

don't write *that* book!

Episode 103:

“What We Wish We Knew”

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.

Mike Michalowicz: Our last episode ended with this thrashing eighties rock tune that no one will hear <laugh>, because I just listened to the tracks. So, how we're recording this is, you're at Madeline Island recording locally. I'm in New Jersey, in the studio here, recording locally. And then we have Reaper, which is the software, so we can hear each other recording. Also in the background, not Reaper, Riverside. So through Riverside. I was hearing from your microphone this rocking song, and you're like grabbing your ears. Like, where are you going? What's going on? And you said it was getting so loud it was getting louder.

AJ Harper: Yeah, it got so loud. I could barely hear you. So I couldn't concentrate at all. So apologies. Apologies if we sounded weird at the close of the last one. We were just, I was trying to get out of there. I was just trying to Yeah,

Mike Michalowicz: I could tell you like, you're giving me the rapid up signal. That's so funny. So we have no idea what caused that. And we didn't reboot our computers. So there's a 50% chance it will return.

AJ Harper: No.

Mike Michalowicz: Um in this episode we're gonna talk about what we wish we knew. And I'll start off with a acknowledgement of you. It's about your OCD, you talked about it last week. I don't call it OCD I, good enough is not good enough for you. And that I think, is an extraordinary talent. It's so easy, particularly in the marathon journey of creating a book. On the last leg, when you're taking that last corner and you see the finish line, it's just easy to say, I, I'm done. I'm here. And in some ways, it's such an important component. Because the final fine tuning happens then. And I've noticed my own tendencies to say, yeah, yeah, we're fine.

Mike Michalowicz: And you're like, no, no. Good enough's not good enough. And if there's still an error or something that can be improved, even though the publisher themselves, the editor saying, no, we can't make any more changes, you're like, yes, we are. You stick to your guns. And a book, particularly in today's environment with AI creation so forth, the greatest books are books that the final 1%, the author, the team, exerts the most effort for making extraordinary.

don't write *that* book!

And so I wanna acknowledge, 'cause that's what you do you attribute to OCD I attribute it to good enough is not good enough.

AJ Harper: I mean, it's probably both. It's a, it's a legit thing. I have, I'm not, sometimes people say OCD and they're using it incorrectly. They're just meaning that they are particular. But that's, that's not OCD. I'm thankful I don't have it in a debilitating way. And it's, it's just shows up as checking which has served me well in my professional life, but is super annoying to my family. So, we'll just put it, we'll put it, we'll put it like that. But I'm, you know, I'm 52 now, so I've learned how to manage it, but it's a real thing. And it, it wasn't so easy when I was younger, honestly. So thank you for acknowledging that. But it is, it's an actual thing that I've learned to work to my advantage.

Mike Michalowicz: Hmm.

AJ Harper: Which I think you know, that's all we can do, right. Is figure out how to work the things about us to our advantage instead of always trying to eradicate everything.

Mike Michalowicz: Yeah. Oh, a hundred percent agree. Yeah. Align with how you've been defined.

AJ Harper: Yeah. And I guess that's what I admire about you is you're always trying to find a way, how can I make this work with just who I am instead of trying to fundamentally change who I am?

Mike Michalowicz: Thank you. And I, yeah. It's super important to me.

AJ Harper: Well, I do, you know that, that is very the antithesis of the self-help movement.

Mike Michalowicz: Okay. I, I didn't, no, I didn't observe that.

AJ Harper: I remember when I was still ghostwriting and a lot of the books I wrote were for self-help authors, and I'm proud of a lot of them. But I also felt increasingly that they were using that there was this undercurrent of you need to be fixed. Hmm. And I don't think you ever think like that. I think you're trying to figure out, okay, well this is what I've got. These are my resources. How can I make the most of it? And you're doing that in a business, but I think you do that with yourself as well. So this is who I am, this is how I think about things. This is how I roll. How can I make the most of it? And it's not that you're not trying to improve, I think you are constantly trying to improve, and you're naturally curious in that way.

AJ Harper: But I don't think you fundamentally look at yourself as broken. And I don't think you look at anyone else as broken. I think a lot of the self-help industry saying, we have to

don't write *that* book!

always be better and always fix. And some of my favorite self-help books are books where people are allowed to be themselves. And this is just another way of looking at yourself. And I think that's one of the reasons that I became so disenchanted from with ghostwriting. This is constant drive to, well, the reason you don't have this in your life is because you did these things wrong. And it's just that it's really punishing and it doesn't actually help. So, yeah. Thank you. And that's the root of the new Profit First and also the new book, the Money Habit.

Mike Michalowicz: That, that's what I was thinking as you were sharing that. So thanks for the kind words. I believe it to be true. And the money habit, we refrain a few times. Don't change who you are, channel who you are. And you inevitably see more results. Every single time, you know, with knowledge comes power. And knowing yourself intimately gives you such an advantage for getting the results or achievements you, you're, you're pursuing, but also in a very harmonious way. You talking about knowledge is power. This episode's about the things we wish we knew about the industry in general, publishing, writing, everything. And what's so cool is you wrote down these series of questions. I'd love for us both to tackle and go question by question. I think other questions will come out of this. And I also wanna invite our listeners, if you have questions that you want answered, you can just email us. It's Hello at dwtb. Don't write that book podcast.com. And when you email us there email, email us the questions you have, you know, we wanna dedicate shows to it. And these are also the questions that you answer at your retreat. I call it the retreat center. 'cause It feels that way, <laugh>.

