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Episode 137:

“Book Club Scams & Other Bad Ideas”

Mike Michalowicz

We just play footsie. Did you just notice that?

AJ Harper

No, I'm just laughing 'cause you've become so hosty.

Mike Michalowicz

How's that? Like what do you mean? like how I'm looking and Yeah. Is it cheesy? Hello. Hello. Throw that thing smile. Little rate of the forecast, better throw your glasses.

AJ Harper

I think you're gonna be a good host. I think actually your future is to going to be this what is it? s what's it called? The your podc other podcast? Becoming self made. Yeah. I think that's the thing and things like that that are gonna be their future. That's my that's my prediction. But I can see you being a little more like hosty.

Mike Michalowicz

I don't know.

Thank you.

Yeah, yeah. I think that is the future because I think that's the last representation of humanity. No future. No, I didn't realize but I'm saying the future is expression through kind of these platforms where you see the real human. Sure. It's it's writing. No, you're right. It's

AJ Harper

Your Saying you, Mike McAllowitz, I think that's your n your natural place to be, and that everything that you've been doing up until now was to prepare you for it. But I do see this shift is, you know, yeah. I'm just an old pal. So I'm just I love giggling over here like you're a little hosting.

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Mike Michalowicz

Yeah. And we've played footsie. Have you ever I my foot was like rubbing across your foot. I thought it was the dog. What is the most awkward like touching moment you've been in? 'Cause I have one that instantly comes to mind, but

AJ Harper

I didn't feel any foot.

On that thing.

You are full of awkward moments.

Mike Michalowicz

So I'll with Monica. Okay, go. I had that ridiculous car, the Dodge Viper, because it was my dream college car. And before I sold it, I was encouraging all my friends to drive this thing. So I was with Paul Scheider. Uh-huh. And Paul is this Midwestern, let it go real slow kind of guy. and also brilliant. So he's in the car, he's drive. I'm like, you got to take these for a drive. So we're going down the highway, and when I say the highway, we're going 55 miles per hour in a 75.

Because that's how he rolls. And he has it in like the highest gear, which I think is sixth gear in a Viper. I'll tell you, at 55, you should have like in third gear, even second. This thing really can wind. And the car starts doing this on the highway. And I'm like, So I reach my hand. I'm in the passenger, reach my left hand over to grab it. Don't he reaches in and we literally clasp, both of us jump back and let's go home. We're done. We are absolutely done. That was my awkward touching moment.

AJ Harper

Y you had you had to end your time together because you touched hands. Such a straight dude thing.

Mike Michalowicz

Held hands, trying to shift gears. Is that yeah. No, it wasn't that.

AJ Harper

You had to be dumb.

With what you were doing, like how that's it.

Mike Michalowicz

It No, it was because he was gonna stall out the car. He was driving so poorly that I felt compelled. Okay. And he was actually No. No, it well it was f because that was the point at the moment, like this is done. This is just ridiculous. Okay. I make him do something he doesn't want to do. Okay. What was your awkward touching moment?

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AJ Harper

You know like it's 'cause you touched hands can't think of I don't have too many. I'm probably not I'm not that touchy, you know. So

Mike Michalowicz

But you love language.

AJ Harper

quality time.

Mike Michalowicz

okay.

AJ Harper

Or so they say. I've I wanna say quality time. I right now it feels like my love language will be quality time to myself. Okay. But no. I like quality time with people. I'm my favorite thing is just hanging with my wife or hanging with our son or hanging. In fact, my gosh. I have to tell you this. Our son does not want hang with us. Do your kids hang want to hang with you? I think they do. Yeah. Our son does not want to hang with us. This has been the case since ever.

Mike Michalowicz

That explains everything.

Yeah, okay.

AJ Harper

So you know, like he wants his moms. He wants comfort and he wants us to be present and he wants us to be there when he needs us. But he doesn't want to like play a board game or go to the movies. He would like us to take him when he was younger, take me and my friends to the movies. I don't want to go do anything with. I'm not interested in doing things with you. He also doesn't really care for the things that we're into.

