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Episode 78:

Understanding Bestseller Lists

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. What do you think about this? Uh, fake spring.

Like it's some hot days and then some blustery days and then freezing cold days.

AJ Harper: Yeah. I walked outta the house this morning and it was freaking cold.

Mike Michalowicz: Right.

AJ Harper: I'm not happy about it, but I have no one to issue a complaint to. Except just my continual grumbling.

Mike Michalowicz: Yeah. That's how I handle it. Just keep whining.

AJ Harper: It's just been a, it was a very cold, annoying winter and it doesn't seem to be over.

Mike Michalowicz: you know, you could see like it's a gift, like, oh, thanks for a nice warm day, but I see like a curse. It's like, oh, you teased me.

AJ Harper: Yeah. I am ready though.

Mike Michalowicz: Me too. Winter seems to be more and more difficult each year, and this year was quite a bit of snow compared to recent years.

AJ Harper: Yeah. I don't know. I'm fine. Yeah. It doesn't compare to when I was a kid. It's okay. Because I really think about

Mike Michalowicz: it's, it's true. Yeah. I actually have, uh, on my calendar it says Wisconsin. I'm like, I'm gonna Wisconsin for five days. Like, what? And I'm like, oh, it's AJ's place.

AJ Harper: That's me, Madeline Island. That's because you always think it's in Minnesota.

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Mike Michalowicz: I do think it's in Minnesota. It's the alliterative nature I have. Madaline Island goes with Minnesota.

AJ Harper: I think it's because, you know, I'm from there, I think in your brain.

Mike Michalowicz: And, and I always, when I picture you, I always see a little Prince on your shoulder.

So I'm like Minnesota.

AJ Harper: I'll take it.

Mike Michalowicz: So today's episode, we're gonna talk about understanding bestseller lists. I think it's gonna get a little, a little, uh, crunchy.

AJ Harper: Oh, you think so?

Mike Michalowicz: I think so. Um, I'm your host, Mike Michalowicz, and I'm joined the studio with my, I guess I'm your co-host and we are fellow co-host AJ Harper, whose author of Write a Must-Read, the book. I didn't realize this. Our, and this is my, uh, acknowledgement of You, our mutual publisher requires that any author that joins them reads, Write a Must-Read.

AJ Harper: Mm-hmm.

Mike Michalowicz: I, I've never heard of a publisher mandating something like that.

AJ Harper: What? I was very flattered when they told me that's their, their plan. So they buy copies of my book and they send it to everybody who gets a deal.

Mike Michalowicz: Yeah. It's remarkable.

AJ Harper: Which is funny for my students who get a deal there, they're like, yeah, all right. I read it. Took the class. Know her.

Mike Michalowicz: Heading to Madeleine Island. Uh, they are just remarkable people. We're actively looking right now for some authors for the imprint, Simplified. So if you listening in right now, if you are a entrepreneurial author, meaning you're an author on the topic of entrepreneurship, I'm on the hunt.

AJ Harper: Do you have any new people?

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Mike Michalowicz: No, we are talking with a few. Um, I just reached out to a guy yesterday. He reached out to me and said, Hey, like to send you my new book. Fine. That's how actually I take it back. That's how it used to be. Fine, because it would get all the time. That was kind of bit, but now I'm like, well, let see what your new book's about.

Um, and it's in the entrepreneurial space. So I do a little research. I'm like, oh my gosh. And I go back with this guy a while. So I asked him, what's your next book? He told me. I'm like, my gosh, we should have further dialogue. I got an imprint.

AJ Harper: You're scouting.

Mike Michalowicz: I'm scouting now. Yeah, yeah, yeah. Alright, you ready to kick into it?

AJ Harper: Yeah. Um, we didn't do like an intro thing besides you telling them.

Mike Michalowicz: Well, that was your, I said that was your intro. Like I said, the thing about you that's remarkable is the... First time ever.

AJ Harper: Oh, okay. So on the next episode on the way here, I thought of, what am I gonna say when Mike says, you know what I admire about you? So since you didn't do it on this one, I'm saving it. Okay. Because we do three back-to-back.

Mike Michalowicz: I we're doing three back-to-back today like we always do, and, uh, I do admire that about you, that your book is so highly coveted by the publisher of Page Two. I think every publisher should require your book to be read.

AJ Harper: Thank you.

Mike Michalowicz: You're welcome.

AJ Harper: Okay, let's, let's go into the, we've got a lot to cover today.

Mike Michalowicz: Yeah. So bestseller experience, we've achieved it with my books. On the Wall Street Journal. Did we get USA today ever? Do you recall?

AJ Harper: Probably. But here's the thing, I don't think anybody was paying close attention to it.

Mike Michalowicz: Yeah, no. And I think we did, at least in the audio edition. 'cause I do remember.

AJ Harper: Oh, interesting. The audio edition.

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Mike Michalowicz: Yes. And at a peculiar time, I remember Kaushiuk or. No. One of the two sending me a clipping pic, like a screenshot clipping with a highlight of Profit First audio. Yeah, audio. So we got in USA today for something and then Wall Street Journal, I think we've done it twice. Um, fix this next for sure to get different, get it.

AJ Harper: I, I don't really know, but I can, I really wanna, I'm pretty sure it did emphasize that when you got Wall Street Journal it was the end times because the book came out in April of 2020 and you had to cancel just about everything you were gonna do to promote the book. And we still got it.

Mike Michalowicz: And we still got it.

AJ Harper: Mm-hmm. It's a testament to pre-orders.

Mike Michalowicz: Is Wall Street Journal now...

AJ Harper: It's gone.

Mike Michalowicz: Yeah, it's done. Right. It's done. So Wall Street Journal is over.

