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Episode 117:

“Deliver on the Promise”

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:

This is the, uh, month of tchotchkes. So, first one, do you have a favorite mug? I think you do that, that water jug you drink out of, right?

AJ Harper:

Well, this is a, yeah, it's not a mug. This is a giant mug. A giant cup

Mike Michalowicz:

From, yeah, just so for our listeners only that was bigger than your head. Just to give context, mine says, I love Boontown is already fading. This is one month old. That's the quality we produce here in Boontown. And, um, what I do now, there's a local store that carries this anytime. There's a guest at our house, uh, they depart with a I love Boontown mug.

AJ Harper:

They, do you have 'em stocked?

Mike Michalowicz:

Yeah, I have 'em stocked. I have 'em stocked. And, uh, it's funny, I've received texts from people saying, oh my God, this is the best mug ever. Is this a good size? It's a good size mug. The, um, ink on it fades very quickly.

AJ Harper:

It looks too small.

Mike Michalowicz:

Too small. Yeah. Yeah. Too small if you want. No, but for coffee, it's perfect. The other thing is, my wife gifted me this hat. She was like, I have the best gift ever for you. You can see it says Spinal Tap.

AJ Harper:

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Spinal tap on it.

Mike Michalowicz:

Um, we, there's a few movies that we share our pure appreciation for Young Frankenstein, and Spinal Tap and Spinal Tap one and two. So we just watch Spinal Tap One again, and the two of us are wetting our pants laughing. And, um, she's like, I, I got this for you. So I returned home from a business trip, my first speaking gig of the year to this being, uh, on the top of the pillow on the bed.

AJ Harper:

I realized when you said that to me, that my wife and I have a couple movies like that too.

Mike Michalowicz:

What are they?

AJ Harper:

The Jerk?

Mike Michalowicz:

<affirmative>. That's, it's a good movie. Yeah.

AJ Harper:

And, um, uh, this is a John Hughes movie.

Mike Michalowicz:

Okay.

AJ Harper:

Say Anything.

Mike Michalowicz:

Oh, yeah, I haven't, you know, I, I wouldn't be able to reference a single thing. I am something

AJ Harper:

Hughes. Sorry. Shoot. No, that's not, that's, um, Cameron Crowe.

Mike Michalowicz:

Okay.

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AJ Harper:

But say anything. Yeah.

Mike Michalowicz:

But the John Hughes years and, um, the Jerk, I, I wonder if that was the breakout movie for Steve Martin.

AJ Harper:

I'm not up on Steve Martin lore, but yeah.

Mike Michalowicz:

I treat the German,

AJ Harper:

I, I, I think he was very famous for his comedy before that. So

Mike Michalowicz:

Our, um, feeder, our feeders, our readers are giving us feedback, hence feeders. If you give feedback and you're a reader, you're a feeder <laugh>,

Mike Michalowicz:

And, uh, we're getting this extraordinary feedback coming in. Um, it really just points to this show is working. I love doing it with you. We are about a month to a month and a half away from having a brand new studio set up. Not exclusively for, don't write that book, but specifically with, don't write that book in mind. So we're gonna have like, an awesome studio space. Um, I had to shovel our driveway today 'cause it's in my home. And, uh, I had to shovel three times this weekend. Like this storm was such, yeah, I'm back. So I shovel, I, we have a plow too for our driveway. So I, I on like a little ATV thing, so I plow the driveway shovel, and I'm like, okay. Then another storm comes through, I'm like, oh. Then one came through last night and I'm like, it's gonna be miles.

Mike Michalowicz:

It's gonna be a dusting. Oh, another inch and a half. So I had to do it again. But we have a studio and, um, it's just gonna be nice to be face to face again. So I think Laura mentioned there's just a little something that's not there, uh, when we're doing this remotely like we are today. Um, and I can't, I just can't wait to be face to face with you and, and in driving distance of you. So, uh, you are listening to, don't write that book. Today's episode we're gonna talk about your book needs a promise, but you can deliver, and this is something that I'd never comprehended, I did not comprehend until I met you, aj and you've coached me through this. So I really wanna explore it. I am joined in Remote studio by **AJ Harper**, the Authority in Authorship. And I'll tell you, if

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you've not read her book, write a must read, don't pass, go. You know, whatever. Just go right to Park Avenue, go and get this book and just consume it. I've yet to meet a reader who hasn't been trans, a feeder who hasn't been transformed by it. People love this book. So, aj, it's good to be, it's great to be with you.

AJ Harper:

So, um, we've heard from a reader and, uh, we wanna share this. It's a, it's quite a success. So we wanna share reader success.

Mike Michalowicz:

It's from Lauren, uh, Novak. I, I thought I'd read it just because she really lauds about what you've, the impact we've had, but you specifically you've had. So I thought most appropriate I'd read it. Um, she's in Adelaide says, good day. Good day. AJ, Mike. My name is Lauren and I'm writing from Adelaide, Australia, where I've been on multiple occasions. It is the wine capital of Australia. If you don't know, I spent the, that's not in the text. This is my uncle fodder. I spent the past year listening to your podcast and your audio book, AJ. As I worked on my first book, I found your insights so helpful, practical, and interesting. I've also decided to take your advice and share my news. Yesterday I submitted my 80,000 word manuscript. I have a contract with a traditional publisher for a nonfiction book, which at this stage is set for publication in February, 2026.

