

don't write *that* book!

Bonus Episode:

“Amy Griffin: A Breakdown and What You Can Learn From It”

TRIGGER WARNING: This episode contains discussions around sexual assault, abuse, and trauma. It may be distressing to some listeners and viewers. Listener and viewer discretion is advised.

Mike Michalowicz

This is like an emergency episode.

AJ Harper

It's not really an emergency, by the time we record things that are topical in the news related to publishing, months have gone by. And we're doing so well with getting ahead of it. So we need to insert this one.

Mike Michalowicz

Just because we're doing more in video, I just want people to know it's not like we're texting or I'm playing around on a video game here. This is all our notes that you prepare in advance.

AJ Harper

We're both over 50.

Mike Michalowicz

But you texted me just a few days ago, said, hey, we have to insert an episode. This is the first time we've ever done anything like this. What inspired what we're about to talk about?

AJ Harper

That's true. We've never done it.

Well, actually, I'd read this article, a substack post by Brooke Warner. She is the founder of She Writes Press. And then I thought to myself, that's just a crazy situation. And I moved on. And then Laura Stone sent this TikTok video to our company, a little group chat. And it was about the same topic, but it was way deeper. And then Laura got me hooked on this.

attorney who's doing this whole deep dive TikTok on this issue. And I thought, you know, I probably shouldn't just say, that's crazy and move on. This actually would be helpful. And it was Laura who convinced me that we should be talking about this. So.

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Mike Michalowicz

This is great. So I know very few details. You did provide an outline, but I elected not to read any of it because I want to discover this as we move along. I do love a surprise. Before we kick into it, this is Don't Write That Book. This is a show that we explore the entire journey of book writing. really, it's a commitment to writing the greatest book you can. And it's fighting this growing tsunami of mass produced books.

AJ Harper

You love a surprise.

Mike Michalowicz

And we're trying to elevate the heartfelt, full out, all you effort writing of books from people who aspire to be genuine authors. What I admire about you is your commitment to that craft. We need a spokesperson for it. And you are so loyal to it that I just want to acknowledge that. We authors need you. Thank you for being.

AJ Harper

Yes.

Mike Michalowicz

our beacon of light, our lighthouse.

AJ Harper

Thank you. I was thinking of my, what am I going to say I admire about Mike-isms. You realize how many episodes this is now that we've been telling each other things we like about each other?

Mike Michalowicz

Hundreds of times now, or over a hundred times at least.

AJ Harper

So I'm going down the road and I'm listening to my old school prints. And I'm just thinking, oh no, did I already say that? Did I already say that? But I think it's that you geek out for things. That's what I like. Oh, thank you. Yeah, like you get full in. Yeah. You're not ashamed of it. No. not ashamed to be a geek for anything. No. Whatever. And I'm as evidenced by what I just looked at in your house, which is the secret, Frank, not just a secret.

Mike Michalowicz

the secret room.

AJ Harper
The Frankenstein room. Young Frankenstein room. Yeah.

Mike Michalowicz
this secret Young Frankenstein room. So the way you went in was there's an emergency exit. By law, you need safe regress from a space. So there's a wall that swings open, but you'd never tell. But there's another way in through my office over there. And it's through a closet. And the reason it's through a closet is because that acknowledges Young Frankenstein. That's how he got into the laboratory.

AJ Harper
So who sleeps in there?

Mike Michalowicz
Yes, it's actually a fan favorite. People ask to sleep in the own Frankenstein room. But we have had some people afraid because it does have hints, a sous-sens of some deviant behavior could happen in

AJ Harper
Okay. You're saying there's two exits.

Mike Michalowicz
There's right right two ways to regress so What the hell

AJ Harper
Okay. All right, so we're gonna get started. What's going on? Okay. So first of all, I just wanna say that this is all, there's a lawsuit. And so nothing's been settled. So everything is allegedly, we just wanna make sure that we're making that statement. And then what else did I wanna make sure for legal purposes? I think that's it. I mean, everything's a Mater of public record. So we just don't know how it's gonna shake out yet. So we'll just see what happens.

We want to share today because authors need to know about this because it poses some questions. And also, know, I get questions all the time about, I going to get sued when people are trying to share a personal story or share a story about someone else? And I always tell authors, do your due diligence, but ultimately you can't control if someone's going to sue you. This is not that. This is bonkers, this story.

Okay, so I'm gonna, I have my notes. So apologies if you're watching the video.

Mike Michalowicz
Before you start revealing it, the case is actively going on.

AJ Harper
It was just filed in March. It's March right now, or in one of the last days of March recording this. it was filed this month.

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Mike Michalowicz

Okay, okay, so we're gonna expedite this episode. We're gonna try to get out in the next week or two after Mat, our producer, produces it. So hopefully nothing's changed likely by that point. that like?

