

don't write *that* book!

Episode 82:

“How to Craft a Reader Statement”

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. There is a book you've got to read, it's called *Burned*, it's by Julie Bee. *Burned, How Business Owners Can Overcome Burnout and Fuel Success*. It's listed on the website and Amazon, of course, and also other bookstores.

Our buddy, our mutual buddy Brian Herriott, and there's a marketing tip here.

AJ Harper: He left a review.

Mike Michalowicz: Yeah. But, a video review.

AJ Harper: Oh, a video review. I'm going to go see that.

Mike Michalowicz: Video reviews attract attention. So, when you're writing a book, make sure to get people to leave video reviews. But this book specifically, Julie Bee's book, you said, AJ that writing a book is like—

AJ Harper: It's a business.

Mike Michalowicz: It's like a business.

AJ Harper: Yeah, so she's talking about helping you avoid burnout. I like what she's talking about, without burning it to the ground.

Mike Michalowicz: Yeah.

AJ Harper: We burn out too frequently, we burn out, and then we just quit. And that happens with authorship. It sounds like a book authors need to read.

Mike Michalowicz: Yeah. Well, that's just it. Because if you're an author, you're also an entrepreneur. You have created a product that you have to promote. And burnout is one of the most dangerous things because you give up on something that could have such great impact.

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AJ Harper: Yeah, and she has a lot of experience helping entrepreneurs love their business again.

Mike Michalowicz: She is the one to read, that's Julie Bee's book, *Burned*. Go read it.

Did you ever have like a nickname? So mine was... I wasn't called Bucko by, I heard other people call someone Bucko. And I, I, I jumped onto that. I like that.

AJ Harper: You called yourself Bucko?

Mike Michalowicz: No, no, no.

AJ Harper: So in the morning you look in the mirror and say,

Mike Michalowicz: [laughs] You got it, Bucko. Today's your day. Bucko. No, I calling other people Bucko or Chiefy.

AJ Harper: Chiefy.

Mike Michalowicz: Chiefy. That was, uh, there was this guy Rob, I used to work with years and years ago and he, he'd be, good morning Chiefy. I'm like, oh, that, that's, it's kind of cute.

AJ Harper: So you plagiarize the nicknames?

Mike Michalowicz: Oh. Yeah. I can't, I'm not inventive enough.

AJ Harper: But how do you have a name like Michalowicz and not have a nickname?

Mike Michalowicz: Oh, I do. They're this R or X rated.

AJ Harper: Okay. So growing up I was, uh, well, Annie is my nickname, and my family uses it. My wife uses it, because nobody could say Anjanette and I couldn't either. As a toddler. But my friends in grade school called me Muggsy.

Mike Michalowicz: Oh, Muggsy, that's a good one.

AJ Harper: And it's because my given name, you know, I changed my name when I was an adult to my mom's maiden name, but my dad's name is Mughli.

Mike Michalowicz: Mughli.

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AJ Harper: Yeah. Mug. So they would call me Muggsy.

Mike Michalowicz: Yeah. That's not bad. Yeah. That's a term of endearment.

AJ Harper: I've also had, um, my son's father, when we were in high school, he would say, uh, Jammin' it.

Mike Michalowicz: That's cute.

AJ Harper: Yeah. So just, you know, I have a, my, I had a lot of nicknames. Yeah. 'cause my name name is unusual.

Mike Michalowicz: Yeah. I call it my daughter. I give my kids nicknames. So, uh, my daughter is Slappy. Uh, my oldest son is Palsy Walsy, and then my youngest son is, um, is [noise].

AJ Harper: What now?

Mike Michalowicz: Bra, bro, but Okay. Bastardized. Totally.

AJ Harper: Even shorter

Mike Michalowicz: Br. Bruh.

AJ Harper: Okay. That's interesting. I wonder if that's a dad thing because Polly's, my wife's dad, my father-in-law, Fred Flint. That is his name.

Mike Michalowicz: Oh gosh. And he was a stoner,

AJ Harper: Not, not even close. Um, used to be a sportswriter and he was a newspaper man. Anyway, Fred Flint loves to give these obscure nicknames, so like, um, I've heard him call, uh, he used to call Polly Standard Buddy. What the heck is that?

Mike Michalowicz: Standard buddy.

AJ Harper: Where's that come from? Standard buddy. I once heard him call his wife, my mother-in-law, Zika. As in the virus.

Mike Michalowicz: Oh my gosh.

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AJ Harper: Like, you know, he says the strangest name. It just come out of him outta nowhere and it never remains the same.

Mike Michalowicz: So I, I use The Money Habit for, I go on a trip with one of my children each year. Father-child trip. So this year I've been saving for three years. Jake and I went to the Final Four. It's the basketball championship in, uh, San Antonio. And we're down there and one of the players, for Florida. His last name is Haw. At least I thought it was. So I'm like, hee-haw. So every time you shoot, I'm like, hee-haw, made a shot. So my son and I are calling him Hee-Haw. Oh, then the announcer comes on. It's How,

AJ Harper: Oh, so you've been just as obnoxious people.

Mike Michalowicz: Obnoxious people. And we had his name wrong. All right. You are listening to. Don't Write That Book. And, uh, I'm joined in studio with my co-host, AJ Harper. I'm Mike Michalowicz.

AJ, I just admire your love that you have for authors. And listen, if you haven't binged on every single episode, just do it and you'll be showered with AJ's love. So thank you for being my co-host.

AJ Harper: Yeah, ditto. I think you have the same love for the same authors.

