

# don't write *that* book!

Ep. 116:

## “Publishing Pitfalls”

**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:**

We may have our juiciest shared story, like, like, and there may be retraumatization for you, Polly, myself, Krista, for sure. If she ever hears this one, <AJ laughs>, it's gonna be a funny story and I hope the, um, per- perpetrator listens into, uh, we're talking about unexpected publishing pitfalls today, AJ. But before we get off, um, I just wanna thank you for, for rolling with the punches and, and being here. You know, we wanted to do this in person. We just wanna make sure we get the video out too. And we are theoretically still a month or two away from having a studio where we can be together and film. But one thing I admire about you is good enough is not good enough. And we did an episode, was that one 14, um, that I just was not mentally there because of all this stuff going on. And, uh, you called me and it was with kindness. You said, you know what? We gotta redo the episode. I'm not feeling it. Polly was listening in and it just wasn't us. And it'd been a shame it would've been a little stain episode 'cause I just wasn't there. And so I just appreciate you holding us to that standard, doing it with thoughtfulness of how you presented it. And that's a big deal. So thank you.

**AJ Harper:**

Aw, Well, you know, right back at you. Like, I don't, I don't, I admire the fact that that's not gonna be an issue for you. So some people are sensitive Sally's, right? And they.

**Mike Michalowicz:**

not, I've never heard that term.

**AJ Harper:**

Really?

**Mike Michalowicz:**

I love it. No, I haven't.

**AJ Harper:**

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Most people are just Sally's and they get, you know, offended by it. Sometimes I'm a Sally, sometimes I'm a Sally, you know, I really wanna deliver. I really wanna do a good job. And sometimes, uh, one comment sends me into a spiral. My team knows this, and I think, oh my God, what did, what didn't I do right? Um, but you can't, you can't please everybody for sure. But I do know that if I tell you we probably need to redo that, you'll, you'll just be, you'll just be game to do it. So

**Mike Michalowicz:**

I'm playing with like a little joke sequence when I do a keynote, if we're gonna use it about names, like just basically apologize to every Karen in the room. Like that used to be Karen was a, was a perfectly acceptable name until it wasn't. And now the worst thing to have though is Alexa. Like, you can't, you can get a whisper. You gotta say, Hey, I'm sorry for all the,

**AJ Harper:**

And by the... no offense to Sally's, I know some nice Sallys. Sally North, great Sally State agent up in the Apostle Islands, Lakeshore area. Um, I've also had a student named Sally. Love the Sally's. I'm talking about sensitive Sally's. Let's be clear,

**Mike Michalowicz:**

You know what I love about real estate agents? It wouldn't work for Sally, but is when they say, um, their full name and their nickname. So it's like Richard Rich, you know, North, Real estate agent. But

**AJ Harper:**

Don't you think Sally North is a good real estate

**Mike Michalowicz:**

Agent? Sally North is great

**AJ Harper:**

For the Northwoods?

**Mike Michalowicz:**

Yeah. Sally North is great. I want to buy property from Sally North.

**AJ Harper:**

You do. She's great.

**Mike Michalowicz:**

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Uh, um, okay. All right. So let's start. We, so we're talking about unexpected publishing pitfalls, but you were you, I was gonna share a story. He said, oh no, no, I got one for you. I was gonna talk about Simon Sinek and, and the inception of his book and the know what I

## **AJ Harper:**

Tell the Simon Sinek inception of his book story at the very end of the podcast.

## **Mike Michalowicz:**

Great. Okay. I'll share that. The one we were not gonna share, I'll share, but we have a mutual contact. Actually, I turned it on to you and I wonder subconsciously if I was trying to dump him. So his name is Stee. He is a, or was against Book of World Records record holder for holding his breath underwater. And he does these deep dive unassisted. Yeah, phenomenal

## **AJ Harper:**

Unassisted. Is that, that fell off unassisted. He is down there, just him.

## **Mike Michalowicz:**

Just him, no tanks, no nothing. And he'll dive hundreds of meters down. You have to do all these different things to actually be able to survive that. And he does it for 10 or 15 minutes. Like.

## **AJ Harper:**

It's crazy. He's in, in like insane shape.

## **Mike Michalowicz:**

Insane shape. So he's from the Netherlands and came to visit. So I met him, I was at here, I met him was, I was in the Netherlands and he came to his speaking engagement and afterwards like hey, I'm Stig. And I wrote a book called Breathe, and we're just chitchatting. And he goes, uh, where are you? I'm like, go in New York. He's like, oh, I come out to the United States every so often. I'm like, oh, have you ever, let's, let's have dinner. And well dinner turned into a visit. Um, but I wanna hear your side of the story. 'cause the visit

## **AJ Harper:**

No, please do go on as to what, what did, why did you decide to contact me?

## **Mike Michalowicz:**

So Stig is there and we're, we're having dinner. He is, he's got no place to stay. So I'm like, oh, stay at our house. And the next morning I wake up. So he does this yoga, these yoga stretches and exercises.

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**AJ Harper:**

We know.

**Mike Michalowicz:**

I I think in the nude, like for four o'clock, it's for four hours in the morning. In, in, in, in skivies at, at the bare minimum.

**AJ Harper:**

Correct. Or action.

**Mike Michalowicz:**

And I remember like looking at my wife, he's like, oh, I can help you breathe deeper. And like yoga wraps himself around her

**AJ Harper:**

In his skivies?

**Mike Michalowicz:**

I, now, I want that to be the truth. Yes. But I don't know if that was true, but like, totally like hitting on my wife in the weirdest way and is like, oh, this guy,

**AJ Harper:**

Any of this, when you called me, can we just, this is a new information.

**Mike Michalowicz:**

So my wife is creeped out by him. And um, I just remember he's like, I gotta stay long. I'm like, dude, you can't stay here long. Like, I thought he was gonna stay for a day. And he is like, oh, can I just stay here? And now it's like three days, four days. I'm like, dude, we, we have family coming. So I'm like, you can't stay longer. He's like, oh, do you know someone?

**AJ Harper:**

Oh my god, Mike, you did not tell me this part.

**Mike Michalowicz:**

I listen, you and your wife, I didn't think would be hit on by Stig. Did he hit on you guys?

