

# don't write *that* book!

## Episode 94:

### “Underdeveloped Core Message”

**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. Yeah, we like, as you said, off air. We're getting there.

We're really getting there.

**AJ Harper:** I meant to like the hundredth episode.

**Mike Michalowicz:** Yeah, it's pretty exciting. Um,

**AJ Harper:** It is.

**Mike Michalowicz:** And the feedback that I've received from people. It is remarkable to me because it's from people I didn't expect to listen to this. Established authors. Mm-hmm. Digging in. Um, there was a guy named Peter Laughter who is building a speaking career.

Just, just a wonderful, extraordinary human being. I know Peter. You know, oh, you know Peter through Heroic Public Speaking, I think.

**AJ Harper:** Mm-hmm.

**Mike Michalowicz:** Okay. So Peter leaves me this message that's just beautiful and, and he said he was binging the show, driving, um, I think down to Maryland from the New York area and. He hears his name come up and he's like, I got these butterflies and then had to pull over and I'm crying. I'm like, you guys are awesome. So...

**AJ Harper:** oh, a little bit of artistic license.

**Mike Michalowicz:** Yeah. Yeah. That there was a little bit of embellishment there, but

**AJ Harper:** Did you know Pete Peter's daughter also is a writer?

**Mike Michalowicz:** That's right. And she performed, or she works with the Moth, I believe.

**AJ Harper:** She does a lot of things. Yeah. I had the pleasure of talking with her.

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**Mike Michalowicz:** You know? Yeah, yeah. I, I've met her Eddie a few times. Eddie is named after Peter's brother. Um, who was Eddie. So, there you go. Um, okay. Question for you. Okay. What is your favorite time of day?

**AJ Harper:** What, what are you doing last, last time you were like, what's your favorite childhood memory? Yeah. And now's favorite. Where? Why these it's questions.

**Mike Michalowicz:** AI says, here's the three questions to ask that opens up someone's expressions of themselves. I

**AJ Harper:** I'm kidding. I'm totally can that one. I, okay. So do you have a genuine interest? Yeah.

**Mike Michalowicz:** No, I'm really curious. Yeah. Okay.

**AJ Harper:** I can say it's twilight, you know when it Twilight. Yeah. Or dusk

**Mike Michalowicz:** Twilight.

**AJ Harper:** When that just, or also called the glooming. Um, I don't know. It's just, um, the light Hmm. And the, the feel of it that the day is closing. Mm-hmm. But it's not all the way done. And I love to sit outside and be in the, that moment.

**Mike Michalowicz:** Do, do the bats come out at that time?

**AJ Harper:** I don't think so, but it's not, would not be a plus for me.

**Mike Michalowicz:** So for us at twilight, there's a swarm of bats. I think they come out only for about an hour. Um, but of course when it's dark, it's hard to tell what's flying around up there. Um. But we had the premier party for the new television show here at the house.

**AJ Harper:** Oh, you did?

**Mike Michalowicz:** Yeah.

**AJ Harper:** How was that?

**Mike Michalowicz:** Dude? It was so good.

**AJ Harper:** It, you were happy. You were happy with it?

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**Mike Michalowicz:** The, I think the show is good, plus and getting better, like it's being edited in the way I hoped now. It's so, it's, it's good. Plus.

**AJ Harper:** But you had a good reaction,

**Mike Michalowicz:** a great reaction, particularly from people. So these were the, the show producers were there. Uh, the show runners. So the producers, there's the producers of record, they help with the show distribution, they're doing the editing. Then there's the show runners who ran the day to day. The, the executive producers that produced the show couldn't be here. They had another show they're working on. But, um, the show runner who.

There's two people, and I wanna acknowledge them publicly. There's Tara, uh, and there's Jen. So it's Jen Tuma-Young, who you actually know.

**AJ Harper:** Oh yeah, I know Jen. Okay. She's the best.

**Mike Michalowicz:** She is an extraordinary human being. Um, and it's Jen. I'm sorry, Tara. Fogerty Graziano. So Jen Tuma-Young 10 or 15 years ago said, Mike, I want to do a TV show with you. This has been her dream more than mine and just has worked it. And we do pilots together and all these different things, and she's just never given up. She's, she's the little engine that could, and against all odds, she, she pulled this thing off. Uh. Tara Fogerty Gra— Tara Graziano Fogerty, I think is the order, but, um, she is a former producer for Rachel Ray.

Um, Rachel Ray Show has been retired, that's why she's former. But she did the Rachel Ray show. These two are, uh, what a extraordinary team to watch and their commitment to making the best show. And there's a lot of chefs in the kitchen, so they only have a certain degree of influence over certain elements.

These were the people that made it happen. It wasn't me, it wasn't the eps, it wasn't everyone else. Comparatively to these two women who just have hustled like I've never seen in my life. Um, so when we had the premier party here, it was at my house. Um, not everyone from the show that was there, but like the makeup artist Deborah was there, and Sammy, who was effectively the guy who was the do everything, what they call 'em, guy Fridays back in the day.

**AJ Harper:** Mm-hmm.

**Mike Michalowicz:** Um, Mike, me, who was the researcher. So behind the scenes, he's always checking like, is this factually true and so forth. Um. And some other folks couldn't be here, but they were all here with their spouses and stuff. Well, one of the spouses, um, had never seen the show, didn't really know what was going on.

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And he came up to me afterwards, said I was hooked. That that was good. We rented a big screen tv, or not even a tv, but a big screen, um, like a, we'd seen in a movie theater and they, they have 'em for outdoor use put in the yard.

**AJ Harper:** Mm-hmm.

**Mike Michalowicz:** Had some, so it was just, it was just an exquisite day. It was just so much fun. Oh, yeah. So.

**AJ Harper:** Oh, how nice for you.

**Mike Michalowicz:** That was great. Yeah.

**AJ Harper:** What's the, when is it premiere?

**Mike Michalowicz:** Uh, in September now, so I don't have the exact date, so I can't say the name. There's gonna be a big PR release and all that stuff. So the day that happens, I'll, I'll be talking about it from the mountaintop, but the, the, the, the, what reminded me of that is the, uh, premiere.