AJ Harper

Yeah, and then we're gonna we have some deep dive links. I mentioned Brooke Warner's sub stack She is the founder of she writes press she they she writes is known for their memoirs And so she was a perfect person to write about this She actually has two sub stack posts about it And so we'll put the that in the show notes and there's two New York Times articles And then there's another Daily Beast article will put in there and then you know what? We'll put those tick-tock deep dive Attorney tick-tock. I love it

that Laura found. We'll put all that. Okay. So if anybody wants to geek out, as we're talking about geeking out, everybody wants to go deep. You just need, you need to realize once you start, you're gonna get a little lost in it. You might lose about an hour or two. Okay. Yeah, okay. So here's the deal. topic today is about Amy Griffin. Do you know who she is? No. Never heard of her.

Mike Michalowicz

Wow, this is a binger. Besides this quick skim, I saw at the top that she's a very wealthy person.

AJ Harper

So I need to make a disclaimer too because I have a friend named Amy Griffin So our kids went to school together. She lives around the corner from me. Okay, and she's a sweet sweet person Broadway actress Yeah, not that Amy Griffin. So I just want in case any of my nyack friends see that I have a Podcast episode called what to learn about the mess about Amy Not that Amy. Yeah, okay

Mike Michalowicz

She's spilling the tea.

AJ Harper

All right, so Amy Griffin wrote a book called The Tell and it came out in I think the first part of 2025 and it was in New York Times bestseller. It was an Oprah book club pick, Reese book club pick and then all these major stars were out for it and she was on all the big TV shows, major, major, major stars out there for her. So she's a billionaire and she's married to a hedge fund guy.

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AJ Harper

And so she, you know, she's also an investor in, you know, Reese's business, Gwyneth Paltrow's business, right? Okay, so you're starting to see a picture here. Yeah. bias. A connection to make that happen for her first book. But just so you know, let's go back in time. So she wrote *The Tell*. That's a memoir about her experiences. Well, she uncovers these memories of child's...

Mike Michalowicz

Could be a little bit.

AJ Harper

sexual abuse in middle school. She uncovers them, allegedly, through MDMA experience, which is, if you're all wondering what that is, it's ecstasy. So she does this ecstasy and uncovers these memories. And then Natal talks about that. So already there was controversy in, I think it was fall, maybe September of last year. And Brooke Warner also wrote about this.

Mike Michalowicz

Hmm.

AJ Harper

there was a New York Times article saying people were sort of feeling like, is this really true? How can you trust memories that someone gets from basically drugs? So no offense to the MDMA people who are super into that. Not my bag, but okay, so there was this stuff was coming up. And this New York Times article, and I wanna give also again, I really respect Brooke Warren by the way from *She Writes*, was really,

advocating for her then, saying, you know, can't question the memories of a person because not every memory is going to be exact, especially if there was trauma related to it. And so if you're writing a memory, you're like, those are your stories, those are your memories. So that was kind of a bad tone. But already in September, there was some question of what's going on here. What she didn't reveal was this this is, this is to me unethical enough.

is that her husband is a major investor in MDMA for this.

Mike Michalowicz

Amy. Here's where my mind's going. When's enough enough? Like, wealth wise.

AJ Harper

Right?

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AJ Harper

Because she's a billionaire? Well, I mean, who knows why she... I mean, okay, let's just say that she did it for the reasons she said, then it would be to share her experience of uncovering these things and how those memories that affected her life unknowingly.

Mike Michalowicz

And perhaps her argument is that's why my husband and I are investors or owners in these types of businesses because we think they have such an impact. That's a spin.

AJ Harper

It's a spin, but she didn't tell the readers. So if you're gonna talk about this, you have to be- You have to disclaim. You have to say, disclose. You have to say, this is just so you know, my husband's an investor in this. Yeah, so already-

Mike Michalowicz

Yeah, yeah, yeah, it is a little...

AJ Harper

Okay, also then there's some, you know, some people disagree with how are you writing about memories and you didn't write it. So she hired Sam Lansky to write the memoir. So she didn't actually write it. Okay. She talks about writing it, quote unquote, on the bathroom floor. And then, but Sam Lansky is the ghostwriter on record.

He is sort of like a Hollywood guy. He also was a ghost on Britney Spears. Yeah, things like that. But when an author says I wrote it on the bathroom floor, I sometimes think of it like, well, I mean, I was a ghost. So I don't think that necessarily means she's lying because first of all, that can be a metaphor for, I was down. I was down on my luck, you know? But also, I've had people give me stuff that was deeply personal, journals, other things.

that I then took and used that, but that doesn't mean they weren't actually writing. So I wanna give that part to her.

Mike Michalowicz

There was this writing course that I was doing and you were kind enough to do a massive amount of teaching. And there was a fella in the room, I won't say his name, but he was handwriting his entire manuscript. And you were like, I love that. I love that. It just reminds me as you're this story is I think that is a practical way of expressing things. One additional thing, I was just traveling, I visiting my son and I brought with him, with me,

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Mike Michalowicz

the journal I maintain my diary as I was going through what I believe was functional depression, but going through depression and was this a good outlet? I think that could be a memoir of some sort.

AJ Harper

Well, also, I would say, I often say to you, I've said to many ghost writing clients, hey, can you write a little? Yeah. Can you just write down what happened? Okay. Right? So I don't, I don't, I'll give her a pass on that. I do not give her a pass on not disclosing the MDMA. Very suspect. Okay. So, but that's not even the thing. That's not even the lawsuit. This is juicy. Okay. It's super juicy. So in September, this New York Times article comes out.