**AJ Harper:**

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No. Oh, I don't think so. I don't know. I'm not really also Stig, you're awesome. And you're, I you know, he's, I'm, he's gonna listen to this.

**Mike Michalowicz:**

He's gonna listen to this. He's got friends all over the planet. Yeah, mostly girlfriends. 'cause they, he started, I remember on his phone, he's just scrolling. I'm like, amazing Steve. Amazing. What happened with Steve's visit with you?

**AJ Harper:**

You said to me that he needed some sort of help. I don't even remember you did 90 somewhere.

**Mike Michalowicz:**

He needed somewhere to stay. 'cause he, I didn't realize he planned on staying in New York for like a month, or, I don't know. It was, oh, I said, wait, I expect him for a day at my house. It's now day four. I'm like, dude, we have family coming. What?

**AJ Harper:**

You didn't tell me that he would wanna stay at my house.

**Mike Michalowicz:**

I didn't think you, I I didn't know what he just, he just couldn't stay with us any longer. I'm like, oh, I know someone that's in New York.

**AJ Harper:**

Oh, now the, now the penny drops for me. What, 12 years later?

**Mike Michalowicz:**

Hot potato. Like how are even doing business together anymore? You're gonna ban me.

**AJ Harper:**

No, but I would ask, I what happened was I thought he wanted to, you made it sound like he wanted to talk to me about his book

**Mike Michalowicz:**

And Oh, that's truly the case.

**AJ Harper:**

Okay. But I thought he was coming and he was gonna like get a hotel room or something. He--

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**Mike Michalowicz:**

And I didn't think he'd ask you for a space.

**AJ Harper:**

He gets off the bus, right where I pick him up off the bus and we go have this lovely lunch and I'm talking to him and, um, that I took me like an hour to convince, well actually I never did convince him. He's insisted that what he was gonna do is just go down to the Penguin offices, which at the time it was just Penguin, not Penguin Random House.

**Mike Michalowicz:**

That's right.

**AJ Harper:**

You know, down, it was like house dinner down down there. And he said, I'm gonna go down there and just go, go say hello. I was like, to whom? Yeah. And he said, well, I'm just gonna go the office. I said, they're not gonna let you in. There's a, you walk in the door and there's a massive security desk with at least five people behind the security desk plus the guards. And then there's a, you need a code to get past the little, you know, what do you call those? You walk through 'em. They're a

**Mike Michalowicz:**

Gate. It's a gate. Effectively.

**AJ Harper:**

Individual little gates, like in a subway almost. Yeah, yeah, yeah. Then you still have to, when you get up to the floor, you can't just be wandering around. So if you even made it up there, like you, he said, no, no, it's fine. I'm just gonna say, who are you gonna ask for? I said, yeah. You go, what desk? Who are you gonna ask for? They're not going, they're gonna turn you away. He did not believe me at all. He did go do it, by the way. He totally went to do it. And he, I think emailed or called me and told me that I was right. I was like, I'd said I was right. If I'm right, I'm freaking right. So anyway, we had this lovely lunch. I'm like, this guy's a lot of audacity. Okay. Go forth. You have to be, if you're gonna dive down into the water by yourself, incidentally, if you're wondering what we're talking about, there was this movie in the eighties called Into the Blue. And that's just about that type of diving. Um, if you're wondering about it. So it's clear to me as we're wrapping up, he thinks he's getting in the car with me.

**Mike Michalowicz:**

Oh, oh, you drove him down to the city?

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**AJ Harper:**

No, I drove him to the coffee shop.

**Mike Michalowicz:**

Okay.

**AJ Harper:**

We're having coffee. Our cafe, I think we went to Art Cafe and we're having a great time. Whatever. He's a little out there,

**Mike Michalowicz:**

He's out there.

**AJ Harper:**

Look at your face, Mike, you really?

**Mike Michalowicz:**

I'm like, I'm stunned.

**AJ Harper:**

So I'm like, wait, he thinks he's gonna go with me. And then I bring up... The worst part is, the worst part is my wife had like five minutes notice.

**Mike Michalowicz:**

Here we go...

**AJ Harper:**

If that, so I bring him to our house, then it be, I, he says he's, we're talking about dinner. It's like, okay, now we're doing dinner. I still has not clicked to me that he expects to be here, except that he has brought every, all his shit, in front. Sorry, I cursed. Block. You gotta block it out.

**Mike Michalowicz:**

No beeping out. Yeah,

**AJ Harper:**

He's brought all his stuff in that he's carrying, you know, like he's walking like a backpacker, you know, with that little cat.

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**Mike Michalowicz:**

He carries around that, that stuff toy, stuffed cat the toy.

**AJ Harper:**

What?

**Mike Michalowicz:**

Yeah, he, he, he'd only take pictures with, he had a little cat called Boof or something and he'd always put it on someone's shoulder

**AJ Harper:**

Oh. I must have blur it out, but any way.

**Mike Michalowicz:**

Guarantee it's, it was pictured with you.

**AJ Harper:**

So we're, we're in the house. Now my son is like, who's this guy? Yeah. And now it's clear he's expecting that he's gonna stay here. I have no option. You know, at this point there's not gonna be a hotel. Like, what am I supposed to do? So my wife is absolutely outta sorts. Like, there, there is strange man in our house, what is going on? And I kept saying, it's a friend of Mike's. Like, he's gonna be, but that's not even the worst part. In the morning you wake up and he is in the living room in his underwear, right. Doing yoga.

**Mike Michalowicz:**

Yeah.

**AJ Harper:**

Like, what are you supposed to do? I, we had a tiny house. We had to like, walk around it. He had tried to give us some sort of, he brought, uh, gave us all this food, was trying to tell us how we should eat better. It. My son was like, what the heck? Then I tell the moms, you know, at the playground about this underwater diver who spent the night at my house. And they look at me like, you let a strange man sleep at your house? Like it did on paper. Sound like

**Mike Michalowicz:**

It does sound weird

**AJ Harper:**

That Yeah. Um, I'm telling you, it was the strangest, like 18 hours of, of my

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**Mike Michalowicz:**

Oh, he was on nine zero.