Mike Michalowicz:

I spent two decades working as a daily news journalist, and about six years ago I became a mom of now two. My book, which doesn't have a settled title yet, is about how surprisingly angry I found myself at times in motherhood, which no one told me would happen. My core message, mum rage happens to most of us, even if no one warns us. The first step to managing anger and motherhood is to start talking about it. And the promise. By the time you turn the final page, you will know you're not alone. And that the feeling, that feeling this way does not make you a bad mom. You also have some ideas about how to manage your triggers. I'll keep you posted for now. The next task is to start settling or setting up my website, social media, et cetera, for pre-launch. Thanks again for all you share with writers around the world. Cheers, Lauren.

AJ Harper:

I love that. And you know what, Mike, when this airs, it's February of 26. So what we can say right now is Happy book birthday month, Lauren.

Mike Michalowicz:

Oh, yes. Right. Congratulations,

AJ Harper:

Lauren Novak, everyone.

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Mike Michalowicz:

It's funny. My, my wife was talking about mum rage. Um, and, and those, those moments and, and it's true. No one warns you about it, and it sounds like I'm not a consumer of this, that a lot of the social media channels share all of the, the pretty side stuff, but not the ugly side stuff.

AJ Harper:

Yeah. And the ugly side stuff is all just sort of, um, comical. Like, oh, we are so right. We're so exhausted. We're so our little, little, Jenny forgot to tell us we had to do 50,000 Valentine's by tomorrow morning kind of stuff. Right. And then it's supposed to be, you know, oh, we're all in this together. But actually if you add all that stuff up, it leads to

Mike Michalowicz:

Yeah. Yeah. Such a good book and topic. I love when people explore stuff that rarely or hasn't been explored. I mean, that's, I would argue these are the most important books.

AJ Harper:

Yeah. Good for you. Learn too, for writing about a taboo subject so that women can talk about it. Because if we don't talk about it, if we're not allowed to talk about it, then it festers. So thank you for doing that.

Mike Michalowicz:

So let's get to the heart of this discussion. Your book needs a promise you can deliver. I, I think maybe we start off with a definition. What does it mean with promise?

AJ Harper:

Well, if you're writing prescriptive nonfiction, so let's be really clear. If you're, I mean, I still think you need to figure out what is your promise to readers by the time they turn the last page, even if you're writing fiction, for example.

Mike Michalowicz:

Okay,

AJ Harper:

What's the experience they're gonna have? And if you want them to come away with a specific message, what is it and how are you gonna make sure that happens? But we're really talking about prescriptive nonfiction, which very vocally has usually has a promise. And so what typically happens is people will give, will say, this is what my book can do for you. This is what will happen to you if you buy my book. But they don't really consider if they've are actually delivering on it. They're just saying it. So this is why I think it's important for, for you to think differently about it. What inspired me to, to start thinking this way was, you know, gosh, 18

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years ago I wrote enough books as a ghost writer where people really weren't delivering on the promise. And, you know, I started to realize as writing them, wait a minute, is this actually happening? Or are you just saying that, is this marketing? Is this propaganda? Is this persuasion? Or do you actually have you actually thought about this? So then I set about doing that as a ghost. You know, how can we, let's make sure that this actually happens. Let's just not BS people.

Mike Michalowicz:

My first keynote for 2026 went down in January. It's a little rusty. I took, I take a for vacation. So I was coming back from that. And one significant change I've made in my keynote since learning this from you, and this goes back almost a decade that you started teaching this, it was in the beginning of speech. You make a hook if you can. And so my hook was, you'll be permanently profitable by the end of this presentation. The what I was doing was actually an over promise, I believe to be true. But it required that they took all these steps and the likelihood of everyone in that room being permanently profitable was unlikely, if that makes sense. So I, I made it a little tweak and I tell people, I say by the end, within 24 hours of today, I promise you in two steps, you have the path to permanent profit. Two ridiculously simple steps. And that's what I'm delivered today. I made a promise that is a hundred percent true for a hundred percent of the group. And I put the element of the commitment they need to make two simple steps.

AJ Harper:

Participation.

Mike Michalowicz:

Participation. Tell me about overpromising in books. Do, do you see that happen and what's the cost or consequence of that?

AJ Harper:

Uh, I see it happen every day, all day. Every minute of every, yeah.

Mike Michalowicz:

So more than I expected. Okay.

AJ Harper:

Yeah, I mean, I lemme tell you, lemme back up. I think, um, I think it happens for a really personal reason. I think people don't think their book is good enough. I think they question their, I think they question their ability to convince people to buy it. I think they question whether it's good enough that people will actually read it. And so they just lay it on thick and I don't think they're always conscious of it.

Mike Michalowicz:

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Interesting.

AJ Harper:

So it's like a over, um, it's kinda like when we did the bios episode and we talked about people using all these a, you know, adjectives and superlatives

Mike Michalowicz:

Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.