AJ Harper: I mean, the, the publication exists, but the bestseller list, they don't do it anymore.

Mike Michalowicz: Do you know the impetus behind that?

AJ Harper: You know, I don't, I don't, and I, I wish that it was, it still existed. 'cause I have a number of students who would've made it.

Mike Michalowicz: And it seems in some ways to be a more algorithmic kind of measurement. New York Times to be, seems to be more, um. Massaged.

AJ Harper: Oh, the New York Times. I mean, massage is a nice word for it.

Mike Michalowicz: Yeah. I, I remember Mike Rowe, the guy who does, uh, dirty Jobs. Mm-hmm. His mother wrote a book called Vacuuming Naked and something, something, something. My wife bought the book. I read parts of it. It's excellent. It's an excellent book. It was ranked number, say, six on the New York Times bestseller. Okay. Mike Rowe did a podcast calling BS on the New York Times bestseller list and showed the rankings and all the numbers. And her book outstripped everybody in sales volume.

AJ Harper: Oh yeah. Because it's not just about sales.

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Mike Michalowicz: Yeah. But he's like, it's, it's not, yeah. It's not just about sales. It's what is it about, you know?

AJ Harper: So we want it to be just data driven and, and, you know.

Mike Michalowicz: Hmm.

AJ Harper: Merit driven based on data. Yeah. But that's not what's happening. But you know, there's, so there's New York Times, there's the USA today, there's the indie bestsellers list from Indie Bound. Um, there's the Publisher's weekly list and the Porchlight list, and a bunch more smaller lists. But the general public is not paying too close attention to IndieBound, Publishers Weekly, Porchlight others, um, the general public might pay more attention to New York Times and USA today.

Mike Michalowicz: You didn't mention Amazon. Is there a reason?

AJ Harper: No.

Mike Michalowicz: Well, there's an Amazon top 100. That's one thing. There's a top

AJ Harper: 100. That's good. Yeah. If you get into that, then that's a good day.

Mike Michalowicz: Yeah.

AJ Harper: But we've got, we're gonna get into it deeper later, but. The Amazon bestseller list based on a category is a fleeting moment in time that is not significant.

Mike Michalowicz: Why do authors want to be on the bestseller list? I mean, what's, what's the, is there true reasons or true benefits and are there other reasons?

AJ Harper: Sure. I think it opens doors. I think it definitely has cachet. I think readers are still impressed when. It's a book was a bestseller. Even though they don't understand much about the bestseller list, I think, yeah, mostly it opens doors, but I think the big reason people do it is because of ego.

Mike Michalowicz: That's, that's what I think. I know of an author who has hired a service, a firm that does bestseller kind of promotions of books is a new book that's coming out and when I asked them, 'cause I have access to 'em, I said, why are you going for this? They said. Well, you know, it can help exposure. And I said, well, let give you some facts of how I think it won't. And they said, yeah, that's a good point. I'm still pursuing it.

AJ Harper: I might know this person.

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Mike Michalowicz: You may know this person. And I'm like, why are you still pursuing it? And they're like, they're dancing around ego. And, and I, my response is, or my thought is. It's okay to have ego around it.

AJ Harper: Sure.

Mike Michalowicz: It's, it's like just, maybe it's better to acknowledge that and say, I'm doing this because I, I just wanna have that credit or credential and that's fine.

AJ Harper: I mean, I think so. Yeah. So I just had, um, two students land on the USA Today bestseller list for multiple weeks, and then some smaller lists. As well. One was Dr. Sunita Sah for her book *Defy*, and the other was Jen Kem for her book *Unicorn Team*, which you endorsed. And um, Jen was really going for the New York Times list and sold enough books to get on it

Mike Michalowicz: And did not get it.

AJ Harper: And the reason wasn't ego-driven. She was doing it. Uh. She really wanted to sort of pave the way for more women business authors and more women of color business authors. So it was a very personal reason, you know, about opening doors in her mind. Um, and I fully support that. And she sold enough books to get on it, but that's not enough.

Mike Michalowicz: So here's my philosophy around how to identify if the author is pursuing it for ego or not. If they feel compelled to tell you they are a New York Times bestseller or Wall Street Journal after it happens So I know some authors who have had I. Okay. Average nice success to their books, but they bought their way onto the Wall Street Journal or New York Times, and they wouldn't have got it otherwise.

And this, there's one person in particular comes to mind for over a decade. Like, I'm a New York Times bestseller. I'm a New York Times best seller.

AJ Harper: For that one week.

Mike Michalowicz: For that one week. And the book was, is not, you know, successful is a no, no one would recognize the title.

AJ Harper: Mm-hmm.

Mike Michalowicz: So I'm like, oh, okay. It, it's an ego thing. And I'm sounding so critical. So we achieve Wall Street Journal bestseller, but I also have noticed, like I don't, I really don't care about the bestseller much at all. So it's not, I don't even think it's in my bio. Maybe it is in my bio somewhere.

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AJ Harper: It should be in your bio. It should be. If you think if you make it, you should put it in the bio.

Mike Michalowicz: Yeah. But, and it was a natural, like we didn't pursue, we just got it. And, but I don't like say, oh, I'm a Wall Street Journal bestselling... That's true.

AJ Harper: You, it was organic.

Mike Michalowicz: Yeah. I don't feel compelled to say, I, I think. But maybe this is like kind of my counter thing to prove to myself I don't have ego, is just if, if people in the room recognize the book title, that to me that's success as opposed to...

AJ Harper: Yeah.

Mike Michalowicz: You know, having to qualify myself.

AJ Harper: So, side note, yesterday, uh, I had, so in my Author Collective, which is a membership group for alums of my workshop. On Mondays, I do something called Marketing Mondays and I bring people in to talk about marketing. And you know, I'm always trying to get my students to sell the heck out of their book.

