

don't write *that* book!

Episode 93:

“Cognitive Debt: The Dangers of Using AI to Write”

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. Woo. We are live, AJ. We are live across the,

AJ Harper: We did it.

Mike Michalowicz: Yeah, we did it across the internet. You know, you know where I was this morning?

AJ Harper: Hmm.

Mike Michalowicz: I was out picking blueberries, hence running late. My childhood best memory, and I'm curious what yours is. My childhood best memory was in Maine, my father's. Closest or one of his closest friends from college had bought a house out there and they stayed friends for the entirety of their life before they both passed away.

And my father's friend, his name was Joe Welch, we called him Uncle Joe. Him and his wife bought a home in Maine. That was like their dream. And they had like. A hundred acres or whatever. And as a young kid, I don't know if I was five or 10, it's such a memorable moment. I was somewhere between that range, probably more toward 10.

They let me go out into the field and you could see the farmhouse in the distance. And I had the, um, a golden retriever, their golden retriever dog with me, and I sat there and picked blueberries and ate 'em. And I just remember, like, it was just magnificent. It was a perfect day weather-wise, at least it seemed like that.

Um, the bees would kind of fly by, uh, not a care in the world. And I love blueberries. I wonder if that's when I fell in love with blueberries or otherwise. But as a result of that most memorable, favorite moment of my life, I, in our orchard, we have blueberries, uh, blueberry bushes, and maybe we have. Eight or 10.

I think I need to have about 20 or 30 to get the yield that I need. But this morning I was out picking blueberries and they're just beautiful and luscious and it throws me back every time

AJ Harper: It was. It was an odd. Note from you.

Mike Michalowicz: Yeah, I know, I know. I was like, Hey, running late. Picking blueberries.

don't write *that* book!

AJ Harper: Running late, blueberry picking.

Mike Michalowicz: I got this morning and I, I, once I get into it, I cannot stop myself. And I looked, I'm like, oh, I, I got 30 minutes and I looked down. I'm like, I, I got 15 minutes. I'm like, I can squeeze out. I looked down, I'm like, sugar, we gotta start in three minutes. So, sorry.

AJ Harper: No, that's fine. It's also not like you, so you must really love blueberries.

I mean, you're, you're. I can count on one hand the times you've been late.

Mike Michalowicz: Oh, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. It's not, yeah, I feel embarrassed when, when I'm late. Um, but hey, so, so tell me, what was your favorite childhood memory?

AJ Harper: What, that's a big question. First of all, blueberry's also my favorite fruit. So maybe. Maybe we actually have something in common. Finally,

Mike Michalowicz: You know, next time on Madeleine Island, if, if you and Paul, you're up for it, I will plant a blueberry orchard for you. I would love to. You have a perfect property for it. I mean, literally perfect.

AJ Harper: Really, but it's all sand?

Mike Michalowicz: Yeah, no, blueberry can grow and it looks acidic soil, but I think it can work. Um, just the, the daylight you get is so perfect. Plus the moisture in the air. I think it's perfect for blueberries, but who knows? I'm, I'm no aficionado, so no expert.

AJ Harper: I don't have a favorite childhood memory. I don't really, yeah, I have lots of, I That's really your favorite?

Mike Michalowicz: My absolute favorite. It, it just, it felt like the world was on my side, you know? And, and that's when, that's the day I said, oh, the universe is good. Like, everything's working in your favor. Just go with the flow. Mm. Yeah.

AJ Harper: Hmm. I don't think I have, I don't, I could think I could isolate one.

Mike Michalowicz: Okay. Okay. Maybe Camp Widjiwajun or whatever?

AJ Harper: No, no, no. You the real, that was torture. Nevermind all the square dancing.

Mike Michalowicz: Oh gosh. Alright, well let's get,

don't write *that* book!

AJ Harper: why did we square dance? Do you know? This is an eighties thing.

Mike Michalowicz: It's Oh, really? Square dancing no longer happens in gym class?

AJ Harper: I don't think so. I don't think so. Square dance, what? What? Why? Why did we all have square dancing?

Mike Michalowicz: It was so ridiculous. It was so embarrassing. And I don't know. What made me more nervous was when you had to wrap arms with another guy or a girl. I was so nervous. It's

AJ Harper: both. Well, I was fine for me with the girls, but.

Mike Michalowicz: Oh, I was a guy is like, I don't know. And then the girl, 'cause the guys would like try to swing each other super hard, you know?

AJ Harper: Right.

Mike Michalowicz: And then the girl, I didn't want to be creepy. Oh, it was worst.

AJ Harper: Yeah. But when did you ever use that?

Mike Michalowicz: Square dancing. Oh my God. I use it like a hundred percent never.

AJ Harper: It's the oddest thing and it's this universal Gen X thing of the square dancing in gym class.

Mike Michalowicz: That's so peculiar.

AJ Harper: Who thought of that?

Mike Michalowicz: I don't know. I don't know. That's so funny. Um, so, so today we're gonna talk about cognitive debt and the dangers of using AI. There's a really interesting article that broke in Psychology Today and how AI is affecting us. Um, before we do that, I want to introduce my colleague. So thank you for joining us here at Don't Write That Book. This is AJ Harper. This is our remote edition. I'm back here in New Jersey. She's on Madeleine Island. In Wisconsin.

AJ Harper: I'm giving it a shot

Mike Michalowicz: and giving it a shot, and we're trying to get the audio levels better and better. We're still trying to figure out, uh, the technology behind it. But I think we're getting

don't write *that* book!

pretty darn close, and I definitely wanna come back out to Madeline Island Yeah. And spend more time out there. That was just a blast. Um, when

AJ Harper: you should come out, you should come out even, uh, when you want, but also when we're not here, you know, you're welcome to use it.