AJ Harper:

To like, speak it into existence. But that's how this is a, this is an intimate conversation with a stranger who is in pain or has a deep desire or is suffering with a problem, or even just dealing with a challenge or wants to make something better or wants to understand something. And then we decide to disrupt that conversation with a bunch of BS because we're n nervous that it's not enough. And I think that's actually where it comes from, although I don't think most people are conscious of it.

Mike Michalowicz:

Well what about the flip side though? Uh, is there a risk of under-promising and dissuading a reader from picking up the book? 'cause like, this will do nothing for me.

AJ Harper:

Well, yes, but I mean, most people aren't gonna write <laugh>, I wrote this book f you if you care about it or not, don't care if you read it or they're not gonna, no one's, no one's gonna write. Um, this book might help you, but probably not. Like, I don't think most people, most people are airing on the side of over promising.

Mike Michalowicz:

Before we go into kind of the, into the technical execution, I wanna go back to Lauren's email. And she said, here's their promise and I want to get your evaluation of this right now. Lauren's listening. She's biting her fingernails. I sus here it comes. She said, my promise, by the time you turn the final page, you will know you're not alone. And that feeling this way does not make you a bad mump. What, what's your thoughts of that promise?

AJ Harper:

Um, I listen, if, if Lauren can deliver that, then I think that's an ace promise. It's not overblown. You know what's, it's actually a perfect promise because I'm gonna break this down for you. The other thing, the other problem with the promises is that they tend to forget the thing that the why the reader picked it up in the first place. So the promise is this overblown thing, but did you hear how she wrote that You won't feel alone? Which remember what I said before, before that how

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things are taboo, right? So that, that ties into that. And then the other is, um, you're not a bad person, right? Is that kind of what she said? I'm not looking at it.

Mike Michalowicz:

Basically, yeah, you're not alone. And the feeling this way does not make you a bad mom.

AJ Harper:

That's the main thing that the women are looking for. Right? So your promise is tied to the desire, the promise is tied to this is this is what I want or this is what I'm feeling. And, um, you wanna speak to that in the promise, not just what you, the author thinks they should want or what you, the author wants for them.

Mike Michalowicz:

I was, I have a little gym at home and I have a, a, a small TV in there so I can listen to my favorite team, Virginia Tech Hokies, uh, the summary of whatever's going on while I'm exercising and I watch the YouTube channel and of these commercials come on and notice this commercial and it's around, uh, aging spots or whatever they call 'em, sun spots on your hand. Those dark spots. I dunno if I fully don't have any. I I have 'em and it's this like, doctor I'm doing air quotes 'cause I'm not sure if he is. And he goes on and says, oh, the things you consume and blah, blah, blah closet. And he goes, if you look at an apple and slice an apple, you see how it's white in the center, uh, and then it turns brown very quickly. That's the same thing that's happening with your skin.

Mike Michalowicz:

Um, you can cure this, uh, within six days with my special diet. And if, you know, and it's normally 1999, but if you act now, you get twice as much. And the comments on YouTube is like Charlatan Bs liar. But it comes across like that's how you sell. And I see this theme over and over again in sales of make the problem as it's painful as possible, the horrors associated with it, and then have this miracle cure that requires no effort. Just a small "investment." We're so trained in this in sales or we observe it so much. Do you think authors are being persuaded to start speaking that way?

AJ Harper:

I think they're just learning it from other authors.

Mike Michalowicz:

Okay.

AJ Harper:

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Yeah. Just think they're seeing other authors talk about these, you know, pie in the sky promises. You can see that. I can tell she read my book 'cause she started her promise Lauren, with, by the time you turn the last page. 'cause that's the deal. Yeah. It's gotta be, it's not a promise that happens someday if everything works out perfectly. And maybe, who knows, a year, two years, five years, 10 years. No, it's by the time they turn the last page. Because when you deliver on the promise, now you have built ultimate trust. You should be building it as you go. But if you did that, they, that reader is now your ambassador for life. You did the thing you said you were gonna do. And they have experienced the change within the confines of the book provided that they actually did the things you asked them to do.

Mike Michalowicz:

Okay. So I think we're already touching on the next question is why does this matter? Your reader will become an ambassador for book is do you have other reasons or benefits of delivering on the promise?

AJ Harper:

Well, I mean, look, why are we all doing this? I mean, Mike, you would not be an author like you, you are jazzed, okay? You love writing, you love the process of creating a new workbook. You, but you love marketing, you love talking about it. You love authors. You just like, this is your jam. You love it. But I don't believe knowing you the way I do that you'd be doing any of it if you weren't able to help make an impact on people's lives. If these books were not actually doing anything, if you weren't hearing from readers and people weren't actually reading it, first of all, you wouldn't have all the success you have because that's another factor. But I just don't think you would be doing it. So yes, it does matter if we deliver on the promise. It's more than just building trust and having an ambassador for your brand. It's actually doing the thing that you set out to do. Something in you wanted to write a book that could help people. So let's not go so far away from that and focus on the helping.