Mike Michalowicz: Mm-hmm.

AJ Harper: And I'll do these marketing debriefs with people who've had their book out for a while. And it was Julie Herres who came in who wrote Profit First for therapists. Yes. So she's at almost 15,000 books sold. Right. She also has a membership that she created in tandem for, for the launch of the book because they can't provide services for that many people. So they have 200 people in the membership.

Mike Michalowicz: Wow.

AJ Harper: All the time, even including attrition.

Mike Michalowicz: Wow. Oh, so that's active membership.

AJ Harper: She had a huge success and she was sharing this anecdote, you know, she says, I said, well, what are you doing now? So it's been, uh, she published in 2023, so it's been almost two years.

I. And she said, well, you know, I, I don't have to do a lot because the book sells itself. I said, what do you mean? And she said, well, I'll be in these Facebook groups just sort of lurking around for therapists. And somebody I don't know, that I've never heard of almost every day

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will say, OMG, you need to get Profit First for Therapists. And I say, yes, that's a successful book.

Mike Michalowicz: That's... Yeah, that is a successful book.

AJ Harper: And that's why I do what I do. That's why I teach my workshop.

Mike Michalowicz: That's why you call it top three.

AJ Harper: That's why I call it Top Three, because I want my students' books to be in somebody's top three lists so that they other people feel compelled to recommend them.

And that's how a book hits the tipping point. Um, so now she's, she's gonna do some stuff. She's got a workbook coming out this fall, but. She's never gonna be on one of those lists if she's too niche.

Mike Michalowicz: But would you call her book a,

AJ Harper: I would call it a perennial bestseller within her community.

Mike Michalowicz: Yeah, within her community.

AJ Harper: It's *the* book.

Mike Michalowicz: It's, yeah, it's,

AJ Harper: It's the book.

Mike Michalowicz: Yeah.

AJ Harper: Do you know what I'm saying?

Mike Michalowicz: I exactly. Got you.

AJ Harper: And I think if you write the book with that intention, which you and I always do, which I teach my students to do. You can maintain, you know, you might not stay on the list, but you can be selling really good numbers for years and years to come.

Mike Michalowicz: Yeah, so I think we identified a few things so far is the bestseller lists. There are certain benefits to it, notoriety, exposure. It can get you access to certain things, or

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it could be ego. We've also identified that you can buy your way onto a list, but you can also naturally achieve a list. Is that true for New York Times?

Can you naturally, sure. Okay. You can,

AJ Harper: but there's certain factors because the edit, the list is a combination of numbers, so sales plus it's an editorial decision, so that's why. What did the person, Mike bro, Mike's mom, Mike Rowe's mom didn't hit number one at, she was number six. And that's why Jen Chem, having outsold other titles on the list didn't make it at all.

Mike Michalowicz: Yeah.

AJ Harper: And they keep that a closely guarded secret.

Mike Michalowicz: Well, is there even a secret to it? Because, uh, ,

AJ Harper: No. Yeah it is.

Mike Michalowicz: Well, the editorial decision just could be, I like this.

AJ Harper: I'm just saying that the, their reasons and also how they calculate the numbers are shrouded in mystery. Now, some people know, have some inside tracks, and have figured patterns out and so forth about the numbers, but they can't control the editorial decision.

Mike Michalowicz: The book title is Vacuuming in the Nude. Okay. And, and other ways to get attention.

AJ Harper: So you, what did you call it? Naked Vacuuming?

Mike Michalowicz: Yeah. It's close Vacuuming in the Nude and other Ways to Get Attention, by Peggy Rowe. 2,300 reviews. Right? As of this morning's ranked 28,000. And this book's,

AJ Harper: Oh, it's still selling.

Mike Michalowicz: It's still selling. And the book is, uh, three years, uh, out.

AJ Harper: So The New York Times is total sales for that week. And for the first week, your book is out, it also includes pre-orders. So that's why people do these intense pre-order campaigns.

Mike Michalowicz: Okay.

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AJ Harper: So that's your shot if you're trying to get on. So you need to show a lot of respect for people who maintain on the list for 10 weeks, a hundred weeks, you know, that's some serious selling going on.

Mike Michalowicz: That's, yeah.

AJ Harper: That's not even happening because of them anymore. That's a phenomenon. Lightning in a bottle.

Mike Michalowicz: Mm-hmm.

AJ Harper: But your best chance is the first week your book is out, because that's when it include the pre-orders.

Mike Michalowicz: Okay, that makes sense. I believe also for the rankings, oh, actually it's in the notes here, is you have to be purchased not just on a single platform, meaning if I just go and have bulk buys of a hundred thousand books for a big event, that's a lot of books and would qualify me on quantity.

But since it's through one distributor. One purchaser, that won't?

AJ Harper: Yeah, so it has to be multiple, it has to be individual sales. You can have some bulk sales, but those bulk sales have to actually be recorded through Book Scan.

Mike Michalowicz: Okay.

AJ Harper: So if you sold up, you know, 500 books privately, that doesn't do you any good toward the list.

Mike Michalowicz: Mm-hmm.

AJ Harper: It also needs to be on multiple platforms and retailers, so Amazon, Barnes and Noble, indie bookstores, brick and mortar.

Mike Michalowicz: Mm-hmm.

AJ Harper: Also different geographic locations. It can't all be, I'm gonna hit all these stores in Seattle and then I'm gonna hit it.

Mike Michalowicz: Yeah.

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AJ Harper: It's gotta be all over. So it's like, it's a lot of organization that, you know, for people who are deliberately trying to get the list, you have to be very coordinated, which is how these consultants come into play.