Mike Michalowicz: Oh, I already told Krista that's, that's so kind of you.

AJ Harper: Yeah, of course.

Mike Michalowicz: Um, so here's what I admire about you is the thoughtfulness you put into your property. I, um, so there's three distinct building spaces. One is the main house. You have a writer's lab and your office. Um, and the guest house, all of 'em have, well

AJ Harper: the, there's an apartment above the garage. It's not a guest house.

Mike Michalowicz: A garage. But there's a, yeah, I, I consider it 'cause there's a kitchenette up there. There's a lounge area. Bathroom bed, you know. What I admire is the thoughtfulness in each one. Um, there's remarkable views everywhere, particularly from your office when you open those barn doors. It's like, like you're working and you're looking at the water like you are right now. Um, but there's also, if you want solitude or quietness, it's, it's within a few steps away. Um, I just think that's remarkable. So kudos to you on your thoughtfulness and vision for the property. It's not just a house. It's, it's truly a retreat center.

AJ Harper: Yes. And, you know, um, most people just kinda looked at me with these big eyes, like, mm-hmm. There she goes again. But, uh, it worked out.

Mike Michalowicz: You nailed it.

AJ Harper: I also have to say to everybody listening, when Mike got here, first of all was super emotional and I was giving him a tour and I said, here's a guest bedroom. Here's a guest bedroom. And. You were excited about that, and then I said, I'll show you the apartment, and then you were like, no, no. I'm gonna stay in here.

Mike Michalowicz: I, I totally wanted to stay in the house.

AJ Harper: How was that for you? I'm curious, how was that for you? I've only ever had friends and family stay there. Yeah. Well, well you're a friend. But what I mean is like you came here in a partial work capacity.

Mike Michalowicz: Yeah.

don't write *that* book!

AJ Harper: So I just, I wanted to see how was that for you?

Mike Michalowicz: Yeah. It was remarkable the, um, space because when the lightning storm came through,

AJ Harper: oh my God,

Mike Michalowicz: In which was the most bizarre light, I've ever seen a lightning storm like that ever.

AJ Harper: It was like a rave

Mike Michalowicz: I counted, I tracked on my watch one minute and I counted how many strikes there were and there were over 80 strikes. It was, I, I literally woke up, thought a light bulb had gone out. 'cause it was flickering on and off.

AJ Harper: It's like a strobe.

Mike Michalowicz: Yeah. So I stayed in the guest house. And why I liked that was I was able to walk around in my pajamas, staring out the window and not freak anyone out. But I did freak out your wife. Polly was there and. And I'm picking a room. She goes, where, where would you like to stay? She also asked me, and I said, I don't know if it's uncomfortable for you and AJ, but since I'm new to the island and a little bit nervous, do you mind if I sleep in your bed between the two of you?

And, and she thought serious? She goes, I, I, if that's the way you roll?

AJ Harper: Nooooo.

Mike Michalowicz: Yeah.

AJ Harper: She did?

Mike Michalowicz: And sitting, she did for, for a split second. I don't think she thought I was joking. And then she did that like, oh, you, you went with the punch.

AJ Harper: Her Midwest nice was taking over. Like how, how? I can't say no.

Mike Michalowicz: Yeah, she's amazing.

AJ Harper: I would've been like, get outta here,

don't write *that* book!

Mike Michalowicz: get outta here.

AJ Harper: We, um, I admire that you, um, God, you know, I really need to say this when you, for me, I felt like we were, we finally did it when you came.

Mike Michalowicz: Oh, god, that means the world to me.

AJ Harper: And what I admire about you is how, um, invested you are in. For me, I'm just gonna speak selfishly in my own. What matters to me and my own dreams and I, but you are that way with your team and your friends and your kids, and every you're, you're invested in other people's dreams.

Mike Michalowicz: Oh, thank you. I I love your house and I, I wanna do everything I can when, when I'm out there to help you further that vision. Um, it's amazing. Thank you. Right.

AJ Harper: Cognitive debt.

Mike Michalowicz: That means the world to me. Yeah. So let's, yeah, let's move on to cognitive debt, you know,

AJ Harper: but I can we shout out Jesse though?

Mike Michalowicz: Yeah, yeah, yeah. There's a couple things you wanted to mention, so why don't you lead us off with that.

AJ Harper: Well, Jesse Finkelstein lovely. Um, co-founder of Page Two had said, Hey, would you two on your podcast do a meaningful debate about AI and publishing and writing? And I don't think this qualifies yet as the debate, 'cause I know you and I have some differing opinions. But I think it's a good conversation starter. I don't think we could ever do just one episode on this, because it's changing everything.

Mike Michalowicz: Yeah, I agree. And I, I've had a thought about this when I saw the request. Tell me if you're up for this. I lean AI, you lean analog. Analog, right?

AJ Harper: Mm-hmm. Analog.

Mike Michalowicz: What if we prepare ourselves where I have to argue analog and you have to argue AI.

AJ Harper: Ooh, blech.

don't write *that* book!

Mike Michalowicz: yeah, exactly. Because I felt, I felt icky too, and I think that's actually a better,

AJ Harper: You feel icky about analog?

Mike Michalowicz: No, I think, I think it's a fool's folly to, uh, ignore AI and its opportunity, but it can become a trap. But, but I can lean so into that. It's like, if. If I'm Republican and you're Democratic, I gotta argue Democratic, and you gotta argue Republican. And there has, there has been, um, debates like this and they find that a, a, a more balanced opinion comes out.

AJ Harper: Sure, no, sure, no doubt. I'm not completely anti AI in terms of all the uses of AI.

Mike Michalowicz: Yeah.