Mike Michalowicz:

My wife and I during my four-week vacation. So this is something you and I wrote about in Clockwork. I've done it now for seven or eight consecutive years since the publication of Clockwork and prior, by two years or a year. Uh, and during his vacation, we, we stayed home effectively, but we went into New York, uh, and one of the times we went to New York multiple times. One of the times went out to dinner with Ramit Sehti and his, his, uh, significant other, his wife, um, who's by the way is, is heading to Japan for six months to, to live out there. It's funny, Krista and I are, uh, we were out for a hike a couple days ago. She's like, yeah, that was such a great trip into New York. It was so fun hanging out with that guy. I'm like, what guy say, I don't know that, that dude.

Mike Michalowicz:

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I'm like, Ramit Sehti? Like one of the most popular authors in personal finance. She's like, yeah, yeah, that dude. So, um, it's so interesting when a author is writing for someone, um, the, I think the affinity we can grow toward a person. And then when you're not writing for someone how much you're kind of insignificant. So that was just aside, but what he did is, in his definitive work, I Will Teach You to Be Rich. He makes the promise in the title. I mean like, spot on. Should we make a promise in the title? Does that matter? What's your analysis there?

AJ Harper:

I think Promise titles are great. I have a promise title Write a must read. Yep. Um, you have a couple. You have Clockwork. And you have All In.

Mike Michalowicz:

That's right. Mm-hmm <affirmative>. That's right. Profit First really is the, the method. It's

AJ Harper:

A core message title. The solution title. Mm-hmm <affirmative>. Yeah. The Money Habit is more, more like the five love languages. The, you know, it's Yeah. Yeah. It's actually a solution title, but it's actually Core message.

Mike Michalowicz:

Right? Right. It's more core message. So interesting.

AJ Harper:

But the reason I said that is because you're calling it, you're then branding that after that.

Mike Michalowicz:

Okay. Oh yeah. So Promise does not need to necessarily be in the title, but you do it to craft the promise. So, so gimme the structure. How we go about creating a promise.

AJ Harper:

It's really simple. So you start with what does your re who is your reader and what do they want? Not what do you think they want? But what would they say they want? And sometimes if you're having a hard time figuring that out, put a time constraint. So say, what do they want most in the next six months or 12 months? And the reason is in publishing, well, first of all, that's what makes people want to take action. Because it's, it's soon, I wanna do this now versus someday that's always gonna be better for you. But also it's better for you in publishing. 'cause now you have an urgent need is established demand. And so if you're trying to get a deal, whether with a top tier hybrid or traditional publisher, and you can establish this is what people want. Now, this is an urgent need now, now that this is better for you.

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AJ Harper:

So all around this is a good tactic to try. What do they want the most for the next six to 12 months? And then you, it's easier to come up with it. And if you can't think of it on your own, if you aren't sure, you should go out and poll. So go on social media, go to the places where you think your readers are hanging out. Or you could do a focus group if you wanna talk to them face to face. And then just make note of how they talk about it. Um, there's gonna be similarities in the language once you have that nailed down, if you can also identify what they think keeps them from the thing they want. So that's their perception of the problem, which is likely different than what you think. It's, so that's partly what happens. I think perception of the problem is the real challenge for most authors. They're so disconnected from their readers and so focused on their own selves. My idea, my story, my framework.

Mike Michalowicz:

Did you, how do you extract that also through the same poll? Yeah.

AJ Harper:

Unless you know them really well. But the same thing is polling. This is just testing. What, what, what do people think? It's, so for example, in the money habit, which when this airs will have been out for one week, so we'll just say available, available where all books are sold, you'll get one. Um, in the money habit, we actually address that. The belief is if you wanna be financially secure and not worry about my, so the desire is for the readers of the money habit. I don't wanna worry about money anymore. Okay. The perception is I don't have enough of it for that to happen, right? Because we think I need a million dollar, like how long, Mike, how long have we been hearing this since we were kids? If we had a million do, it's this magic. There's,

Mike Michalowicz:

There's even a song. No, add a million dollars.

AJ Harper:

Yes. Magical mythical number that's supposed to solve everything. Now, not to diminish people would be better off if they had a million dollars for sure. But,

Mike Michalowicz:

And, and let me, let me even challenge that. I don't know if they'd be better off because it can amplify if you're poor hat,

AJ Harper:

Sorry, I know. But if, like, if you're destitute and you need money for medicine, like yeah, a million bucks is gonna be good. Yes. Okay. The point though is that's the reader's perception of the solution. And your perception, your perception is different. But you can't just go in and say, I'm gonna ignore what you say you want, what you think the problem is. Because now there's a

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disconnect where the reader has to jump over all these hoops of what they think it is to try and stay in that book with you. But if you at least can articulate their mindset, then, oh, okay, this dude gets it, this person gets it. Right? So if Lauren Novak did not address the fact that women are scared that there's, there's something bad about them. If they have rage, there would be a disconnect, right? Right. So if she went in with, oh, I'm sorry you feel that way, that's not a normal thing to feel and we're gonna fix it. Oh, that's she,

Mike Michalowicz:

Right? Yeah. You famously say, meet them where they're at.