AJ Harper: It's not, don't, it's not that grandiose. It's a studio.

Mike Michalowicz: Well, the nature is so grandiose.

AJ Harper: Yeah.

Mike Michalowicz: It's immersive. And there's this great disconnect from the daily world to this focused world your location. And I, I suspect these questions come up in different flavors over and over again at your retreats.

AJ Harper: I think some, somewhat, yeah. I would say more in conversation in dinners, in group activities. And, but you know, we're primarily focused on reader journey there. But yeah, of course, all this stuff about publishing comes up in, in the quiet moments and in the relaxed casual moments where people are trying to figure out what it means to be an author and how to navigate in this publishing industry.

Mike Michalowicz: So I'd love to go through these questions and you share maybe two voices. One is your own natural instinct when you can reflect back to it and you were getting started, but also the collective voice of the community you're serving. And by the way, for our listeners, go to aj harper.com right now. You can go and work with AJ personally at her retreat center on Madeline Island. So the first question you have here, it says what do you wish you knew about

don't write *that* book!

publishing when you first started? Yeah, I have a few responses that come to mind, but I want them to kind of mature a little bit. What, what's, what's your thoughts on that one?

AJ Harper: I mean, it's, there's many depends on which aspect, right. But I think, I wish I understood that absolutely. No one knows how to sell books. Like when I see—

Mike Michalowicz: <Laugh>, including the publisher.

AJ Harper: No. I mean, it's really like, if you we're all just doing our best to try and different strategies that were.

Mike Michalowicz: Yes, okay.

AJ Harper: Yes, we know and fundamentally how to sell them. But I don't think people can really put their finger on why did this one go exactly Y versus this other one. Yes, there are some things that people need to absolutely do, but I don't know. I feel like there's always this X factor. And I wish I had known at the start that that's, the industry is primarily gambling. That at least traditional, traditional publishing is gambling that waiting for the big hit, knowing that a lot of the books aren't actually going to do well, but not necessarily telling authors that. And there's a huge disparity there of communication. So a publisher knows kind of how they think the book might do, but they know most of their books are not gonna earn out.

AJ Harper: And so, but imagine if they told the author, we're not, you know, we're not banking on this one, or we're taking a chance on you, but we know that a percentage of our books are not actually gonna earn out. It's just, you wouldn't feel good about the relationship. You know, you wouldn't feel like, oh wow, this publisher really believes in me. Hmm. Do you know what I'm saying? And so I wish I understood that that's, there's no magic thing that's happening over there, you know, that everybody's just trying to figure this out. And I, I think then I wouldn't have, I think our, our tendency to put too much faith in any one person in publishing is probably misplaced, including me. You know, including, including both of us.

Mike Michalowicz: I was talking with Daniel Ahman yesterday. He's the author of *Change Your Brain, Change Your Life*, sold millions of copies. And he's looking to come to our author event. So I, I go through an interview process and we kinda talked about the subject. He goes, no one gets that. That the publisher does not market your book. You, you are responsible for it. And even though it's talked about constantly on this show, you hear it from fellow authors, I didn't go in with that belief. I was like, yeah, but my publisher's Penguin Random House, my publisher will, will market my book.

Mike Michalowicz: And so I wish I really could comprehend that they don't market the book, at least in the way that the author perceives it. Yes. They get into distribution. Yes. They sell their sales team. But I didn't understand that. A publisher, my one book, while it's extraordinarily

don't write *that* book!

important to me, that's the one book they launched that day. And they have another book coming out tomorrow. And, and within the entire publishing arm is probably the one book they launched that hour. Like, there's, there's so much coming outta that. I think another thing that comes to mind is the music industry. And I think we can leverage this. I wish I knew that the publishing industry for books was so akin to the music industry and albums and all that stuff. Because as I learn more about that, and I don't know much about, but as I learn more about it, and I've talked with some musicians and so forth, they've shared that it's the same thing is, is they don't know which one's gonna be the hit. And it's so o everything's so obvious. In hindsight. I was watching Billy Joel's documentary recently. It's, it's, it's on a streaming channel. It's amazing. It's two episode.

AJ Harper: Oh, do you recommend it?

Mike Michalowicz: Highly. Highly. Okay. Okay. It's, each episode's two hours. So it's a four-hour commitment over how much time you wanna spend with it. But we watched it, my wife and I, over a weekend, day one. Saturday was one, day two was on Sunday. And Piano Man wasn't a hit. Like it came out and it was, it was okay. It was an okay tune. It needs to be marketed, which makes no sense. It is, it is his closing song. It is what he's known for. It's the number one song, perhaps that any piano player will ever play. Like, I went to a dueling piano bar and you're like, piano man. Everyone's shouting it out. <laugh>. And the performer knew it word for word. Note for note.