Mike Michalowicz: I do.

AJ Harper: You love authors, you love talking to authors. You love being an author.

Mike Michalowicz: I think authors rule, it's the ultimate platform for expression for service. Yeah, I, and it's been around forever, ever since the written words existed. I mean, the first book was probably on a cave wall, but someone wrote something. Um, I do have a couple updates I promised from last week's episode.

I got a surprise for you, AJ. I got a call yesterday from The Atlantic.

AJ Harper: No!

Mike Michalowicz: I was interviewed yesterday for a half hour, and they had read one of the blog posts I created about tariffs and. It, it points to the power that, you know, blogs still may work to some degree. So I had written with tariffs coming about. I saw some journalists requesting information about, says, oh, I should write a podcast, uh, blog about this. I came up with some basic ideas, gave over to Jenna. Jenna, I. Is the ghost, if you will, for our blog writing. She's really good and just wrote this really simple, accessible but actionable strategy.

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Like, here's what it is, here's the implications, but here's what you can do as a small business owner. And the Atlantic calls and says, we loved that blog post, and they said, we'd like to interview you on it. So it's there were, there were my ideas. She codified it in a really well written way, and then I did the interview. Uh. They said it's gonna be 10 minutes, went for a half hour and um, we'll see. We'll see.

AJ Harper: Oh yeah. Send me a link when that comes out.

Mike Michalowicz: Yeah. Yeah. So that's one update. Uh, update number two is we got the royalties. They came in. It's that time of year.

AJ Harper: Yeah.

Mike Michalowicz: And what's interesting is on all the books we've done together that are published by Penguin, we get royalties the last day of the month or the first day of the month, except for All In, which is a profit share. And they go through these calculations and stuff. So it's delayed by... So it's kind of like this little bonus booster shot. You're like, oh, nice royalty check. I mean, it was, it was a low six figures, but six figures of royalties and then boom, there's another like chunk of money.

It was nice. And the last thing, uh, is last update is the bonus chapter for The Money Habit. I was working on that for about a week. I. I'm just really proud of it. Really put a lot of time into it. Send it over to you, and you're like, damn, this is pretty good. Thanks for that feedback.

I'm always embarrassed by the typos I make. Uh, I can't, whatever. That's not a big deal. But, um, and I sent it back to you. And then you're gonna send it back to me one more time. I'm gonna send it over to Kendra, our editor, with her permission, because it's not part of the core book, but it is, it's gotta work in total synchronicity with the book.

AJ Harper: Sure. I think you should.

Mike Michalowicz: And I, the, the part I struggled with that chapter, it's the big reveal and it needs to happen after you read the book. So the fact that it's delayed is, is perfect, was what is the story I'm gonna share? And I'm sitting in my plunge pool, thinking like what? What's like something that like most people wouldn't buy, and what, and I'm sitting, I'm like, I'm sitting in it trying to think of what it is.

It was like, sometimes they say it's in your face. It was enveloped around me like, oh, this of course is the story. It's so ridiculous what I did.

AJ Harper: You realize that you talk about your plunge pool on almost every episode

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Mike Michalowicz: They say plungers like, can't stop talking about that. The world has to know, like, that's not me.

I talk about more than any other plunger combined.

All right, so today we're gonna talk about reader statements and this is something that we spend a pretty extraordinary amount of time on. It doesn't necessarily just pop up to the point where we actually even refined it further this morning.

AJ Harper: Mm-hmm.

Mike Michalowicz: What is the reader statement?

AJ Harper: So this is something that I developed as a ghost writer. I developed a set of fundamentals to help me get clarity when I was working with authors. So the book fundamentals are a reader statement, a core message that's transformational on its own, and a promise that can be delivered by the end of the book. Those are the three fundamentals. It's the base of everything I teach, but it all starts with the reader statement because we're putting the reader first and everything comes from that place.

And I had, I developed this for myself so that I had a good filter and compass while I was working on a book. Without that clarity, it's actually really hard to write a good book. So the reader statement is the first part, and it is what you know about the reader and it's it, there's four parts to it. It's pretty easy to put together in theory, but it takes a little bit of effort because most of the time we can't get out of our own head of what we think the reader should be feeling, should be thinking, should want. And we intellectualize everything. So it takes a lot of revision to get down to something that's super accessible, um, and help and gives you the clarity you need to write it.

Mike Michalowicz: What? You said there's four parts. What, what are the four parts?

AJ Harper: So, uh, who they are. Demographics.

Mike Michalowicz: Okay.

AJ Harper: And let's be clear, this does not mean women aged 45 to 70 who drive a Toyota and never went to college and really like, you know competitive puzzles. You know, it's not, we're not going for the granular.

It could be just as simple. Yours, for example, your demographics for most of your books, not the Money Habit.

Mike Michalowicz: Yeah.

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AJ Harper: But all the other books. The who, the demographic is just underdog entrepreneurs. Right. It's not, there's no other qualifiers.

Mike Michalowicz: Right.

AJ Harper: For me, for write a must read it's authors and aspiring authors.

That's it. Okay. Okay.

Mike Michalowicz: Super clear, but it is inclusive, exclusive. Either you're in it or you're out of it, but it's not overladen with specificity.

AJ Harper: No, because what happens is, and sometimes you do need the specificity, but you have to ask yourself, do I really need it? You know, you might decide to say, um, use the word say, I'm writing for... I am writing for—

Mike Michalowicz: Could be teens.

AJ Harper: Could be teens, but then what if you threw in teens from broken homes?