AJ Harper:

Meet them where they're, you can take them wherever you want them to go if you simply meet them where they are. But most people skip ahead and they're just in their own world. People meaning re offers, offers just are in their own zone. The hardest thing my students, I mean, I'm constantly bringing them back, but is that what they think? But what do they think? Well, is that what they say? What do they say? And we also do this thing where they'll tell us flat out in simple language, and then we author it where we make it sound smarter, right? So this no, Lauren says they, they are, they're gonna understand that they're not alone and they're not a bad person because they have mom range. But if she had said, and you'll be relieved from the loneliness epidemic of blah blah, it just doesn't hit home.

AJ Harper:

I'm always saying to people, it's like, if you're standing in line for Starbucks or wherever you'll stand in line, what are the conversations you're gonna overhear? The way people talk to each other? What's the language they're using? I wish I didn't have to worry about money ever again, but I just don't think I can ever get enough of money for that to happen. That's what people say, you know? So you have to get that, take the time to really be clear about how people are talking. And once you do that, you craft the promise. So it addresses those things. So, um, you, they're intricate, they're connected. This is why you always start with reader, by the way. You don't craft a promise before you know the reader

Mike Michalowicz:

Greeley led a couple, uh, woofs, partial woofs behind you is awesome. I heard,

AJ Harper:

I don't think you could hear, I don't, I bet they can't hear it on here. Oh,

Mike Michalowicz:

Maybe not. I heard a little Greeley is, uh, AJ and Polly's pooch, the, the most gentle but also intimidating dog you've ever seen in your life. It's like, when I visit you in Madeleine Island, I'm like, whoa. Like, it's a, like what kind of dog is that?

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AJ Harper:

American Bulldog? They have the same, they have the same attack rate as golden retrievers. Like they're, they're gentle.

Mike Michalowicz:

But their face, gentle. And he just comes running up and then just goes in your lap and starts liking you. Yeah. And, and Slobbers all over the most kindest beautiful dog you've ever seen in your life. Um, two things that came to mind is when it comes to running poles, uh, a little hack I have is Reddit, because that's a public forum where people just share or have conversations about a topic and are very, it seems to be very candid about it. So if your topic is mum rage, go onto Reddit and, and type in that subject line and see what people are talking about. And you may find some stuff there.

AJ Harper:

Well, I wanna make one more point is it's when you're crafting the promise, it's not, this is where other people go wrong. It's not a summary of the book.

Mike Michalowicz:

Right?

AJ Harper:

It's also not a description of the solution.

Mike Michalowicz:

To me it is it fair to say it's, it's it's acknowledgement of where they're at and where they'll be by the conclusion of the book.

AJ Harper:

Yeah. And that's why I always tell my authors, start with this language. By the time you turn the last page or by the end of this book, start writing it with that language and it will change the way you write it.

Mike Michalowicz:

I use this technique in speaking is of the meet them where they're at. So when I talk about the money habit on stage, which I've now been keynoting on or any subject, um, sometimes they ask to do a q and a or a fireside chat on stage after I do my presentation. And audience members will ask something and they may reveal whatever struggle they have. Um, like I have tons of debt and so forth. Well, I use a technique. I said, oh, there's actually a term for that. An entrepreneur who's racked up a lot of debt and yet their accounting shows are, they're profitable and they have this internal struggle. There's a word it's called being human. And that little say be that part, being

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human is so disarming and accepting. It's interesting. You see the shoulders drop a deep breath and now they're ready to listen to the solution. I think the risk is to say, oh yeah, that's a big problem a lot of people have. And you can't do that. Like there's a, like placing judgment, a negative judgment on it. People can't then receive the solution.

AJ Harper:

Yeah. And there's Yes, absolutely. So, so again, the promise, it has to be something that by the time they turn the last page, they understand or feel or experience what, because it just depends. Your book might not actually have a tangible promise. Like your book profit First. That's, you know, we promise you'll be profitable by the time you turn the last page. We really get there by chapter three. Yeah. Um, but money habit is you won't worry about money again. That's a different kind of promise

Mike Michalowicz:

That a hundred percent. And we, we even redefine, not redefine we put parameters around financial freedom and financial independence. And to, to kind of paraphrase what I write about is financial freedom, which is, or perhaps the more common phrase that's out there is, I never have to worry about bills again. I can do what I want whimsically and there's no consequence. So if I said, now I wanna head down to the beach, which is the Kirby Island by Jet, and I say, jet, I mean my own jet, that when I do that trip, I don't worry about it. That's, that's the definition of financial freedom financially. But we talk about financial independence and the difference is financial independence is where instead of money controlling you, you're controlling money, you flip the script, and now it's regardless of the income you have that you can put control and authority over your money and with control. And that, uh, comes clarity. And with clarity comes financial independence. Um, and, and then when that million, if it does come to you, uh, since you've asserted control over your current circumstances, you are far more positioned to have success if your income increases. Yeah.

Mike Michalowicz:

Um, how do you know you've delivered the promise by the end of the book?

AJ Harper:

Uh, well, hopefully you're doing advanced reader protocol and you're checking to see if how people are doing, you know? Yeah. Hopefully you've done that. Hopefully you haven't just turned in your manuscript and said, well that works.

Mike Michalowicz:

Well, that one lands. Yeah.

AJ Harper:

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That, yeah. That I think is the, is the true test. And you need to make time for that. We have a whole episode on that, by the way.