Uh, when we showed the show kicked off at twilight, we had to wait for the sun to set. And I, I'm looking up as they, they have the screen there and here comes the bats. So I'm like, let's, let's, the bats do their thing for about 10, 15 minutes and then they kind of settle down. They get all their meals and then they go, go, go off and do whatever bats do after that.

And then we, we flipped on the show. So. Twilight,

**AJ Harper:** What's your, what's your favorite time of day?

**Mike Michalowicz:** Morning, first thing earlier the better. But blueberry picking time.

**AJ Harper:** Okay.

**Mike Michalowicz:** And my, my favorite thing about y you, uh, just to throw a little compliment your way, uh, I think I may have said this before, is just the genuineness in your laugh. When you do laugh, it, you, you don't throw out artificial laughs. You're not the person that does the feign of a guffaw because you feel obligated because of the person how to feel. Like that joke landed with you or whatever it was. No artificial laughing from you, but when you hit it, you hit it. And there was a couple times when I was visiting you out on Madeleine Island that you got into a chuckle state that you couldn't stop.

And that's the best. It's just the best to see.

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**AJ Harper:** It is just the best.

**Mike Michalowicz:** Yeah.

**AJ Harper:** Yeah. I don't think I could fake it.

**Mike Michalowicz:** You don't, you just don't. I do. Yeah, that was, that was cute. Yeah. But you

**AJ Harper:** Oh, that's, that is your fake laugh.

**Mike Michalowicz:** Yeah.

**AJ Harper:** Oh, now I'm gonna be self-conscious every time you do it.

**Mike Michalowicz:** I don't think I've ever used it with you.

**AJ Harper:** Oh. Yeah.

**Mike Michalowicz:** Oh, come fall. Shame on me.

**AJ Harper:** No, I don't know what the context is. It could have been at yourself, but probably,

**Mike Michalowicz:** see, there's a real laugh

**AJ Harper:** I like to laugh at... My wife always says, you think you're so funny. I'm like, I do. Like I, I don't care if anyone else thinks I am, but I entertain myself. Yeah. Yeah. I think this is bodes well because I'll almost be entertained.

**Mike Michalowicz:** Yeah, there you go.

**AJ Harper:** Even when I'm alone, just chuckling to myself. Um, yeah, I'm trying to think of something that I wanna, I always wanna take play off of what you, you sure?

**Mike Michalowicz:** Sure, of course. I like that stuff.

**AJ Harper:** Play off of what you say. Um, but you, you just said that you have the fake laugh, but I just see you as so genuine.

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That surprises me that you have a fake laugh To me. I feel like I'm always telling people he's absolutely, just as he presents himself to be.

**Mike Michalowicz:** Thank you. I, I feel I am. Thank you. That means the world to me. Yeah.

**AJ Harper:** I think you are. I'm surprised. You have a little fake laugh.

**Mike Michalowicz:** I think it's a, uh, Emily Dickinson thing. You know, speak the truth with slant. Like, sometimes you just gotta give someone that laugh, but it's hard to get out. So you're like, that was good. That was good. It was good.

**AJ Harper:** Oh, okay. Okay. Yeah, but I, I just know you as. Exactly what's on the tin, you know?

**Mike Michalowicz:** Thank you.

**AJ Harper:** Yeah, for sure. And through every, through everything, you know, the book, speaking.

**Mike Michalowicz:** Thank you.

**AJ Harper:** Just having a convo.

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

**AJ Harper:** Yeah.

**Mike Michalowicz:** Um, today, which is episode 94, we're getting very close to that one.

**AJ Harper:** What happens at 100? What we are, we, what are we gonna do?

**Mike Michalowicz:** I think maybe we should do like a mega episode, like a six hour marathon?

**AJ Harper:** No, that would be, no. Yeah, A six hour is, I'm, I'm, I'm out after like two.

**Mike Michalowicz:** Our listeners would be out within seconds.

**AJ Harper:** No, me.

**Mike Michalowicz:** Yeah. No, I know, I know.

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**AJ Harper:** I'll just be babbling if you feel like we could just talk about, say, um, John Hughes movies, Hallmark movies. Um, you know, just random pop culture stuff. Yeah, I could do that.

**Mike Michalowicz:** I think maybe it'd be fun to bullet point all the stuff we've talked about to, to give people a package to kind of walk through maybe

**AJ Harper:** 90 bullet, bullet point 94 episodes.

**Mike Michalowicz:** Yeah. Yeah. Like just stitching it all together.

**AJ Harper:** Maybe I was thinking more like we could have like party hats.

**Mike Michalowicz:** Oh, I see what you're saying. Okay. Yeah, that's a good idea.

**AJ Harper:** So, uh, somewhere between 94-episode bullet points and party hats. Yeah. We'll do something.

**Mike Michalowicz:** Well, we'll have party hats with bullet points on them.

Um, all right, so today we're talking about the underdeveloped core message.

**AJ Harper:** Yeah.

**Mike Michalowicz:** Um, I don't even really understand what that is. You, you shared on last week's episode, you gave a little brief, but why don't you start off with that again and define that for us.

**AJ Harper:** So if you, have you ever heard, ever listened to an author, say, someone says, what's your book about? And then it's about four minutes later.

**Mike Michalowicz:** Yeah.

**AJ Harper:** They're still talking about it. How does that engage you? How is that compelling to you? To listen to someone go and this and this and this?

**Mike Michalowicz:** it's the worst, like a sales pitch almost, and that rambles like a sales pitch.

**AJ Harper:** But do you feel like you really, so what they're tell, what they're trying to do is sell you on the book, but do you know what they really believe?

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**Mike Michalowicz:** Mm, no. Not necessarily.

**AJ Harper:** Often, not some. Some authors are really great at it and they got that. They've got that whole thing down, but my experience is most are not, and I don't think it's really a diss on authors. I think they don't know better.