**AJ Harper:**

Well, I, I, he was determined to go to PRH. He was determined to go to Penguin.

**Mike Michalowicz:**

That was his goal. Okay. Did he ever get into PRH?

**AJ Harper:**

No, he walked down there. Didn't let them. Of course he didn't let him in. He's a backpacker with no, no name of anybody he wants to go see. Yeah. Yeah. Listen, chutzpah. Okay?

**Mike Michalowicz:**

Chutzpah. Chutzpah and yeah. Nice guy.

**AJ Harper:**

He's a lovely person. He's such a lovely, it never occurs to him that it's a problem.

**Mike Michalowicz:**

Correct. He, he is lovely. Um, but he goes to this extreme and, uh, it was, it was a funny journey. And so my wife and I still laugh about this, the experience with Stig. And, um, so we'll, we'll do the yoga imitations, like him grabbing under her her breasts and lifting. Like, what do you...

**AJ Harper:**

I think, oh, now that I remember, I think he was doing something to my wife's neck or head. Oh, she's nodding. She's in, she's sitting in my office with me.

**Mike Michalowicz:**

You've been Stig'd.

**AJ Harper:**

You've been, she my wife do not touch her. Like, seriously, she does not want a stranger to touch her at all. She barely wants a friend to touch her, but he was doing this thing with her neck and head, and I thought, I mean, she's lucky. He's lucky she didn't deck him.

**Mike Michalowicz:**

Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.

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**AJ Harper:**

Seriously, it was so odd. And then I felt bad after, like, I didn't want him to feel unwelcome, but then all my friends were like, what, dude? You know.

**Mike Michalowicz:**

No, you listen, you wanna help out. I felt human and he had all good intentions. Just, that was his, uh, style was, was total chutzpah. Fast forward. There's a TV show about him I watched about, you know, he's been very successful in his industry, um, and does have some books out there.

**AJ Harper:**

He does. And he is, he is fascinating. And he's a lovely, lovely person. And there was no danger there at all. Of course.

**Mike Michalowicz:**

No, I, no, no.

**AJ Harper:**

Now the part that all these years later you fess up that you totally sent him to me hoping that I, that you didn't tell me. You ain't telling me the whole story.

**Mike Michalowicz:**

Yeah, I know. I, I'm, yes. I I didn't want him staying at my house anymore. And he said whatever he needed to get to New York. I was like, oh, I know someone in New York. So I feel so bad. I feel so bad. Sorry.

**AJ Harper:**

That's okay. It's okay. We've all been Stig'd. It's in,

**Mike Michalowicz:**

we've been Stig'd.

**AJ Harper:**

Look him up. Actually, he's fascinating. Watch some of his videos. And if you're listening, Stig, Um, we love your chutzpah, but the reason we're telling this story on this podcast is because we're talking about publishing pitfalls. And so a pitfall here would be, you'd think the pitfall isn't, you should have a place to stay when you're coming to meet authors. It's not, the pitfall is don't walk up to Penguin or a Big Five or any publisher and try to get in the door to pitch your book.

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**Mike Michalowicz:**

Yeah. Because you, I think you kind of get on the, the X list. I've seen people go in ill-prepared, thinking that you get countless shots at going in front of a publisher. Uh, but it doesn't get forgotten. I've seen like, horrible proposals, like just atrocious typos, not well-formatted. And they submit it and say, well, if they don't get this go around, I'll come back. I'm like, I don't think you'll ever come back. I don't know if publishers just have a mental list or the editors or whatever, but it seems like there's a list and, and it seems like some kinds, sometimes a word spreads too. Is that any truth to that?

**AJ Harper:**

Like there's a blacklist, you know, in that don't, on blackball list, rather don't talk to these people. But, you know, look, if I, if someone contacts me, one of the things I do is go into my Gmail and search their name to see if they've ever contacted me before.

**Mike Michalowicz:**

Okay. Yeah. So if it's a repeat, it's funny

**AJ Harper:**

So I'll remem I'll look and I'll say, oh, that person, I might not remember them at first. And then that's influencing me.

**Mike Michalowicz:**

So I have a, uh, investment company's called Prosper Group. And we invest in businesses that are at risk businesses, businesses that are, um, need help turning around but are already doing millions in revenue, but just are stuck in some capacity. And we fix these businesses. And, um, we maintain a list because we get so many applications. We maintain a list and there's some people that are just not a fit. And maybe they have the technical qualifications, but personality wise it's not a fit. So we maintain that. And sure enough, there's certain people that apply over and over again and like, oh, there's that person again. Think off. They're off. And so I, I can only assume that, that we, we do have a necessity so that we don't try to reinvent the wheel over and over again. I can only assume that the same thing's maintained by publishers. Otherwise you get stuck in this purgatory with, with people that are just not a fit. And then they're coming back to you over and over again.

**AJ Harper:**

Hey, before we move on, let's talk about who inspired this episode.

**Mike Michalowicz:**

Yeah, you tell me.

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## **AJ Harper:**

Yeah. So it's uh, top three book workshop alum. She's a longtime listener, Vickie Lanthier. And she's also the author of High Agency Human, um, which comes out on March 26th. And she's featured in the Money Habit where she tolerate about radical reduction. Um, so this is a co you know. Yes. The Money Habit is newly out. Yes, we want you to buy it, but it is a coin in that we're mentioning Vicki here. I keep a list of recommendations and requests from listeners. And this one, this one made the cut today. So she wanted us to talk about publishing pitfalls, things that maybe, um, authors aren't aware of in advance, things that could happen. So, you know, we talked, let's talk about mistakes, let's talk about things that went wrong

## **Mike Michalowicz:**

When Vicki was, when we interviewed Vickie, 'cause we did it together and she was talking about radical reduction. She reduced her living space. She had a home and so forth. And I, she's gonna get a two bedroom. So she had one office, one, uh, bedroom space. I said, Hey, I have a friend, uh, Steve, who's looking for a face. She, she reduced it to one room. She has a one bedroom apartment. Um, I can, I really can't push 'em off on anybody. So let's talk about the different categories. One of the categories you put in here is covers and metadata. Yeah. Why would you put those two together?