AJ Harper: So does everybody else in the room.

Mike Michalowicz: Exactly. Everyone sings along. And when it came out, it was like, oh, that's okay. It had to be marketed. And how he did it through, it was through his concerts and, and so forth and radio play and, and pushing it and all these different things. And he wrote very early on his career in the seventies. Well, the, the same thing is with books. I wish I knew that a publisher, to your point, doesn't know what's gonna work. But the publishing industry is like music. If it gets enough air play on the right channels, you got a shot when people start talking about it and making requests for that tune. You've got a shot when, when you're on stage and they want to hear that presentation one more time. You as the author better be pumped up to be speaking or keynoting on Profit First for the thousandth time, as opposed to talking of the new subject that's of interest to you. Now, that's, that's, that's right. That, that's not necessarily

AJ Harper: Profit First is your piano Man

Mike Michalowicz: Profit First's my Piano Man. Mm-Hmm <affirmative>. And for now, and I'm trying, I'm actually, I'm trying to write, I believe the Piano man, but none nonetheless the publishing industry is in this churn state because they don't know either, to your point.

AJ Harper: Yeah. And I think authors need to know that going in.

don't write *that* book!

Mike Michalowicz: What do you wish you knew about writing?

Mike Michalowicz: That's now you gotta go rewind until age, what, seven before you were writing?

AJ Harper: Well, there's, you know, I was a playwright for a long time, and then I started in publishing about 21 years ago. Hmm. I, I wish I had known what I learned through Steve Pressfield. I wish I had known about resistance, and that I understood that writer's block isn't real, and that the resistance I had to writing things was gonna, was normal, not spec. I'm not special. That's, it's and that it's gonna keep coming back no matter what I do, that all I can do is manage it. And I, I think that if I had known that earlier, honestly, I'd probably still be a playwright. Really? Yeah. I think I'd still be a playwright.

Mike Michalowicz: Huh.

AJ Harper: Yeah. 'cause I would've, I would've rocked that.

Mike Michalowicz: And you're returning to that genre.

AJ Harper: No.

Mike Michalowicz: With, with, I know the work you're doing with Michael and Amy Port for a while was kind of pushing you in that direction, the work you do with Gunderson.

AJ Harper: Yeah. I mean, I did. It's almost like Michael Port would call me up and say, Hey, do you wanna, or Amy, and say you wanna work on this thing with us? And, you know, they're theater kids too. So that's where we bond over getting to do play like that and have fun writing a script. So I would write a theatrical keynote. That's the closest I ever would come back, you know, to get back to playwriting. And it was so fun because they approach it in a development way that theater people do. So yeah, it was like coming home and I would do maybe one or two projects a year, but I don't, you know, we don't, I put a pause on that mostly because they had a change in leadership over there. And I really just wanna hang with Michael and Amy. You know, like,

Mike Michalowicz: It was just, yeah. They're such good people. Yeah.

AJ Harper: No, it was,

Mike Michalowicz: Has he ever sent, have you ever got the emails about his baked goods?

don't write *that* book!

AJ Harper: Are you kidding me? Yes. And I'm telling you, and I've talked to him about it. And too, we went out to dinner about, in July, and also told him what I'm interested in, in terms of the type of dessert I'd like him to make. So he's gone from not baking at all to like, expert level baking is true Michael Port fashion. Right.

Mike Michalowicz: It can't, can't just be

AJ Harper: Like, oh, I'm just making some brownies. No, he's completely renovated part of his house too, so that he can do it.

Mike Michalowicz: Oh, just for baking. Yeah. I, I signed up for the list, but I'm not receiving the email, so I gotta see what happens. So.

AJ Harper: What you need to do is you need to text him and say, this is what I'd like you to make me now <laugh>. And then, no, I'm not kidding.

Mike Michalowicz: Yeah.

AJ Harper: And he'll make it

Mike Michalowicz: Unbelievable. Yeah.

AJ Harper: He does everything in an excellent way, but I mean, I'm sure I'll do some fun things in playing with them again. But you know, my dedication has been to publishing for the last 20 plus years. I, I don't think I miss it that much. Maybe I'll do it again someday, but I'll tell you what, if I had known back then what it takes to stay, to be productive as a writer, which I only learned through reading the War of Art, yeah. I probably would've never met you because I would've just been writing, I would've been successful at it. 'cause I have a you know, a drive and a str a sense of strategy that I think a lot of that has served me. So I'm not going off into this creative space without ma like, I will make money at the thing, is what I'm saying. Mm. Because it's just how my brain works. So I think if I had conquered that, I would still be doing that

Mike Michalowicz: Later when it comes to me. What I wish I knew about writing, there's two books I wish I read, but one of 'em didn't exist at the point was your book, Write a Must-Read, it's literally the entirety of your book is a world class education. But there was another book that one sentence revealed what writing really is to me. And the book is on Writing Well by William Zener, and I think it was an opening sentence. And what he says is, the essence of writing is rewriting. And I was like, that is it, that, is it <laugh>?