Mike Michalowicz

Well, I give her a pass on being very suspect.

AJ Harper

One of the people that the New York Times interviewed for the article was this woman who ends up being the person who filed the lawsuit against Amy Griffin. So they call her Jane Doe in the, okay, a classmate. So they interviewed a bunch of the people who went to school with Amy Griffin because apparently this was a middle school teacher that. So they interview all these people and one of them is this woman. it through this experience, the woman's like,

Mike Michalowicz

Hmm. Of those perpetrators.

AJ Harper

Wait a minute. What she wrote in that book, that's actually happened to me. Yeah. no. So we're not, okay, so now we're in a whole nother book. We need to honor people's memories even if people should not have to prove, know, like a child who's gone through something, you know, we need to trust and believe people, right? Okay.

but she allegedly took this friend's story and claimed it as her own.

Mike Michalowicz

Is it possible that this perpetrator

AJ Harper

That's what I thought. Yeah. Initially, I'm reading through everything and I'm thinking, okay, well, there must have been more than one person. And so maybe it

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Mike Michalowicz

Yeah, totally. Particularly someone in that authoritative position over children.

AJ Harper

Well, there were very specific descriptions of things that I don't want to mention because we know kids listen to this show and also because I don't want to trigger anybody who's been through this. But there were very specific details that were exactly what this Jane Doe person went through, which if it would be pretty hard to duplicate. I mean, perpetrators usually have a main way they do things, but some of it was way,

Mike Michalowicz

Okay, okay, that's I was gonna ask.

Mike Michalowicz

Mm-hmm.

AJ Harper

too specific. Okay. And there's another little detail you got to go in the deep dive because there's stuff I won't say on this because of who's listening. But there's some other factors that are just kind of what? So wait. Okay. So she hears she, this is the part where I'm not clear about is did she, I don't think she understood what was in the book until the New York Times reporter interviewed her. No, this Jando woman. she said, wait a minute, that was me.

Mike Michalowicz

Amy didn't understand what was in her own mind.

Mike Michalowicz

Yeah.

AJ Harper

Okay, what makes it so okay, I would think what you thought. it also happened to Amy. But here's the thing. A few years before this, they reconnected as adults, Amy and this Jane Doe person. And then out of the blue, this talent agent calls Jane Doe interested in her story.

and interviews her for hours and hours and then nothing comes of that. And it turns out it's not really an interviewer. Allegedly.

Mike Michalowicz

Are you kidding me? This is the tea spilled over.

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AJ Harper

And so if there wasn't, if it wasn't who was calling, who's this person? And so the claim is that Amy Griffin stole the story by having this talent, so-called talent agent grill her friend and then actually pawned it off as her own.

Mike Michalowicz

So.

AJ Harper

This is not that, it's not what you thought it was when we started.

Mike Michalowicz

I did not know, this is now highly suspect. Can I ask the question, may I ask? I don't wanna skip ahead of the story, I'm just wondering this quote, talent agent, have they been identified?

AJ Harper

I'll do my best and my ability. Potentially. I don't really know. Yeah.

Mike Michalowicz

okay. Could you imagine that's a gun for hire? Yeah, gun for hire.

AJ Harper

if they knew what they were doing.

Mike Michalowicz

And maybe they didn't even know what they're doing.

AJ Harper

Yeah, what if they were just somebody who was, I don't know, but they would have had to impersonate a talent agent.

Mike Michalowicz

Mm-hmm, but they surely were not a per a talent agent

AJ Harper

Okay, I think that part's murky for me. think... But there... Anyway, the point being, it wasn't that.

Mike Michalowicz

Yeah. Yeah. Yeah, that's wild. Okay, is there more? Is there more?

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AJ Harper

So now this Jane Doe person filed a lawsuit against Penguin Random House, Amy Griffin, and the ghostwriter Sam Blansky, putting fear into all ghostwriters all over the world.

Mike Michalowicz

Okay, so what is the justification besides sue everyone with deep pockets, invoke fear? Let's go person by person. Why would you sue the ghost rider in this scenario?

AJ Harper

Well, mean, someone's saying that Ghostwriter is culpable. Now, when I was a ghost, I had contracts that said, you're in charge of your own content that you give. You're the one who, you have to assure me in the contract that everything you give me is yours, that you own it. And it's mostly for plagiarism and ripping off intellectual.

Mike Michalowicz

Back to the author. Yes.

Mike Michalowicz

Which is the definition of plagiarism. It's worse. Yeah, actually it is worse, right? Because plagiarism is copying pre-written someone else's material verbatim. This is taking someone else's memories and making it your own memories.

AJ Harper

and pawn them off as your own.

Mike Michalowicz

Remember that book, uh, a thousand pieces or something? A little bit similar, possibly, or he was just...

AJ Harper

A million little pieces James Fry.