Mike Michalowicz: Exactly. It does seem like fair consideration. It does feel like a book that is on multiple platforms is in multiple regions, is likely selling very well.

AJ Harper: Well, right. And so it makes sense that they care about that because if it's just concentrated in one area, it isn't representative of a book that people need to pay attention to.

Does that make sense? And also, some retailers hold more weight than others. And when the, so that New York Times considers this, this retailer more significant than another one. And how that's weighted is a mystery.

Mike Michalowicz: Yeah. Yeah. It's interesting, you, you mentioned consultants, so there's some consultants that specifically will, will provide services to get you on the New York Times Bestseller. Uh, and they, they can charge a substantial fee for that

AJ Harper: hundreds of thousands of dollars sometimes

Mike Michalowicz: because they're charging for their fee. Plus they use some of those funds to actually buy your own books?

AJ Harper: Yes.

Mike Michalowicz: And distribute them. My understanding is they will compensate people to buy the book. So, uh, if I join this list, I can say, yeah, I'll buy whatever book, you're gonna reimburse me for the book plus a fee of \$5 or something like that.

AJ Harper: Plus a fee?

Mike Michalowicz: That's my understanding. It can be, yeah.

AJ Harper: Okay. That's a new one for me. I've, I've seen it all.

Mike Michalowicz: Yeah.

AJ Harper: Like when you,

Mike Michalowicz: I don't know these consultants.

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AJ Harper: I have seen it all. It. There's so many things you can tell when someone's doing it.

Mike Michalowicz: Yeah,

AJ Harper: Yeah,

Mike Michalowicz: Yeah. Uh, yeah. But, but there's a lot of demands for these consultants. There's more than one out there.

AJ Harper: Oh, yeah.

Mike Michalowicz: And so clearly. People are willing to pay perhaps hundreds of thousands for that.

AJ Harper: Personally, I'm not, I, I don't see the ROI on that.

Mike Michalowicz: I don't, I've never seen the ROI on it.

AJ Harper: It's very, it's odd to me. Yeah. But again, if I had other goals, maybe it would make sense to me.

Mike Michalowicz: You, you know, I take it back. I'm saying I've never seen the ROI on it. I've seen some authors that come out of nowhere and they have some sustained activity, large speaking engagements and other stuff as a result.

AJ Harper: Sure, that could be the reason, and you would easily, if you could get, you know, 10 good keynotes, you got it covered.

Mike Michalowicz: Exactly. Exactly. Um, what, what's the quantity of books that need to be sold? How's, how's the details work for New York Times? Does that matter? You gotta sell more than a thousand that week.

AJ Harper: I mean, what? Just times that by 20.

Mike Michalowicz: It's okay, so 20,000 seems.

AJ Harper: I'm not saying it's exact. Don't quote me. Yeah. But I mean, it's a, it's, it's more than you think and I think, I think it's gotta be at least 20.

Mike Michalowicz: Okay. So at least 20,000. Um, does the genre matter, meaning if that's prescriptive nonfiction, it's 20. If it's a fiction book, it's 50.

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AJ Harper: Yeah. Everything's, yeah, everything's relative. Okay. It's all relative. And also the witch books are. Hot right now. And how fa-- how many are they selling? That's right. So you're, you're up against, you know, um, Atomic Habits forever, but then you get a big sensation like, um, what's the one? The Mel Robbins, um,

Mike Michalowicz: oh, Let Them.

AJ Harper: Let Them. So that's selling, that's not just on the list. That's selling. They're doing print, new print run after new print run after new print. Yeah. So if you got a phenomenon on there, then you. Like a real one. That's taking over the nation.

Mike Michalowicz: Yeah.

AJ Harper: Well, that's gonna be harder for you if you happen to launch during that time.

Mike Michalowicz: Yeah. It's, it is totally gonna affect you.

AJ Harper: Mm-hmm.

Mike Michalowicz: Um, is there any source for how to get on the New York Times?

AJ Harper: There's a lot of information out there.

Mike Michalowicz: Yeah. Yeah. It's probably always changing.

AJ Harper: We're sharing basically everything anyone's gonna tell you. And then the rest, if you are serious about it, you do probably need a consultant.

Mike Michalowicz: Yeah.

AJ Harper: Mm-hmm.

Mike Michalowicz: Okay. Uh, anything else on the New York Times we, we should move on to?

AJ Harper: No, we'll go on to the next one, USA today.

Mike Michalowicz: Walk me through it.

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AJ Harper: Well, again, I mean there's a lot of information out there, but it's the USA today. So New York Times is separated into different genres, but USA today is just the top 150 books.

Mike Michalowicz: Mm-hmm.

AJ Harper: So your book could be on there, mic with a picture book. And a cookbook. Oh, okay. And a young adult novel.

Mike Michalowicz: Interesting.

AJ Harper: And Colleen Hoover. And like it's, you know, it's uh, it's just a big grab bag of the 150 top selling books

Mike Michalowicz: I wanna mention Colleen Hoover. Um, her books are now. Diminished on, I don't see 'em at all on the Amazon top 100, where she was a constant for years in the top.

AJ Harper: Mm-hmm.

Mike Michalowicz: And I wonder if the TikTok fanfare over her has shifted onto something else.

AJ Harper: Yeah, everything just, everything's cyclical.

Mike Michalowicz: It's just so interesting.

AJ Harper: Yeah, it's, people burn out, you know, you kind of have to, in. In publishing, you have to plan for this. There's cycles all the time. You have to always be working on some new thing and be aware that there's gonna be moments in time when it's huge for you and moments when it's not.

Mike Michalowicz: Yeah. And she would've no influence over that. But someone like Stephen King, I suspect it came out with another horror novel and they, they seem to do it over and over again. He's extraordinary. And of course that's,

AJ Harper: Well, he's a very different writer than Colleen Hoover.