AJ Harper: You know, it has great important uses in the advancement of science and. Um, our physical wellbeing and the climate and so forth, but it also has negative impacts on the climate. There's, we could get into a whole thing.

Mike Michalowicz: Yeah. Yeah. So, so let, let's, let's do the debate. Alright,

AJ Harper: we'll, we'll do okay. I mean, I don't know if I really wanna like, prepare, like a report as if I'm defending AI, but I would give it a little time.

Mike Michalowicz: Well, it, it was funny. Um, this plays into kind of how I lean AI and you lean analog. Um, I'm helping accept the podcast studio at the lake and one of the frustrations, there's still a little bit of it, is this echo.

We, we got the audio quality there, but there's this echo and, um, I immediately default default to Gemini. Gemini is Google's AI system and I'm. You know, and you can activate the camera so it can see people. I think what freaked you out

AJ Harper: Mike is having a conversation. Mike's having a conversation and showing the whatever, the ghost in the machine. Here's what I'm doing. Yeah. Tell me, told me how to fix this and having a convo with it. Mm-hmm.

Mike Michalowicz: Do you remember when I said, oh, and I'm with my friend and co-writer AJ, and I panned it up and it looked at you. It was like, Hey, aj, do you remember that?

AJ Harper: Yeah.

don't write *that* book!

Mike Michalowicz: That's freaky. Um,

AJ Harper: I wanted to say like, don't. Tell don't—don't introduce me to the machine.

Mike Michalowicz: Yeah, yeah.

AJ Harper: Is this like a thing that's gonna be like Terminator, you know where just a little,

Mike Michalowicz: Yeah, 'cause well, yeah,

AJ Harper: 2001 Space Odyssey.

Mike Michalowicz: The funny thing is analog beat AI, because you pulled up on YouTube, the steps to take and AI gets in a loop. It's dropping gang and, and I have notable frustration building. And you go on YouTube, you're like, okay, like you did it in a, uh, what's that voice like an NPR voice? You're like, okay, this is what we need to do, Mike. Follow these instructions. And it's like, bing, bing, bing. Oh, that was it. So yeah, I spent like, that's act,

AJ Harper: That's actually the second time that's happened in a really funny way.

Mike Michalowicz: What's the other time?

AJ Harper: We were in a meeting and it was for The Money Habit.

Mike Michalowicz: Yeah.

AJ Harper: It was before we called it The Money Habit. And we were, so we were in a development meeting and we were working through the seasons framework.

Mike Michalowicz: Yeah.

AJ Harper: And so you were in AI trying to get it to generate different names for the different seasons. Meanwhile I was, had my notepad and a pen.

Mike Michalowicz: Yeah.

AJ Harper: And you go through, you're totally dedicated. It's like half an hour and I'm not saying anything to you. I'm just like, mm-hmm. That's, that could work. And meanwhile I'm writing it down. And then the season's framework we have is what I wrote in the notebook.

don't write *that* book!

Mike Michalowicz: Yeah. So, uh, AI ain't perfect and actually it can be a detriment. Um, so let, that's what we're gonna talk about today is the cognitive debt. Do you mind sharing some of the research we found (Yeah.) Um, from Psychology Today?

AJ Harper: So, this is from Psychology Today, and it's based on a study from MIT, uh, researchers divided 54 student participants into three groups and then kept track of them over four months. Now I'm gonna get this... I'll just use the abbreviation. This is a direct quote, by the way, from Psychology Today, so I wanna make sure that's clear. Using Electroencephalograms EEGs of the Brain, Linguistic Analysis and Post task interviews, the researchers found that using Chat GPT weakened participants, neural connectivity, memory, and sense of ownership over the writing—so they couldn't remember stuff. They couldn't remember what they wrote—while AI used, while AI use allowed tasks to feel easier, the lack of effort required could over time, dull cognition, critical thinking and creativity.

Mike Michalowicz: Yeah. My daughter, when she broke her ankle, they put her in a cast that went from her ankle to her knee, and when she took that cast off and went into a boot, which was only like a month and a half later, the, I guess the words atrophy that had happened. The the muscular deterioration was remarkable. It was unbelievable. Uh, it was like a toothpick on one leg and um, a carrot stick on the other, you know, if we compare size

AJ Harper: mm-hmm.

Mike Michalowicz: Our, our body responds to inactivity and, and our brain. Have you no noticed with A GPS, at least when I'm minus a GPS sometimes. It's difficult to navigate, meaning I'm like, how did I get here? So if, where I, if I go to Madeline Island to visit you, like I, in which I did from, from, uh, Duluth, I, I would have no ability to get back to Madeline Island from Duluth or vice versa because the GPS took me the whole way.

Like there, there's no storage of that experience.

AJ Harper: I think if you repeat over time, you would, though. It was the one-time thing.

Mike Michalowicz: Yeah, maybe. Maybe. I, I just think it is the brain doesn't need to store stuff. It's like, oh, just, you know, the, it's beeping now. Turn left. So I'm gonna turn left.

AJ Harper: Yeah. And the, the study showed that, um. They, they, they also didn't like what they produced, that most of the students who used it weren't happy with what they produced. They couldn't even quote one line from it.

Mike Michalowicz: Yeah.

AJ Harper: And this is the thing that scares me the most is this is the quote again from Psychology Today Chat. GPT essays had a flattening effect.

don't write *that* book!

Flattening. I mean, one of the most important things when it comes to writing is voice. So you tell yourself. It's just like me. It sounds just like me. You train it, you train it, you train it. I've actually watched, um, a pretty, um, oh, you know who I watched do this? Kevin Rogers. You know Kevin Rogers?

Mike Michalowicz: Mm-hmm.