Mike Michalowicz: I thought writing was Flow State. And you just get the words out. And it works. And what it is getting the idea out. But then it's the polishing of the, the words and the,

don't write *that* book!

and the, the rewriting that, at least for me, it can be one sentence on the fifth or seventh or 12th time that it's arrived. And for me, that's where writing, you know, the, what they call the labor of love, that's the labor part. I do not like the rewriting. I want to move on. That's my natural tendency. Just go, go, go. Next thing, next thing. And I have to very consciously pump the brakes and rewrite and rewrite. And I've shared the story in the show before. There was that one flap copy or something I was writing. And I spent literally six hours writing a hundred words or 200 words and send it to you. This is years back. And you're like, yeah, this is good. And I was like, yeah, I get it now.

AJ Harper: See, but

Mike Michalowicz: The essence of writing is rewriting.

AJ Harper: I think, you know, I've all, I think any artist knows that that's the creative process, whether it's, you know, it doesn't matter what you're making. We know that it, there's a process of revision in some way where the end product, if you wanna call it a product or the, the art is revealed over time. And I think most authors are stunned at what that process is really like thinking instead that it's a process of getting something right in a specific period of time. And it's not, it's a reveal process.

Mike Michalowicz: For back to Billy Joel. I was just googling to make sure I'm saying this correctly. Yeah. So the Piano Man is written to a waltz, which is a 1 2, 3 1 2 3 beat, which originally wasn't, I believe. And when they were discussing it just didn't sound right until they introduced this element. But what's funny is the rest of the band was not familiar with it. They, they didn't know what a waltz, the drummer did not know the Waltz beat. So he had to learn it before he could actually perform it in Piano Man. I think that's part of writing is as I went through the process, I had to learn, it's way different than writing an email or general communication, which I did a lot of prior to becoming an author. It's a whole different process. To me. It's like learning the waltz.

AJ Harper: You mean long-form writing?

Mike Michalowicz: Long-Form writing. Yeah. Yeah. What do you wish you knew about publishing contracts?

AJ Harper: I wish I knew that there were, that a lot of things could be negotiated instead of just accepting whatever the contract was.

Mike Michalowicz: Yeah. I gotta back that one up a hundred percent. Just because there's an industry standard doesn't mean it can't be negotiated. You know, one thing we negotiated very effectively with the books with Penguin, particularly with Profit First, I simply asked the question to Kaushik the editor at the time, what could authors ask that they don't typically ask?

don't write *that* book!

And he thought about it and said, oh, you know, it costs us basically nothing to print a book. So it's like, I can get copies of Profit First written, printed for less than 50 cents a book, like, you know, 25 cents a book or something, because we print as such a massive volume. I think they even own the printer.

AJ Harper: They do. Yeah.

Mike Michalowicz: So he goes, what authors don't ask for is comp copies, free copies, complimentary copies of their own book. So I said, well, how many can you ask for it? He goes, well, most people get, you know, 25, 50. I said, well, if I ask for 500, he's like, well, do you have a reason for that? I said, yeah, I can give it to 500 people to market it. I said, how about a thousand? He goes, do you have a reason? They, they sent over the years thousands of free Profit First books that we distributed aggressively all over the country to different influencers. And that was a huge piece of marketing. In the contract itself. You can negotiate the terms. Most advances if you can advance, are in four T tranches. I know authors have gotten in three tranches. I know authors who've gotten one tranche through negotiation, but also through their prestige.

AJ Harper: Yeah. I mean, that's a factor. If you're a newbie, it's harder to negotiate, but you can try.

Mike Michalowicz: Yeah. Well, you know, what, what are the cards you're holding? You gotta play those cards. Yeah. Yeah. One thing I was also didn't know about contracts is they do talk about a clawback. And a clawback is where if your book does not perform based upon whatever parameters that the publisher has a right to request your retainer back so they your advance back. And in practice, it only happens, it sounds like, when an author fails to deliver a completed manuscript. But once a book is out there, it can happen. But clawback is really re-really rare. Very rare.

AJ Harper: Very rare.

Mike Michalowicz: Very rare. I got a call from a very well-known name, like everyone listening in will know this person. Their spouse called me on their behalf. I know them, but their spouse called, they had published a memoir, and I was strongly discouraging them from doing a memoir just because the memoir already existed. Oh, I know. In multiple states.

AJ Harper: I know who you're talking about.

Mike Michalowicz: You know what I'm talking about. And I said, you should, you have an opportunity for prescriptive nonfiction here. You can talk about subject better than anyone else can, and there'll be demand for it. And, and my call Penguin, they said, oh, we, that's the book we want. And they're ready to put down a million dollars or more for this book. And the author chose to do a memoir, and it, it's a flop, meaning that the demand is very low for the book.

don't write *that* book!

Hopefully it'll catch momentum and there's other activities hopefully supporting it. And, and I read the book. It's a freaking great book. So I asked him, I said, is there, has there been any threat of a clawback or any discussion? I said, not a word. And this person got an advance in the millions and there hasn't been a request for a callback, and the book has sold in the thousands. So just show you the Yeah, yeah.

AJ Harper: That's the gamble. But that's the gamble.