## **AJ Harper:**

Well, because a lot of the mishaps have to do with, um, releasing stuff too early, you know, and then you, it's very hard to correct it once it's out in the wild. People think, oh, let me just get my listing up with this one cover and then I'll change it. Or let me get my listing up with this metadata and then I can change it, meaning page count or something. And then discover. It's not that easy to change or you can't change it consistently across every platform. So there's this belief that it's pretty easy to do that stuff, but it's actually complicated. So you, so I thought, let's put these together. Metadata, meaning the information, the details about your book title, subtitle, author, book, summary, ISBN, page count, trim size, all that stuff is metadata.

## **Mike Michalowicz:**

I mean, what, what are some of the pitfalls that you've seen or challenges?

## **AJ Harper:**

Well, I mean, a, a big one was the trying to change the cover. So when we had our publishing house, um, sometimes a listing would go up before the cover was done, and then one instance.

## **Mike Michalowicz:**

Isn't that kind of normal, by the way?

## **AJ Harper:**

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Yes. But one time we had switched the cover, so the wrong cover went up. It had been infiltrated through all the different online retailers, and then we had to change it. And then it didn't change across all platforms. So we had a very upset author who we had. It was a, it was bad. It wasn't just like a slight variation on the cover. It was the wrong cover. It was not a go, not a good look. So meanwhile, a bunch of retailers have one cover. A bunch of retailers have a very bad, not good cover up. And the author was pretty upset.

## **AJ Harper:**

And even though we had changed it in the system, what people don't understand is that whether you using Ingram because you're self-publishing or with a hybrid or you have trade distribution, it's actually a little easier for trade to manage it, but actually not that different. Um, they're not, when they push that metadata out, it's not like there's one system. You push a button, everybody gets the same info and processes it in the same way. They get the same info, but they don't process it in this in the same way. That's the difference. So not all the platforms, they, that's why it, that's why Ingram will say it might take six weeks for it to show up on everywhere. Um, so it might show up in two days on Barnes and Noble, but then it's four weeks for it to show up on another site. And that's because they're not using the same systems. So as it infiltrates, some of it is never going to update. And there was a point where I was trying to locate someone in a help desk for retailers in Europe, Australia, et cetera, trying desperately to get through to people. I think it was for Book Depository at the time, so that I could get this freaking cover changed. And it was a huge drama, huge drama. All because there was just this, you know, understanding that maybe we could change the cover once it was up. No, you can't, don't, don't do that.

## **Mike Michalowicz:**

We had a similar problem with Get Different. So Get Different was originally labeled Different is Better. That was the title. And uh, I can't remember what stage was that, but the cover with Design was done and the cover was up for pre-order. And I get a hold of Sally Hogshead who does a speech called Different Is Better Than Better, and said, Hey, I got my new book coming out. I think this is how it transpired today. Would you endorse it? And she goes, Hey, um, that title that impedes on my work different is better. I'm like, holy cannoli. I'm like, I don't mean to do that. I don't wanna do that. What do you mean? She's like, I've been building and I'm gonna write a book called Different is Better, different is better than Better ultimately. And she's like, this, that's my pinnacle of my career. And she goes, I, I don't want you using that title. And I'm like, I don't know if I can change it. So I called Penguin, they were amazing. Nikki Papadopoulos helped with this. And we go through re titling redesigned the book cover, and this is like 11th hour stuff.

## **Mike Michalowicz:**

And I think ultimately it may have hurt the book in many ways. Um, I think the relationship with Sally's today is, is so much more important anyway than that book. That is fine. Um, but the cover then was circulating as different is better in all platforms. And the change took forever,

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even when the book launched, there was, it wasn't get different on all different sites. So it took a long time. And that was, I think, confusing for the reader. The one thing was the book cover looked at the same, was different words, but it was confusing. So you'd see the metadata, which was the title on say Amazon says, get different marketing that Can't be Ignored. And then you see the book, it says different, better marketing that can't be ignored. And it was just, it was just confusing. Yeah.

## **AJ Harper:**

So, so don't, uh, if you aren't locked in on your cover, locked in on your metadata and a certainly title, A lot of people tell me the title of their book and they haven't finished writing it yet. And I'm saying it's great for you to have a, it's called a working title. You're not pulling that in your bio. You're not, you're not doing anything with that except maybe telling people that it might be this title, but you're not gonna get it on on the internet where people can find it. And now imagine if people are searching using generative ai.

## **Mike Michalowicz:**

Yeah.

## **AJ Harper:**

And now you've got multiple titles because you decided to put it in your bio or you decided to sell it or whatever. You don't wanna do that until it is completely locked in. Please don't put that stuff out there.

## **Mike Michalowicz:**

Totally. You know, another that covers you were talking about in the notes, or you haven't mentioned the notes here is, and I'm sure you experienced this, people that don't know how to design covers are designing covers. And, and that can be very costly from my experience. So tell me what your experience is.

## **AJ Harper:**

Well. So here's the thing. There's this view that, you know, well, okay, it's kinda like with editing. "Well, my really good friend is an English teacher and she's amazing and I'm just gonna have her do the copy edit." Please don't do that. You need to have a trained person who understands the Chicago Manual of Style, understands nuance, understands your genre, um, has experience with it. It's not enough that you're a grammar nerd. A grammar nerd is not qualified to be a copy editor. Um, so it's the same with cover designers. Oh, you know, I know a good graphic designer is not the same as cover designer. Cover design is its own thing. Aside from the fact that cover designers study the history of cover design and the trends, what's happening with colors and other aspects of design, they are mindful of the fact that your book needs to stand out but also look like it fits and it's modern.

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## **AJ Harper:**

It's both, it can't be such a standout that it looks like it doesn't belong in the next wave of books, right? So this is a, this is a very specific type of person that knows how to navigate that. Aside from that, there's so much to do with just the specs. Like, do you know, like let's say you're, 'cause if you're hiring a cover designer on your own, you're probably self-publishing. Did you know you need different specs for Ingram Spark than you do from KDP than you do from your printer? Um, and that you're, that might not be something that you're cover your graphic designer understands until it's too late and then you, you're scrambling to try and get a different something. They might not understand how to handle the spine. They might not understand where the barcode goes. They might not understand how much space you need on the back, um, how many words it's appropriate for the copy.