AJ Harper: Um, he showed me how, you know, this AI tool and how he trained it. And talked to me about how it's actually freeing them up to do more important work, which is a different type of conversation. Like if it's, if you're using it for, say, short little posts or whatever that you have to do on a grind, and it's just becoming challenging to try to get all that done, say every day or every week, but then that then the, the way he trained it, it makes it faster so he can do other writing. Right?

So I can see that and. You couldn't, I mean, I don't think I know his writing well enough to know if there was. Any real difference, but he doesn't think there is. But that flattening effect, I don't, I think you'd have to be a really skilled writer to be able to tell if it was doing that or not.

Mike Michalowicz: Yeah, I, I agree.

AJ Harper: So I don't think you could discern that it was doing that. You say, that sounds like me, but actually it is flattening.

Mike Michalowicz: Yeah. Yeah. It's that last 1% of differences, I think, where all the flavor comes. The pepper and the spice. I've noticed that AI, um, uses what I believe is rules around best practices, or not even best practices, most common practices.

So I assume it collects all the data from the interweb and says the most frequent way people or, uh, the most frequent elements around such and such is this. Therefore say this, it just seems to spit out the same thing. Based upon the volume of frequency it sees it and, uh, therefore assumes it is the appropriate thing, which then I think would cause this dulling effect. I've noticed also like, uh, AI is M dash crazy.

AJ Harper: And you're, you're on an em dash killing mode.

Mike Michalowicz: Oh my God. I, I hate m Yeah, I, I, I'm killing our own em dashes, but when I,

AJ Harper: you don't have to kill every single one, you know? I know They do. So on purpose. I know. I, it just,

don't write *that* book!

Mike Michalowicz: it, it frustrates me. 'cause now I see m dashes everywhere. I, I look at other people's copy. I'm like, oh, that's, that's purely ai. You, the em dash is the first giveaway.

AJ Harper: I, okay. Yeah. I've been hearing that. That's actually an issue.

Mike Michalowicz: Yeah.

AJ Harper: You know what's worse about the flat flattening thing? What's that? That the, the teachers could tell.

Mike Michalowicz: The teachers could tell without having to analyze it. Just they could tell?

AJ Harper: The teachers could tell, they could recognize the flattening effect. So if they can tell, other people can tell.

Mike Michalowicz: You know, on the flip side though, is, is it used to be an abacus? Well, first you speak by hand, then an abacus and a calculator, and I strongly suspect when the calculator came about, the frustration that teachers had that, you know, kids aren't doing math anymore and has that posed a real problem? Once it becomes the, the social norm. Like everyone has, I have a calculator sitting right here, or you have one on your phone, or does it, does it actually hold you back? Trying to do math the old way or, or knowing math and being able to do it by hand is an advantage still, even with all the technology doing it, 99.9% of the time.

AJ Harper: Well, I guess it depends on, um, what you're trying to do. I mean, are you just trying to get some words out because

Mike Michalowicz: Yeah,

AJ Harper: You wanna get a book done fast or because you wanna get your marketing copy out and it's a grind? Or are you a writer?

Mike Michalowicz: Yeah, I, I also think, uh, and in the article it says this, and you, and you did mention it, the sense of ownership, or in this case they say the sense of authorship dropped with use of AI. AI users had a more mixed sense of authorship with some participants claiming full ownership and others denying it. It reminds me of audible. I will have people say to me at an event or something, Hey Mike, I love your books. I just finished reading Clockwork. And then there'll be an awkward pause by them and I'll say, well, I didn't read it. I listened to Clockwork. I said, oh, thanks for consuming the book. Like I don't care what format. The fact that you're engaged with it is amazing. But there is this internal conflict that I didn't really make the effort to read it. And, and, and that means something different to that person as a consumer, as an author too.

don't write *that* book!

Uh, I do know some people that just did pure AI stuff and they say they authored a book, but you can tell that they even feel that they didn't. So what kind of pride are you gonna have behind it? And, and what kind of effort are you gonna put in, in getting it out there when you don't, you didn't author it.

AJ Harper: I mean, man. I don't know. I think there's people who are just gonna not care. You know, there's people who just want the output, and so they're not, they're transactional about it. Um, so it's not gonna matter. But I think, I think some people won't feel a sense of ownership for sure. But then we've got, you know, challenge. I've got, I've got students who have, you know, say severe dyslexia.

Mike Michalowicz: Yeah.

AJ Harper: And AI is really helping them.

Mike Michalowicz: Yeah.

AJ Harper: So, you know, I think there's more to, more to consider, but at the same time, I don't think we can use it in the way a lot of people are using it. Just a total replacement.

Mike Michalowicz: Well, let me ask you the big question. What are the things, in your opinion, AI, we as authors, cannot allow to become dull?

AJ Harper: I, I still think we have to write, I mean the, I think we have to write. I think we have to write, we can't just start with the AI. You can't log in to Claude or whatever you're using and just start there. You know, you, you, if you spend some time developing your own ideas, spend some time doing that.

Otherwise, you're not attached. So in that MIT study, they're talking about that ownership and they're also talking about memory retention, so you're not actually even remembering what it's conjuring up. It didn't come from you. And so therefore, this what happens when we're in what you and I call writing season is all these downloads that are gifts from how we are paying, we pay attention differently to the world. And so we are not gonna get that if we can't even remember the thing that we were writing.

Mike Michalowicz: Right?

AJ Harper: So for example. You love to tell the story, and now I'm doing it too, so I'm guilty of it. But you love to tell the story about the opening story in the Introduction to All In, which is about the Russian, the Guard at the Russian Museum. And you're just still so fascinated with how I came up with

Mike Michalowicz: Oh, the Counterpoint. Oh, amazing.

don't write *that* book!