Mike Michalowicz

Yeah. I'm with you. Yeah. is he still living at home? Is he back? so I thought he's in Brooklyn, right?

AJ Harper

No no. Yeah. But he comes home often. I see. Because he has a lot of high school friends, you know, when they're home for spring break or the holidays. well, laundry. What is my wife

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making? Never. Really? no, never. No, no. He's he's on his own. We we pay the health insurance because he's still in the early he's still able to be on.

Mike Michalowicz

Had nothing to do with you guys. Yeah.
Kind of borrow some money.
I think I think it's by twenty seven or twenty five.

AJ Harper

He's twenty six. Maybe he's twenty seven now. Yeah. But I'm happy to have him on.

Mike Michalowicz

And he can't get health insurance through his current work.

AJ Harper

He could probably. But I don't know. I don't think he's you know, he's not at that stage where he would even think it was important to have it. Mm-hmm. So I just like having and he would actually pay me for it if I asked him to. Wow. Yeah, no, he's good. But I'm gonna tell you something funny. the whole thing was to tell you this funny thing. So I wasn't I ended up accidentally falling asleep on the couch because I was watching Ken Burns documentary. That dude sucks you in. You're like, this is just

Mike Michalowicz

Yeah, yeah. Okay.

AJ Harper

I'm just gonna watch this for a little bit. And what do I care about, Roosevelt? On the no I'm all of a sudden I'm like, I am fascinated. Yeah. I did not he's just like sucking you in like it's reality TV or something. Yeah. It's like a cliffhanger all the time. I'm the way he tells it. But I ended up accidentally falling asleep. But then my son came home. He was home for the weekend to see some friends who were home on spring break. And it was two in the morning and he was home from wherever. They're all 21 now, so they're out.

Mike Michalowicz

Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Yeah. Right. In your sleep.

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AJ Harper

He came home two o'clock. He was drinking his electrolytes. And he sat down to chat with me. Four in the morning is when I went to bed. Two two whole hours. Wow. But because he doesn't want to hang with us or talk to us much, I was like, okay, it's this is this is the moment. And we were just, you know, shooting the you know what back and forth. It was so nice to have an adult conversation with him. But

Mike Michalowicz

Yeah it. Yo, you have to you take it for all it's worth.

AJ Harper

You know, that was it. Two to two to four AM. Yeah. Two to four AM. Yeah. I don't know how we go on this about awkward touching. But because we're talking about quality time. that's why. Yeah. Cause that's my that I'll I'll live off that two hours from two to four AM for a really long time. And then I got to tell my wife, my gosh, you'll never believe it. No, she you know, with she knows with him it's like opportunity, you know, this is the moment. And that's when you get to have that conversation.

Mike Michalowicz

That's why. Did she get jelly?

My kids like to spend time with me as long as it's assigned time. I I don't get a call from like my kids like, Hey, you wanna just chit chat? No. My daughter does occasionally

AJ Harper

I get advice calls sometimes.

Mike Michalowicz

Asking for advice. me too. Like oil change, something like that, like mechanical. Yeah, yeah, yeah. I I get those too. Yeah. but I was about to say manufacturer, but that's that's a negative connotation. I pick times for us to be together to do a specific activity. And then my wife goes, Well, the kids are spending time with you. I'm like, no, they're I'm picking it. And to get that one on one time, yeah. It's not that they're out seeking it, but then it's very enjoyable.

AJ Harper

Very specific advice.

See, I can't I I'm not we're not gonna he's not gonna say

Mike Michalowicz

Yes. Yeah, okay. Yeah. My kids will say yes every time to that. Same thing with my wife. They'll do the same thing with my wife, like 'cause about just the two of them.

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AJ Harper

I wish. But you know what? You have your kids are who they are. You just gotta love exactly as they're and it's fine. Maybe if I would be go to the next game.

Mike Michalowicz

Kids are who they are.