Mike Michalowicz: Yeah, he is true. So Colleen Hoover. It's a very different writer, just I think caught onto a certain moment at a certain time, yes. And just exploded. TikTok supported it, but now TikTok's attention's moved on to something else and it's, you can see it has such a negative effect. It doesn't seem like her books on their own are carrying her like a

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Stephen King would, uh, and just ongoing demand, it seems, just 'cause I don't see her in the top 100. She's probably the top one 50. You know, she's doing very well. I just don't see her in the top 100.

AJ Harper: I mean, I don't, I don't follow her well enough to know how much of this has to do with, I think she was pulling back for a while.

Mike Michalowicz: Oh, okay.

AJ Harper: Uh, I don't, but I don't, I don't read, honestly, haven't read a single word of one of her books.

Mike Michalowicz: I've read one just 'cause I, I wanted to,

AJ Harper: It's not my bag.

Mike Michalowicz: Totally. For, not for me either, but I was like, why is this so popular?

AJ Harper: I mean, I understand why it's popular. All I have to read is the way people will react to it. And the book descriptions. She has a, anyway, it doesn't matter. We can get into a whole thing about that. Anyway, hers was organic.

Mike Michalowicz: Mm-hmm.

AJ Harper: Brought on by TikTok. Mm-hmm. So she's not working with a consultant. No. Yeah. So anyway, the USA Today list, you need to sell thousands of books in one week. The same with the New York Times, but you can get on it more easily and it's not an editorial decision.

Mike Michalowicz: Just numbers.

AJ Harper: Again, best time is when you launch, but not necessarily. So I mentioned Dr. Sunita Sah's book, *Defy*. She launched in January and made the list in March. So it was. Again, it's that book people are talking about. We wanna write that book that people say, oh, you gotta read this. And so it was building in momentum.

She didn't even know she was on the list. In fact, Jen Kem, the other person who was on the list is the person who told me. And I told Sunita and she was in, uh, the UK. I was just saying, congrats, and she didn't know what I was talking about.

Mike Michalowicz: Wow.

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AJ Harper: So, because it, it, you know, you aren't necessarily looking when it's months out.

Mike Michalowicz: Did we talk about the book Inner Excellence and how it, it's skyrocketed.

AJ Harper: We haven't talked about it, but it's the co-- it's the football thing, right?

Mike Michalowicz: Yeah. Yeah. Isn't that a fascinating scenario? Because that book was actually out of print. Um, the print, the author bought back the rights from the publishing house.

AJ Harper: Oh, again, it's so not, I know. I was looking at it the other day and looking at the numbers.

Mike Michalowicz: This dude, uh, AJ Brown, he's a, on the team, the Eagles team, he's sitting on the sideline just skimming or reading the book and it's caught on television. And then, and it sells 300,000 copies within days. Within days.

AJ Harper: yeah. So that's, people try and replicate these things. You can't, it's, that's just,

Mike Michalowicz: I called the New York Jets and said, Hey, would someone take my book?

AJ Harper: The this again? That's the lightning in a bottle situation. But if you're gonna try and make the list, you really do need a strategy.

Mike Michalowicz: So, uh, yeah, this guy gets his book with a, on television through a football player. I got my book on television with, uh, Sister Wives and, uh, didn't sell a single copu.

AJ Harper: I mean, l. Listen to me.

AJ Harper: I still can't. I watched the episode and I can't. Like someone had an eagle eye.

Mike Michalowicz: Oh, to spot that.

AJ Harper: Yeah. So it's not like it was, yeah, it wasn't like some guy, like was reading like they were, all the sister wives were reading Profit First, you know?

Mike Michalowicz: Yeah.

AJ Harper: It wasn't, it wasn't in their laps.

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Mike Michalowicz: Um. So, all right, so now we, we talked about anything else about USA Today?

AJ Harper: No, just that I think that's a more doable for most people. It's fewer books.

Mike Michalowicz: Is the benefit basically the same? You can say you're a bestseller.

AJ Harper: You can say you, yeah. You can say you're a USA Today bestseller.

Mike Michalowicz: Yeah. Okay.

AJ Harper: Yeah.

Mike Michalowicz: Okay.

AJ Harper: I mean, I don't even know who reads USA Today. Anymore. .

Mike Michalowicz: Yeah, yeah No, I hear you. I hear you. Y

AJ Harper: You know, we're, we're losing lists. You know, it's becoming,

Mike Michalowicz: I've never really had an aspiration to be on a list. I think once we achieved it. I don't know. There's a little bit of a cynical side of me, so when someone else is like, oh, I'm a, I'm a bestseller, I'm like, oh, yeah, yeah. That's great.

AJ Harper: You know, you know what? I'd love to be, I'd love to be on the IndieBound list, Indie Bestsellers. Because it, the be the in independent bookstores are looking at that and going, oh, okay. I should, I should, I should stock it.

Mike Michalowicz: I remember once

AJ Harper: I wanna be on that list,

Mike Michalowicz: there's a bitter side of me. I was on a television show on. M-S-N-B-C. There was a show called It's Your Biz, or it's Your Business with JJ Ramberg, amazing host. And I'm in the green room and there's this guy and he just walks in and just, oh, I just didn't like it. Got all icky. And he goes, I'm so and so. And I'm like, I'm such and such. And he goes, I'm a bestselling author and this and that.

AJ Harper: Oh, that gross, gross, gross.

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Mike Michalowicz: Right? Gross. And I, he goes, what do you do? I said, oh, yeah, I've written, I called books and stuff, and I've never been a bestseller. I said, right, and just whatever. We get on the set and she goes, Hey, Mike, how's Profit First going?