AJ Harper: Which is the guards at the Baltimore Museum.

Mike Michalowicz: Yep.

AJ Harper: I'm gonna tell you, if we had been using AI, that would've never happened.

Mike Michalowicz: I agree.

AJ Harper: I wouldn't have recalled that Russian Museum story and I wouldn't be connecting the dots. I would not have even noticed when the Baltimore Museum story came on my television during the news program. I would not even connect at anything

Mike Michalowicz: that is, of all the books we've done, that is likely my favorite story. It's because it has that wonderful juxtaposition. So just the backstory, because I don't know if we shared it on this show specifically several times.

Oh, we have, yeah,

AJ Harper: there's my, there's my cognitive of

Mike Michalowicz: debt already.

AJ Harper: We'll just do a little brief.

Mike Michalowicz: Alright. So the quick story is, uh. The, uh, news break comes out, um, many years ago about this Russian guard who actually deface one of the pieces of art he's intended to protect. It was just a fascinating story and so I, I made a note of it.

I store it in, I was using Evernote. Now I use OneNote in Microsoft. It's a storing it there, and I reflect on these stories 'cause I, I don't know when it can be used, if ever. But at one time you can use it. And I'm gonna digress here. That's how musicians work. They figure out like a riff or some kind of musical lyric or chorus and they say, oh, this is good, but I don't know where it goes.

And they store it and then they go back and And pull it back up. Well, I pull it back up and I say, this is such a good story of. The counterpoint of all in, like when you assert yourself as a boss over them, when you, you demand certain outcomes, how it actually degrades the performance of an individual and you're, oh, this is a good story.

And then one day you say, I got the counter story. And it is this beautiful story of Baltimore where they did the reverse. They asked the guards to curate the art and, and elevate them to a

don't write *that* book!

whole new level. Do, do you feel it's because that story is bouncing around your head that. It revealed itself, the, the Russian story bouncing and you found Baltimore.

Is it that you're sitting there saying, I need to find a counter story? How, how did it come about that you discovered that?

AJ Harper: I was watching today show, and my brain is wired. I'm in writing season. Mm-hmm. I'm actively writing. And I, my brain can connect the dots super fast.

Speaker 3: Mm.

AJ Harper: And say, oh, you know what, what if we showed, I didn't say I need a counterpoint.

I wasn't even necessarily gonna use the Russian story. 'cause you give me maybe 300 things and we'll use a hundred of 'em.

Mike Michalowicz: Yeah, that's right.

AJ Harper: So I had, you know, I had gone through and read everything, so I remembered it. Um, and then I also kind of knew kind of where it would go. The, you know, initially, and we ended up actually splitting it into two stories because we did an interview.

Had we not done an interview, it would've just been right, right where it is, uh, in the intro. But I knew, I kind of knew, um, just my brain just sorts it. And I don't wanna lose the ability from my brain to sort it. Yeah. So listen, you are pulling from, there's another example, and we've also shared this one where one day I, I was trying to get a call to greatness, which is a, a way that we do is I teach my students how to do a close, close for a nonfiction book.

And Mike and I do them, and a lot of students do them. There's a whole episode on it if you wanna look it up. I don't have the number in front of me right now, but. Um, oh, it's, you know what it, the title of the episode is, don't Write That Conclusion. Yeah. At any rate, I, we always need a good story for a Call to Greatness, and we were kind of at the end.

This was for the revised edition of Clockwork, so I wanted to do a different call to greatness. I wasn't happy with the original. And I couldn't, we didn't have the story and we were kind of getting to the 11th hour and uh, we don't really push, you know, we kind of wait to have it show up. And I remember that I texted you and I said, oh, I know what it is.

It's um, Lin Manuel Miranda's, um, story about how he went on vacation and it was on vacation that he read the Alexander Hamilton biography and he was able to. Like, he wouldn't have tapped into that had he not been on vacation. And I was like, oh, finally. I think this is it. And then you texted me back.

don't write *that* book!

Boom. BOOM. All caps. So you're always saying, when I say, oh, that's hot. Like freaking Paris Hilton. I don't know why I do that. But when you say, boom, I know we're, I know we're good. Yeah. I'm boom. So for mes, it's hot. You're boom. But that wouldn't have happened had I not pulled from my own data bank. That came from a article I read years before.

Years before. Yes. And so when you think about what AI is pulling for you, like it's cool for it to generate ideas, but the better way is for you to be living in the world.

Mike Michalowicz: A hundred percent agree. Hundred percent agree. 'cause I think we, I just, go ahead. It's like a jigsaw puzzle and these pieces click together and I, I don't think AI.

Actually we'll ever be able to do that. May, may, um, I shouldn't say ever. Maybe.

AJ Harper: I don't know.

Mike Michalowicz: Yeah. But it's these things that don't, like when I look at Jigsaw, I'm like, these pieces don't go together. And then when they snap together, it's like, ah, of course they do. And I think that's the exact same thing that happens.

AJ Harper: What's the thing is though? Writers are, we're supposed to show the world as we see it. From our collection of memories, from our mm-hmm. Knowledge bank, from our insights. Right. That's why we don't need one book on a topic. We need many books on a topic. So writers I think need to be better about not relying on AI to find everything because I didn't find that Baltimore story using ai.

I found it 'cause I was listening and because I was in writing season, I was able to connect the dots.

Mike Michalowicz: You just gave me a huge aha. I remember this is kinda the jigsaws clicking place. They said the importance of the color. Say black is without black. You can't see white without white, you can't see black.

It's, it's the contrast that gives color definition as an example. And what you just said is a book is from the vantage point of the author. Mm-hmm. AI is effectively all the colors blended together. Mm-hmm. And that, that becomes this drone, this Yeah. Dullness. And when, when it's only from one person's vantage point, then we can see the contrast as a consumer or the reader of our own lives.

