chapter, I think she moved the debt chapter back to where we originally had it.

AJ Harper: Where we originally had it. You, you had wanted to move it up because you thought debt was a bigger deal. But actually she would, and we also got reader feedback saying that that seemed out of sequence for them, too.

Mike Michalowicz: Right, it messes with the system.

AJ Harper: Yeah.

Mike Michalowicz: Yeah, my concern was the concern people had about debt, and they couldn't address the rest of the book.

AJ Harper: But they wanted to stick with the system.

don't write *that* book!

Mike Michalowicz: But the reality is, yeah, tell me the system first.

AJ Harper: Yeah, so she just put it back to where we originally had

Mike Michalowicz: it. I think that's brilliant. Um. And I like also what Kendra was giving feedback on was there were certain content that she said this could be was the word an appendix or (Yeah), an adjunct basically,

AJ Harper: I'm not surprised, which is great and we knew this is a completely different format. We had, we'd kicked around. Do we break up the tips and put them in little chunks Shaded boxes throughout the manuscript and we knew we were probably going to have to do something different with that chapter.

Mike Michalowicz: On the call with Kendra I said something and just it feels like she kind of lightened her up or emboldened her I said, I just asked that you defend the reader at all costs and like she she kind of smiled I don't think they hear feedback like that. Like I think the author is more in a confrontational thing Like don't be critical of me where i'm saying please defend the reader.

AJ Harper: I think most authors are in a sort of novice thing, right? The editor is the authority.

Mike Michalowicz: Yeah. Yeah.

AJ Harper: You know, and you're just seasoned, you know? Yeah.

Mike Michalowicz: Yeah. Okay.

AJ Harper: I was, I was very pleased with the feedback and um, I'm excited. I love editing. It's more fun for me than the writing is.

Mike Michalowicz: yeah, this is where you're so it's so interesting. I'm the reverse I like the big chunky clay on the table and you like sculpting it.

AJ Harper: Oh, yeah, so satisfying. Wait till you see it when it's done!

Mike Michalowicz: Yeah, this is gonna be...

AJ Harper: it's so fun I never take offense to any bit of feedback 'cuz I'm like, all right.

All right Yeah, and I love figuring it out. And then I love when they see it again like whoa, okay. You know, we're going to, we're going to, we're going to gussy this up

don't write *that* book!

Mike Michalowicz: and we're in good flow. We were on a phone call over the weekend, um, debating, um, and that was really healthy, good stuff.

AJ Harper: Yeah. 'Cause I will always be honest with you. I defer to you. Of course. They ultimately it's your book and you're going to decide. And I know, I know instinctively when it's time for me to stop arguing. I don't say it to you, but I'm just like, okay, okay.

Mike Michalowicz: We came to a compromise, which is an elevation,

AJ Harper: But can I point out why we had to do it? 'Cause we had done reader feedback and had we not done reader feedback, we wouldn't have, I wouldn't have pushed back at all.

Mike Michalowicz: Yeah.

AJ Harper: I was only pushing back on behalf of the reader. Which is why you were listening.

Mike Michalowicz: Yeah,

AJ Harper: and thank God we did.

Mike Michalowicz: Yeah,

AJ Harper: because otherwise we would have missed an opportunity

Mike Michalowicz: 100 percent agree.

AJ Harper: Yeah, I'm psyched. I'm my first day to really dig-dig in is Friday and then Saturday is marathon.

Mike Michalowicz: Yeah,

AJ Harper: and so like I can't I can't wait

Mike Michalowicz: Friday morning. I'm digging in in parallel with you Then we're doing the call and then you're you're off to the races.

AJ Harper: Off to the races. So now you're going to get trade reviews.

Mike Michalowicz: I'm going to get trade reviews. Yeah. I actually just put in the marketing plan while we were talking. Um,

don't write *that* book!

AJ Harper: that pleases me. Yeah.

Mike Michalowicz: And I'm a little bit embarrassed that

AJ Harper: that's okay.

Mike Michalowicz: I didn't pursue in the past.

AJ Harper: You know what? It's good because this is the book to do it for.

Mike Michalowicz: Amen.

AJ Harper: You know what I mean? It's a much bigger, uh, audience, so we got to do it.

Mike Michalowicz: This episode had like three segments. We, we kicked it off talking about, uh, what was it now?

Sales pre orders. Just

AJ Harper: cause I'm hot on the collar right now.

Mike Michalowicz: Yeah, yeah, and about marketing and how you're focusing on that and then we talked about, it was a sales team, that's what it was. We talked a lot about the sales team. We dug into the trade reviews and then now we're ending with—

AJ Harper: Incidentally, by the way, if you did get a hot review, the sales team would be like, okay.

Mike Michalowicz: Yeah.

AJ Harper: You know, they can use that. See, because the industry knows it, they can use that. (Yeah.) They say, look at this, look at this review this author got, they get to, that means something to the people they're pitching to.

Mike Michalowicz: Oh, you are arming them. I love it.

AJ Harper: This is, and this is the stuff that people don't know. There's such a disadvantage of the lack of knowledge, people missing out on all this stuff. So I love that we just give this information.

don't write *that* book!

Mike Michalowicz: You just listened to the best damn show on the interweb on authorship. I want to remind you, go to dwtbpodcast.com. We got all our free materials there. You can join our email list.

We love hearing feedback from you, Tina. Thanks for your feedback for this episode. If you have any questions, any comments, any observations, anything, anything, you can email us at hello at dwtbpodcast.com. Our inbox is filling up. So just put the word. Uh, in there of, or the title of what you want to share, feedback, thoughts, ideas.

But if you want to go to AJ's retreat, her editor's retreat, the top three workshop, email us there, or go to ajharper.com it's ajharper.com and gosh, if you haven't got her book yet, like, what are you thinking? What are you drinking? Write a must read written by AJ Harper. It's the best. Plus we got an imprint coming out called simplified.

If you're an entrepreneurial author, we want to hear from you. You can email us at hello at dwtbpodcast.com. Thanks again for joining us on today's episode. We look forward to seeing you next week, of course. And as a reminder, don't write that book, right? The greatest book you can.