Okay. But I'll give you one little last thing before we kick into this. I did life training with Anthony Robbins back in early two thousands, late nineties. You could call the Anthony Robbins hotline and they assigned you a a life coach. Okay. So I worked with this guy for like three sessions, but he did give advice that still sticks with me. He goes, do what your kids want to do. If you want spend more time with them, find their interest and do it. And I said, My son only wants to play video games. He goes, Become a gamer.

AJ Harper

I read.

Yeah. That's that's true. That's definitely true.

Mike Michalowicz

Yeah. So outside this room on the wall, we have all these different like sports memorabilia for my kids. Yeah. Except my oldest son was never into sports. He was into gaming. So we have Diablo. And I said, Why do you want to put Diablo? 'Cause they picked what they put up there. I said, Why do you want to put the game Diablo up It's like, Dad, you and I please play that all the time together. It sticks. Do what they want to do. Go to the Knicks games.

AJ Harper

Yeah. I mean I yes. Yes. I I'm definitely was at all his sports things.

Mike Michalowicz

Yeah. You know. Do the Knicks together. today we're gonna talk about book club scams and bad other bad ideas. It is a good title. I'm joining the studio with AJ Harper.

AJ Harper

is a good title.

Did you want to call it scam, scan, scam?

Mike Michalowicz

yeah, yeah. I like that. I well, I feel that way when these scams come in again. So scam, scam, scams. And we're gonna dive into this. What I admire about you, I've said this probably three or

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four times, is just the the preparation you put into this. So I got this last night and I g I was giggling to myself some of the notes you put in this one in particular. But I just appreciate the effort you make to have an outline for the show. So it's makes a difference, right? It makes a massive difference. In the beginning, it's like, we can just riff it all the time.

AJ Harper

Change it. Scam, scam, scam.

Now you don't like to listen to those podcasts, do you? Where people are just going, Mm, wandering all over. When will this end? It's like a Saturday night live skit.

Mike Michalowicz

No preparation matters.

All right. We good?

AJ Harper

No, but I admire about you. I had one I was driving in. I was like, 'Cause we have said it all. We should just document it. It would probably make us feel really good about ourselves if we listened to every single ad admire thing that you and I said to each other.

Mike Michalowicz

We said all.

Do you know who does something similar to this beginning, which I didn't know we were replicating or maybe they're replicating us, is Brene Brown and Adam Grant.

AJ Harper

Don't think they know about

Have you started listening to that? I haven't listened to their podcast. Do you like it?

Mike Michalowicz

Yeah, it's yeah. I I I I'm more into Brene Brown's style than Adam. I they're interesting. But they're very complimentary. They it works very well. he he almost to me seems to be almost over acknowledging her and and playing into her she's giving more direction than he is. I wish there was a little more tug and pull.

AJ Harper

okay.

Mike Michalowicz

They're both very intelligent.

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AJ Harper

Thing, the thing I did wanna it's coincidentally the thing I wanted to talk to you about. I was thinking when I was driving in, was about the hosty thing. just I I like the way you are you are willing to take on this, I'm gonna be excellent at it. You know, I really love this thing. I'm gonna I wanna do this now, so let me be excellent at it. Yeah. I can see you really working on it.

Mike Michalowicz

Thank you.

I am. Thank you. That means the world to me. I also want to acknowledge

AJ Harper

That's your that's your but your love language is words of affirmation. Yeah, so you love that. No, and you'd be like, I miss everything. I'm so they talk.

Mike Michalowicz

It absolutely is. my God, you could say anything.

Yeah, but you what's so interesting is it it's the reverse. Like if you said something like your hostie thing is a little questionable, I feel that deeply? I feel it deeply, yeah. Isn't that wild?

AJ Harper

The words don't land with me the same way they do with you.

Mike Michalowicz

Which is so bizarre, but that's that's someone speaking Japanese and someone's speaking German. Yeah. It's it's two ships in the night. This episode's sponsored by Simplified. That's the imprint of page two. Mm-hmm. Page two has been an extraordinary journey for me. And we have three new authors now in consideration. We're going through a betting process. And why asked page two, I said before that so they've all asked to join and contractually they meet everything, except I said I want to do a final interview with them. I want to make sure that they're all in.