And that's where the life comes, that's where the color mm-hmm. Becomes, uh, expressed.

don't write *that* book!

AJ Harper: Yeah. And also, you know, I believe as you know, that we need to write a reader focused book that's always thinking about the reader on every page and how. How, where, how, who they are when they're starting the book, how we want them to be at the end.

But it's way more than that. It's, it's also about how they take in the content on every single page. And so, you know, AI isn't gonna know your reader as well as you. They're gonna use it. They're gonna just, you can give it a composite and you can say, I think this is whom, these are the traits of my reader.

But really they don't know your people like you know your people. Hmm. And so also, AI shows the world as the pulls from this data. And so there's no cons. It's using prompts from the writer, but it's still pulling from this whole, like you said, all the colors, but there's not, um, those color tho they aren't really all the colors.

You know, it's pulling from a data source that is historically, you know, mostly, uh, Caucasian point of view.

Speaker 3: That's true.

AJ Harper: Um, mostly male point of view.

Speaker 3: True.

AJ Harper: Um, Western point of view.

Mike Michalowicz: True.

AJ Harper: You know, so like, it's not actually everything.

Mike Michalowicz: It's, it, it is gray as opposed to a rainbow of colors.

AJ Harper: It's actually really limited.

Yeah, and that's what you are using as like this is the massive source. So I don't know, man. I think it's in dangerous in that way.

Mike Michalowicz: Yeah. Super interesting. Lemme tell you how I used it and I want to hear how you don't use it. So how I used it. What

AJ Harper: it, just the way I don't, but that's gonna be a short part of the conversation, but go ahead.

don't write *that* book!

Mike Michalowicz: Okay. How I use it was to collect stories. So what we've done historically is I'll say, okay, here's the story and I'll type up this massive download of just stuff. You skim it and come back and say, here's the essence of the story. So what I was doing was. I was writing up this whole story, actually speaking the story into, not into, um, the ai but into like Word.

'cause you can, you know, speak into it, it collects it, and then I put it into AI and say, assimilate this into the, the bullet points. Then I go and I write the story and then I had, I went back to AI and said, is there any editorial comments on this? Um, and it would gimme that feedback. So it was iterative.

I feel that, um, that. The money habit. I know this book inside now. I know the process inside and now, but I know every story inside and out. So I still feel that I lived it. But AI gave me it cut, it cut down a lot of time of that, especially that first pass of assimilating all this just garbage that I'm spitting out to the key elements so I could start writing around that.

AJ Harper: Hmm. So I didn't know you were doing that, by the way, everyone, the AI was not. Used to write, technically not used to write the money habit.

Mike Michalowicz: No, I didn't. You

AJ Harper: you, you can't, you gotta make sure that's really clear.

Mike Michalowicz: Really clear. Yeah. AI did not write it. Um, I used AI to It sounds

AJ Harper: like you're using it to get the bullet points so you know how to organize your mind.

Mike Michalowicz: Yeah, exactly. And, and I think some of the stories and then you're

AJ Harper: writing it,

Mike Michalowicz: the stories came out so much better. Like the, the part about Krista. So what I did is I sat down and interviewed Krista for an hour. We just sat here. We're both. Hearing, crying, uh, about the red shoe, the shoes, the, the Lou Vuitton shoes.

Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm. I then. After I interview, sat down and I just type, I go like crazy, typing up, actually speaking. Here's all the stuff I know and then adding notes to it, typing it in. Then I put it into AI and it assimilates it and it, it just gave me all the bullet points. It's like, okay, and this is exactly what you were doing for me.

And then I'm like, now I can go and do the next pass, and I do it and I write it. And it was so much better than I sent it to you. Then you were editing it and we're going back and forth. So

don't write *that* book!

AJ Harper: you're using, you're using the bullet points to help you organize your mind so that you're not writing. Sort of like an epic, 'cause you in the past would write, maybe say.

4,000 words on that.

Mike Michalowicz: Oh yeah. Well, but yeah. 'cause

AJ Harper: you couldn't, you weren't able to just isolate key

Mike Michalowicz: I, yeah, key. So, right. The key points, so I was, now I was speaking 4,000 words.

AJ Harper: Mm-hmm.

Mike Michalowicz: Then it would bring it down to the six key bullet points in,

AJ Harper: and from there you can

Mike Michalowicz: write it. Hundred. Yeah, yeah. And then actually, okay, now I can write and then I go back and say to AI saying, I don't know if I like this flow because it, it.

This. And it's like, well, you can, and then it's just an editorial comment and they'll say, well put this first. I retyping like, oh yeah, that's better or not. Um, yeah. And

AJ Harper: then you have me going in there and changing a lot of it. I know.

Mike Michalowicz: Well that, yeah. So I didn't come back and say, here, here's the perfect thing.

But, um, it was really helpful in that assimilation. I mean, really helpful. So that's how I used AI with the money habit. And I, and I really think it's the best work that's come out of me. Because I was able to focus in it. It's interesting. I find that the any line and you have the ability to do this inherently, and for me it's very deliberate, but I, I got to it faster.

Was changing just one or two words in a line or deleting one or two words. All of a sudden that line pops and I think I was able to get there a million times faster because of its. The use of that bullet pointing. So that's how you, so I wanna

AJ Harper: also point out that over time your writing has gotten better.

You've learned a lot. Yes, true. That's true. You remember things that I've told you, so I wanna challenge you so that you aren't gonna need that.

don't write *that* book!

Mike Michalowicz: Yeah.