**Mike Michalowicz:** So give me an example of a rambling core message.

**AJ Harper:** It's just, it, it was just, uh, well, my book's about, my book is about, okay, let me, I do a rambling one for the book I'm working on.

**Mike Michalowicz:** Okay.

**AJ Harper:** Um, or should we try and do one, one for the money habit? Yeah. Let's try and do, let's try and do one for the money habit.

**Mike Michalowicz:** Lay it on me.

**AJ Harper:** Oh, I wanna see. I want you to do it.

**Mike Michalowicz:** Oh, me do it. So a lot of people struggle with money and the reason they struggle with money is because they've tried different systems and actually people really aren't wired, uh, to really manage money properly anyway.

And they get frustrated. And honestly, there's a lot of conflict between. Um, partners, if there's many people managing money. So I wrote a book because I'm already out. I'm already out. What? Me? This was the, and this was the Good core message.

**AJ Harper:** That's not a core message.

**Mike Michalowicz:** No, I know.

**AJ Harper:** Yeah. This is, you just can't retain it. And it's, it's hard because what people are think they have to do, the core message is sum up the book.

**Mike Michalowicz:** Yeah.

**AJ Harper:** And or they think they have to have. Uh, it needs to be promise focused, like this book will do this for you and the promise is a really important part of your book Fundamentals. But it's not the core message.

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And so when people try and sum up or give a promise, they kind of ramble on about that and they are trying to pitch it. It's not a pitch. I was just doing. Um, I do these core message clarifying sessions for heroic for speakers. They're in speech writing mastery, and uh, that's what inspired me to wanna do this. Actually, I've had wanna do this for a while, but I'm ready to talk about it today because I'm in core message mode.

**Mike Michalowicz:** Mm-hmm.

**AJ Harper:** The first thing I tell them to do is turn off their marketing brain.

**Mike Michalowicz:** Hmm.

**AJ Harper:** Because first of all, we're conditioned, especially people who are trying to promote themselves in some way, trying to be a brand, they're entrepreneurs or they're trying to push their career forward.

We're just constantly being told of how we have to sell ourselves, promote ourselves how we need to be forward like that. So it's hard to turn off that part of your brain. Um, but it is absolutely the wrong brain to be using when you're coming up with core message.

**Mike Michalowicz:** So what is the part of the brain that we should be using?

**AJ Harper:** Well, you need to really be thinking about the fundamental perspective shift. That your readers need to make and so they can get the transformation you promise

**Mike Michalowicz:** Is it a, it's not this, it's that statement?

**AJ Harper:** So that's the construct that I use, that I've taught you to use and taught other people to use. And we can get into that in a moment 'cause it can be a really good way to get into it. You don't have to end there. And we can talk about that, but I really, I really think people need to understand that you need a solid core message that's clear. So meaning it's, you can understand it. It's not full of a bunch of jargon that requires an explanation. It's repeatable. So why does that matter?

Because you want people to take it in, retain it, because it's clear and tell other people about it.

**Mike Michalowicz:** Mmm.

**AJ Harper:** The best thing is when other people are saying your core message. It might annoy you if they don't credit you, but it's still a good thing when people are spreading it around because it means that it's sticky.

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**Mike Michalowicz:** Is it, is the core message a stance?

**AJ Harper:** Um, it could be. It's doesn't have. It kind of is because it's what you believe about something. But there's a third element, and this is the part that's really hard for people. When they are trying to come up with core message, it's usually the first few stabs aren't, aren't it?

It has to be transformational on its own, and that's where, that's the hill I die on, meaning when you hear it, you can begin to make a change whether you read the book or not. So for example, with Profit First. There's a it is it. We did a two-parter and then there's really a one parter, so just do the one parter. Take your profit first is as simple a core message as you can get. Which I argue is part of the reason the book is a big success.

**Mike Michalowicz:** Yeah.

**AJ Harper:** You don't even have to read the book and know how to do all of the applications and set it all up. If you just start taking your profit first.

**Mike Michalowicz:** Yeah. It's so interesting. You know, we, we nailed it in the title and

**AJ Harper:** That's a core message title.

**Mike Michalowicz:** That's a core message title. And what's so interesting is there are people who've deployed Profit First, maybe not to the script of the book, but deployed at least conceptually Profit First in their business successfully and have never read the book.

All they know is the title.

**AJ Harper:** Yes.

**Mike Michalowicz:** Yeah.

**AJ Harper:** And the title is The Core Message, ver versus say Clockwork, which is a promise title.

**Mike Michalowicz:** Yeah.

**AJ Harper:** Right. Or All In which is a promise title.

**Mike Michalowicz:** Yep.

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**AJ Harper:** But at any rate, that is an example of a core message where people can start to make a change just from hearing that.

**Mike Michalowicz:** Mm.

**AJ Harper:** Yeah. So it has to be transformational on its own.

**Mike Michalowicz:** Can you give me the money habit? 'cause now my mind is like spinning around and there's so much garble going on. What's the core message for The Money Habit?

**AJ Harper:** Uh, so we actually had a few, but where we landed was don't change your habits. Uh, leverage your habits.

**Mike Michalowicz:** Yeah. Channel. Yeah.

**AJ Harper:** You like to say channel. I like to say leverage. Yeah. That's wordsmithing. It doesn't matter. The essence is the same.

**Mike Michalowicz:** Is essence the same? Right? Like you, you're already wired for wealth.

**AJ Harper:** Don't changer. Well, no, that's different. That's wired. That's, um, that's what I mean. The

**Mike Michalowicz:** cha channeling means you're already wired for wealth.

**AJ Harper:** Right? But there's more that you need to do. So that's why we change it to habits from.

**Mike Michalowicz:** For money. Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. And there's also, in that statement, there's the don't but do like, don't do this, do that.

**AJ Harper:** Yeah. So that's one construct you can do. But, well, I'm gonna explain that in a moment, but I want you to see that that is a big mindset shift.

So let me go back to Profit First. Profit first. The, it's actually had a two-part construct initially. So it was the traditional accounting method. And actually initially way back it was the gap accounting method, but then we changed it to traditional.