So what he did was he fictionalized, he had a novel that was loosely based on his life of addiction, but there were actual characters that were completely made up. So it was a novel initially. And at the time, memoirs were really hot, and especially memoirs like that of addiction. And so he was convinced by his publisher, this is his claim, that it would be a better sell if it were true.

There was a memoir. It certainly was. It was also an Oprah book club pick. I think she needs a team of investigators. There's a third book actually that that's happened to with her.

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Mike Michalowicz

And it was a better sell.

Mike Michalowicz

Yeah!

Mike Michalowicz

That's fascinating. Third book. So, okay. So, so the Jane Doe is suing the ghostwriter because the ghostwriter perhaps participated in some of this behavior, this fraudulent behavior.

AJ Harper

I mean, some would argue how could the ghostwriter not know? This is interesting topic for me. I don't know that I would know if it were. Maybe I could suss it out. I think because the topic is so...

emotional, and people react to these things in different ways. Not everyone is... Some people have this shut down affect when it comes to trauma. I do. So if you saw me processing something, you might say, doesn't, she seems fine. And, but I'm really not. It's just the way I roll. know, I just go into like an autopilot. So how could you really ever...

Mike Michalowicz

Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.

AJ Harper

No, if a person was behaving appropriately.

Mike Michalowicz

And may I add, it's such a taboo, if that's the word, subject. For me to purloin your memories as my own, that seems beyond unethical. It's almost inhuman.

AJ Harper

I don't think that most ghosts couldn't, yeah, I wouldn't even think that, yeah, it wouldn't even occur to me. I'm usually shocked at bad behavior though, still. I'm still always like, really? Who would do that? So it could be this dude, Sam Lansky is his name, had no clue.

Mike Michalowicz

Who would do that?

Mike Michalowicz

It's possible.

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AJ Harper

I mean, yeah, and he's the kind of ghostwriter that likes to have a name for them.

Mike Michalowicz

Okay, so he's a ghost that's not totally invisible. like how I He's not invisible. Okay, so Sam is being sued. Jane Doe is suing the author, of course. Griffin. Amy Griffin. And the reason is, is you took my ideas. Free. You took my ideas. Free. Yeah.

AJ Harper

The billionaire.

You took my story? My story. said it was yours?

Mike Michalowicz

We talked about, this is not related except for a little vignette maybe, Mel Robbins, we talked about on an episode where the Let Them was potentially a poem. is poem. But that she stole that concept. Yes. Okay, so it is a poem. It came out years prior to the book, couple years prior to the book. Yes. That case, I think that author of that poem sued Mel Robbins, is that true?

AJ Harper

With it, a-

AJ Harper

They're in legalish, there's some legalish-

Mike Michalowicz

Okay. So, okay, so this isn't the first time that someone's taken another one's work in some capacity.

AJ Harper

What happens all day every day it happens to me It's happened to you. Yeah, but this is not that this is not stealing intellectual property. This is stealing some personal story of trauma. Come on like

Mike Michalowicz

Yeah. Yeah.

Mike Michalowicz

Story, which is thing is different

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Mike Michalowicz

I can't tell you how many times my books have been ripped off, but almost in defense of those, it's a variant. It's kind of like music. Someone writes a song. I remember Vanilla Ice, when Ice Ice Baby's, doong do do doong do doong doong.

AJ Harper

Yeah, my favorite song in the world is pressure pressure. It's the greatest rock band

Mike Michalowicz

Queen David Bowie, Such a good song. And he made it into a rap song. So it's the same sound, but it's a whole different song. I think there was a lawsuit over that. And I can't believe he denied it. He's like, no, I didn't rip it off. It's definitely different. It's definitely the same. But I think that's okay to say I took something that was great and I made a new flavor.

AJ Harper

Well, if you're also working with those people and paying them for it.

Mike Michalowicz

Yeah, it's But then, so when does something become a ripoff as opposed to a variant? I'm not saying in writing this case is so clear, but when are you enhancing someone's idea and becomes a new idea as a result?

AJ Harper

Well, you have to say in writing, because I don't really understand how it works in the music industry. mean, I feel like people do sample with permission. But then sometimes there are lawsuits where it's just the music got stuck in someone's ear and it sounds similar. I mean, I don't know how you get around that stuff. With writing, people emulate style all the time. But then if we talk about prescriptive nonfiction,

Okay, let's see an example. In The Money Habit, you talk about Dave Ramsey's snowball method. You pay homage to him, but you have your own way of doing it. But you're not saying, invented the snowball. And you're also not doing something I've seen with your work and with my work, where people use the same name and explain it without the attribution.

Mike Michalowicz

No

Mike Michalowicz

that's a great point.

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AJ Harper

Yes, so that's not allowed. But you can take something and say, I love this and this is how I do it.