Mike Michalowicz:

Do, do you ask, during that pretesting, do you ask readers to confirm that, that you've delivered on the promise? Or, or is there a way to query that?

AJ Harper:

I, yeah. I mean, but I don't, I think, I think it's, you could ask outright, but I'm, I like to be a little more subtle than that. You know, ask a question that leads you to the answer to that without being, because Yeah. You know, if you just say, did I deliver on my promise? Most people are gonna be like, oh, yay, thumbs out. Yeah. So it's more like, what do, what do they feel capable of doing now? Or depends on what the, what it's, you know, so if it's Lauren's book, it might be, um, how do you feel differently now about your, oh,

Mike Michalowicz:

That's so great.

AJ Harper:

Right?

Mike Michalowicz:

That's so good.

AJ Harper:

Let them answer instead of yes or no, let them talk about it and then go look and see. Is that what I wanted? Is that what I said would happen?

Mike Michalowicz:

So I could say, for the money habit, I could ask, how do you feel in your relationship with money now? At the end?

AJ Harper:

Well, no, it would be, no, it would be more like, what's your confidence level?

Mike Michalowicz:

Oh, that's even better. Yep. Gotcha.

AJ Harper:

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Right, because that's really speaks to the worry. The worry is, I don't think I can confidently handle this financial situation. The worry is I don't think I can confidently meet the needs that are coming up in my life. Or I'm worried that if something bad happens, I'm not gonna be able to manage it. Um, so I think that could be a good way, but we could, you could probably brainstorm 10 different ways to figure that out.

Mike Michalowicz:

Yeah. I remember us having a conversation one day and, uh, you shared, I I, I'm gonna paraphrase, but some insight is like, oh, I guess that's true. And now I really realize it's true is, uh, the biggest consumer of books is the writer of books. Like, when you're in the craft of writing, you read more than anyone else by by

AJ Harper:

Unless you're, unless you're a, read romances.

Mike Michalowicz:

Yeah. That's funny. So, and then I had a, I really got into guitar over the last two years. I've always played guitar, but just a few chords. Um, I've really gotten into it where I'm soloing and all these different things and I'm listening to music in a whole different way. I'll listen to the same song 10 times in a row, not 'cause I'm into the song, but I'm listening for, um, just elements of the song and the rhythm and trying to distinguish actual notes when I'm listening for the first song in my life, AJ happened this weekend. I was listening to a song by Chris Cornell of Audio Slave. The guy's got this really beautiful voice and the opening note for the song, be Yourself, there's this guitar, uh, element. And I was like, oh, that's a B I don't know where it came from. I said, he goes, ding, ding, ding. And I heard that first ding like, oh, that's a B. And so I, I quickly ran down and I was like, like I looked this up. Sure enough, the opening notes b for the first time I heard a note and I actually could pick it out without having to interpret. And I, I noticed with books the same thing. So what, where are books that, that you've recently read, that you've read historically where like, they nail delivering on the promise?

AJ Harper:

Um, so for me, and not historically, let's just do the last year. 'cause I think, you know, I'm gonna say some of the same books, otherwise there's some new books. Oh, that's a good point.

AJ Harper:

Yeah. So I'd say for me in the last year, two books come to mind that I, I mean, I've read some good books, but I'm saying the question here is, did it deliver on the promise? That's a different situation. I'm also excluding all my students. 'cause I'm not gonna, I think all my students have done it, but I would have to list a a lot of people right now. So I'm not, I'm gonna exclude you guys if you're listening. Um, so I, I thought this, um, it came out early in 2025. It's called Too Much and it's by Terry Cole. And that I felt she totally delivered on that promise and she also

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articulated it from the get, which I appreciated. Mm. Um, and then, uh, probably one of my favorite books of the year of 2025 was, um, I always forget to see this, why I have, why do I have such a Block with this? Hang on one second. Yes. The Book of Alchemy by Ika Juad, um, can't say Enough about that book. And she totally delivered on The Promise and she didn't. And it's a, um, curated book in that other people wrote passages of it.

Mike Michalowicz:

Oh, that's interesting.

AJ Harper:

Yeah. So at any rate, I loved those two. What about you?

Mike Michalowicz:

Well, you said something interesting about too much, you said delivered on it from the get. Um, no,

AJ Harper:

No. Articulated it from the

Mike Michalowicz:

Get, articulated it from the get. Okay, okay, okay. Okay. I heard that a little differently. So the book that landed with me is called Reset by Dan Heath. And, uh, what it is is how organizations that are in struggle, how they can get back on track now, a book like that, I may have found it interesting. I now find it profoundly interesting. And the reason is, is 'cause I've started investing in businesses, I dunno if I give you enough update on this. We are in 20 investments, give or take one. So maybe 19 or 21. Um, and by and when, by the time this broadcast will probably be in 25 investments, we're specifically investing in at-risk businesses. So, uh, quick back fider, the, the success of the books that we've written, AJ have drawn readers to come to me and say, I wish you were my partner Mike in my business. And so I was like, once I heard that enough times, I was like, why be a partner in these businesses? I I should do this. Teamed up with, uh, an extraordinary colleague. His name's Greg Ler, like I I we make fun of, and everyone in my books, 'cause we're back, we're buddies back in from the college days.