Mike Michalowicz: Yeah.

AJ Harper: Right.

Mike Michalowicz: Yeah.

AJ Harper: Unless the book is specifically for teens from broken homes, then you're limiting the audience. But what if the message you have to share is more about a general wellness or something?

Mike Michalowicz: I understand.

AJ Harper: Right. So what if you're dealing with depression or some, or anxiety, why does it have to be from broken homes?

Mike Michalowicz: I, I, okay, I gotcha.

AJ Harper: So you're getting too specific, the granular then people self-select out.

Mike Michalowicz: Yes.

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AJ Harper: And I see that a lot when people use words like ambitious.

Mike Michalowicz: Interesting.

AJ Harper: This a, there's a buzz word that some people are uncomfortable calling them, especially women on calling themselves ambitious

Mike Michalowicz: and you've excluded now your readers. So the reader statement part, one of the four parts is the who?

AJ Harper: Very simple. And then the second part is what they want. Okay? And this is the page one desire. We did a whole episode on this, if you wanna look backtrack on that. But to be clear. It is not what you think they want, and it is what they want on page one of the book, meaning they open it and they start reading it, and if they were to tell you what they want, it would be that thing.

Mike Michalowicz: And why is it so important to be on page one?

AJ Harper: Because they have to, you have to show that you understand who they are and what they want. They have to feel seen and heard and understood by you.

Mike Michalowicz: Oh, it's beautiful.

AJ Harper: And if you don't, if you can't articulate that, then you're not knocking that outta the park. They might give you some grace. But if you can nail it and say, I see you, I see this thing you want, or this problem you wanna solve, right? Then it's an immediate connection. It's also part of why they bought the book in the freaking first place,

Mike Michalowicz: Right.

AJ Harper: Yeah.

Mike Michalowicz: So, okay, so who, want...

AJ Harper: And then page one desire. Yep.

Mike Michalowicz: Right.

AJ Harper: And then the third one is what they think prevents them from getting what they want.

Mike Michalowicz: Okay.

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AJ Harper: Perceived problem. So this is where a lot of authors screw up. They'll put in the problem they think it is that the author believes it is, but that's actually not necessarily what the reader thinks it is.

Mike Michalowicz: This is gold.

AJ Harper: This, this is the, this is right here where? Where books go off the rails. Yeah. Okay. I can't tell you how many times when I'm working with students, I have to say, okay, let's pull that back. Is that, is that what you think it, you're giving me a really long list here, and that's another thing I'll tell you in a moment.

And it's very intellectual and it sounds like you, so I don't think that's them. So we have to pull it back. What would they say? One of the things I like to say is, okay, your friends are just sitting around having coffee and they say, oh, I, I really want this, but you know, I just can't... What? Yeah. Or this thing keeps happening and it's this.

Mike Michalowicz: Yeah.

AJ Harper: Or I never can... What?

Mike Michalowicz: That's brilliant.

AJ Harper: What, what's the barrier that they would say to a friend? Why can't I just, that's keeping them from what they want. What's that language?

Mike Michalowicz: So I can see this being a trap for the author because I am teaching the solution. So I know the quote unquote real problem.

AJ Harper: Mm-hmm.

Mike Michalowicz: And so I may have this bias, but I'm seeing past the problem that they're identifying with.

AJ Harper: Correct.

Mike Michalowicz: So how do you, if, if you're past their problem, how do you identify it? How, how do you fix your own guidance on what it should be?

AJ Harper: So if you're working with them really closely, you probably know.

Mike Michalowicz: Mm-hmm.

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AJ Harper: They're coming in and asking you the same questions. And they have the same complaints.

Mike Michalowicz: Oh, okay. Yeah,

AJ Harper: They have the same issues. But you know, you can just, honestly, it's as simple as a social media poll. Yeah.

Mike Michalowicz: It really is that simple.

AJ Harper: Yeah, it's, you know, hey, if you're, you know, if this is some, if this is your goal, so that would be the thing they want. If this is your goal, what is keeping you from that goal? What are the top things that are keeping you, or if you don't wanna mention the goal, what are the, what's the number one problem you wanna fix right now? You could just go on social media and ask, and if you don't think your readers are following you on social media, you don't have a big enough network ask a friend to post it for you.

Mike Michalowicz: Mm-hmm.

AJ Harper: And sometimes people don't wanna share the truth, so let people DM you. You know, or make an anonymous survey because then they don't have to say it in a comment where other people are seeing it. Sometimes people don't wanna share their problems.

Mike Michalowicz: You can use, uh, Gemini, ChatGPT now too, and you can say, scour the web to identify what the most common vocalized concern is about something.

AJ Harper: So you could, and I would still encourage the social media trick because it's people giving you their own words in that moment.

Mike Michalowicz: That's right. That's right.

AJ Harper: Reddit works too for that.

Mike Michalowicz: And they're also more your tribe on social media. As opposed to a generalization.

AJ Harper: That's how you can also find the page one desire. By the way, sometimes people aren't sure what their people want, and you have to know.

Mike Michalowicz: Yeah.

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AJ Harper: How are you gonna write a prescriptive nonfiction book and not know. Yeah, how? How can that be? How can that be? But so many books are written that way because we think we know what people should want and what the problem is, and we get, we're not thinking of them. We're really not. We just think we know best. So you can go in and say, what's the number one goal you have this year? What's your biggest want right now for your business, for your marriage, for your body, for your friendship group, whatever the focus is for your book.

Mike Michalowicz: Hmm. Okay. So we have the hoots for the want they have. The problem as they see it. What's the fourth component?