Mike Michalowicz

So let's talk about the Dave Ramsey situation. So Dave Ramsey, my conclusion, took that idea from B.F. Skinner's work. So we acknowledge B.F. Skinner's the original source. And Ramsey. And Dave Ramsey, we acknowledge both. Yeah. B.F. Skinner in the early 1900s finds out that humans get motivation, they'll sustain an activity if they get small wins early on. And I can't remember what the behavioral term is, but that was the root method is when you wanna eradicate debt,

Don't go for the logical expensive debt, that's the logical approach. Go for the emotional wins of your smallest payments due. Win that debt and eradicate the small debt first. Well, in Ramsey's work, it's clearly a translation from BF Skinner, but does he need to acknowledge BF Skinner? Because BF Skinner is just a psychological pair for him. He gave a term to it that was unique to snowball. He gave his very specific application. BF Skinner is just general motivation.

AJ Harper

I mean, I think it's the right thing to do.

Mike Michalowicz

Yeah, if he even knows it, he may not even know.

AJ Harper

not unknown. Because sometimes things filter through and you think, do I know that? Why do I think that? Well, just, you know, you've got to your own diligence with how do you know these things you know. Yeah. One important thing to do if you're a thought leader is to jot down the ideas you get when you get them and to jot down how you came to them. Like, for example, I have Burning Questions and Chief Concerns, which is a tool I use in the reader profile.

Mike Michalowicz

So what do do in that case?

AJ Harper

But I can remember when I came up with that. I remember the exact phone call I was having with someone and how frustrated I was and how I asked for this. And then that opened the door for me and it started me, okay, I know how to talk to this person. That's amazing. So I think you should document when you come up with things and what inspired it. I think that would be, that's a good practice, I think, for anybody who's gonna be doing this for career.

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Mike Michalowicz

I use one note as looking at it. was on a flight yesterday and just in my one note going through all my notes and that's exactly what I do when I have a when I capture something that may be significant at some point in some way in the future but I don't know how I'm gonna use it. I take it, store it, write some notes with it. So let's go back to Amy.

AJ Harper

And this is totally different. is a, so you mentioned Mel Robbins.

So there's people who know all about this and they don't want to read Mel Robbins about her using that idea. And they feel strongly, but honestly, it's not hurting her sales. mean, she's beat Atomic Habits out for that spot. She's selling hundreds of thousands of books, what, a month? Something like that. That's not going to change because people ultimately think that's a gray area. Who knows if she heard that? And I will also say,

Mike Michalowicz

yeah, yeah.

AJ Harper

When I heard Let Them, I thought, that's just like Alanon, Narnon, the family. Totally. You know? It sounds like Detached with Love, which is a sentiment of those group, you know? So it's like, is this another way of saying it? So I personally am not going to read it. I think that she should have talked about the poet, and she probably should have a conversation with that person, and so forth.

Mike Michalowicz

Yeah.

AJ Harper

Setting that aside, that is not a person's actual trauma. That's not the same thing. And so I'm gonna be shocked if this doesn't really affect Amy Griffin in terms of her literary career, right? I say literary with quotes because she didn't write it. She had a ghost. But here's what's interesting is I went some, when I said you're gonna end up in a deep dive, I went deep dive into the comments. So you can see all these people now, the same...

Mike Michalowicz

Yeah.

Mike Michalowicz

Hmm?

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AJ Harper

when I read that, it fell off. When I read that, it fell off. I couldn't finish that because something wasn't right. Now, are they saying that now because of the story or did they really think that? And that's bad. So it's one thing if it's, you know, why I think Mel's not gonna have a problem. And I don't really know her, Mel Robbins. I'm gonna say Mel. She's not gonna have a problem. But I do think this Amy Griffin...

Mike Michalowicz

I

Mike Michalowicz

Hmm.

AJ Harper

billionaire, not my neighbor, is probably going to have a problem because of the reactions of readers. Once people say, oh, I thought that was something was off. Yeah. Did they really? I don't know. I haven't actually read the tell. But it's possible that they did. But now they've convinced themselves. Yeah. So if you go through and you look at comments in all the articles, it's people saying things like,

She doesn't sound like emotionally connected the material in the audio book and all this stuff. So now she's cocked. Even if the lawsuit is settled or in her favor in the end, it's kind of, she's kind of...

Mike Michalowicz

Yeah, I mean, brings us to the social purview. We all see it now. I wonder about the law of the weekends. Penguin, why would Penguin, in this case, just the publisher, are they culpable for something?

AJ Harper

No, I mean, that's the thing is you've signed the contract, the indemnification, how many pages is Forget it. You can't, not only are they not liable for it, but they don't not even liable for any attorney fees.

Mike Michalowicz

my god, I'm still reading. I'm still signing.

Mike Michalowicz

Yeah, that's fascinating. So.

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AJ Harper

Because they need to say, we trust that the author is, they're not investigative journalists.

Mike Michalowicz

No, they're not the journalists, period. Yeah. Is the books, is it selling at a faster rate? Because sometimes all news is good news. We're looking up right now.

AJ Harper

We trust that this is your story. Yeah.

AJ Harper

I don't know. didn't. I think I wanted to bring this topic forward because I get this question so often. I probably get the question at least once a week. Am I going to get sued? People who are talking about the personal stories that they're sharing.

Mike Michalowicz

Yeah.

Mike Michalowicz

So what I'm afraid of is in some authors are going to not write their books when they should because they're so afraid of lawsuits.