## **AJ Harper:**

They're just taking what you're giving them and trying to make it work versus advising you, right, based on what they know about good design for covers, are they thinking about the fact that you might need an endorsement on the front or you get a good pull quote from a trade review. So you need to hold space for it. What about if you're gonna have a little spot where you're gonna be able to eventually put 1 million copies sold or an award that you got, it's there space for this stuff. Um, there's a lot to consider and they might not understand simple things. I had a client once who had, um, the graphic designer designed the cover and didn't understand enough about ink saturation. So that when yeah. So that the color that was chosen, the ink required for that cover, then ble that bled, right? But a graphic designer who understands, or a cover designer understands these things. So a lot of the books were ruined and that had to be fixed. So that, that's a pitfall people don't understand, is you have to use the appropriate person who has experience specifically with books.

## **Mike Michalowicz:**

When a dust cover, or I, I guess it's true for any books or created, they actually get a cut at the very end. So it it, the paper, the dust cover is bigger than the final and it gets cut. So it's perfectly square. And I think there's a term for that. So there's margins that have to be addressed for this cutting part. And I've seen, um, covers that look good electronically and they get cut and the margins off. And now the the author's names are the very bleeding edge of the cover and it just looks bad. Um, we, 'cause they don't understand the specs. We, yeah, for my books I worked with, um, Liz Rinka, who's just, uh, extraordinary talent talented designer of covers, uh, a website. It's like she gets all of that stuff. Um, and it's just due to the nature of her background and she's nailed it for us.

## **Mike Michalowicz:**

Um, but even her, she'd say, you know what, before you finalize it, we're gonna do some trial runs of it. And she would get like three or four printed up and she says, fit 'em on a book. Make

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sure it's absolutely perfect. Um, so do those things. I I had a situation with, uh, clockwork and this was communicated but not received all covers that we do, I want in a mat finish. Now, this isn't because I have a propensity toward mat People, particularly nowadays with social media or other platforms, take pictures with your books. Uh, when I'm doing a signing after a speaking event and people come up like, Hey, can I get a picture of you? Often someone's holding the book, a glossy cover will get the reflection of the camera on it. And so the title of the book could just be blurred.

## **Mike Michalowicz:**

And that's, that's the marketing piece. So Clockwork comes out like, here's your book Mike. And I'm like, oh, the cover is is matte, I mean, is Is gloss. And they're like, sorry, we, they, there was a mis order. They knew it should be matte. It was specified. Matte, we went over the order, it came out glossy and they're, we can't do the reprints, it's glossy. Um, well there were supposed to do was a metallic text. The word clockwork was supposed to be metallic. And the gears that we had in there and everything else, Matte. Um, and sure enough for the photographs, um, you, you get this blur on it. Now I have Money Habit here, money Habit where they did, it's a matte finish but gloss on the font. Um, so it's really, you can kind of see that I moved around. You got the reflection off the font, but oh, is that better? Maybe you can, maybe you can see it now. I, that's why I walked away from the mic. But you can see the text reflects, but the, um, matte finish on the book doesn't. So that's a, sorry, just

## **AJ Harper:**

Treat one title Treatment is, is Gloss and the rest is matte. And so it doesn't have the same effect. Incidentally, they, that happened again. Do you remember when they were supposed to do the reprint for Clock Clockwork?

## **Mike Michalowicz:**

Yeah, it went Gloss again.

## **AJ Harper:**

It's still gloss.

## **Mike Michalowicz:**

It's so, yeah, it's just pink.

## **AJ Harper:**

So the trick there is to double, triple check everything.

## **Mike Michalowicz:**

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Triple correct with, um, you, you put a note in here about Surge. The surge cover is fine. Um, in fact, I like the material they used too. It is very tactile. It's almost like a rubbery feel even though it's a paper finish. But, um, what was wrong with Surge? I totally messed this up. I knew it. I just knew going in is you gotta do a search on all of the buying platforms where books are purchased for your proposed title and Surge. When it comes to Amazon, they don't sell just books. They sell soda called Surge and they sell surge protectors. So when you type in Surge, the title, my book was three or four Natural Rankings Down and still is today. Google figured this out very quickly. And there's, there's studies around this. When someone searches for something on Google, that first page gets nine, 9% of the clicks. And it's usually the first three listings. If you're a page or two deep, you're lost. And the search engine for books is Amazon or bookshop.org or Barnes Nobles or Pals. But these are search engines and you got to test your title. You gotta come up first, second or third worst case. But you wanna come in that first spot. And so that was a big mistake with search. That was a

**AJ Harper:**

<inaudible>. I mean Okay, so, but let's, I don't think that, I think the whole cover was a mistake.

**Mike Michalowicz:**

You didn't like the, the title, the cover. Wait, what was wrong with the cover in your opinion title

**AJ Harper:**

Was right, because I don't think it's really spoke to what people, the reader.

**Mike Michalowicz:**

Yeah.

**AJ Harper:**

I also think that there's this, so if you're wondering what Surge looks like, you probably don't know 'cause you didn't buy it. Ah, but it's a wave with like that little stick figure man. Yeah. Surfing, wave the wave. But what does that mean to me, you know, as a, a reader? Like you get it if you read the book, but you shouldn't have to be, it shouldn't be, the cover should not be an inside joke between you and the reader that covers should be compelling you to read it.

**Mike Michalowicz:**

Yeah. Right. Or actually I would say compelling you to open it. Right? A book covers designed because they get the person to read the flap when they're a hundred percent. Yeah, a hundred percent.

**AJ Harper:**

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Yeah. So, um, I don't, I would love someday to try and reboot Surge in a way that, to see what if the cover changed. Oh, you wouldn't change the cop title, but, um, you know, I I judge

**Mike Michalowicz:**

That'd be interesting.

**AJ Harper:**

I just had an author though, who, um, so, uh, Dr. Sunita Sah she wrote Defy, uh, the Power of Yes. In a World That Demands No Amazon, uh, this is December 2nd that we're recording the Amazon just named it one of the best books of the entire year. Uh, yeah, no, it's

**Mike Michalowicz:**

It's a student of yours?