What's unique about page two simplified is a collaborative, intentional collaborative co-marketing effort. It's required of what you always wanted. Always won. So you join, you're supporting not you, you're supporting the entire imprint and getting the word out. And that's very unique for authors. Ironically, it's what all authors that I know seek. They wish your imprint would do it. They get shut down. So now it's inherent, but I'm gonna speak with these authors and say, are you all in on us, not just you?

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AJ Harper

And they get shut down.

Yeah, I love that. So you had an you had an event for Simplified in Austin, just the beginning folks. Will you do that annually?

Mike Michalowicz

Yeah.

Yes. Okay. I love that. That was yeah, that was extraordinary. Cause we just got together and we came up with over a hundred ideas of how to co market. We've boiled it down to ten or eleven essentials. And it's it's a low lift, high impact stuff. I got an email. it started, I want to say three, four months ago. I'll tell you exactly when it started, January twenty seventh, because that's when the money habit came out. And it says, Hey, I Mike, I have a book club.

AJ Harper

Love it.

Mike Michalowicz

I admire so much what you've done with the money habit. And then it says like a couple key things from it. It says we are in Austin, Texas. We have a thousand members and we'd like to consider your book for our book club. do we have your permission?

AJ Harper

thousand members in Austin. Okay, go ahead.

Mike Michalowicz

Yeah, so

And it just reeked of a scam right away. Okay. Whenever there's some indicators, but whenever I see something come from a Gmail address, gmail.com, that's highly suspect.

AJ Harper

I got one right when we were recording.

Mike Michalowicz

what'd you get? Tell me. I'm gonna read it. Read it out.

AJ Harper

okay, I can read it. no subject.

Mike Michalowicz

No subject.

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AJ Harper

Sober Digital Empire is the name. But the but the email address is sober Digital Empire Zero Four at gmail.com. Okay. It's short. Hi. That's it. No name. Your book has qualities that could translate well into a film or series with the right development approach. I work with a small network that reviews written works for possible screen adaptations.

When something shows potential, it goes through a simple evaluation process to determine if it's worth developing further. If you're open to that, you can share your book link. I'll take a look and let you know if it's a fit for the next step. No name, no signature. Now this one's obvious, right? This is a common one. I was asking my team because you know what I do? I get I probably get four or five of these a day.

Mike Michalowicz

My god.

AJ Harper

What I do is this one I would never forward to my team because it's so obvious. But one of the reasons I wanted to go through it because you said let's do scams. And then I thought, yeah, there's these in the last six months, there's been a ratcheting up of questions in the email scams. But some of them are dumb like this. Others are so good. They're using AI.

Mike Michalowicz

Question.

AJ Harper

that it sounds like someone really did read your book because it's so detailed and they so nail it. And it looks very professional. So I've now taken to forwarding them to Shade and Laura because first of all, I'm I usually can't smoke out the ones that are really good like that. I'm not sure. And then I have them checked to vet it for me. But it's but it's happening four or five times a day now.

Mike Michalowicz

Yeah. The reverse went down at the McAllor office. I wasn't forwarding these messages. So I was getting these scams, similar volume, four or five a day. Yeah. Mostly the book club club scam, but there's other ones we get. And I was like, scam, scam, scam. Once you get one or two, you get very attuned to it. Yeah. And so you start deleting them. Well, I was out of the office for whatever in the morning. So Amy monitors my email. And so she gets one of these. And

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I over I come into our office. Thank God we have a physical office. I come in and I overhear Amy talking with Andrea and Erin. So she's engaged that's more than half our office now, saying, look, there's this book club with, you know, 5,000 registered book clubbers who want to read the money habit. So how should we respond? And they're asking for certain information. And they're talking about this like and I'm like, I don't mean to over like listen in to eavesdrop, but thank God I am.

That's a scam. And then we went through it and like, my gosh. Could not be. So what they asked for is permission to meet with me and interview me. Then what they often want is well, I believe they want is they want books for free. they want some kind of account, like say, hey, our book club, because we're so select and we're so large.