AJ Harper

Yeah, I mean, think that happens now. It probably happened even more so. So I think, you know, if you're operating in integrity and you're doing your due diligence, it's okay. You know, I always tell people your version of events is okay to share.

AJ Harper

but it can't keep you from being sued.

Mike Michalowicz

So yeah right now it's ranked this BSR is 8,000, which is pretty darn good. It's pretty good the book has I'm going back to reviews 6,000 reviews more than that and good reads 53,000. It's a 4.3, which actually is not a great Yeah, think 4.5 to 4 4.8. It's exceptional 4.5

AJ Harper

Good for 6,000 reviews.

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AJ Harper

The lawsuit just came out like two weeks ago, so we'll see.

Mike Michalowicz

I'll just jump to the comments here. And I wonder if I can sort it by date.

AJ Harper

It's harder to sort by date since they made some changes, but you can do it. Sort by one star, two stars.

Mike Michalowicz

Yeah, okay, I'm not gonna spend time. I see what it's doing is it's just ranking most popular reviews, so it has its own algorithm. So I won't spend time on it. Now, what has been her public, has she made a public response? Yeah.

AJ Harper

this is you know totally false right

Mike Michalowicz

She's saying that, yes. She's like, this is a lie. I'm being picked on. Yeah. Okay.

AJ Harper

She has deep pockets, so...

Mike Michalowicz

I will defend this with my life. Kind of.

AJ Harper

Yeah, I mean, can't think of what could she ever ssss... I mean, I don't know how...

Mike Michalowicz

Well, the motivation sounds like fame, perhaps money, but I mean, they don't need money, but sometimes people are so driven by money. It's not about how much it's about more. And I wonder if that's it. it supports MD and because she she reference her husband and her company.

AJ Harper

Like we said at the start of this thing, she wasn't ethical and revealing. She didn't disclose that investment. That came out later.

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Mike Michalowicz

She's just, yeah, okay. So she doesn't say, gotta use this company or anything, but she is promoting the method.

AJ Harper

So was that it? it a deal of let's do, let's have this? They knew it was going to be a New York Times bestseller because of all their famous friends. So they hire a really successful ghostwriter. Yeah. Okay. Do they have a plan that they're going to have this book that then launches this whole phenomenon of people trying to recover past memories using ecstasy?

Mike Michalowicz

Mm-hmm Their brand of it and I think the fame is just so appealing I think my god, don't you want to be famous like?

AJ Harper

their brand of it.

AJ Harper

Really?

AJ Harper

I want to stay in my house.

Mike Michalowicz

No, I hear you.

AJ Harper

But I saw I just it's so hard for me to relate to the need for more money or to have fame or any of those things. It makes me think is this a long term strategic business move for the MDMA?

Mike Michalowicz

I bet you that's part of it. I wonder if it's led by fame because it sounds like it's so rich in ego and willing to live a lie for the rest of your life.

AJ Harper

Okay, what about this?

Do you feel like it's also the type of people she's, she invested in? Let's, okay. I'm really sorry to Amy Griffin. Well, yes, but also like I don't, well, actually I'm not, I'm just saying, I don't know.

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AJ Harper

This is all speculation. Yeah, of course. But I'm just thinking you're a person who invested in Reese Witherspoon's food company, Gwyneth Paltrow's goop thingy.

Mike Michalowicz

your neighbor.

AJ Harper

The people you're investing in are these actresses, these storytellers. Are you, and you're hanging out with a lot of them. Is that you just want to be one of them?

Mike Michalowicz

I'm picking up what you're putting down. 100%. I think that's the fame play.

AJ Harper

So not fame, fame, but more like I'm one of you. I'm not like a, I'm not a peripheral person who gets invited to all the Hollywood stuff. I actually am the story. That's what- I'm the story.

Mike Michalowicz

I think that's the driver in a situation like this. What it means for the rest of your life, her life, if this is all a lie, she has to live that lie. You have to perpetuate that. That's the problem. Here's something interesting I found speaking. So I consider myself a Z-list celebrity, meaning one out of like 100,000 people will say, didn't you write a book one day in the past?

AJ Harper

That's so sad.

Mike Michalowicz

And it's usually my mom, but what I found is when I go speak, the attraction to a speaker is the transparency on their story. So there's two types of speakers. One's that go up and say, I'm amazing and I'm fantastic and here it is. And there is a community that's like, oh, I wanted someone to rule my life and they run to them, but that's rare. There's other speakers that say, listen, I've been where you've been and this is how bad it got for me.

and there's a magnetic connection. I experienced that, because I'm very transparent about my story. And so people come up and say, it compels them to share their own story. But I think the greatest, I'm not saying Amy Griffin is a narcissist or a psycho- We don't know her. Don't know her at all. But the biggest kind of manipulative strategy is when people fake those stories because they know it's bait in the water. You can use that to influence huge communities saying,

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Mike Michalowicz

I've had so bad, I get you. And look at who I am now, I have so bad. We're one in the same.