AJ Harper: Really. Yeah. I want you to see what it's doing. 'cause you're very, the thing that really important talent you have is you can see, you know, you wanna figure out how things work.

Speaker 3: Yeah.

AJ Harper: And then you wanna, yeah. Grab that as fast as you can and use it for yourself. Right. So I hope when you're doing that, that you're noticing how things work and so then you can just do it yourself.

Speaker 3: Yeah.

AJ Harper: And I just wanna challenge you to, because you've been able to do that by just listening to the things I've been saying.

Mike Michalowicz: Yeah, no, that's true. I, yeah, I like to dig into the, and then you've also

AJ Harper: been studying other writing. You've been doing this for a long time, so. You know, give, just saying.

Mike Michalowicz: Yeah. No, that's, that's wonderful feedback. And, um, yeah, I, I take that to heart. Tell me how you're not using ai. Um, and, and how, how does that, what, what are, what are the benefits?

AJ Harper: Short conversation. I don't use AI to write.

Mike Michalowicz: Yeah. But are you using AI in any capacity in the writing world?

AJ Harper: No.

Mike Michalowicz: You know,

AJ Harper: that's why it's not like I,

Mike Michalowicz: how do you do, lemme ask you about book blurbs. Like, so I get, I don't know if you get as frequent as I do, but literally every day someone's like, please blurb my book.

Okay.

don't write *that* book!

AJ Harper: No, maybe like a few, few times a year.

Mike Michalowicz: So what I'll do is, um. They sent me the PDF of their book, and I'm like, I will read, I'm not gonna read an entire chapter. I don't even have time to read that entire chapter. I'm gonna read a section or two to see if I like the flow, and then I'm gonna input into chat GPT and have it summarize the entire book so I can go through the elements.

Um, that's been super helpful to understand and assimilate. Okay. A book.

AJ Harper: I don't do that. Okay,

Mike Michalowicz: so you, yeah, I don't read the entire book either. You don't have the time for that.

AJ Harper: Um, I haven't endorsed anything that I haven't read

Mike Michalowicz: in its entirety.

AJ Harper: Mm-hmm.

Mike Michalowicz: Wow. Wow. I have so many endorsement requests. There's no, if I had to read every book that I endorsed end to end, you know, it takes me with concentrated effort about a week to read a book and with my neural pace about two weeks to three weeks when I have time available.

I could never keep pace.

AJ Harper: I mean, I'm a speed reader, so I had, um, it's different for me.

Mike Michalowicz: Yeah. I remember, um, Seth Godin endorsing the pumpkin plan and, um, while he didn't explicitly say this, so I can't. Say this is the exact methodology. The indication was he skimmed the outline, um, read a page or two stylistically saw if he agreed with the outline components, and then gave an endorsement based upon that.

Mm I and I think that's pretty much most of the endorsements I've received or done that way. No. What,

AJ Harper: there's a few, few that were, I remember on the pumpkin plan and that's the one he endorsed. There were a couple authors who definitely read your book.

Mike Michalowicz: There's some, there's some, yeah. Like Michael Gerber may have read the entire book.

don't write *that* book!

Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm. Just based upon what he was saying. Um, but the other endorsements, guy Kawasaki, I would be shocked if he did Bob Berg. I, I'm confident he didn't, 'cause he told me he didn't. Um, but, well,

AJ Harper: I know Steve Pressfield read mine because he insisted on not only reading it, but getting a hard copy galley.

To read it, would not read the digital. And only after reading it told me if he would endorse it.

Speaker 3: Hmm, interesting. So,

AJ Harper: yeah, he, he, he, you know, writer to writer, man. I don't know.

Mike Michalowicz: You know, one another thing I noticed with ai, um, I, I am fully off of social media in regards to consuming it. I put it out there through my team, but I don't have, actually, I don't have any accounts on my phone that I.

Have access to. Um, but what I noticed is this TikTok mentality that I experienced myself, and I've seen other people that, you know, you just watch some of these videos are 10 seconds long and that's too long. Like you watch three seconds like next, next. And I was doing with guitar practice and I remember going through it and like all was in two hours had blown by.

But then reflecting on what did I learn those two hours, I'm like, I don't know if I learned. Anything like, I don't know if I absorbed anything, the mind, my mind went into this little, this drone consumption mode. It wasn't actively consuming, and I wonder if that's same here is that you can output, that's this droning input.

Now you have droning output, but your mind goes into almost this hibernation stage and it's, it's just all fluff. There's no peanut butter. No bread.

AJ Harper: You, so you're talking about social media and how it relates to the way we, the way we consume social media, doing the same kind of thing. Yeah, creating problems.

Exactly. So

Mike Michalowicz: social media, this droning cons, consume consumption. I'm like, oh, there's this droning output now.

AJ Harper: Yeah. I mean, I can see the, can see the relation. Last night I was, I had a stressful day. I worked about 14 hours and uh, it's not normal for me anymore. And it was just kind of a tough day. And, uh, I went to bed and, um, my BFF Zoey Bird had said, do you wanna chat?

don't write *that* book!

And I didn't feel really up to the call, but she and I, this is a new, we've been friends since we were teenagers. Okay. So we've had a lot of, we communicate on every level. Right? Yeah. But we have this thing we've been doing for a while on Instagram where we're just trading memes. So I just DM her and I'm like, just forward one to her.

This one's funny. You know, I don't even, I don't even put commentary, I just send it. She knows what I mean. Um, something that's, it's always something that's gonna make us laugh.

Speaker 3: Yeah. Yeah. That's cool. And

AJ Harper: last night I was in bed and we were both doing it. It was just, there was, there was no, we were not having a conversation.

We were just trading memes. Occasionally a commentary, but mostly like, I know what she's thinking 'cause she sent me this one.