And he looks at me, he goes, you wrote Profit First? I go, yeah, yeah. He goes, oh. He goes, you said you weren't a best seller. I said, no, it's, it's never been a best seller. He is like, oh. And then he starts arguing why my book's a bestseller? Because, you know, he had put himself in this corner. So I'm like, it hasn't, I'm like, I, it's not been on New York Times.

It's not been anywhere else. It's not a bestseller in that category. It sells well. I'm proud of the book. He goes, well, it's, it's really a bestseller. It's a, you know, I'm like, okay. That's, that's cynical me. I was, I planted the seed, a little bit of a logic bomb I planted in his back pocket, and it went, it went exploded.

AJ Harper: Yeah,

Mike Michalowicz: so I don't, I so cynical, Mike. I don't aspire to really be list.

AJ Harper: Okay. So then, then the question remains for this next book, which is in a more expanded readership. So I should say that getting on the list with business books is hard.

Mike Michalowicz: It is,

AJ Harper: you know, so you've got a more expanded readership for the next book and it's personal finance. And so are you gonna try?

Mike Michalowicz: Yeah, we're, I'm gonna try to sell the living hoo-ha out this book,

AJ Harper: But specifically to be on a list?

Mike Michalowicz: Not to be on a list. But we are gonna do everything to move massive volume of this book because it's the greatest way to be of service.

AJ Harper: Well, so then I would say to you, if you're not gonna work with a consultant to specifically get on the list.

Mike Michalowicz: No way.

AJ Harper: Okay. So if you're not gonna do that, you could still do some things to vary the sales so that you could do it organically, right? Not bought and sold. But you could do things where you, you know, you have people buying stuff from indie bookstores or buying stuff and just,

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Mike Michalowicz: We are gonna encourage that.

AJ Harper: Yeah. So you can split it up. You can try different things. Um, you never know. I mean.

Mike Michalowicz: You never know. And it may happen, but it's so, it's so not an aspiration of mine. It feels so much like it's just trying to buy my way on. So what, what, here's what I like to do. We have such a good marketing plan. Did you know they dedicated.

Oh, you were on that call. Leslie. Leslie Boodle. Yeah. So Leslie and I have a call Sunday, this Sunday, and we're going over the marketing plan in detail. What I wanna do is invite. Readers to buy on their preferred platform and to support small business. So I'll say, listen, the easy purchase is on Amazon, or maybe it's Barnes and Nobles, but there is a local bookstore in your community.

If you're willing to make the effort to buy it from them online or in person, it's gonna support them in a big way. So that's what I wanna encourage is the buyer to support the community in the way they see fit, if that helps get it on some ranking, great. If not, I think it's the right thing to do.

AJ Harper: Mm-hmm.

Mike Michalowicz: So that's what I'm just motivated to do.

AJ Harper: Yeah.

Mike Michalowicz: We're gonna have bulk buyers, you know, we're working with, um, we don't work with Porchlight historically.

AJ Harper: Is it Book Pal?

Mike Michalowicz: Book Pal. Love them because I, because I know, no, I've spoken with the president a few times. I can't remember his name at the moment. Just really good people and. They say, listen, if you have, like, there's this one group that's gonna buy 500 books. They say what we can do is process as individual orders. Um, if the buyer gives every

AJ Harper: Address,

Mike Michalowicz: Address, and we can ship it direct.

AJ Harper: Mm-hmm. So that's part of a plan, by the way.

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Mike Michalowicz: Yeah. It's part of a plan. And so that I'm gonna tell the, the bulk buyer, if it's easier for us to ship it, there's a fee for that. We can gladly accommodate that. So if that serves you better. We'll do that. And if you just prefer us to send you bulk books, then we'll do that. Like whatever serves a customer, you know.

AJ Harper: You're not going to get caught up in the whirlwind of trying to make the list.

Mike Michalowicz: No,

AJ Harper: It's just, it's, it's, you know what, it's all consuming. And I have to say, a lot of people are, they're really crushed because you put so much effort into it and so much money behind it, and to the exclusion of a lot of other mental bandwidth. So you're just, that's all you're thinking about. That's all your team is doing.

And then it doesn't happen because you can't control the editorial decision.

Mike Michalowicz: I just don't get it.

AJ Harper: So then, so then you're crushed. And I see people get even very depressed about it and it's, I wish they wouldn't happen 'cause they wrote a great book. I mean, what could be better than that?

Mike Michalowicz: I don't know why I am so cynical. I do. I have one experience why? And maybe this is part of, now,

AJ Harper: I want you to get it because I want to get it organically. So because you're being, you're saying I don't want it.

Mike Michalowicz: Yeah. And maybe that that's the best thing. So I talked to this guy, uh, Kevin O'Connor. Oh, I got such a great update about the TV show. Maybe we'll put it on next week's episode. Yeah, I'll do the next week. Okay. So Kevin O'Connor, you, you've heard of This Old House with Bob Viollet.

AJ Harper: His, I mean, that was the only thing on the tv. We've all seen it.

Mike Michalowicz: Good point.

AJ Harper: we've all seen it. Like who wanted to watch it though? You were like a

Mike Michalowicz: Repair radiators and put baseboard in.

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No, so Kevin O'Connor is the predecessor of Bob Villa. And I was talking to him because I was doing something with television and I needed a, uh, an attorney, a media entertainment attorney, and so my agent, my speaking agent, Lee Hayes of Go Lee Word says, oh, I represent Kevin O'Connor. He's got all these TV deals going on. Let me make an introduction.