AJ Harper:

Yes. And I, I get a note from the editor saying, are you sure you wanna say this about this person? Because you always

Mike Michalowicz:

About, it's, it's glorious. It's absolutely glorious. It's an Easter egg. And so we started investing in these at-risk businesses, businesses that are doing sometimes millions and multimillions in

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revenue, but are not sustainable or are in the brink of going under. And so, um, reset is about addressing businesses just like this. And as I was reading it, I'm so familiar with the problems they're facing. It, it, it proved, to your point, he's meeting the reader where they're at, where they are now I'm reading, it's like, oh my God, Dan, you, you're nailing all the problems we're experiencing. And from the get he starts giving solutions for and within the two chapters, like, my gosh, we've deployed some of these things. It is extraordinary. The other thing that's interesting, I think about, uh, Dan Heath's book is, and I, I emailed him about, I, I emailed we're, we're in contact, but, uh, I didn't ask him this one question. Um, but it's clear he does not turn around businesses. He's, it's journalistic. This is what he's curated and he nails that he doesn't feign that he could, he's worked and solved businesses that he's done this. It's just powerful to me. Like you, you don't necessarily, I always thought you had to live and experience to talk about it. You can do it from a journalistic vantage point and still deliver on the promise.

AJ Harper:

Yes. Yes.

Mike Michalowicz:

Okay. Uh, anything else you wanted to cover on this?

AJ Harper:

Yeah, I do wanna say one thing and I think it's really important. And that is, if you feel you can't deliver on the promise that you wanna make by the time you turn the last page, then you need to modify the promise. So I, in write a must read, I don't say by the end of this book, you will have a must read book. I can't ever promise that because number one, who knows how long it's gonna take you to write it, who not knows how I can't stop you from quitting, et cetera. I also can't guarantee it will be about seller, none of that, none of that. So I have to modify to give some part of what the reader wants some part of it. And if, but I also think there's merit in saying, okay, could I deliver on it? Because then what it does is it elevates your writing.

AJ Harper:

So now you're saying, wait, what, what, what could I do? And maybe the answer is, you just can't. But maybe you'll come up with something great that's gonna elevate your book. 'cause you're trying to rise to the occasion. And you and I, when we're working on your books, the thing we say most once we're in the actual writing and editing part, the thing we say most is, but wait, are we delivering on the promise? But wait, did we do that? Wait, did we do that? And we keep coming back and we make changes. We make changes tonally, we make changes with stories. We make changes with accessibility. We make changes with graphics. Okay. It could be almost anything that you need to be able to hit it. But by letting it be your beacon, by letting it be the thing that you must follow, um, you, you change the shape of the book and you elevate the book.

Mike Michalowicz:

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We shared this story before I was, uh, at an event. This is when we were writing Fix This Next. And I, you know, the, the promise of fix this next is there, or here's how I positioned it is, um, there's always a biggest or most important challenge in your business. You need to identify that and fix that. Don't fix everything. Fix the right thing. And so we came, I came up with this kind of testing protocol and I, I put in front of this group of about 20, 30 people and said, Hey, this for five, 10 minutes would you guys go through this test? Um, so we can identify the biggest challenge in your business and resolve it? And about one minute into it, people are chitchatting and some people put aside, no one completed the exam. I was like, oh my gosh. It was so clear in that early testing stages that the way I was approaching the promise of Find Your Fix was not gonna work. So I think it was still an accessible, the promise was real. That, that, that, if you can find the fix in your business, but the way I was approaching it was totally wrong and had to rewrite from the scratch. And that was one of the painful but most important lessons is test your protocol to getting people to the promise.

AJ Harper:

Yeah, for sure. It's, it's just that, it's, the point I really wanted to make is it's everything connects to it. Yeah. It's not just the frameworks and processes, it's the stories you tell. It's the tone you use. It's it, if you're, if you're using enough repetition for and different accessibility for people who might learn differently, it's, do you need short chapters or long? It's, it's so much. A lot of it is doability. And, um, I just hope that this becomes, um, a must for authors that authors just, this is my hope that authors will say, wait a minute, I gotta check that over and over and over and over again, because that is what is going to take their book to the next level.

Mike Michalowicz:

I got a couple things as we wrap up here. Um, there's a couple books you should check out that you've coached both of these individuals, aj and I think these are great, uh, examples of delivering on Promise. These are books that are not released yet, um, but are coming out this year. And you can pre-order them right now. Um, but you can also study the journey of how they deliver on the promise and, and these books will serve you. So the first book is Take Breaks Work Better. That's by John Briggs. Um, he created this concept called the Three three Rule. Yep. Take breaks Work better. Yep. And, um, he was the creator of the three three rule, which is three hours of work, max, which 0.3 or 30% recovery. And, um, he's totally revamped the system to make it more simple, more accessible. And, and you've coached him and Brian Harriot, um, such a lovely guy.