Mike Michalowicz: That's the gamble that the publisher made. Yeah. But

AJ Harper: That's, they're gamblers. That's what they

Mike Michalowicz: Oh. They totally are.

AJ Harper: Yes. That's what they are. I wish What what you wish I wish that they would back. I wish, you know, God, I wish, I wish, I wish if I could get publishers to do anything, it would be to change the way that they interact with authors so that

Mike Michalowicz: I know, I know, I know.

AJ Harper: It just, it's, I, it, it wouldn't even take that much. It wouldn't even take that much. Because here they are investing all this money in authors and then literally telling them nothing about how to sell it.

Mike Michalowicz: It's it's maddening. Nothing. It's maddening. It's maddening. They penguin Random House had a author. They do have an author portal where they had some educational content there, but no one walked with you one-on-one. No, but,

AJ Harper: And the, I'm sorry, I'm interrupting you, but your main point of contact is not qualified to be training you in that way. Your main point of contact is your editor, and they have five other jobs to do with your book that they have. They, that's not their aptitude. Right. That's project management. Right. They're the liaison with the marketing team and the sales team also, the, you just mentioned the contract negotiations. So they're a middle person and point person for every one of those things. And often are not qualified or even just, just good at, like, maybe they're just not a detailed person, so the project management falls off, or they don't know anything about marketing, and so they're just shrug, you know? Yeah.

Mike Michalowicz: Yeah. And I, not that I've worked with other mainstream publishers, but the story is the same. There is no education, so I'm not picking on PRH.

don't write *that* book!

AJ Harper: No, no, no. It's just that this, it's the bureaucracy. It's the way they've set up the whole industry.

Mike Michalowicz: And this is with hybrid publishers. I've heard the same too. Is there really isn't an education. So you're, you're, you're left on your own. What, what do you wish you knew about your own abilities?

AJ Harper: Oh, that's a good question. You know, I wish I knew that I had a good, I didn't know at the time that I, when I started out in, in publishing, that I had a good strategic mind. I knew I was a good writer, and I, I knew I could write just about anything. And I learned over time through ghost writing, that I could help authors really solidify their intellectual property. I, I knew I could do all that, but I didn't understand that I had a good strategic mind. And I wish I had known that earlier because I probably would've advocated for myself and taken more chances had I known that.

Mike Michalowicz: I wish I knew. And I'm totally cognizant of it now and, and use it. I wish I knew my ability to take complex subjects and make 'em simple, accessible. I thought that's, I thought everyone does that. Like, it's so obvious and yeah. I, I wish I knew that throughout my entire career. It's only an awareness that I have acutely in the last 10 years.

AJ Harper: So that would've given you more confidence and, and maybe changed the way you looked at what you were producing.

Mike Michalowicz: Totally. And, and yeah, I would double down on that. Like prophet first. I wonder, it's hard to recall now, but I wonder if it was, if, if I would've leaned out more and when I wrote it, because I was like, it's so obvious. Like, just take it. Everyone knows this. Right. Right. It's even said like, take, take your profit first or pay yourself first. Like, everyone knows that phraseology. I'm like, this is so stupidly obvious. But you know, what would change? That was when we wrote the article, you wrote the article for the Wall Street Journal And we published it. And these emails start pouring in. Like, this is a game changer. Thank you. I never thought of this. I'm like, oh, maybe there's something here. And I guess with our abilities, it's true. You have to hear it a thousand times before you accept it <laugh>.

AJ Harper: Yeah. But I think that's true of so many authors is they overlook the thing that is, comes naturally to them. The thing that seems, what doesn't everybody know this? And then it gets buried in the book.

Mike Michalowicz: Yeah.

AJ Harper: There should be a spotlight on it.

don't write *that* book!

Mike Michalowicz: It should be. What, what do you wish you knew about Marketing?

AJ Harper: <Laugh> Well, I wish I understood how I, I, one of the, one of the, one of the challenges with the industry is that because we authors don't learn what's going on behind the scenes, they don't really understand that they're missing a bunch of milestones and opportunities. They don't know that they're squandering the time because no one freaking tells them until it's too late. And so, I wish I had in the beginning really understood what was going on behind the scenes with respect to marketing. I wish I had accepted the fact that you kind of need a personal brand. I'm just coming to terms with it now for myself.

Mike Michalowicz: Yeah, yeah, yeah. There you go.

AJ Harper: You know, because I didn't, ugh, I don't want it to be like that. But it is, I hope,

Mike Michalowicz: I hope our listeners underline that there, there's two products going on. There's the book and there's the author, and those are two different things.

AJ Harper: Yeah. And, you know, coming up as a playwright, not the case, not the case at all. It's the play. So it really took, I really didn't get it. And I've been really resistant myself to the personal brand piece because I feel part of it is you know, just my own conditioning. I like to be, I like behind the scenes. I'm, I'm comfortable there. Part of it is being a Minnesota girl, where we're not supposed to draw attention to ourselves. It's just like an entire state of people who don't wanna draw attention to, to ourselves. <Laugh>

Mike Michalowicz: The whole state's basically invisible. Yeah.