AJ Harper

I think it's so sad. I hope none of it's true, but the problem is everything's suspect now because of all the other missteps. I did not disclose the MDMA thing. Yeah. Right? And there was already an investigation that had nothing to do with this lawsuit. Don't forget that. There was a New York Times article in September of last year, September of 2025. And then now there's another, there's follow-ups, of course, because of the lawsuit. So.

Mike Michalowicz

I hope that's not the case.

AJ Harper

It's this is a saga. It's not like one thing. It's not like a crackpot who says you stole my story.

Mike Michalowicz

Now, I'm sure this is not the case, but could there be a crazy Jane Doe who's like, you know what? I'm gonna spin this whole thing because this is the money, this is my out.

AJ Harper

That could definitely have happened. The problem is there are a lot of things that don't.

Mike Michalowicz

Yeah. Yeah, the evidence doesn't seem to indicate that the most suspect thing is to be interviewed for two hours by a talent agent

AJ Harper

I don't know if it was two hours. was several calls.

Mike Michalowicz

But this person can't be a... They've identified the person, they actually know who it is? That's the linchpin to this case.

AJ Harper

think so. For sure. For sure. I mean, I don't know, man. This is so... This is diabolical. If it's true, it's To me, it's actually kind of evil.

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Mike Michalowicz

Let's go through, before we go wrap things up, a list of what to do. I, an author, don't want to get you did. Okay.

AJ Harper

So.

AJ Harper

I did make a... Yeah, because I wanted to make sure... Okay.

soos soos.

Mike Michalowicz

Mat, as she's looking this up, what are you thinking about? Is this crazy? Have you ever heard anything like this, Mat?

Mat Robinson

This is pretty interesting, but I know AJ, you don't know my story, and Mike, you do, but actually, I had this really bizarre awakening experience. I was kind of like financial rock bottom, and to me, writing a book, I thought this is gonna save me, you it's gonna fill up the bank account, and I was actually terrified to Google anything, because all of the insights and revelations that I had about, you know,

how my mind was interpreting the world around me, I thought was so unique and groundbreaking. And I thought this could be so big, know, psychologists are gonna jump all over this and it's gonna be, you know, just transformative for so many people. So I literally spent a year where I didn't Google anything because I was afraid of seeing somebody else's work that matched what I'd come up with. Interesting. Oh, they got him on camera. That's Mat Ross. Yeah.

AJ Harper

If you're all wondering who's Mat.

Why, if you're just listening, we just introduced him another... This is an interrupting episode!

Mike Michalowicz

Mat, that'll be the first introduction of you. We introduced you last episode. Good introduction. Yeah. He's the weird, weird guy in the corner.

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AJ Harper

Mat. Weird guy in the corner, Mat. Okay, these are the lessons. So number one, number one, use your own dang stories. Yeah. Use your own stories. And look, confirm your own facts. And if you can't say definitively, say the best of my recollection, my memories are foggy, this is what I think happened. Yeah. Use that type of language so that you're not saying, if you can't say definitively, then...

say, I can't say this definitively. Also keep the focus on yourself, you know, as much as you can. So I'm always telling offers, you might wanna put your ex-husband on to dry, but let's talk about your own journey instead.

Mike Michalowicz

I remember an author going through that exact situation and they spoke with you and you said it's too early to the book, you're still going through it. You're still in it.

AJ Harper

I do think it's wise to give yourself some distance from a story. But definitely use your own stories. Do not take anyone else's story. So if you want to talk about your own experience growing up, fine. If you and another person were in an experience together, write about your version of that. But if someone else tells you a story that happened to them and you weren't there, that's not your story.

Mike Michalowicz

Sorry.

AJ Harper

Yeah, so let's be really clear. I'm not gonna go tell the story about... I would ask your permission, Mike, if I was gonna try and tell the story about, your dad and Helen Fuller. I'd say, hey, can I tell my own little version of this? And then you'd say, well, let me see what it looks like.

Mike Michalowicz

Yeah, totally.

And you could talk from your perspective, right? I share a story because as Mike was saying, this is what I'm feeling. is.

AJ Harper

100%. Yeah. The other thing I think is if you interview people for your book, this is really big, record it, document it, and get permissions on at every stage. we record all the calls, we keep all

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AJ Harper

the communication. When we write a story based on an interview, we send that story to the person to get their approval of the story and to fix any inaccuracies.

So that's the process we go through and we save all the recordings. Yes. I also think for memoirists with strong narrative components, and this I think is pretty standard now, is a disclaimer. This book is based on my recollections, right? Meaning you're not saying this is a cold hard fact. Our memories are not reliable. Shoot, I mean, I'm sitting here holding my phone to remember the research I did on this thing.

But I couldn't tell you for certain some things from my childhood, but I can tell you some feelings, right? So I don't hang anyone out to dry. So people that are featured in your story, if you're a memoirist, they can sue you if they don't like how they're depicted. That you can't stop that from happening, but you can be honest with yourself and be honest with readers and say, this is my version of events.

It may not be the cold hard truth.