AJ Harper

Asking of you.

Mike Michalowicz

We just ask the author makes a contribution of a thousand dollars to offset our administrative fees as a free book club. So they collect Yeah. Yeah. But often they don't do that at the beginning. The the first step of these scams is simply engagement.

AJ Harper

Giant red flag.

Really it goes that involved. You know it would be as good scam is to get the books from you because then they could put sell them up on a as a used bookstore up on Amazon.

Mike Michalowicz

So there's another scam that that's exactly what happens. But this happened out of China mostly, but it happens in other locations. Happened with the pumpkin plan. I get a complaint and a review on Amazon says the book quality is absolutely horrible. I opened it up, the spine fell apart and they show pictures of it. And it looks horrible. The print quality is bleeding through and stuff. And they're showing pictures. I'm like, that's my book. Well, in China, and it's not limited to China.

Someone took the book and photocopied it effectively and and assembled the book. And we're flooding Amazon with this. There was hundreds and hundreds of copies. So I bought one and sure. Just to say notified Amazon. Well, this is thank God for Penguin. Penguin has this legal department, notified Amazon, and it was shut down. That we sell our research. So we're selling it as a used book. The the one thing that was because it wasn't through the Amazon Prime, which is sourced from the author.

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AJ Harper

See. Yeah. What did you do to shut it down? Anything?

Mike Michalowicz

It was a used book that they were selling for say eight dollars and ninety nine cents. It said brand new. And what they were doing is getting the selling box on Amazon. So you would normally see my book listed there, sourced through Amazon, you know, prime today. You would now see because they the lower price and it was brand new, it was listed as the primary book. So when you were clicking buy now, it was defaulting to buying from them. So we shut we shut it down through the Amazon engine. But Amazon, Amazon's making money, so they don't really yeah.

AJ Harper

But it's these email scams that have really picked up people using AI to assess your book and maybe anything else you put out in the world, any any public blog, any interfacing, and to take all that information about you and then create something that looks like an actual person who was moved or touched or inspired or whatever by you. Yeah. And to find something very narrow and specific.

That makes you think, my gosh, this person really did read it. They really did, they really do think it's cool. And then you're hooked.

Mike Michalowicz

You're hooked. You know, I was telling you I got hold of Charles Duhig and I spoke last week's episode, I was telling you about that. You know how I got hold of him was he wrote an article that I was really impressed by around money. So I wrote to him, but I did it through his website. So I went to his website where he filled out. And there's a robot, like, you know, click here to verify. Those things work pretty effectively. So ironically, if someone's genuinely reaching out to you, if it comes through a Gmail account or whatever, right into your email, it's more likely a scam. If they go to your website,

It requires human intervention. It's more it's a great vetting tool. So if you actually want to get in front of someone, because you do have a real book club, because those people are getting screwed now. I have a real book club with my 10 book club members. I do want to do your book. I do have question for the author. Go through their website directly.

AJ Harper

But I also think that, you know, I never I want I want to make this point clear to everybody. Sometimes they also are including a link or something. And now this is a fishing. So there's difference between someone who's trying to get money from you through this book club

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situation or just enter into an arrangement with you and start engaging with you. And then there's folks who have actual links in there that you should absolutely not click on in any way, shape, or form. Yeah.

And so don't click on anything in any of the emails. If you want to investigate something, go Google then outside of that based on the things that they're sharing. But that's other thing is I click on nothing.

Mike Michalowicz

Click on nothing. It used to be a little bit of the inside joke at our house is mom got scammed again. So I get a call from my sister or a text saying mom got scammed again. And she did last week. And yeah, it's a shame. It's around this was around energy, like a fake energy company. And it's it's impossible to to educate her to protect herself. So you you can talk to her face to face. They never give information on the phone. Don't talk to anyone.