**AJ Harper:**

Yeah. Yeah. She's an alum. That's Dr. Sah, SAH and her book is Defy and she's just been killing it. Um, it's a very important book and it's based on her life's work, her research. She's a professor at um, Cornell. And at any rate, when they issued the paperback, they wanted to change the subtitle and they did so, um, because they felt that there was some, it was misleading a little bit and confusing readers and so they went ahead and changed it, which actually surprised me to change the subtitle for the paperback. Um, so I'm just saying you might wanna consider Mike as a little Pat project, not that you don't have a million things to do, but what if, what if we changed the cover on Surge? What would happen?

**Mike Michalowicz:**

Yeah, that'd be interesting to consider, but like will never happen because that doesn't happen. We got fish to fry and that's,

**AJ Harper:**

Sometimes you just have to let it go. Another, another cover thing was, I've told this story before, but it's releasing your cover reveal before you have a pre-order link.

**Mike Michalowicz:**

Yeah, yeah. I, I've seen that too. And um, you get people excited in the moment with no action step, always have a, we write in different, I'm sorry, get different, the dad model direct, um, I'm sorry, differentiate, attract direct. And it's that direct the last stage where you gotta tell people what to do that many authors don't do. So you have this pinnacle moment of here's my cover and people are like, Hey, this is great. What do I, how do I get it? And they're like, oh, can't get it yet.

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**AJ Harper:**

Yeah, I always see authors too talk about their book and then there's no preorder link at all. Sometimes I sneak into the comment section and drop it in there.

**Mike Michalowicz:**

What are some of the uh, publishing pitfalls around stocking up on books?

**AJ Harper:**

I think people underestimate how long printer lead times are if you're doing offset printing. So that's a different type of printing than print on demand, which is what self-published and a lot of hybrid authors do. But if you have trade distribution, uh, or if you yourself are distributing, you might do offset printing, which you're gonna do for print runs of about 2000 or more. Sometimes there are a thousand, but it's better if it's 2000 and up. Um, it's significantly less money and it's the actual different type of printing and it has a long lead time. So it could be six weeks, eight weeks, or even longer depending on if you have a really, you know, wonderful printer that's booked pretty booked and busy. So you have to get that stuff prepped and planned in advance and most people are shocked to discover that they can't get on the line, you know? Yeah. 'cause it's basically you're paying, you're getting your quote and giving a deposit for your place in line. Yeah. And most, yeah.

**Mike Michalowicz:**

So these, these print shops, I've been to them, these book printers, they're massive facilities and they have to optimize around 24-hour production, seven days a week. Like there's not a minute that line stops 'cause every 10 seconds stop, they're losing money.

**AJ Harper:**

Yes. And those, the books you probably saw were that were going around have been, were on deck for months.

**Mike Michalowicz:**

I'm sure, I'm sure. Um, so offset printing is where you effectively print in batch,

**AJ Harper:**

Larger, larger quantities.

**Mike Michalowicz:**

And then there's large quantities, there's a storage fee, the quality of output between Offset and POD, is it still the case that offset is a better production quality? They can go higher end. ,

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## **AJ Harper:**

Yeah But I mean I think the average person cannot spot a POD book.

## **Mike Michalowicz:**

Yeah. Problem with POD is, while it sounds like it gets printed, the second is ordered, that's not the case. Well POD is small batch printing is my understanding and yeah, short run. And so what they do is they stock up an inventory. And so when I order a book from, uh, Barnes Nobles, that book that's in stock, it's sent to me, but they only have 10 bucks sitting there. And then they put an order into POD to replenish it, but it's not a one for one trade either. They'll wait for that inventory to hit a threshold, so it goes from 10 to nine to eight, and once it hits three they say, okay, bring it back to 10. And they do a order of seven. But you can run out very quickly. So POD um, if you have surge demand, you can actually run out book i I see that happen pretty regularly.

## **AJ Harper:**

Yeah. The solution for that is, um, to also have your book available using Amazon KDP. So to, to do it in both places have in or Ingram content group, you do that first. So you can do the pre-order component because KDP does not allow that. And then a couple days before or on the day, also make your book available through KDP so that they can replenish it themselves. 'cause that's Amazon's own printing facilities.

## **Mike Michalowicz:**

One of the best things was stock management in my experience, has been working with a publisher Penguin. I've never ran outta stock with Penguin and I've never been Overstock, never outta stock. Well, we'll see, but I anticipate it with page two. Page two's been communicating so effectively they said, okay, based upon order demand and so forth, we're, uh, nowadays 15 or 17,000 book print run for first release hardcover. Um, which as an author I've been through so many times, I'm like, oh, we probably need, you know, with to paper entrepreneurs. I said, I probably need like 20,000 books. I order 20,000. I couldn't sell one. So I was like, oh my God, I was stuck with books. That was devastating, but also probably the greatest thing I could have done because now I had to, I burned the boats, I had to sell these. But then I'm like, oh, I, I think you know, most of my books, I should have a a seven to 8,000 run.

## **Mike Michalowicz:**

And if I went into the money habit with a seven or 8,000 run, because that's what I think these books will sell, I I'd be outta inventory on day one. And there's nothing worse than an out of stock notice when people, particularly during launch week are trying to buy your book. It is crushing. But overstocking, I see it all the time too. Overstocking, you've storage fees, um, you've inventory that maybe it crunches you on cashflow 'cause you had to buy this inventory and you, and you're not selling it. So you, you need to nail that number. Um, is there ways, uh,

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that someone could do it when they don't have a publisher? AJ, do you have tips how, how to calculate what you should print?

## **AJ Harper:**

I mean, you know, there's your goals obviously and what you're hoping to get done. Um, beyond that it's pretty hard to, I mean, you could be checking your BSR on Amazon all the time and then combine that with whatever private bulk pricing that your bulk sales you're gonna be doing and come up with your own estimate. That's the best that you can do because you're publish is looking at all different data from many different sources that you actually don't have access to. So it's kind of hard to do. I've also seen authors sell a lot of books at launch and then they're self-published, right? And then their marketing drops off. So now Amazon was seeing, oh my gosh, this is gonna be a big seller overorder, so now two months later, all the books show up at your house and now you have all these returns which you ended up having to pay shipping on. So I think a big pitfall is people don't think about, well, okay, the Amazon, okay, if I do a lot of big Kush and Amazon sees this as a possibility, they expect me to keep pushing or they're gonna get rid of my the inventory because they wanna make space for something else. So it's that, and it's demoralizing when Amazon books arrive, when your boxes start coming.