Mike Michalowicz

Malcolm Gladwell, I don't know if it was in a book or in a podcast, talked about memories and how they shift. And there was a relatively famous story, I think it was Tom Brokaw. It was a newscaster who said he was in a helicopter during some kind of combat, some combat scenario, a war, and that his helicopter took gunfire. And he remembers the gunfire, the missile, the panic that he felt, how the pilot adjusted the helicopter and so forth.

They then interviewed the helicopter, he said, we never took fire. And he says, he's lying.

AJ Harper

Was he conflating that memory with a different one?

Mike Michalowicz (44:34.132)

No, he never took fire ever. But so that the whole story is like, wow, what a liar. He's trying to show his braveness or something like that. Well, the study by Malcolm Gladwell goes on to say people can conflate memories to that degree. He goes, there was stuff going on. Tom Brokaw is hearing stories of people taking fire. He was lift like 10 helicopters and they went different ways and so forth. And he can conflate it. There is Tom Brokaw acknowledging goes, I read the records, we didn't take fire. He goes, my mind.

told me something else. was like, had a

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AJ Harper

He had interviewed all these people though, and so his brain started to think it happened to him.

Mike Michalowicz

So just to your point that memories you can say or experience something so it's how propaganda works. You hear it or consume it so many times that all of a sudden your brain morphs around this. That's reality. That's true.

AJ Harper

Yeah, you know, my mom has dementia. And the last time that we were visiting her, she told a story about her childhood that happened to me. She told this whole story to the nurse. And I was like, my God, that's exactly me. not even childhood. It was a trip I took. She'd never even been there. She told this whole story about this trip. She was remembering it. She knows about the trip.

Mike Michalowicz

there you go.

AJ Harper

I had told her, she was remembering it as though she had been the one to take it.

Mike Michalowicz

So should we disclaim everything we write or just in the beginning saying this is my recollection?

AJ Harper

No, just if it's a memoir, this is based on my recollections. Yeah. Yeah. You got to write your... Look, be in integrity. That's the main thing. You can search your soul and you know. You know if you're being in integrity. And, you know, not everyone's always going to be happy with what you write. And you can't stop people from suing you, but you can keep records and you can document things.

And ultimately, I think the best measure is are you telling the truth as you see it and then saying that that's the truth as you see it. And not writing to hurt someone or for personal gain or to revenge or any of those things. And I think if you just keep in personal integrity about that, you'll be okay. Nothing's for certain and people can always choose to sue you, but ultimately you'll be okay.

I don't think it should stop us from telling stories.

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Mike Michalowicz

How much longer will this case play out?

AJ Harper

I don't know. mean, it's very public. I mean, if they get, I would be surprised if this person settled.

Cause I, that's personal. Yeah.

Mike Michalowicz

That's really bad. is the ultimate violation. Yeah.

AJ Harper

She shouldn't settle. Yeah. She should get her day in court.

Mike Michalowicz

let's end on those words. Thank you for listening to Don't Write That Book. I just invite our audience to do AJ and myself a big favor, and I know it takes about 30 seconds, but it's massively important for us. Could you please rate and review the show? The more that happens, the more exposure the show gets to other aspiring and established authors. So if you want to be of service to us, that'd be the greatest way to do it. We are also on YouTube. We now have a studio. We are up grading.

So go to our YouTube channel, Don't Write That Book. Please subscribe, hit the notification bell, we'll get you the most current episodes. So do that right now, please. Also, if you wanna check out the free resources we have, it's all content produced by AJ herself, go to DontWriteThatBook.com. And you have a course coming up, you have the summer camp.

AJ Harper

it's just, it's not a course. But Summer Camp is a free thing I do every summer to help authors make progress over the summer when they probably wouldn't make as much because it's summer. So you can sign up for free at ajharper.com or just check the show notes is probably the fastest way to get there. And we'll help you stay the course with your writing in the summer.

Mike Michalowicz

Also make sure you get AJ's book, *Writer Must Read*. Mat's book, *Discovering Happiness*? Is it *Discovering Happiness*?

Mat Robinson

It's *Understanding Happiness*.

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Mike Michalowicz

Understanding, not discovering.

Mat Robinson

There is another book out there called Understanding Happiness.

Mike Michalowicz

Okay.

Mat Robinson

Because that's one of those things, right? You can't necessarily copyright a title.

AJ Harper

You can't, it is correct.

Mike Michalowicz

Yeah, so Understanding Happiness.

Mat Robinson

Understanding Happiness, the Pocket Companion Workbook.

Mike Michalowicz

Yeah, and it's Mat with one T, M-A-T Robinson. An autocorrect on my phone constantly adds a T. And why I introduced Mat to someone else. So by the way, if you want a studio, Mat built this studio. If you want a producer, Mat's producing this show. He's gotta get your butt to New Jersey or pay his fee to fly him out to you. He's literally the world's best. And every time I text someone, I made an introduction to my friend, Dave Gilbensky, and Mat may be flying out to, I think, Michigan to do a studio for him. He's like, Mike, you keep misspelling Mat's name. I'm like, no, I don't.

It has one tea, bro. So, talking about spilling the tea. I think we covered everything. no, we didn't. One more thing. Don't write that book. Write the greatest book you can.