AJ Harper: We're just, no, the, what we think is a scene you would just think is a conversation like, don't make a scene <laugh>. So it's just been hard to come to terms with that. But it is real, I, the, the authors who are committed to their personal brand, and it does, I guess I thought it was just gross. Like, oh, I, you don't wanna be like, too salesy, too egocentric. And it's not, it's actually really essential. So I wish I had known those things.

Mike Michalowicz: Yeah. An identity or framing I've used that's really helped me with that. 'cause I do feel, it feels like ego is to call it a spokesperson role. And a spokesperson is someone who speaks vocally about something, but is also not stake it. The kind of, the stake they have in the outcome is a little bit more disconnected. There's a little bit of a wall. So the, the book is not me, and I am not the book. It's what I believe in more than anything. At least that's how I frame it. And it takes away that ego and allows me to push harder for the book, because I'm a spokesperson for it. You know, what I wish I knew about marketing was, it's really hard, maybe even impossible to start marketing your book too soon. I, I, I've done the wrong, the other side where I've market it aggressively after the launch, but before the launch I've played too cautiously. There's trepidation. Mm-Hmm <affirmative>. Thinking that the awareness will burn

don't write *that* book!

out. And it was funny, when we were at the event mm-hmm <affirmative>. The author meetup mm-hmm <affirmative>. I can't remember which author it was, but someone's like, oh, you gotta wait till, you know, eight weeks before, that's when you start, start pushing James.

AJ Harper: Clear,

Mike Michalowicz: Clear. Oh, it was James. It was James.

AJ Harper: And it makes sense to him, but he's not a new author anymore.

Mike Michalowicz: That's correct. And it makes sense in that it, it triggers a cascade of momentum for maybe purchases. But to your point, marketing a book is not selling a book. And that's two different things. You can't start marketing soon enough around your concept, your idea profit first. The first exposure it had to the public was not the Wall Street Journal article that came out two or three years prior to the book, whatever it was. It was in toilet paper Entrepreneur. There's a line that says Profit First and There's a line explaining what it is. Yeah.

AJ Harper: Yeah.

Mike Michalowicz: That's, that was the kind of the inaugural marketing. And then I spoke about it. I talk when I'm on stage, I'm speaking about it. I was putting it out there over and over and over again, and building awareness. Which meant people cognizant. There was an idea out there, people committing to signing up for a list for learning more. It's really hard to start marketing your book too soon. I, I think it is. There is a period where you say, buy the book now that people forget, yes, they bought the book, but marketing it starts, it can start years and years in advance.

AJ Harper: But further, I wanna say that I get what he said, why he said that eight weeks is about the maximum that anybody can stand to see you talking about your book over and over and over by my book, whatever. Right. Get that. That's activating your existing network. But there's a ton of stuff you can be doing behind the scenes in terms of author connections leveraging other, not your primary reader, but your secondary and tertiary readership. Getting that going, getting the attention of your publisher, getting enough buzz so that your, the sales team sees what you're doing. 'cause It's not a freaking democracy. And they're not gonna equally promote and sell every single book. That's not happening. They understand what they're gonna put their money and effort behind the books that have the most potential, and that's just what's gonna happen. And so you have to make sure that your book is seen as having the most potential so that they're gonna throw more money and more resources and time behind it. And that's part of your job. So I think it's easy to say you only do this eight weeks out if you're a known author, but it's not gonna help you if the sales team has no idea who you are. And they're focusing on other books instead. So, you know, and so that's back to knowledge about how the industry works.

don't write *that* book!

Mike Michalowicz: What do you wish you knew about the business of authorship?

AJ Harper: Well, I'm gonna say this in a, this is more from a publisher perspective. From when I was a publisher. I wish I knew. So I don't think I, I'm looking, I wanna come at this from a different perspective. I wish I knew that not everyone really wants to do the work. So authors want the outcome, right? But not necessarily the corresponding work and risk involved. And I don't just mean, I'm not talking about financial risk, although that's sometimes the case. I'm talking about personal risk where I don't, I just see authors not wanting to put themselves out there. So you're gonna climb this giant mountain, which is writing a must read book, which I hope you're doing. And then now you're just not gonna tell anyone about it, or you're just gonna do the cursory stuff. And I think I didn't know that.

AJ Harper: I didn't, I I just thought everybody, if you're writing a book, that you would want people to read it. And I learned the hard way when we had our publishing company, which for our listeners for about eight years, had a, a publishing company publishing fiction. And it was an award-winning company. And I'm really proud of it. And we sold that company, it still exists. And now owned by Chicago Review Press, what I learned was, you know, I would go out and try and offer deals to authors. 'cause We were just getting started. Like, oh my God, you're a great writer. Have you ever considered publishing a book? We'd love to publish. Then I learned, learned that the people we were offering deals to were less likely to actually try and sell their book than the people who submitted to try and get a deal.

Mike Michalowicz: Oh yeah.

AJ Harper: And

Mike Michalowicz: Interesting and obvious in hindsight.

AJ Harper: And I've worked with so many authors who are just not, they just don't want the corresponding work that goes with the goal.

Mike Michalowicz: For me, I think, I wish, this is why I wish others authors would know that authorship is a business.