**Mike Michalowicz:** Mm-hmm.

**AJ Harper:** Because some people couldn't under, didn't know what GAP was.

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

**AJ Harper:** So the traditional accounting method is killing your business. Take your profit first.

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

**AJ Harper:** So we could have changed that to, it could have been more of a detailed explanation, meaning. You know, the traditional accounting method, which puts profits at the bottom, is killing your business.

So you could have had clarity there if you needed to. Um, but I don't think it was completely necessary. And it can also be just shortened to, to take your profit first. That's a mindset shift. That's a disruption. Mm-hmm. That's something that goes against the status quo and conventional wisdom.

**Mike Michalowicz:** Hmm.

**AJ Harper:** And most core messages that go against the status quo. Those are the strong ones. To saying we need to think differently about this. The reaction that you wanna get from your reader isn't, oh, that's cool. The reaction you want is, oh, I never thought about it that way. Yeah, that's what we're going for. I never thought about it that way, or, um, you're blowing my mind or whatever.

Like, I can't, it's not like a meh, you know? Well, what a cool idea. We don't want cool idea. We want. Holy Moly,

**Mike Michalowicz:** holy moly. And I think also the solution or the answer they're finding in that core message that Holy moly can be really simple. I mean, it doesn't need to be this complex. I actually say it shouldn't be complex and confusing.

**AJ Harper:** No. It should be really simple.

**Mike Michalowicz:** It's like, oh, that's so. Obvious, but it's not obvious,

**AJ Harper:** but it, but I'm gonna correct you. It's not a solution. It's not the solution, it's

**Mike Michalowicz:** the mindset.

**AJ Harper:** It's a shift in thinking that leads to the solution and on which the solution depends, on which the solution depends. So if you can go try all the stuff in profit first, but

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it's not gonna be as effective if you really haven't bought into the fact that you need to do certain things before other things with your money.

**Mike Michalowicz:** You, uh, work with Cara Poppit, who? Yeah. I don't know why I didn't, we're talking off air about her. I don't know why. I didn't appreciate that. She has launched a brand new book, Big Freaking Change. I actually, I think I have my copy here.

I gotta look. I got an autograph copy from Cara.

**AJ Harper:** I've got mine right here.

**Mike Michalowicz:** The colors. The colors on it stand out too. Yeah. It's a nice poppy book itself.

**AJ Harper:** Yeah. She's an uh, she's an alum of my workshop. She wrote the book and workshop.

**Mike Michalowicz:** What is the core message for her?

**AJ Harper:** She has such a good core message and we worked on this together, so it's readiness is not a state of being.

It's a feeling that comes after you take action. So I'll break that down. (Yeah.) Readiness is not a state of being is the conventional wisdom, meaning I'm waiting, you know, I'm going to get to a point where I'm ready. Mm-hmm. I will be in that state. She says, that's actually false. It doesn't, isn't something that happens before and then you take action. It actually comes after. So she's messing with the status quo and saying, we're thinking about this all wrong. We have it backwards.

**Mike Michalowicz:** That is. Yeah. That's interesting.

**AJ Harper:** It's, and it's a huge mindset shift. If all you did was hear that and you didn't read Big Freakin' Change, which you should do because she has a whole process in there, and it's very inspirational, and she wrote every single word, and I'm so proud of her.

But, um, if all you heard was, oh wait, I'm gonna feel ready after I do it, which is really about confidence, right?

**Mike Michalowicz:** Mm-hmm.

**AJ Harper:** Could you make a change? You absolutely could make a change because maybe you would tell yourself, why am I still waiting to be till I feel ready?

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**Mike Michalowicz:** Yeah.

**AJ Harper:** And then you would move forward. Um, I'm also gonna tell you, you know, it's a good core message when they put it on the book in a big letters look.

**Mike Michalowicz:** Alright,

**AJ Harper:** but I'm holding, I'm holding up the, to the camera, the back of her book. Yeah. Which has her core message in big letters and different colors. It's all right there.

**Mike Michalowicz:** And squiggly underlined.

**AJ Harper:** Yeah. And that's because the publisher knows that's important, right?

**Mike Michalowicz:** Yeah.

**AJ Harper:** A lot of books, you can't pull that out.

**Mike Michalowicz:** So let's get into the underdeveloped core message. Why or how do, why do authors have an undeveloped court message? Why do they stay stuck in that state?

**AJ Harper:** Just because they don't know any better. I really don't think it's anyone's fault. I just don't think that, um, I, I, no offense to my fellow, um, editors and teachers and book coaches, but I think a lot of people don't think about this as detailed as I do and as hardcore as I do, I'm so tough about getting this right because it shapes the book and it changes everything.

Can you imagine if we didn't get Profit First down to that? I mean, that would be tragic.

**Mike Michalowicz:** Oh, it would be, it would be tragic.

**AJ Harper:** And it could have been any, it could have been other core messages.

**Mike Michalowicz:** Yeah. I wonder if, if an undeveloped one, I'm just riffing here, is accounting is crushing your business. There's a better way. Like I wonder...

**AJ Harper:** That's a, that's a, that's an example of what people give kind of stuff. People give me all the time.

**Mike Michalowicz:** Okay.

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**AJ Harper:** What way.

**Mike Michalowicz:** Exactly

**AJ Harper:** now. And so here's what hap Okay, go ahead. Sorry. You something.

**Mike Michalowicz:** So if Profit First was literally the exact same book, but we titled it a better way than Accounting and that was the core message.

**AJ Harper:** Oh my God, yeah.

**Mike Michalowicz:** The message we were working on, it feels like it'd be dead in the water. I mean, the core message doesn't only define the title, I mean defines the entire book, but

**AJ Harper:** Shapes, shapes the book.

**Mike Michalowicz:** Yeah.

**AJ Harper:** Yeah, for sure.

**Mike Michalowicz:** What were you gonna say? I, I wanna, that's

**AJ Harper:** okay. Well, here's what, here's where people go wrong. They try, like I said, at the top, a really common, they try to sum it up. They try and encapsulate the entire book in a core message. That's not what it is.