AJ Harper: The problem as you see it. Which we call the real problem.

Mike Michalowicz: Okay.

AJ Harper: Because the first aha in your book is when you show them, I see you. I understand. Yes, I know that's the problem. But did you know it's actually this other thing?

Mike Michalowicz: Does it need to be something that they're like, oh my gosh. Does it have to shock them into awareness at that moment?

AJ Harper: Well, ultimately it will.

Mike Michalowicz: Okay.

AJ Harper: Because what that fourth part becomes later, and I'm, I'm this, I'm a little bit sneaky like this. It becomes the seed of core message later of what the, the main mindset shift you want them to make.

And sometimes the main mindset shift is around seeing the problem is really something else. But sometimes the main mindset shift is how you deal with the problem. In your case, for *The Money Habit*, it's. It's a shift in what the real problem is. Mm. Your core message is actually a shift in what the real problem is because the perception for your, well, we should, let's read it. Let's, let's do your,

Mike Michalowicz: Yeah. Do you want me to read it or do you wanna read it?

AJ Harper: Yeah, you go ahead. It's your book.

Mike Michalowicz: So our book says, as a reader statement, I am writing for people who never want to worry about money again, but they don't think they will ever have enough money to get there and do not realize that the key to stress-free finances is cash clarity.

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AJ Harper: Yeah. So they think the problem is, so they want, they never wanna worry about money again. That's a really clean distinction, but we didn't come up with that right away. What's the thing you would think you would put, people who want financial freedom

Mike Michalowicz: Usually be rich.

AJ Harper: Yeah. Wanna be rich. I want financial freedom. Right. But you had done enough work with the individuals that we were testing the money habit system with, and they just don't wanna worry.

Mike Michalowicz: Yeah. And you can use the why the three why's. So when someone says. What they want. Ask them why. And then when they say that, ask 'em why three times. So you ask someone--

AJ Harper: You get to the reason behind. The reason.

Mike Michalowicz: The reason behind the reason. And you get to the core reason. If you ask why too much. It always ends up in the word love, by the way. I found out like, why do you wanna be rich? So I never have to worry about money again? Why do you wanna not worry about money again? Because it avoids stress. Why do you wanna be stress free? 'cause I'd be more present with my family. Why do you want? Because love at the end of the day 'cause love.

AJ Harper: Because love is a great book title, by the way. Because love.

Mike Michalowicz: Oh my gosh. Because love.

AJ Harper: Ah!

Mike Michalowicz: yeah. So that's,

AJ Harper: Someone should use that.

Mike Michalowicz: That's ours, man. That's ours, dude. But the, uh, never worry about money again. They, they started revolving around. So by the three, three why's, you start revolving a little bit around the core reason. And if you dig too deep, you're gonna get to love. But, um, we were revolving around it. And when people were saying they wanted to get rich or wanted to be wealthy, um, I'd ask 'em why. And inevitably it was because they wanted to be worry free.

AJ Harper: Yeah. And that, so you want that, that's gonna hit them in the gut. So when they hear it. Yeah, that's, yes, that's right. I don't wanna be, and then the second part was they

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think they need a lot of money to do it, so that's why they said Rich in the first place. I'm never gonna have enough money to be worry free.

Mike Michalowicz: Yeah. And what's interesting about that research experience was that's the solution. They're applying and never getting there. It's the hamster wheel. So I think in many cases, tell me if this is true, their, the thinking they have that's prevailing from getting there is often a hamster wheel.

And then when it's not working, they say, I'm not doing it well enough. I'm not doing it hard enough. I'm not doing it strong enough. I don't have the discipline. And they stay on that hamster wheel.

AJ Harper: And also I think a lot of people just have money stories around whether or not they'll ever get to have it. You know, there's so much.

Mike Michalowicz: Yeah. But I'm saying the, this is true for not just money, for any situation where the solution they think is working when it's not working.

AJ Harper: Oh, I see what you mean, now.

Mike Michalowicz: they say, I gotta do it harder. They, they don't seek the alternative path. They seek doing the current path and they have a reason for... Yeah.

You know what I'm saying?

AJ Harper: And in this case, they have, they have misinterpreted what the problem is. Yes. Because they equate being worry free with having a lot of money. And you know that the real problem is that they don't have clarity over their cash.

Mike Michalowicz: Yeah.

AJ Harper: And it's not. So that actually frees them from the burden of being rich.

Mike Michalowicz: Yeah.

AJ Harper: So in that way, this is a big game changer. Yeah. It's so, so that's the reader's statement and that's total clarity for you as an author.

Mike Michalowicz: The reader statement, does it change? We didn't nail it the first go around. Does it change over time as you're writing the book, even?

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AJ Harper: It can. I mean, I've had students who wrote a good part of their book and then came to me and said, I'm so embarrassed, but I, I think I have the wrong reader.

Mike Michalowicz: Mm-hmm.

AJ Harper: Like, there's nothing to be embarrassed about.

Mike Michalowicz: They discovered it.

AJ Harper: Okay. Would you rather have published it and you had the wrong reader?

Mike Michalowicz: Yeah.

AJ Harper: And yes, it is work to go back, but it's not as much work as you'd think. It's usually not a tear down, but pretty significant editing. But that's okay, you know?

But this is why we need to spend time getting this clarity in the beginning, because if you try and write the book without this clarity, you are missing the mark and missing the mark and missing the mark, then you're more likely to have a tear down or worse, a book that absolutely does not land with readers.