He calls like 10 minutes later, nicest dude. And I said, Hey man, I, I haven't seen your show yet. I. By Did you, was it in the seventies? I'm like, how'd you get that? You, you must have worked hard. He's like, no, because I didn't wanna be on tv. He goes, I actually wanted to have my house done. So I called This Old House and said, Hey, would you do my house? And they took me up on it and they came and he goes, I got so involved in the project. They called me a few weeks later and said, you really like to do this stuff? He's like, yeah, like how about hosting the show? He's like. I don't know. I don't know if I want this, you know, how many people are starving to get on TV like I want in the worst way.

That I have the same feeling about this list. Is like there's a starving, get on it. And then when someone doesn't care and doesn't want it and gets it, I almost feel like that's the person who deserved it the most.

AJ Harper: Well, I don't know about that, but just 'cause it's, I think it's a good attitude to be.

I think, you know, you can just do your best and don't, don't be touched to the outcome.

Mike Michalowicz: Second story, uh, and maybe why I'm wired this way is a group called EO in New Jersey, Entrepreneurs Organization. Yeah, I've been in that for a long time. I'm no longer, but I was in it for 18 years. Like 10 years in, they said like, you gotta be president of our chapter.

And I'm like, no. It's like, it's, there's no thank you for this. It's all volunteers and all you get is all the disappointment and hatred, but it's, but it's so honorable. You can put in your resume, you're president of an EO chapter. I'm like, who cares?

And to me it's the same thing. It's like, yeah, I don't know.

That's why I'm so bitter.

AJ Harper: I, okay.

Mike Michalowicz: I'm bitter.

AJ Harper: I don't think you're bitter. I just think, I think it's a good, a good place to be. You wanna sell books, you wanna change lives. You know, you got other things you're worried about. You're on a mission.

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Mike Michalowicz: But I also, I, I'm judgey is what it is because when someone's like, I'm a New York Times bestseller, I'm like, are you?

AJ Harper: Okay.

Mike Michalowicz: You know what I'm saying?

AJ Harper: Well, once you understand how people pull strings to make that happen, it does make you feel a little bit jaded. But if you see someone who's consistently on the list respect, you know, like that book's selling really well.

Mike Michalowicz: Yeah. Oh, for sure.

AJ Harper: But also the New York Times has come under a lot of criticism for their choices.

Mike Michalowicz: Yeah.

AJ Harper: So do you really wanna be on a list where they decide that you're cool?

Mike Michalowicz: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

AJ Harper: I don't know, but can I, can I just say, I have to tell you, I'm so proud of my students that made it on the list. You know what I mean? And especially like, wait, especially when they're like, wait, I got on the list? You know?

Mike Michalowicz: That's the ones I love. Wait, I got on the list,

AJ Harper: but also, um, can I just, I need to say this out loud, so you know, I have my workshop again, by the way. It starts in, um, I think it's August 18th that we start the next workshop, which I only do once a year, and I have a few open slots, but my people are cleaning up the prestigious book awards. This, this, we're in— We're starting in the, uh, award season right now, which will go through June where a bunch of different awards happen, and it's just every day we're hearing about a new student of mine that's book finalist for this, won that, won that.

And I'm not talking like the dinky awards that are just, you know, a money maker for the award. People I'm talking about well-respected awards. And I just every day hear about how their books are making a difference. And anyway, so I just had to say that because that's what I'm, you know, if you can get that book that is just so awesome. You've written the best book you can. It's absolutely helping people. I mean that's really—

Mike Michalowicz: Yeah!

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AJ Harper: That's what we need to be proud of. And then you actually do get critical acclaim. You sell a lot of books, it does open doors for you, even without the lists. Uh, anyway, I just had to say that. And also to remind people that I have that workshop.

Mike Michalowicz: AJ harper.com.

AJ Harper: Yeah. I only take 15 students a year.

Mike Michalowicz: You've got to go.

AJ Harper: We are recording this in. April 1st. April 1st today?

Mike Michalowicz: Yeah.

AJ Harper: Yeah. We're recording this April 1st, and I think I have, uh, nine open slots, so by the time you hear this, that will not be the number, but, uh, anyway. I would love to.

Mike Michalowicz: You got to go.

AJ Harper: It's my students. It's a gauntlet. It's a, it's hardcore, but it is the only way to get me as a developmental editor. For 14 weeks.

Mike Michalowicz: And the best. The best work of your life will come out of you as an author because of that. Yeah. I'm, I'm so Got to go.

AJ Harper: so every time I get excited about who's coming in, because they're about to experience the beginning of that process where so many of my students now are publishing and getting awards and doing these things.

So the other day I actually said out loud, I love my life so much. I was, it was yesterday. I was go, uh, went on Bookshop.org to look for someone else's book, and there was this giant ad for one of my students. Her publisher had put a giant ad up, big giant banner on the top third of Bookshop.org and it was Ida Rose Florez, um, the end of education as we know it, and her publisher is New Society.

Mike Michalowicz: Wow.

AJ Harper: And I was like, oh my look, it's Ida Rose's Book! And I took a screenshot and that's amazing. You know this, that these lists are, they matter, but they don't. What matters is just putting the best book out. You best

Mike Michalowicz: you putting the best of you out there.

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AJ Harper: We have to talk before we close. We have Amazon have to do this because I used to keep quiet about this, but I don't keep quiet about it anymore.

Mike Michalowicz: Lay it on me.

AJ Harper: The Amazon bestseller list is lovely to get. But it is basically a scam.

Mike Michalowicz: Okay.

AJ Harper: I think it's total BS and I think anybody could get it. Simple, simple strategy. We'll, we can put a link in the show notes too. There's an article that just breaks down exactly how to do it. You could easily do it on your own. You shouldn't ever hire anybody If you really wanna get an Amazon bestseller. In a category, it's not difficult to do.