It's one, the fundamental shift in thinking, not you're gonna have other ahas, you're gonna have other shifts in thinking in the book. It doesn't mean it's everything, but it's the main thing that they have to get for change to happen.

So the fundamental foundational truth on which the whole book is built. So it's not everything. So stop trying to sum it all up. It's not a book description, it's not everything all in one. People get frustrated 'cause they kind of wanna be like kitchen sink it.

**Mike Michalowicz:** Yeah.

**AJ Harper:** But also this and then, but you also need to know that. And I'm always saying, but that's the book.

**Mike Michalowicz:** Yeah.

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**AJ Harper:** Right. So part of your job is gonna be converting people to that way of thinking.

**Mike Michalowicz:** I liken this so much to sales, the salesperson that. It cannot stop talking about all. But wait, there's more. When if they just delivered on serving the pain the customer's having and say, this is the pain we're gonna address and the entire package, the book, we'll fix that, then the conversation's done. Do you wanna buy the book or not? Um, are there other ways people go wrong? So they sum up the book.

**AJ Harper:** Yeah. The other one is they give what I call good news, core messages. It's true. It's really good news. Something like, um, yours. If so, if there was an underdeveloped profit, first message, it would, and it was good news based, it would be something like, um, you can have a profitable business.

**Mike Michalowicz:** Yeah. No matter what.

**AJ Harper:** That would be the one. Yes, that is true. And it's optimistic. It's really good news. It's not shifting their thinking at all. Right. Now, a difference. A difference would be Andrea Lee, who's a dear friend of mine. She has a core message for her speech.

You can stop being abusive.

**Mike Michalowicz:** Hmm.

**AJ Harper:** That one is a good core message, even though it's a, you can, good news. Mm-hmm. Because the audience thinks they can't.

**Mike Michalowicz:** Interesting.

**AJ Harper:** And it's a big sh um, they, it's like a, the conventional wisdom is, this is impossible. And so she's breaking that and saying it actually is.

And so that's a rare exception. But most of the time if you find yourself writing a core message, you can. And it's just good news. That's not core message.

**Mike Michalowicz:** Interesting.

**AJ Harper:** That's a promise. It's true. And I love you for it, but it's not actually gonna shift anybody. We don't want anybody being like that. Yeah, that's great.

No, we don't want that. We want people like Holy Caboley. Trying not to say the S word.

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**Mike Michalowicz:** Uh, clearly. Holy boldly. Holy caly. So, okay, so don't sum up the book the, like, the yes and, uh, don't, don't do the, um, good news. Good news. Just why don't you roll through. What else we got that people mess up?

**AJ Harper:** Okay. They try to sound, they try to sound good, so they sacrifice the truth for sounding good. They wanna sound whatever their vibe is. Cool, sexy, sophisticated, edgy, whatever. They wanna sound a certain way. They're focused on that. They want it to sound, um, like a slogan.

**Mike Michalowicz:** Oh, okay. So they're, they're trying to tagline it.

**AJ Harper:** They want it to sound like, take your profit first. Not realizing that actually you start with the truth and eventually it does actually start to sound pretty cool.

But if you start with trying to sound cool. Yeah. Then you're gonna miss the truth. So you have to let it go. And you have to go with just what the plain truth is.

**Mike Michalowicz:** So if we said like, profit is the path, like

**AJ Harper:** That would be too slogany.

**Mike Michalowicz:** Yeah. Yeah. Is a slogany.

**AJ Harper:** And also it doesn't shift anybody.

**Mike Michalowicz:** No, it doesn't do anything. Right. But it sounds kind of cool.

**AJ Harper:** it's totally cool. It does sound cool and it's totally useless.

**Mike Michalowicz:** Exactly.

**AJ Harper:** I mean, you can put those things in your marketing, but again, we're turning off the marketing brain.

**Mike Michalowicz:** Hmm.

**AJ Harper:** We're not trying to sell the book, we're trying to shift the reader's thinking because we have to deliver on a promise.

And if we can't actually shift their thinking, we can't deliver on the promise.

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**Mike Michalowicz:** Interestingly, that's not even good marketing. You know, profit is the path. It's like, but what does that mean? And there's no call to action. Read get different. Yeah.

**AJ Harper:** You already, you already hate it.

**Mike Michalowicz:** I already hate it.

**AJ Harper:** and then also we don't wanna pitch like we've been talking about. So it's not a, you should read this because. Um, that is not it at all. Okay. Nope. And then also people try and put the how to in it, like the framework or the steps or this, you know, my core message is the five step. Um, like what's a framework? We, what's one of your frameworks?

**Mike Michalowicz:** Uh, well Surge, right? Surge is five steps separate Unify Rally.

**AJ Harper:** Yeah. So, but if you had a name for it, it's always an acronym.

**Mike Michalowicz:** Yes.

**AJ Harper:** Look, I got nothing against acronyms, but when people give them to me, they're always so excited. Like I came up with, it is for the word dream. Then there's, you know, in my head, I have to admit, I'm kind of dying inside.

**Mike Michalowicz:** Yeah.

**AJ Harper:** And I just try and smile through it. Like no offense, everybody or any students who come to me later, like, I'm afraid to tell you my acronym. Acronyms are good, they're fine. It's just sometimes I feel like, do you need that? But anyway, don't put that, the acronym, the way forward, the how. Um, if you do this, this will happen. That's not a core message.

Core message is we used to think this, now we need to think this other way. Or it's just, let's think this way. It doesn't have to be the context.

**Mike Michalowicz:** What if it's not a shift in thinking?

**AJ Harper:** It is a shift in thinking.

**Mike Michalowicz:** No, I'm saying what, what if you write something that's not shifted thinking? I remember you railing against someone who called you back in the day wanting you to ghost, and they said, I have the most profound idea. And I can't remember what it was, but it was like, it was such an obvious dumb thing. Like...

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**AJ Harper:** it was a person who tried to convince me. They came up with the concept of taking baby steps.