If it's ever about money, my sister or myself will physically come to the house. I get it. I get it. And then she gets scammed the next day. Yeah. So the but but the thing is now it's become so sophisticated is it doesn't matter how old you are, you can fall off these things. And shame obviously shame on the people that are perpetuating this. It's it's just yeah, is there that many creeps out there? And why can't they just apply their their effort to something nobility? What do they abuse or something?

AJ Harper

Do it if it wasn't work.
Why can't they?

Mike Michalowicz

I'll throw

AJ Harper

Well, I don't know. I think there are probably myriad reasons, but the point is don't click, don't respond.

Mike Michalowicz

Let's talk about the various scams. Yeah. so the the book promo is another one. So I get emails occasionally from a company that says they're a newsletter that they have I'll tell you some of the indicators as we move along here too is is size of audience. You know, we have fifty thousand subscribers, two hundred thousand subscribers, a million subscribers. that's very suspect when they gotta inflate their egos right away. Yeah. And so the book promo scam is we we have a newsletter

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And we're willing to feature your book. It's been highly recommended by some of our readers. Yep. Please contact us. It's a minimal fee.

AJ Harper

We have a newsletter, we have a blog, we have a platform, we have a podcast, we have a whatever. It's usually preying on what authors really want, which is more exposure, help with marketing, you know, getting their book in front of people. Yeah. The scammers know this is the biggest challenge for authors.

Mike Michalowicz

Yeah. Yeah. Yeah, and usually leads off with a a a bravado of the size of a list. Typically I see, or or you know, we have access to all this massive community. ironically it's the smaller, more niche things that are better when they're when they're real. you just talked about the one turner movie. you're

AJ Harper

Isn't that funny? I have that listed as something. That was one that Laura reminded me. This I get these all the time. We want to turn your book into a movie, which is funny. I would love to see how you're going to turn Ride and Must Read into a movie. What's that? That'd be great. What's happening? What kind of movie is that?

Mike Michalowicz

It's just it's just someone sitting there typing, editing.

AJ Harper

you know what? Given the challenge, I could probably put something like that off. But so that one's not very well researched scam, but we do get them all the time. And I think the scams are playing into these sort of secret wishes and also what you don't understand about the industry. So I think one of the best defenses is understanding how things work in the industry. So if you think a person would randomly email you and say, we develop.

books into movies, that this is something that is actually legit and happening to you, then that means that you aren't educated about the industry that you're in. So I think one of the best defenses is understanding how things work.

Mike Michalowicz

Understand. Yeah. Yeah. And the old what they call trust but verify or consider but verify. So I told you last week about the our property because we have a long driveway, they wanted to possibly do something here. Yeah. The first thing I called was the town.

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AJ Harper

Right, because you thought it was a scam. That it could be a scam. And I would be nervous about anything in my mailbox.

Mike Michalowicz

It could be a scam, yeah. Yeah. Yeah. So anything. But yeah. I r isn't that kind of quinky dink? Any mailbox, physical or on your your

AJ Harper

But did you s but did you say that you one tur was that the one that you said a thing you thought was a scam turned out to be real? Or was there a book one too?

Mike Michalowicz

there was a book one. So it wasn't a book one, it was sponsor one. So you I'll get into it. okay. So I get a email that says we've identified Mike as a potential board member for our organization because of his exposure in the entrepreneurial community and so forth, and his work with different tools and his books. We think we'd like to consider him for a board position. Please contact us. Now the the weird thing is it came in through our speaking page.

So there is a kind of bot protector there. So it was like, this could be legit. We then I put it into, I did use AI. I said, look at this email. I said, verify this person, find this person on the internet, because they reference a name, find this company, and identify the likelihood that this is real versus scam. And found the person, verified it, looked at the person's history and came back and said, This is like a 90% chance or higher this is a legitimate inquiry, albeit came in a peculiar way. so then

I gave it to Andrea. Andrea said when I saw this email, I I thought it was a scam. So she's like, I'm just gonna try this guy out and she did. She called and it is a legit opportunity.

AJ Harper

And that's the the thing, she called. There was a number to call. There someone answered the phone.