## **Mike Michalowicz:**

I've had that happen once and I can't remember what book it was, um, but I got this back and the part I didn't expect was the books came back damaged, like dented corners. Like it wasn't, because what happens is they, they received the boxes and they put some, some on, I think it was Barnes and Nobles put 'em on shelves and so forth and they, oh, not sound, they pull 'em back off shelves, put 'em in the box. It's not like people are carrying for your books. And so these were unsellable, uh, what we did is we, we we moved them into, um, used books and we shipped them through Amazon as damaged used books. We set a used bookstore, but still that took us years to delete. It's probably toy paper branch to deplete that part of the inventory.

## **AJ Harper:**

Yeah, It's tricky.

## **Mike Michalowicz:**

It's tricky. Here's my little rule, but this is mine, so don't bank it, but whatever your pre-order is, just double that and that's probably a safe bet. So we have 6,000 pre-orders, 12 thousand's probably safe. If you have 200 pre-orders, 400 bucks, it's probably gonna cover you. But I would probably wanna do 2000 doing an offset. So it's not perfect science, but that's the number I use.

## **AJ Harper:**

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What are you gonna do, then? Let's say, um, something amazing happens. You said you wanted to sell 14,000 books. You said that in the last episode. Yeah. At launch, but you just told me you only sold, got 17,000 run. So then well

**Mike Michalowicz:**

As of the last, the last thing, so, uh, page two is monitoring and every two weeks we have a call saying this is what should be. Yes. The last report they said was about,

**AJ Harper:**

Yeah, but our they're printing the books already. They already printed the books

**Mike Michalowicz:**

And they can print. I, 'cause we asked 'em, we said, what if we outpace this? They said we can add to the, um,

**AJ Harper:**

Quote? The quote?

**Mike Michalowicz:**

The quote. Yeah. But they've already printed so they, they can, they can insert or an emergency run. There's something like that. They can address it very quickly.

**AJ Harper:**

That's, yeah. So that's a, that's a pitfall, right? So when you're having the conversations with your offset printer, let them know, communicate with them and say, you know what, if I end up needing more books, what's that gonna look like? When do you need to know, have these conversations? Don't wait until it's an emergency to contact them because you can set something up with them if you need to

**Mike Michalowicz:**

For Yeah, and for us, I hit that 14,000, we need to move another 4,000. We estimate before the book launches maybe even 5,000, we get past the 10,000 threshold of pre-order. Um, so that's what we're still working on. Actually, my flight to Toronto heading up to Toronto this evening, I'm, all I'm doing is working on pre-orders, uh, forget some more bulk buys because the individual orders we're anticipating we can maybe get 4,000 during launch week. It's hard to individual orders. Right now, our individual orders, it's hard. Our individual orders with Amazon right now I think collectively is 800 orders. That's pre-orders. Um, that's, that was really hard to get to that level and that's pretty good. And that's, you know, what I'm doing is when I'm doing

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any kind of webinar with anybody, whatever the topic is, I simply ask the host, Hey, do you mind if I mention the money habit, invite people to order?

## **Mike Michalowicz:**

And people are like, yeah. And I just go through that process, which I shared over and over again. Hey, I'm selling my book. Um, I think we'll serve you by the way you're serving me. Would you be willing to do it? Say it in the chat. I wanna thank you and 30% of the audience, we'll move it. So I it's some weird events. I'm, I'm speaking, uh, tomorrow, uh, at Relay. Oh, I gotta tell you what we did. It just arrived today. So I was at Relay a few months ago. This is a, a huge important sponsor. They sponsor Becoming Self-Made. This podcast is taking off. I just actually just got a text from the producer, Bethany. She said, this new episode is amazing. It was Amy Porterfield. And um, so I'm going up there to speak to their team and teach them what entrepreneurs are experiencing and how to cater to entrepreneurs.

## **Mike Michalowicz:**

Well I was up there two months ago for filming and um, I noticed like everyone is like half my age, like everyone's in their twenties. So I'm like, I'm old enough to be their father. So this becomes the joke. Um, I sent up a Darth Vader, but it's my face in Darth Vader's thing and it says, you know, if says his line, I'm your father. And then it says, technically I'm not really your father, but I'm old enough to be, I love your relay. And so they said that they're already laughing their off 'cause it's this goofy picture of Darth Vader. I'll send you a picture of it up there, but they said they have it on display. Now I'm doing that to build anticipation too. Like it's a marketing thing, it's goofing around. But when I get up there, I go, oh, this is that crazy dude who sent that thing. And then I'm gonna invite them to buy the book, um, the all the team members there. So I'll announce the book and say, if you feel compelled to get it, great. Um, if not, totally fine. Um, but always be selling the book and that will help me get to the stock pitfall pitfall. If, if I don't get to 10,000 before the launch, um, we're not gonna get the 14,000, but they can, Page Two's in the position to start pushing more book books through.

## **AJ Harper:**

Wow. Exciting. I'm excited to see how that all shakes out. And I think also we should talk about a couple other pitfalls. Um, this experienced as a, as a publisher, and I think you probably have experienced it as well. Um, when you sell foreign rights, good luck figuring out what the hell, you know, the the myth is, oh, I'm selling, I'm, uh, great, I'm gonna get a book, I'm gonna get a, I'm gonna get, right. Okay, so you sell your rights to, for foreign translation, you're selling to another publishing company. You're, that might be the last you ever hear from them.

## **Mike Michalowicz:**

Likely. Yeah.