**Mike Michalowicz:** Baby steps. That's right. That's right. Yeah. Yeah. Okay.

**AJ Harper:** Can you imagine? The audacity to say, this is your brilliant idea.

**Mike Michalowicz:** Yeah, that's, so a core message is if you wanna get results, don't go all in, take baby steps. Like that's like. Is that a bad core message? Because it's so obvious, but maybe it's not. I, I don't know.

**AJ Harper:** Um, yeah, I mean, well, okay, so context matters. Who's the audience, right? That's true. Yeah. So we talked about Cara Poppitt's book.

A lot of people do the readiness thing, you know, where they, they're waiting to be ready. But it's a really, a big problem for women. Hmm. It's a huge issue. Um, so we think we have to be, you know, men. Men will apply for jobs that they're only, I don't remember the exact statistic, but I think it's like 60% qualified for, and women will wait till they're at least 90% qualified before they apply.

**Mike Michalowicz:** Okay. Interesting.

**AJ Harper:** You know, stuff like that. I've seen that with you and I, you'll, you're like, let's go, you know? Yeah. You have just a little information. I'm like, hang on, hang on. Yeah. Hang on now.

**Mike Michalowicz:** Yeah.

**AJ Harper:** Um, and so her message is, uh, for everyone, for sure, but it's really gonna resonate with women who are stuck in the readiness cycle.

**Mike Michalowicz:** Hmm.

**AJ Harper:** So if you were to say a message like, don't go all in, take baby steps, it could actually be transformational for a group of people who have a tendency to put, um, go too hard, too fast. So it's all of this is dependent on reader, which is why we always start with reader. And in fact, I would encourage listeners to go back, we have an episode we did on crafting a reader statement, which is the first of the three fundamentals, core messages too.

So you don't start with core message, you actually start with reader and then it... connects.

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**Mike Michalowicz:** What if the solution. The mind shift that you're thinking of is like so obvious to... How do you know it's not necessarily obvious to your readers?

**AJ Harper:** It could be obvious, but then the question, you know, the question I always tell authors, students is ask yourself if you have a common solution.

If you actually think the solution is a common solution and you, and it's. The conventional wisdom is correct. Then the, then go deeper and ask yourself, why does this, why aren't people doing it? Then, so if the solution is common and you agree with it, why are you still talking about it? And people still need to hear this.

Underneath that is probably a deeper core message as to what's happening that's actually keeping people from implementing the solution that you know, does work.

**Mike Michalowicz:** Now, you've already alluded to it. You've, you've said this, but I want to give the most simple structure here. Like if I'm, I wanna nail my core message. And I'm afraid it's underdeveloped. What, what's the formula?

**AJ Harper:** So an easy, it's not, it's not even really a formula, but it's just a way for you to start playing with it so you're not overwhelmed is to: "It's not that. It's this," it's a simple structure. So here's the conventional wisdom. This is what I think.

Or this is the old way of doing things. This, here's a new way. Um, and that is, uh, you can play with that structure to get at a core message and then you don't have to keep it. You could keep it, but you could also just end up leaving, leaving the part of what you're, what you want, the current thinking you want them to have.

**Mike Michalowicz:** David, uh, zinc Kozko, um, I mispronounce the name, wrote the book, eat this, not that it sounds like. Like every page is going to be a core, a core message.

**AJ Harper:** Well, no, he's, that's prescrip. He's, yeah, it is prescriptive, basically saying, yeah. Yeah. So it's a new way, but he probably has a core message underneath, eat this, not that.

He probably has a core message about what we're missing and when we make the, to, to discern how, what to eat. I actually haven't read it, so he probably has a core message around how to discern what they should eat.

**Mike Michalowicz:** Yeah. Yeah.

**AJ Harper:** So it eat this not, that is not his core message

**Mike Michalowicz:** is, is the core message, you know, in Cara's book you showed the back.

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It's right there. Do we put it into print or, or is it just something that we keep in our mind as an author, as we develop our book?

**AJ Harper:** No, you state it, you state it, you prove it. You, you, um, you show, help people understand how you actually came to it. And sometimes that will help you refine it.

There's also a process of refinement once you, you wanna get a couple drafts going, but the process of creating what I call a core message origin story, kind of like superheroes have origin stories. You think about, how did I come up with this? Why do I believe this? What led me to this way of thinking?

And in the process of writing that, or you don't even have to write the whole thing, you could just bullet point it. Um, or in my workshop I do a timeline exercise that helps people really see their trajectory of how they came to that way of thinking. Sometimes in doing that, you realize that is maybe a different core message you want.

You know, so for example, for my own book, my own book is, a book is not, the core message is I say it all the time and people tell me all the time and tell each other it's, a book is not about something, a book is for someone.

**Mike Michalowicz:** Mm-hmm.

**AJ Harper:** I am trying to get people to see that we have to put the reader first and that that my, everything in my book hinges on that, and everything I teach hinges on that.

**Mike Michalowicz:** Hmm.

**AJ Harper:** But I had a whole list of potential core messages for my book. One of them was a thing I used to say when I was a ghost writer all the time. A book is forever. Make it great. That's a, that's a slogan though, but I used to say it because I would want these ghostwriting clients like, please don't be transactional.

This is not, you say, oh, I'm just gonna get this out there. You actually might be disappointed in this five years from now. And I was sure that was gonna be my core message. It does shift a person's thinking and away from the better business card method. Um, so one could argue that that could have been my core message for my book, but actually it's not because I need the truth that I need readers to decide to agree with me so that they will go on the rest of the journey with me and implement what I have to show them.

And if they don't agree that a book is for someone, we're only gonna get so far.

**Mike Michalowicz:** Hmm.

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**AJ Harper:** So a book is Forever, make It Great, became a teaching point in my book, but it's not the core message.

**Mike Michalowicz:** Interesting. You,

**AJ Harper:** you can still say all the other stuff you wanna say, but Core message means I'm centering my book around this.