Mike Michalowicz: Oh, that's so great.

AJ Harper: That's. I just needed an hour of that. I didn't actually wanna get on the phone and talk about my to and troubles. I wanted to just train memes about, you know, I don't know, gen X toys we used to love.

Yeah, yeah. Or bad singing or you know, whatever. Like it was a joy. We just did an hour of it. Um, so that is intentionally. Brain drain, you know?

Speaker 3: Yeah.

AJ Harper: But, um, so I don't know. I'm not totally against social media, I gotta say.

Mike Michalowicz: Oh yeah. I'm, I'm not even saying I'm guessing. No, but I'm just

AJ Harper: saying you can, you can engage like that with those rando things, um, in fun ways.

Mike Michalowicz: Totally. Totally. I think it just can go, just like anything can go too far. Right? Yeah. Anything in excess becomes a problem. I was rereading the *Comfort Crisis* by Michael Easter. A really fascinating book. Um, and he talks about he, he goes into the wilderness for these extended periods and does, he lives off the land effectively.

Um. And when he returns to civilization, his full appreciation, like he said, he was on a flight back from somewhere in the wilderness in Alaska, back to his home. And on that flight he's

don't write *that* book!

like, these chairs, I haven't sat in a chair in three months. He's like, these chairs on these planes are so ridiculously comfortable.

And then they served a meal. He's like this pasta, whatever is the best pasta I've had in my life. And he goes, that's what discomfort brings around. It brings about appreciation for comfort and that we're in this comfort crisis, that we're actually frustrated about how uncomfortable the airline chair is and how sucky the food is, and the reality is the exact opposite.

Unless you immerse yourself in constant comfort and then the reality is mm-hmm. What you're experiencing. Mm-hmm. And I think it's the same thing with AI. If, if we go all AI and AI just produces it, it's gonna be just this marginalized, repeated voice over and over again. Mm-hmm. I think the, the authors who excel, in my opinion, are gonna leverage the parts of AI that compliment them, but not ever lose, lose that self-expression.

Never lose that. Thirst and curiosity to be out there. They're intentionally putting themselves in an uncomfortable environment because that's where the lessons, the, the learning, the jigsaw puzzle comes together.

AJ Harper: Yeah. I mean, I just, I just think AI writing black soul.

Mike Michalowicz: Yeah. That's, oh, uh, what a good summary.

Hey, um, I think we should wrap things up. What are we talking about next week?

AJ Harper: Do you have an underdeveloped core message?

Mike Michalowicz: Ooh.

AJ Harper: The answer is probably.

Mike Michalowicz: And just for our listeners again, what is the core message?

AJ Harper: So the way I see it is with nonfiction, and this can include prescriptive, nonfiction, memoir, teaching memoir, that the core message is the main, uh, transformational truth on which the book is built.

Mike Michalowicz: And do you find some people just breeze through that and say, yeah, yeah, it's close enough? Is that why it's underdeveloped?

AJ Harper: Um, I think it's, that is one kind of person and I think most people though, really wanna get it right and just don't have tools to get it right.

don't write *that* book!

Mike Michalowicz: Oh, cool. That's gonna be an amazing conversation.

Hey, to our listeners, thank you so much for listening into Don't write that book. Uh, a big ask I have for you, um, come to our live event if we ever do it. Someone actually called me. Aj, I don't remember who it was, and said, I know how to get Steve Pressfield for you. I'm like, um, I can call AJ and she can make the connection.

So that was interesting. Listen,

AJ Harper: I mean, and you might need multiple people to get him.

Mike Michalowicz: Okay.

AJ Harper: Well, it's not like, it's not like he's my bestie.

Mike Michalowicz: No. But I think if we have a, a compelling. Invite where a couple hundred people are gonna be in a theater to see him, to hear what we're talking about. I think, I think that's gonna be compelling.

So if you're interested in coming to a live event, just tell us. We, uh, we are up, up to down one. Um, we want to go up a lot. So tell us if you're interested, we would really be honored if you rate and review the show. Listen, we're not looking to have the biggest show in the world. We're looking to have the greatest show for authorship in the world.

And so you're rating. And review of our show honestly will be very helpful. If you want our free materials, AJ does tons of stuff and, uh, she has made that available for you for free. A lot of it to get you started or to elevate your authorship game, we have those resources@dwtbpodcast.com. And if you go to ajharper.com, if you do nothing else, go to ajharper.com and just immerse, go to her retreat, join her community.

Uh. And Bbe in the sprint groups. I listen, I went out to this, this location, this retreat center that she has. And it is, it is breathtaking and there was a whole different life experience there. And you meet these amazing people. And this dude Justin, um, I can't remember his last name. It was Nordic, but I met on a, on the ferry and he and I are texting back and forth about saunas that he manufactures, like.

Amazing things happen and he will be in the future book. Um, and the last thing is, if you're interested in our imprint, uh, this is an imprint that I've created with page two called Simplified. If you are an author in the entrepreneurial space, we are looking for authors who have profound ideas that can shift the entrepreneurial game.

You've proven the strategy by serving an entrepreneurial community already, and you have a community that you wanna serve with it. We have some. Really amazing authors who've

don't write *that* book!

already joined the imprint. I, I gotta ask Jesse and Trina when we can reveal the names, but gosh, I'm chomping at the bit to do it.

So, uh, email us at hello@dwtbpodcast.com with, uh, the title simplified so Adayla can see that our producer and get the word to me and aj. Alright, aj. Uh, I think we're done. Right. And

AJ Harper: we're done.

Mike Michalowicz: Okay. Thanks my friends. Thanks for joining us today. As with every episode, we appreciate your presence here. And you know the great reminder, don't write that book.

Write the greatest book you can.