Mike Michalowicz: Anyone can do it. It's 20, it's 20 books.

AJ Harper: My beef with this is that people who help authors get to market, so book coaches or publishers, so-called publishers or self-publishing packages or book launchers, talk about all their best sellers. And it's this one time that a book was a bestseller in an obscure category for two days.

Mike Michalowicz: Mm-hmm.

AJ Harper: That's not a legit representation of success.

Mike Michalowicz: No, of course not.

AJ Harper: That's completely ego-driven and I think people... Number one, if you want it, don't pay for it. Number two, if you get it, please, dear Lord, do not put it in the bio.

Mike Michalowicz: Yeah,

AJ Harper: Do not put a big sticker on your book that says Amazon Bestseller, because in the industry most of us don't pay any attention to that. In fact,

Mike Michalowicz: And consumers don't pay much attention.

AJ Harper: Well, no. What I'm saying is it's a sign in the author community that you don't actually understand. Yeah. Yeah. Like to me, it's somebody who is not really part of the author community because they don't understand that that's not something that you that you brag about.

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Mike Michalowicz: So the, the quick way to gimmick it is, uh, you can call 20 or 30 friends and say, buy my book a certain hour. Yeah.

AJ Harper: Certain hour. You need the right category.

Mike Michalowicz: Yeah. Pick a category that's not popular. So, and all you have to do is for an hour be ranked higher than any other book in that specific, weird obscure category, and you get number one for that category. You take a screenshot and you're like, look at me. Um, that's different from the, uh, Amazon top 100. That's really hard to do.

AJ Harper: That's really hard to do. And you're probably getting a book deal after that. Yeah. If you self-published.

Mike Michalowicz: Um, another way to do this instead of calling friends is you host a webinar. So I do this, I host webinars. And invite people to buy the books. Um, now we don't. Get it for the Amazon bestseller. We get it to link other books together. So there's a strategy. I will tell you something to brag about. Profit First has 3,620 something days of number one.

AJ Harpers: Now that matters.

Mike Michalowicz: Yeah, it's sustained. Consecutive days. Sustained.

AJ Harper: And it's organically sustained, but also a, you taught me that, that little flag that says bestseller, that's more about buyer confidence than it is about your own ego. So I'm imploring everybody here. Please hear me. If a, somebody who's supporting you, whether it's a book launch coordinator or somebody who's helping you publish your book, touts that they have so many Amazon bestsellers, walk away. This is not a thing of value. And if you can get that on your own, if that's the thing that they think makes them special, it's a red flag.

Mike Michalowicz: Mm-hmm. The buyer confidence flag though. So when someone shops your book, there's this little triangle. There's the, the picture of your book, there is the quantity of reviews. The more reviews, the more confidence you get.

AJ Harper: You need at least three digits.

Mike Michalowicz: Yeah. At least three digits. Exactly. At least a hundred reviews. There is the stars, so that's your ranking. You need to be 4.5 or higher from people who have confidence. I mean, would you buy a product that's a three-star product? Probably not.

And the last thing is a best seller. So if it has a best seller, but they also have editors pick, there's a couple other flags they put up there. All those things exude confidence with the consumer. More likely to click on the buy button.

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AJ Harper: But, but I really, really, I hope everybody's listening. Let's not fall into this trap of number one Amazon bestseller.

Mike Michalowicz: And I'm saying, don't fall in any of these like traps I got where you're buying your way on. I just, I don't get it. I don't think it, if, if I could say it unequivocally moves more books, I would say, okay, I think that's a prudent purchase. I don't see any evidence identifying that, except for a few. But these are ancillary stories of someone that. Bought their way onto the list and I saw them give some big speaking gigs, and I don't even know if those are correlative.

AJ Harper: Yeah, I'm sure there are other doors that open. I, I do also think that, um, if you get on any of these lists organically, including Amazon category bestseller, celebrate.

Mike Michalowicz: Yeah,

AJ Harper: yeah. There's nothing wrong with saying, oh, totally, look what happened. How cool is that? But don't put that in your bio. Please remove them if you have it in your bio. Take it out.

Mike Michalowicz: Next week we're gonna talk about book development, all the pieces in the puzzle, everything you have to consider when you are developing your book. Uh, and then two weeks out, we're gonna talk about our own book. Um, I, I don't think we shared the title yet.

AJ Harper: I want you to know that you did, you put it in an email? And it was like this little, tiny whisper.

Mike Michalowicz: Okay. So we can say it then.

AJ Harper: Uh, I can't believe it after all this time we've been holding on. I'm like, oh, it's there it is. Right there. In the freaking email.

Mike Michalowicz: In the email. Okay.

AJ Harper: You need to announce it.

Mike Michalowicz: Alright, we'll announce it officially on the next episode. How's that sound? In case you didn't see that email. Thanks for joining us. Hey, I wanna invite you to go to our website. It's dwtb podcast. Dot com. We have a lot of free materials there. You can check out what AJ's doing with her workshop. Do go to [aj harper.com](http://ajharper.com). You know what? Skip dwtb podcast.com. Go to aj harper.com first.

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If you haven't been there, go there and bookmark the page. Please, please go to her training. It is life-changing. I'm going there for five days solo because it's that effective. Plus, if you go to dw.tb.podcast.com, you can join our email list here. Uh, reach out to us. We've. Readers reaching out often. We have someone who actually wants to sponsor the show.

You can go to Hello or email us at hello@dwbpodcast.com. If you're interested in AJ's work. Of course, we'll respond to that there too. Um, simplified is the name of my imprint with page two. If you're an entrepreneur, author, love to talk with you, just email us there. Thanks for joining us today. We'll see you on next week's episode, and as a constant reminder, don't write that book.

Write the greatest book you can.