**Mike Michalowicz:** Do you have to have your core message fully developed before you start writing your book?

**AJ Harper:** No, but I think it's, you have to get it to where you feel pretty good.

**Mike Michalowicz:** Okay. What if you change your core message while you're—

**AJ Harper:** then your book's gonna change.

**Mike Michalowicz:** Okay. Okay. How long does it take to get it right or to nail it?

**AJ Harper:** You know, it depends when people are working with me. It might take a couple weeks. Um, because, not because I'm, I'm doing anything for two weeks. 'cause they're doing, you know, they're having to kick it around and I have some process of testing it and, and so forth. It's not instant by any means.

I would at least allow yourself. You know, three to four weeks to kick it around.

**Mike Michalowicz:** Okay. So yeah, it takes time and, yeah. Mm-hmm. Yeah. Um, and, and talk, I mean, you

**AJ Harper:** and I can get through it pretty quickly. We just have, have, we've had, yeah. We've, some of our

**Mike Michalowicz:** retreats, we, it we're, we're done in a few hours and it's like, oh, this is the one, and it sticks.

**AJ Harper:** Um, yeah. But this is a s year, 17-year writing partnership.

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

**AJ Harper:** Yeah. And you went, we go through my process and we can do it fast.

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**Mike Michalowicz:** Yep.

**AJ Harper:** Because be also, we know who the reader is. It took us longer with this new book because we have an expanded reader.

**Mike Michalowicz:** That's actually a great point. We were ping pong back and forth and had some really great discussions around. Who's this for and, and how to, how to develop this core message.

**AJ Harper:** Yeah. And I would argue that the core message for the money habit, which is around ha you know, um, don't change who you are. Basically leverage, you know, let me go back up here. Actually I have it right.

Don't change your habits, channel your habits. Mm-hmm. Or leverage your habits. Mm-hmm. Directly relates to the money shame that readers have. About trying to change.

**Mike Michalowicz:** Yeah.

**AJ Harper:** And failing to change. That's why I'm saying you have to start with reader. You don't start with core message, you start with a reader.

There's a, an order to book development.

**Mike Michalowicz:** Yeah. There was something interesting in the money habit in that when people were consuming it, and as I was writing it and as I was having more and more dialogue with people as you were writing it, is that, um, there was this acceptance like, oh, I'm okay. Like there was this mm-hmm.

Realization that. I'm not flawed, that I'm actually okay with money. And once they had that, then they could start channeling that natural good behaviors they have to get the outcomes they wanted.

**AJ Harper:** Yeah. And the core message is enough for them to start thinking about that. Um, but it really, the rest of the book shows them how, so it's not like you don't continue to explain everything.

But that message is critical.

**Mike Michalowicz:** Um, if someone is struggling with their core message and they wanna work with you specifically, what's the pathway to work with you?

**AJ Harper:** Well, I have a workshop, but it's only once a year. So that one's

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**Mike Michalowicz:** Actually, your core message has to wait 365 days. Okay.

**AJ Harper:** No, um, you know, I'm starting to do strategy sessions.

A limited number, like maybe one or two a month.

**Mike Michalowicz:** Is that one-on-one?

**AJ Harper:** Yeah, just for an hour.

**Mike Michalowicz:** Oh, that's awesome.

**AJ Harper:** So we can get, we can get a lot done in an hour where I can, as if I have people fill out this, um, uh, the book fundamentals and do some work with my book in advance and then get an hour with me, we can get pretty far.

Interesting. Yeah. So they can, they can go to [ajharper.com](http://ajharper.com), but I can only really do, I really don't take private clients ongoing, but I can do a fundamental session with people. Awesome. You know, so if they wanna go to [ajharper.com](http://ajharper.com), they can, but also I have a membership. And you know what? The people in my membership, they get to talk to me every single week.

I have opportunities where they can come and say, can you, can I run my core message by you? Can I run my core message by you? It's like, can I, can I run my reader statement by you? And it's kind of every week. So this, that's the most cost-effective way to do it.

**Mike Michalowicz:** It's an AMA ask me anything. 'cause I, I was at your place and you had that group.

And they're started to talk about speaking and there's a whole dialogue about speaking and which I wanted to jump in and give my 2 cents too. I know you, it was really interesting to listen to that.

**AJ Harper:** So there's, those are a couple ways you can get my 2 cents.

**Mike Michalowicz:** [AJharper.com](http://AJharper.com). Okay. Um, so, and if everyone listening right now does not have Write A must read. I, I'm be like, I'm begging you. I don't know what I need to do to get you to get this book. It is the most game changing book. On writing that I've ever experienced. So get it. Write a must read. I promise you it'll serve you so deeply. It's probably the best investment you'll ever make. Also, hey, while you're at it, if you don't mind, pick up a copy of the Money Habit, selfishly, that serves me.

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Plus it's, I think you'll

**AJ Harper:** pre-order, pre-order. Pre-order,

**Mike Michalowicz:** get, pre-order. I'm trying to get pre-orders and you'll get financial independence. So go do your favorite bookstore, indie or otherwise, but I'd be honored if you get it. Can

**AJ Harper:** I add something to that?

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

**AJ Harper:** I mean, we wrote the book. From start to finish concept, we decided which book it was gonna be.

We would have whole episodes where we're trying to figure out which one to write. The whole journey is in this 94 episodes. That's true. So it's like a souvenir of you're bingeing, you gotta go get it to see. That's true. To see how did we start it? How did we write it? And we've been sharing that journey the whole time.

You gotta get it.

**Mike Michalowicz:** We, um, we got a couple updates that we wanna share. One is, we had the first author acknowledge this show in their book.

**AJ Harper:** Yeah. We didn't, we read it in the last episode. Oh, you read in this episode. Justin Bennett,

**Mike Michalowicz:** Justin? Yeah. Oh, I'm sorry. Well then Justin, shout out Justin again, if you don't mind.

I purchased this book. I'm not gonna have a call with him now.

**AJ Harper:** You are? Oh, good.

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

**AJ Harper:** I'm excited about that.

**Mike Michalowicz:** What? What's the title of this book again?

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**AJ Harper:** Oh, it's over. I'm sorry, Justin.