AJ Harper: Mm hmm.

Mike Michalowicz: I think people conflate authorship and writing, and I think they're two different, I know they're two different things. Writing is the process of writing authorship is the ideation, the codification, and then the promotion of an idea. But for me, when it comes to the business of authorship, I caught on pretty quickly. But it would help me if I understood from day one, 'cause I wasn't raised in the entrepreneurial space this way. Your biggest competitor in

don't write *that* book!

authorship is your biggest friend and ally. I, in my old businesses, when I did computer crime investigation and computer systems, you know, the tech space I was in, my biggest competitor, if they won the job, I lost the job, or vice versa. So I had to find ways to differentiate and beat them out on every proposal. With authorship, you gotta find a way to differentiate vocal, you vocalize your own unique voice.

Mike Michalowicz: But then that competitor, when we talked about this in the prior episode, if people are falling in love with that author's work, they're falling in love with that concept. And if you have something that is a, speaks that concept that that category, that interest, the category of interest they have, but is a different voice, it becomes very appealing to them. And I would say half the authors in the world get that, that if I can reach out to other authors in the profitability space, Garrett Gunderson would be one. There's other authors, he's more personal finance, but there's other authors in the business finance space. Simple numbers. I can't remember the author of that book right now. If I did meet with him,

Mike Michalowicz: If I can collaborate with them and promote their work, it actually elevates mine. And I have a very practical experiment. We did, we did a promotion of Michael Gerber's E-Myth when I wrote Clockwork, because they're kind of complimentary books where we didn't do, we didn't mention Clockwork, we didn't say also by Clockwork. It was in simply the, the line that said from Mike Mcow, it's author of Clockwork. And it said, there's a book that bar None you have to read if you're serious about building a business that can run independently of you. And it's E-Myth by Michael Gerber. I love this book. People bought that book. I'm getting thank yous from folks that read the book and said, oh, I didn't know this existed. But what was fascinating is within a few days we saw a bump in clockwork. And specifically on Amazon, you saw the buy box where had E-Myth and Clockwork signed together, even though we weren't promoting clockwork. And that just points to the power of promoting what I perceived as my biggest competitors. Really my biggest ally.

AJ Harper: Yeah. Yeah.

Mike Michalowicz: Okay. Next question is, what do you wish you knew about the industry overall

AJ Harper: When you started? When you started?

Mike Michalowicz: What do you mean? When I started? When

AJ Harper: You started out, what do you wish you knew about the publishing? Overall? Overall?

Mike Michalowicz: Yeah. Yeah. That, that's the question to you though. Well,

don't write *that* book!

AJ Harper: You want me to answer first?

Mike Michalowicz: Oh, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. Yeah.

AJ Harper: That a lot of people are full of, you know what

Mike Michalowicz: <Laugh>

AJ Harper: Yeah. Yeah. Because I think I had too much reverence. I think I had too much deference. I think I was willing to just accept I thought people were always telling the truth. I think it's my, I'm, I'm known actually for my trusting nature, which sometimes really upsets my wife and my team. And I think I learned the hard way that not everybody is in service and a lot of people are just full of it. And I actually wish I had known that to begin with because it was really challenging for me to come to terms with it. And had I known that to begin with, I imagine that I probably would've retired from ghost writing much earlier. Hmm. It just, for me, it is just, I, I don't wanna be part of projects where the person behind it is full. You know what?

Mike Michalowicz: Yeah.

AJ Harper: I don't wanna do it. And there's so many, and I just wish I had known, known upfront. 'cause I, I just take people on their word every time. It's a good thing. It's a good thing. I like that quality about myself and I, but I've had to surround myself with people who are kind of BS detectors. So that they tell me because I'm more apt to be like, that's amazing. You know, it's, I, and it was really hard. It was really hard to, to realize that I was caught up in that, and that people aren't always what they seem.

Mike Michalowicz: Yeah. The truth comes out. I, you know, people are very perspe perceptive and the BS

AJ Harper: Voice comes out. I don't know. I got, I, I wrote for some serious BSRs who are still doing just fine, Mike. Oh,

Mike Michalowicz: Real. Okay. Okay. There you go. Yep. You know what? I wish I knew about the industry overall. Now I gotta think. I, I had a thought, but now it's changing. I, I guess it's, I wish I knew that the industry is an industry. Mm. It felt like it was a hobby initially. Mm.

AJ Harper: You were treating it like, you were treating it like another p an extension of things, but not the

Mike Michalowicz: Thing. Yeah. This, this was a thing. It was a thing. It was like, it's like how I treat guitar. It's like, oh, it's, it's cool. It was kind of fun. I can say I play guitar, but it wasn't a

don't write *that* book!

devotion, nor did I appreciate, it's a real industry. One thing I did know it just took time to land, was that you can also be very financially successful as an author. And the thing I've shared this, I don't know if I ever shared on the podcast, but I know I've shared it with you, is I started interviewing authors before Toilet Paper entrepreneur came out and was asking, you know, can you be successful with books? And most people said, are you kidding? No way. Like, are you crazy? But then I'd ask people, I said, well, tell me about the books you've published. And the vast majority of those, didn't they, they were, they were just opining. So I'm like, okay, discredit that or discount that. When I talked to an author that would say, oh, you're gonna, it's hard as hell. You don't make money. Then I said, well, tell me why you don't make money. I was also looking for authors with The Counterpoint. And the story is, I met with Tim Ferriss. Yeah. We were both on a TV show together, and I had a half hour with him in the Green Room. He had just launched the 40-hour work. The Four-Hour Work Week?