Mike Michalowicz: Yeah, scattered. It doesn't really know where it's going.

AJ Harper: Your people aren't feeling like they need it, like there's no urgency.

Mike Michalowicz: Mm-hmm.

AJ Harper: They aren't feeling like this person sees me when they open it and start reading it, they're not gonna finish it.

Mike Michalowicz: You said the reader statement comes before the core message?

AJ Harper: Yes.

Mike Michalowicz: Why? I know you said the, because the readers first, but is there more to it?

AJ Harper: Yeah, because the core message needs to speak to solving that problem and the mindset shift people need to make in order to bring about that change. Okay. It's all connected.

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Mike Michalowicz: I'm curious, when you're going, when, when you're writing, when you're editing, is that core message something you, you look at each time before you start the editorial process? Is that your anchor? How does it serve you as you--

AJ Harper: You write the whole book around it.

Mike Michalowicz: Yeah. But how are you actually technically using it? Do you just see it before you do a, a day writing or, or you just have it so ingrained in you, you just know—

AJ Harper: It's so ingrained.

Mike Michalowicz: Okay.

AJ Harper: Listen; I get book fundamentals when I work with students in my workshop, it's at least two weeks, sometimes three before they really get it. And that's with one-on-ones with me, where I'm giving them feedback and they're continuing to work on it. It's not an instant thing. It takes a little, and it could take longer if you don't have that work, you know, have me to bounce it off of, you know?

Mike Michalowicz: Yeah.

AJ Harper: So you have... Development takes longer than you think. By the time you're done with it, you have so earned those book fundamentals that you remember 'em. But I always tell people, write them on a post-it. Stick 'em in your wallet, stick 'em in your car, stick 'em on your, in your computer. Just you have to get used to what they are, saying them feeling natural when you say them.

So by that time you absolutely, when you're writing, you know it.

Mike Michalowicz: Do you know if I shared the Savannah Banana story with the girls' shoes at the conference table? Does that ring a bell?

AJ Harper: There's so many Savannah Banana stories.

Mike Michalowicz: I'll do it real quick, I just don't wanna belabor it. If I shared on the show before, but Jesse and Emily Cole, uh, hosted a game in Savannah and when they were cleaning out the stadium and, and now these are massive games.

5,000 people for a minor league game. Now they, Jesse just sent me a video two weeks ago. They hosted their biggest game, 75,000 people (Wow) At some major park. And he said Thank you to prophet first. Actually, I gotta show you the video during our break. It got me emotional. Um, but. At a Savannah's game, someone left these little girl shoes here and they realized this family was so into the game.

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They were having so much fun and so excited, the whole family, that they actually left the stadium and forgot her shoes. They kept the shoes and they have 'em at the conference table, and there's one dedicated chair at the conference table that no one's allowed to sit at. And the shoe sit in front of it and they point to that shoe before every meeting those shoes and say, we're here to serve her.

We're here to make this event so fun that you forget your clothes, you know that you're not on your phone, and are we serving? That's kind of their core message. They keep on looking back to, it's an anchor.

AJ Harper: I think his core message is about that it's that it's the entertainment factor. It's not the game.

Mike Michalowicz: That's right. It's not about the game.

AJ Harper: Yeah. That I think they have would be his core message.

Mike Michalowicz: But they have this, in this case, it is very much a mnemonic to look at as a memory point, and I'm hearing as an author you, you just have it ingrained in you, but you're working on so many books. I wonder how you stay on it.

Do you have to kind of go through the zen moment to get anchored?

AJ Harper: No. I have a weird, like, um, recollection. I, I can even recall if a, if I haven't talked to an author in a long time and they come in for live edit. And I do their live edit. I'll say. What about that paragraph that you had in the last version?

I have no idea how I remembered that. And it was months ago.

Mike Michalowicz: Oh my gosh. Live edit.

AJ Harper: I just think my brain is like that.

Mike Michalowicz: If someone listening in wants to do live edits with you, they have to be a part of your organization.

AJ Harper: They have to be in the workshop. That's where I do it.

Mike Michalowicz: Okay. How do they sign up for the workshop?

AJ Harper: AJ harper.com, but I only take 15 students a year or so, hustle.

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Mike Michalowicz: Oh, so these live edits are only 15 people. And the alumni maybe.

AJ Harper: And the alumni. And then once you're an alumni. So we're going a little, I will explain this briefly once you're an alumni, what I do with my workshop that's kind of different is all my alumni can audit all future workshops for free.

And they can stay in my sprint community for free, which means they can have life writing, sprint for life, unless, you know, they do something that I don't, you know,

Mike Michalowicz: Something inappropriate?

AJ Harper: No, that's, no—

Mike Michalowicz: Like, juicy story coming.

AJ Harper: No, no, no. I'm just, it's fine. We're, we're, everybody's good. Um, but then, there's a membership that's only for alums, so you can't even be a member. It's called Author Collective.

Mike Michalowicz: Oh, cool.

AJ Harper: And but the reason is they all have the shared knowledge, so I, I'm not teaching, you know what I mean? So now we do live edit every single week, every single Thursday, and they can sign up for those whenever they want.

Mike Michalowicz: You've had authors that stuck around for a long time. There was a guy, Josh Spodek or something?

AJ Harper: Oh, Josh, yeah. Yeah. I just saw him yesterday. He was, uh, coming to a class.

Mike Michalowicz: Yeah. I've watched a transformation of his work. Um, I connected with him through your group, maybe five years ago, maybe even more. And, uh, he's very, his focus is environmental responsibility.