Mike Michalowicz:

He wrote a book called Time Freedom, rethink Your Work and Money to Create a Life You Love Now Where you're independent of contained constraints, flexibility, you gotta get these books. They're on pre-order right now, and I, I promise they'll they'll deliver on their promises and you'll learn from them. Not only just be served by them. Also, uh, my book, the Money Habit is out. Now. I, I do know this, this has been the best launch ever and we haven't even launched yet as we're recording this just because the numbers are already in on all the, the pre-

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order matter. And I'll tell you, aj, that wouldn't have happened without this show because you and I had the great debate over pre-orders. You won the debate,

AJ Harper:

I won the debate over pre-orders and I won the debate over bulk orders. And I know that it's influencing your success

Mike Michalowicz:

And Totally. And so I've deployed all those strategies. I ate my humble pie, I acknowledged it, but, but now I'm not, uh, resentful. I'm, I'm grateful for the loss and I'm deploying this stuff. And, um, we're gonna have exact numbers after the launch, but um, we do know it's going to beat the launch of Profit first, beat the launch of, um, get Different, which was a actually a massive launch fix this next. It's, it's beating all of them. Not combined, but independently. Um, you have do stuff going on.

AJ Harper:

Yeah. You know, I wanna tell everybody I have, um, twice a year I do Writing Sprint Marathon. It's a free event. It's free, free, free. So I only do it twice a year and I have one coming up on March 21st. And it's where we write from nine to four. You don't have to come for the whole thing, so don't panic, which you could come and there's usually a ton of people there, professional authors there, newbies there. And we write together, we get a ton done. But I also answer questions. I give a bunch of prizes. It is a fantastic day and you'll feel so invigorated. So come, if you're trying to get stuff done, come, if you're just trying to put your toe in the water come, if you need to reset and get back into it March 21st from nine to 4:00 PM you can, um, if you go on any of my social media channels, there'll be info. But also if you subscribe to my newsletter aid and just get on my mailing list, I'll tell you about it. And if none of that works, of course we'll also put a link in the show notes to register. You can also email hello@ajharper.com and they'll hook you up.

Mike Michalowicz:

So I just, I just literally put my calendar as you're saying it. March 21st, nine to four. Saturday, it's also, uh, that's Eastern time. 'cause I know we got folks from all over the world. Eastern

AJ Harper:

Time. It's 'cause I'm in New York, so I'm, I'm always think I'm the center of the universe like all East Coasters do.

Mike Michalowicz:

And, uh, do any retreat spots left?

AJ Harper:

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I do have some retreat spots left. We only have three this year. We decided to shorten it to three because we just wanted a little bit more of a break in the fall. So we have a retreat in June, July, and August. I do have spots available, but when this, you should just run to **AJ Harper** dot Con about that.

Mike Michalowicz:

They, they, yeah, they get packed. And these are all at Madeline Island?

AJ Harper:

They're all at Madeline Island. Yep. There's only eight people per retreat, so that's why we only have so many slots.

Mike Michalowicz:

It's, it's one of the most beautiful places I've been. Um, it's a a Hey, have you, by the way, have you hung out with that neighbor at all? That we went over and we checked out their, their sauna. Oh, okay.

AJ Harper:

No, I haven't, but I have good neighbors up there. I have Hi Dean and Becky who live next door and normally they are there for half the year and they're otherwise in Washington and we love them. Dean and Becky

Mike Michalowicz:

And, uh, right, Dean and Becky, shout out to you. Uh, next week we're gonna talk about the new publishing path decision points. And, uh, you have I guess a, a list of priorities that you'd advise authors to consider when publishing. Yeah,

AJ Harper:

I wouldn't saying the same thing for at least a decade, if not more. And I've recently added two critical decision points based on the changes in publishing.

Mike Michalowicz:

That's awesome. This is perhaps the, the most consternation I hear from new and established authors is what's the publishing path now? It's, it's radically changed, so I can't wait to hear that. Um, thank you for joining us today. Don't skip through this part. Be like, ah, alright. It's over. I can just stop. I got one favor. I wanna ask you if this show's serving you, would you please rate and review us on Weber pod catcher? You're listening on, it serves us so deeply, so I know it's a selfish ask, but if you'd be willing to do that, take the one minute to give it a rating that you feel is fair, but also a review that's a game changer for us in getting the word out. Um, if you want free resources, it's at [d wt b podcast.com](http://dwtb.podcast.com). These are materials prepared by aj. It will help you in

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your writing journey. If you have a topic you want us to talk about, if you want to connect with us innate capacity outside of what we've already shared, you can email us at hello@dwbpodcast.com. Adayla is monitoring that. Um, post whatever you want and we will, or tell us whatever you want and we'll address that. Um, he, there's another note. Pier, do you see that? I'm gonna highlight it 'cause I don't, hang on. I'm highlighting it in our notes. Is that, is that a ton of

AJ Harper:

Old things then we those are those monuments. Do you leave for yourself? And I, I probably didn't notice it was there, so I deleted it.

Mike Michalowicz:

Deleted it because that was kind of weird. And the last thing is, thank you for joining us on today's episode. We're looking forward to having you join us next week. And grand reminder to kick off, well, I was gonna say kick off 2026, but the reality is we're already in 2026 for a few episodes to continue. 2026. Remember this, don't write that book. Write the greatest book you can.