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## **AJ Harper:**

Tracking them down is hard. You might never see another dime trying to get a report. When I had my publishing company, there was a French publisher who had, we had the, so multiple writes multiple books. We had no idea when the books were coming out. Sometimes they were out. We would just happen. Someone would tell us, I saw this book in France. Um, the authors are clamoring saying, where is my book's in France. Like, where's my book? And just getting the copies, getting the report one time, it took two years to get a royalty report. Um, so I would call that a pitfall because I think authors have unrealistic expectations about what that's gonna be like. And

## **Mike Michalowicz:**

They know what the advance is. Like, oh, I, why, why my advance offer \$500? Um, well for Romania that's pretty good. Like, you know, so I just got, um, I had I think 31 to thirty two translations out there. This, this is different languages, distinct translations. Private first has all of them, but I just got another one in from All In for China. Um, literally came in yesterday. Here's a couple things that I've experienced, and this is to me was shocking. The only countries that I've gotten consistent royalty payments from ironically is China and Russia. <laugh> The two most trustworthy countries. So something interesting there, um, the most important thing to do is to negotiate the advance upfront. 'cause that's the one thing you can be guaranteed is the advance payment. Um, but don't have these outlandish expectations. And just like anywhere else, if one, if, if in Romania you have one publisher interested and you say, sorry, the five hundred's not enough, I need 3000 or whatever your number is, they'll simply say no. And then you have to find another publisher. See, make sure you have multiple people bidding on this. So with China, there's multiple publishers and they bid in Russia and all these other countries. Germany, we're in negotiation with the Netherlands with three publishers right now. And that's where you, uh, uh, discuss these bans. The reporting is my experience too, is horrific. I get very little details, nothing. The other part is, um, good luck enforcing it.

## **Mike Michalowicz:**

Like you're gonna get a law firm to pursue in another country. Their, you cannot afford to do this. So get everything upfront and the things up front are the advance upfront, but get copies of the book because this gives further credibility to your authorship. So, uh, when someone's like, oh, I like, like profit, you know, I'm interested in reading profit first, we have the ability to display the 31 different versions and all the different languages to show how is this impacting the world. It's great for when you're speaking a keynote, instead of having one book up there, even if you only author one book, you have 20 versions on the screen. People are like, wow. So it gives, it substantiates it. Um, yeah, and, uh, blah blah. Oh, and also, um, give some of the rules upfront of what you want the book to look like.

## **Mike Michalowicz:**

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So tell 'em, here's the author picture I wanna include. Um, one of the things I do is I still have, I ask people, please, you have to include in the translation that people can still email me. And so I get emails from another great country, Iran. Like it is so funny. Like all the, the political enemies of the United States are the best countries. I get more emails from Iran, from entrepreneurs out there that have read profit first. Um, I think it's probably the, the third or fourth runner up country. China is number one. Uh, Russia doesn't communicate much anymore. Germany is good. US of course. Uh, Latin America is massive, so Mexico, but Iran, um, make sure you, you can engage those readers because we have built, uh, businesses in these different countries. Not in Iran yet, but these other countries. These countries because we have communications with readers. That's the biggest gain, at least for me over the events and all that stuff.

## **AJ Harper:**

Yeah, so there's a, a lot of pitfalls. I mean, I think the biggest pitfall is unrealistic expectations about how long something is gonna take. And yeah, that, that's the ultimate pitfall, is thinking things are gonna go faster than they will. There will always be hiccups. There will, you will always need more time. There will always be one more review you need to do. There will always be one more mistake. None of this is indicative of anything being wrong. It's just the nature of the beast. And so padding your schedule as much as you can. Sometimes you have to wait for the best people. Sometimes the best people take longer. Sometimes it's it, um, uh, there's a big, you have a discovery and so you wanna slow it down. So I think, um, our society, which requires us to hit this, these milestones that we set is not really, um, uh, in alignment with how publishing works. So to just, just cool your jets a little bit and leave room, um, so that you don't end up paying for costly mistakes because you had to be done at this certain time.

## **Mike Michalowicz:**

The great thing you can do is listen to every episode. Don't write this book and you will avoid, do 99% of the pitfalls that exist. Uh, I got a little bonus story, but before we do that, the money habit is out. Now. I really would be grateful if, uh, if the listener right now gets the book and I promise you it'll transform you financially. And please get with another book called Write a Must Read. That's AJ's book, those two work in concert for authors. I believe AJ's got retreats going on. Go to [ajharper.com](http://ajharper.com). You've heard about them, but have you gone to [ajharper.com](http://ajharper.com) and checked them out? I don't know if you have do that next week we're talking about why your book needs a promise you can deliver. I think this is gonna be one of my favorite subjects we've ever talked about.

## **Mike Michalowicz:**

When I understood this, and it took me years to get this, um, I finally understood how a book can really transform people. Uh, this is probably one of the most important foundational elements of your teachings, aj. Um, go to [wdwtb.com](http://wdwtb.com) to get all of our free resources. Email to [hello@dwtpodcast.com](mailto:hello@dwtpodcast.com), um, so that we can answer any questions you have and maybe do an episode around it. Here's the quick story. Simon Sinek and I, um, we're working together at his

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loft in New York when he was writing his first book and I was writing Toilet Paper Entrepreneur. His first book ultimately was titled, uh, start With Y and, and we are leaving his apartment. And I'll never forget, we were on an avenue in and a street. You know, say it was somewhere in the downtown area, but I'm gonna say like, say 17th and third or something like that.

## **Mike Michalowicz:**

It wasn't, but he goes, um, I'm gonna go to Penguin right now and make my pitch. It was right before he is making his pitch. I'm like, what do you mean? He's like, I'm going in meeting with Adrian Z Zach. I didn't know who it was and I'm pitching him directly. And uh, it became folklore. Here's a guy came in and pitched his book and got the deal and this book exploded. But other authors thought, oh, that's the way. And so they tried to pull the steam move of going in there and they're barricading people. Just because one person did it first doesn't mean everyone else can copy that strategy. It's a pitfall to assume that when it works the first time, I'll work every single time. Be, be the first Invent something new. Um, Simon Sinek did it for himself. What can you do for you? Alright, I think we're done. Hey AJ, remember this? Alright. Do you wanna say, I always say it. Do you wanna say it?

## **AJ Harper:**

Yeah. You, yes, I will say it. Don't write that book. Write the greatest book you can.