AJ Harper: Yes.

Mike Michalowicz: As a, as a generalist. Um. He lives in New York City.

AJ Harper: Yep. He lives off the grid.

Mike Michalowicz: Off the grid!

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AJ Harper: In an apartment in the West Village.

Mike Michalowicz: The, the story is so transformative and he, he didn't talk much about it in the beginning. I didn't even know this. And he said one day, I wanna see if I can go off the grid. And he found a way to do it in New York City. Um, it's, it's a remarkable story. And I watched the arc of his writing and how he took these really complex concepts he had. He's just, he's consistently compressed it, compressed it made more accessible, more accessible. And he then did a challenge. And sure enough, I joined the challenge.

AJ Harper: You did?

Mike Michalowicz: Yeah. He goes, I goes, I used to be like, you know, you gotta stand on a, a, a soapbox and, and preach to the world. He goes, you know what? Don't do that. He goes, whatever you think is appropriate, that you can have a small impact in serving our environment. Just, just do it. Mike,

AJ Harper: What'd you do?

Mike Michalowicz: Start picking up garbage here in Booton. So every time I walk in, aw I, my little clippers, I've been doing it for three years now, and the magic moment, thank you, Josh. If he's listening in, I'm walking down main street after year two to students, I got my little pickup, you know, you squeeze the handle and it has that little clot, the end, and you pick up garbage that way.

I advance that level, I'm picking up garbage. And this woman walks by with a child and the girl goes, mommy, what? What's he doing? The mom goes, oh, he's just picking up garbage. And she's like, I wanna pick up garbage mom.

AJ Harper: Oh.

Mike Michalowicz: I was like, oh my God, Josh, look what you did.

AJ Harper: I should tell him. I just saw him the other day. He's working on a new book. His book is Sustainability Simplified. He's been in the New York Times. He was on The Daily Show.

Mike Michalowicz: Wow.

AJ Harper: He is amazing and, uh, you should check out his book.

Mike Michalowicz: What would you say? Just leaning into Josh a little bit, his reader statement.

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AJ Harper: I don't know his reader statement off the top of my head.

Mike Michalowicz: Mm.

AJ Harper: Um, apologies to Josh, but I don't have that one memorized. But he's, you know, people, I can say this, he's writing for people who wanna change--

Mike Michalowicz: Yeah.

AJ Harper: --the climate who wanna do something to help our planet, but it seems too much. Right? That's what I thought, that they can't make a real difference. And um, that's the first, those are the first parts.

Mike Michalowicz: That's what I, I think of one thing of Josh. Yeah.

AJ Harper: Yeah, I don't have it exactly as he would word it exactly, but that's, I think, who his reader is for sure.

Mike Michalowicz: And I experienced it. 'cause just talking with him, I was like, this is just, I want to. Participate. It's so overwhelming. It's too big, it's too daunting, and the response was effectively, well then you'll never get started. So here's the easiest way to start. Just pick one.

AJ Harper: One thing I love about him is that his core message is totally disruptive because it's around the joyful act, like how much joy it brings you? Because we see it as a pen, um, like, almost like, um, chore that we have to go, you know? (Yeah.) Do whatever we have to do to help save the climate, save the planet.

And he, and he sees it as a joyful way of life and he wants people to see how much pleasure it gives you. Yeah. And that's such a disruptive way of thinking. And his whole book is built around that.

Mike Michalowicz: Remarkable. Yeah.

AJ Harper: Check it out, Josh Spodek.

Mike Michalowicz: Okay, so the reader statement, it, it gives us clarity. We know there are four elements now. Um, what are the ways you use it? Why do we need it?

AJ Harper: So you need to be able to talk about your book with others. So that's, that's one. And have you ever listened to somebody answer when they ask, what's your book about? Blah, blah. Go on and on and on. (Yeah.) So all you need to do is flip it.

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Mike Michalowicz: Yeah.

AJ Harper: And you say, my book is for. You don't have to say it's about, 'cause if you say it's about people aren't gonna connect in the same way, they'll say, oh, that's cool.

Mike Michalowicz: Yeah.

AJ Harper: If you say it's for people who never wanna worry about money again. But they're worried that they're never gonna make enough to make that happen.

Mike Michalowicz: Yeah. It's like, oh, I'm in.

AJ Harper: Then what you have see, like that's a whole 'nother thing. Then people lean in, you're looking for the lean in, and then when people say, that's me, or they say, when here's your book available. That's what we call a pre-order, pre-order request. That's the sure sign. Or they say, I know someone who needs that. When is your book available? And that's what we need is an emotional resonance. So the reader statement, you know, I'm not a fan of the marketing avatar. The reader statement is simplified because you're writing for a group of people who want something that similar and have a similar perceived problem, and that is it.

Mike Michalowicz: Mm-hmm.

AJ Harper: It's not a long thing about creating some character you're writing for.

Mike Michalowicz: And they think the problem is unique to them. In many cases, it's, it's something. That it's, I dunno if it's a shame associated with it, but they're like, everyone else has this right? How come I don't?

AJ Harper: Yeah. So

Mike Michalowicz: Often the situation.

AJ Harper: You need that emotional gut punch when they hear those first three parts of it.

Mike Michalowicz: When people ask me like, what's Profit First about, uh, I I've, maybe this is not the reader statement as we typed it, but what I'll say is, uh. I'll say, it's so funny, the vast majority of people start businesses to make money and they never make a dime. And you know, the reason why is they think the bottom line is profit.