**Mike Michalowicz:** I know, I feel bad.

**AJ Harper:** Hang on, hang on. No, no, no. Don't. It's okay. We have, we keep a lot of books in our brains.

**Mike Michalowicz:** Yeah, so it's on personal finances.

**AJ Harper:** Keep talking

**Mike Michalowicz:** and. He specifically works with, uh, religious communities, churches, and, and temples and so forth in helping individuals, uh, elevate their financial game. So,

**AJ Harper:** um, I have the selfie we took, so rather than me going to find it on my bookshelf Oh, that's right. We took

**Mike Michalowicz:** a selfie and sent a video to Justin.

**AJ Harper:** Yeah, hang on.

**Mike Michalowicz:** Justin kindly in the back of his book, I have to take

**AJ Harper:** off my class. Just 'cause I'm my old level up. Your finances, is it level up your say goodbye to winging it with money?

**Mike Michalowicz:** Yeah, it's a black covered book. It's with a picture of him on the cover. Um, it's a

**AJ Harper:** great cover. He is, yeah. He's kinda looking off into the distance.

Yeah. But he used write a must read to help him with that and he used this podcast to help him in getting that book out the door and um, what a lovely guy.

**Mike Michalowicz:** Lovely dude. I cannot wait to talk with Justin. Um, so that's Update one. Update two, the surge. Our book Surge. It Ain't Dad. Look at this AJ in Espanol.

That's a

**AJ Harper:** much better cover.

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**Mike Michalowicz:** Y Yeah. Isn't that cool? It's very modern. Um, do you

**AJ Harper:** think maybe we might, we might ever

**Mike Michalowicz:** get outta the black. Yeah. So maybe, maybe. So, um, you know, when you think a book is done, that's a

**AJ Harper:** nice picture of you.

**Mike Michalowicz:** That's a nice picture. Yeah. When you think a book is done, it isn't. Um, there's all the Spanish editions of our books, so, uh, it's not going, it's not zooming in.

**AJ Harper:** I, I really think you need a new cover.

**Mike Michalowicz:** For Surge and maybe

**AJ Harper:** revive the surge a little bit.

**Mike Michalowicz:** Yeah, we may, we may. Um, but Surge came out 12 or 13 years ago, maybe more than that. Did, yeah. Yeah. Oh my gosh. I stand by the concept and it applies today as much as it did back then. The core concept of the book is a shift in the market triggers a cascade of ripple effects that you can.

Cling onto, so, you know, the old gold rush, don't go for the gold, make the shovels and picks. And now with ai, there's all of these benefits, all these opportunities are springing up and this tells you how to capture them. So I got a call, um, Adeela got a call from, uh, penguin. This is Penguin, uh, random House in, uh, Mexico City.

And they called up and said, we, we think there's a great opportunity for Surge. We want it. And they just bought the rights recently. And, and here's the book. So Okay. Over, so that

**AJ Harper:** means, so just so that everybody knows though, surge was self-published. Yes. So what you're saying is now it has a traditional distribution in Mexico City.

**Mike Michalowicz:** Yeah. In Mexico. Yeah. Yeah, yeah, yeah. And, and yeah, the Spanish, and they, they bought the Spanish, right. So we'll distribute it in the US and Spanish, which is actually, um, an overlooked market in many cases. There is a massive Spanish speaking community in the us um, that can be catered to with, with translations.

So, cool. Update.

**AJ Harper:** I hope that. Actually leads to getting in the black.

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**Mike Michalowicz:** Yeah, yeah, me too. Me

**AJ Harper:** too, me too on that book.

**Mike Michalowicz:** Me too. Me too. It's

**AJ Harper:** 12 late years later. Yeah,

**Mike Michalowicz:** me too. Me too.

**AJ Harper:** Yeah.

**Mike Michalowicz:** Uh, the next episode we're gonna talk about is understanding the life of a book. Do you wanna give us a quick, uh, 32nd tease on that?

**AJ Harper:** You put me on the spot. Um, I think that authors without realizing it, uh, are a little bit transactional with their books and thinking that there's a shelf life for their book in, in terms of one is gonna get yanked from the shelves That's right. When they're gonna stop. Yeah. And I don't think they fully understand the full.

Lifecycle of a book or see the potential in and or really even understand how a book can, um, take off years after it. It's published,

**Mike Michalowicz:** it ain't ever over. Listen, surge is back in the market and growing. Yeah. Yeah. And there was, we mentioned another episode, and I'm gonna forget the book title, but maybe we'll do research before next week's episode, uh, of that book where there was a athlete on the side at the Super Bowl reading.

**AJ Harper:** Oh yeah.

**Mike Michalowicz:** I think it, with the film it starts.

**AJ Harper:** It starts with an owl.

**Mike Michalowicz:** Yeah. He was with the Philadelphia Eagles as a

**AJ Harper:** self-published book.

**Mike Michalowicz:** Yeah. That was pulled from the shelves and now it became a, a New York Times bestseller so it ain't over. Mm-hmm. It ain't over if you've written a great book. Alright, aj, thanks for sharing everything you shared today.

# don't write *that* book!

I learned some more stuff. I hope our listeners did too. Make sure you go to [aj harper.com](http://ajharper.com) and check it out. Make sure you get right. A must read. It will transform your life. We do have a imprint for entrepreneurial authors, so it's called Simplified if you are looking to work. Potentially with our imprint, which is under the page two publishing arm.

Go to or email us at [hello@dwtbpodcast.com](mailto:hello@dwtbpodcast.com) and just put simplified in there and ala uh, will connect with you to see if there may be a potential fit. We have tons of free materials for you too. That's at [dwtbpodcast.com](http://dwtbpodcast.com). I'm pining to do a live show one day. So if you're interested to email us that you'll come, I gotta get enough interest before we put the effort into pulling that off.

And um, here's a grand reminder. The greatest of all, there is so many authors out there that are writing that book. Don't be one of them. Don't write that book. Write the greatest book you can.