AJ Harper: No, the 40 Hour Entrepreneur was the crap title that someone wanted.

Mike Michalowicz: I know, I know, I know. That's why I started giggling twice. Someone wanted

AJ Harper: Wanted to call Clockwork

Mike Michalowicz: Unbelievable. But the Four-Hour Work Week. And I said, can you make money, you know, through books? And he kind is like, one of those things where his eyes kind of go left and right. Like, is there someone else in the room? Am I being punked? And he goes, you can make an f ton of money as an author. And I was like, you can. They're like, how do you do it? And he started, you know, do your research speak to a subject that no one has spoken to before in your voice, in your way, blah, blah, blah. And starts going through this, promote the Living Hell out of it. Be relentless. And I follow that script, not to a t not as effectively as he has, but, you know, we've moved, I say 1.5 million. It's probably more than that book. You've

AJ Harper: Been saying that for a while.

Mike Michalowicz: For a while, yeah. And Profit First has moved over 1.2, so it can't be, 'cause other ones have moved hundreds of thousands. So, but whatever it is that, that it's made a good income. Some people could choose to live on that alone. So I knew that early on, and it served me, the way I looked at books was, oh thi this is a source of income. I just wish I knew as an industry, not a hobby. Really absorb that earlier. Since you were a publisher yourself, do you, I I you have here in the notes here some thoughts and stuff. Do you have kinda list of other ideas you wanted to share?

AJ Harper: I shared a bunch of them already. I think.

Mike Michalowicz: Yeah, it's a thought. Is there anything additional?

don't write *that* book!

AJ Harper: There's, yeah, I'm just thinking, I wish other authors knew that they, that they belong there. And I think this feeling of, I don't know if I fit here. I don't know if I'm good enough. I don't who's gonna read this, who's gonna care? It's just killing all the good stuff. And I wish authors knew they absolutely belong there. The amount of mediocre pulp that is out there. Come on. Like, the fact that you're listening to this podcast at all and means you're probably gonna write a better book than a lot of people <laugh>. At least, at least you want to. Yeah. At least you wanna try and you, you definitely belong there, but you're, you're feeling like you're outside of it and that you need a ticket or permission or whatever is keeping you from realizing it now to acknowledge some groups are actually definitely kept out behind the gate for sure. But I just want you to have the attitude that you deserve to be there. I'm talking about just the attitude. Years are wasted while people are trying to wait for in, you know, admittance to this place that is just anyone can be there as long as you have a commitment to this, to excellence. So I wish authors knew that they absolutely belong.

Mike Michalowicz: I'm very fortunate to meet with a lot of aspiring authors, especially from my community, and they'll say, Hey, I'd like to get your advice. So I met with aspiring author and they shared a book concept of writing. I'm like, oh, it's interesting. And they said, and I got an advantage. I'm like, oh, what, what do you mean? They're like, well, I'm using ai. Oh Lord. And it's really elevated my game. And he's like, this is gonna be a really good book. And then I did the Tim Ferriss, am am I being punked here? So my eyes kind of screwed around. Like, is someone listening in? Like everyone is using ai. I'm like that. You're just simply saying you have a tool that's like a word processor. It's just the next version of it that everyone else is using. That's not an advantage. That's table stake. I'm like, what is your differentiator? How are you gonna elevate beyond ai? Is the question. And he's like, I, I wasn't thinking I was just gonna just use ai. I'm like, well, that, that's, that's exactly not the book to write. Don't write that book. And I, I yelled at again, I said, don't write that book. It's a podcast at the coffee shop. I yelled it out and I left <laugh>. Anything else you wanna share before we wrap it up?

AJ Harper: No, I think everybody stick with it and you'll have your own list of things you wish you knew, but hopefully you'll have fewer because you listen to this podcast.

Mike Michalowicz: Yeah. This is, this is fun. I, I hope our listeners are getting a boatload of education and knowledge and having some fun on the journey. Next week we don't know what we're talking about because we haven't planned next week's episode yet. No, we're not there yet. So not there yet. But our, listen, as a listener to our show, you can tell AJ and myself what you want to hear. Email us at hello@dwtbpodcast.com. So that's your call to action. Any questions, any thoughts? Plus we have free material at the website, which is also the same domain. I I say it over and over again. I, I just wonder if there's a single listener that hasn't done this. Have you purchased AJ's book? Write a must read. If you haven't, you've lost the plot. Like, if you are committed to being author, I'm telling you, this is the book that defines all. And if you wanna up the game, you can go to aj.harper.com and go to on one of those retreats or meetups where

don't write *that* book!

authors are working together. But start with the book if you haven't yet. One final thing. Don't write that book. Write the greatest book. You can.