And they're like, isn't it? And I'm like, no, that's the whole problem.

AJ Harper: So that's you introducing core message?

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Mike Michalowicz: Yeah. Oh, is the, okay. How's that different than, and then I go on to explain, profit has to come first. You know, we, we think it's the bottom line, but in reality it come first.

AJ Harper: Yeah. You just setup the core message by doing that.

Mike Michalowicz: Yeah. It's just really interesting because it. In their mind, you can see them saying, yep, yep, yep. Whoa, wait.

AJ Harper: Yeah, you can. Yeah. And that's the hook. So the reader's statement though is who it's for. And so you also not only need to talk about it with others, but you need to pitch it. You're gonna have to pitch it to someone. And it might be a publisher, it might be an agent. Yep. Maybe you need a sponsor.

Mike Michalowicz: Mm-hmm.

AJ Harper: Um, and I'm gonna tell you. One of the things that a lot of publishers tell me, the same thing is when I send them a, an author who came through my workshop. And they'll say, I can't believe your authors have so much clarity about their reader.

And publishers don't expect it because most people don't have the clarity and it is essential. So it's a huge plus for you as you're going out and trying to get some sort of a deal.

Mike Michalowicz: Hmm.

AJ Harper: But more importantly, the main reason why you need a reader statement is because that's your guiding force as you write the book. You have to know who are you writing for? What do they want? Why do they think they can't get it? What's the impact of that? What's the pain around that? Why do they want that thing? Do you need to verbalize so they feel like, oh, this person totally gets me?

Mike Michalowicz: Why do you think so many authors struggle? Kind of understanding the statement, figuring out what the statement is?

AJ Harper: Um, well, I made it up so they wouldn't,

Mike Michalowicz: They don't even know it exists.

AJ Harper: Yeah. I don't think people, it's a tool. It's a clarity tool that I created for myself and that I teach now.

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Mike Michalowicz: So how are most authors going about it? They don't know of your tool, do you think?

AJ Harper: I think they're having a long-winded response about who their reader is, and I don't think that they've really thought about their starting point. I think they're trying to deal with them, sort of a version of them that they imagine, but it's not really true.

Mike Michalowicz: Mm-hmm.

AJ Harper: You can't take a person from the big where they are to the promise of your book.

Mike Michalowicz: Hmm.

AJ Harper: The transformation. We're talking prescriptive nonfiction. Here, the goal is to help them make a change. They have a baseline and most people aren't really familiar with the baseline of where they're starting from.

Mike Michalowicz: Okay. Um. What, what other benefits do the reader statement provide? I mean, does it help you write copy for this book pages on the different retailers?

AJ Harper: Sure. It helps you with all your marketing, helps you in every single interview you do, every podcast you're on, every, every, everything. I mean, once you've got it down and you feel like it's accurate and true, and you can, it can roll off the tongue. It's everything.

Mike Michalowicz: Do you, do you use it when you're doing a podcast interview? Um, is it just a way to position your book and get the word out there?

AJ Harper: Yeah.

Mike Michalowicz: For the audience to find you?

AJ Harper: I wrote this book for.

Mike Michalowicz: Yeah.

AJ Harper: And you say it in a way that's seems natural to you.

Mike Michalowicz: Yeah.

AJ Harper: You know?

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Mike Michalowicz: Yeah. Um, any other thoughts or ideas about the reader statement?

AJ Harper: Well, just where people go wrong with it. So they tend to put in the kitchen sink. So authors wanna hedge. So they want this and this and, and this and all those. And it's like from the jerk, Steve Martin, I don't need anything except this lamp.

Right, right, right. And this, and that's it. I'm just gonna leave with this lamp and this ashtray, this lamp, and this ashtray.

Mike Michalowicz: Yeah.

AJ Harper: And then. This thermos and this lamp and this ashtray, and that's it. And it goes on and on, right? That's all.

Mike Michalowicz: That's a good reenactment.

AJ Harper: That's all I need. And this chair, and this lamp, and this ashtray, and this thermos and this chair,

Mike Michalowicz: He's brilliant.

AJ Harper: And it's like that. It's, they want this and this is what they think is wrong. All these things. And they need to let go of that and really get the clarity, what's going on, what's the driver? And um, if you do that, then you're unlocking things for yourself. Otherwise, you're just hedging. How many times have you read a book that goes like this In the beginning?

“Maybe you're here because...”

Mike Michalowicz: Oh, maybe.

AJ Harper: Oh, no. Okay.

Mike Michalowicz: Yeah.

AJ Harper: I don't even have to finish. Yeah. Maybe you're here because you really wanna find love, or maybe you're here because you found love and you, it's not working for you. Or maybe you're married and you don't wanna be married, or maybe you're divorced and you wanna be married to the person you used to be married to.

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Yeah. Or maybe you never knew love existed, like, come on. Yeah. That's a bunch of different books! Like, are you kidding, is that author is having a problem? (Yeah.) That author is freaking out. When I read that, I'm like, what are you, you, what are you doing?

Mike Michalowicz: Yeah. And I think as a reader at dilutes you right away it's like, yeah, I have a great marriage and I want to deepen the love in our relationship. And I'm one of the maybes, but I'm also not all, I hear more no's. So in the reader, as a reader goes through it, they say, no, no, no. Oh, yeah, yeah, no, no, no. And if there's no, no, no repeating my subconscious over and over, I'm out. I wanna say yes. Yes, yes.

AJ Harper: It gives you no confidence that that person knows you well if all there is is a string of maybes (Yeah.) Of why you might be, have picked up the book.

Mike Michalowicz: Yeah.

AJ Harper: Um, so get rid of the kitchen sink and don't impose your own ideas and intellectualizing the reader statement. It's not, um, they, people try to sound good. Right? Sound smart. And they use a lot of the terms they would use, but not terms that the author would use or that the reader would use, sorry. So you just need to use the vernacular in the first three parts. Who, what do they want? The perceived problem should be just a natural conversational language. The goal again is that people are gonna hear your reader statement and say, tell me more. When's it available? That's me. Or I know someone who needs this period.

I was just in Jen Kems, uh, big book, big book, deal retreat, and I was teaching about fundamentals and there's some great people in there. And we did a reader statement exercise and I said, okay, who needs this book? Put pre-order in the chat. Pre-order. Pre-order. Pre-order. Pre-order. Pre-order.

Mike Michalowicz: Yeah.

AJ Harper: You know, like that's the reaction it should get, is, yep, I need that. I'm interested in that. Tell me when that's available.

Mike Michalowicz: Um, and you also mentioned here in the notes it that, and you mentioned it earlier in our conversation, is often people say, what's your book about? And you have a way of reframing it.

AJ Harper: Yeah. Just say. Just don't answer the question. Just say it's for, and then fill in the rest.

Mike Michalowicz: I would do the shush lips over their lips

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AJ Harper: Because you're obnoxious.

Mike Michalowicz: obnoxious. What's the book about? You're like, sh. You twist their lip up and it curls into their nose and you say, no, no, it's for.

AJ Harper: No, don't correct them. Just say it's for some. Listen. No one ever said, okay, maybe you could get it down. What's your, what's your book about? You just, you just shared it for Profit First, but most people have a really hard time answering that question. Yeah. So, um, flip it.

Mike Michalowicz: I, uh, I do wanna share, there's a new book that's coming out. It's actually out right now, uh, when this broadcast by Chris Gillebeau, our buddy time anxiety.

AJ Harper: It's not my buddy,

Mike Michalowicz: our buddy.

AJ Harper: It's your buddy.

Mike Michalowicz: Oh, well, you know of him. I love him. I love,

AJ Harper: I know of him. I followed him way before he had a book,

Mike Michalowicz: so he's got a brand new book out called Time Anxiety, the illusion of urgency and a better way to live. And I got a little surprised for our listeners, if you email us at hello@dwbpodcast.com, you gotta be in the United States.

Uh, I'll mail you a free copy of the book. We'll do it for the first 10 people. So. Uh, in the, in the subject line, you have to have an audacious compliment to AJ or myself or our show. So gotta say like, best show ever. Uh, my God, this has transformed my life. And then to say, and by the way, please send me Chris Guillebeau's book includes your address.

We'll ship it out to you. It's an amazing thing.

AJ Harper: So remind listeners, the other books he's written.

Mike Michalowicz: Oh, he's written

AJ Harper: The Art of Non-Conformity, A Hundred Dollar Startup.

Mike Michalowicz: Yeah. My favorite is the, the Happiness of Pursuit.

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AJ Harper: I haven't read that one. Oh,

Mike Michalowicz: it's his best, in my opinion. Um, and he's written more than that. He, he had a new one come out called The Money Tree.

AJ Harper: Oh yeah.

Mike Michalowicz: Um,

AJ Harper: Didn't read that one either.

Mike Michalowicz: And now I'm looking, is there anything Oh, born for, this was another one. God, he is just a prolific,

AJ Harper: He's prolific.

Mike Michalowicz: Prolific author. Yeah. And just an extraordinary guy. Um, I'm getting together with him again this summer. His co-author, Gretchen Rubin, who worked on with him I think, on, um, the Art of Nonconformity. But now I can't recall which book it is. So there you go, Chris Guillebeau. Alright, anything else on a reader statement?

AJ Harper: No. Just write one.

Mike Michalowicz: Damn it. Also go to ajharper.com.

AJ Harper: You can, you can actually build the reader's statement. It's in, I explain how to do it in my book, by the way.

Mike Michalowicz: It's in the resources. Yeah. It's in Write a Must Read, so the book is write and must read.

AJ Harper: Yep. It is chapter two, man. Just go read chapter two.

Mike Michalowicz: We can do buy a book. Get a book, buy AJ's book. Send me a receipt and you can get a book.

AJ Harper: What are you gonna give them? Surge?

Mike Michalowicz: I'm, I'm purging on Surging. No, you don't have to. You can have one of my books for sure, but I have, uh, some stuff by Godin. So Penguin, um, because I worked with the same imprint as Seth and. Simon and others, they, they provide all these books for me, so I have a surplus of some really great books.

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AJ Harper: So just like a grab bag, like you're gonna get what you get. We'll do a grab bag.

Mike Michalowicz: Yeah. Yeah. It's probably gonna be a business book. So send me a copy of the receipt and say, grab bag me in there. Otherwise, if you're one of the first 10 people that laud on the show, then you'll get a Chris Guillebeau's Time Anxiety book.

AJ Harper: You're just full of the giveaways today.

Mike Michalowicz: Today, yeah. It's hello at dwTB podcast that you email us. Check out ajharper.com so you can join her for a retreat. They are extraordinary. It will transform you into a career author, I promise you. And if you're interested in our imprint called Simplified and you're an entrepreneur, author, maybe there's something there.

You can email us tons of free resources on the website, dwtb-podcast.com. And as a great reminder, do not, do not, do not write that book. Write the greatest book you can.