Mike Michalowicz

She called. There's a number Correct. Correct. She and she also researched the company little further. So I'll tell you one of the challenges with always scams coming in is I don't trust much at all. Mm-mm. Including stuff that comes from anyone's email address. It can come from you or a business partner or anyone. And I see it and I'm like, mm, were they hooked? Were they schnapped? I don't know. So it was legit.

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AJ Harper

emails are scams. My emails are

Mike Michalowicz

If you said something's inconsistent with how you sure you know.

AJ Harper

Course. And then you can text me and say W T

Mike Michalowicz

And they do feel a little scammy, your your new your newsletter. Your newsletter a little scammy.

AJ Harper

What emails am I sending you? This is my my whole email situation is here are the links for this thing. There's no there's not even a message.

Mike Michalowicz

No, it's not even a message. It's like see at six AM. Is there gonna be half and half this time?

AJ Harper

I am s I am suffering without the house. It's okay. I'm gonna get myself a little cooler. Show up with my cooler. I think do that. And Matt is gonna be happy that I do.

Mike Michalowicz

I know. Well I think. Yeah, Matt, you drink half and half too or

Mat Robinson

I do, yes. Yeah. okay.

AJ Harper

I'm gonna get a special one that's a s and that fits inside a small little you like the construction worker lunch boxes? That's all I'm gonna

Mike Michalowicz

Gonna show up. I'd be honored if you do that.

AJ Harper

Brought it. My wife said today, I have two half and halves. Bring one of the half and halves. But then I was a w afraid that we would be poisoned because I would be in the car for an hour.

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Mike Michalowicz

Yeah. Well a thermos, like a thermos wouldn't do that. what about the the scams where it says I'll help you market it to a TikTok following, a Facebook following, a

AJ Harper

all the time. You especially because you don't is this gonna work for you because how many authors think I should be on TikTok and they're not on TikTok. So now the scam is solving some sort of problem or relying on the mystery of it all. Right? The mystery of it all. I don't know about how to do that. Okay, well this person does.

Mike Michalowicz

I hadn't so there's scams, there's also suspect. I got an inquiry in a few years ago to speak in China. And the my honorarium at the time was say 40,000 or something. They said, Well, it'll be like paying Mike's honorarium. And my agent wrote back and said, his fee because international a little bit more. And I said, What does he need? And I'm like, just throw it out an arbitrary number. And maybe she doubled it, 80 or 100. And they said, No problem. That became very suspect. And this is where my head was going, is

They want me in China, so I can't leave China. That was my That's where my head bent. So I'm like, I don't

AJ Harper

That's all those that's all those war games movies in the eighties that have you worried about all that. my god. You know, it g maybe an intellectual property thing though.

Mike Michalowicz

Maybe. Maybe. IP theft. Also, there was and there constantly is. There was conflict and and there was some ho people being held hostage. I'm like, it's it's n there's not a dollar that makes it worth it. And and and the more the dollars Yeah, you wanna be held hostage?

AJ Harper

Being held hostage in China? No, I'm asking. There were people being held hostage. yeah, yeah, yeah.

Mike Michalowicz

Yeah, put political pawns. So you so you go across like, mm, you you you failed to pass this test or you're carrying drugs with you. Remember that basketball player, I can't remember her name. Yeah. Who's held in Russia for carrying drugs? Terrible. Yeah. Was she carrying drugs? Was it planted?

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AJ Harper

I d I don't know.

Mike Michalowicz

You someone be that foolish? So I don't know, but she spent a long time. Yes. And th part of it, yeah, their exposure stuff, Arch. Arch is Archer. Archer's yeah. I don't know if you can catch on the camera. Hopefully you can't. This is that means he wants his belly rubbed. He love that. But there's people get used as political pawns. Yes. It's leveraged for something that Chill right.

AJ Harper

So so the average person is not gonna be lo you know, coerced into going to China. I don't think so. Okay, fair. Listen, all of it we should be suspect about all of it.

Mike Michalowicz

I don't know. But okay. If the bait's big enough

Exactly. Yeah. Exactly. why why do scams let me rewind. Old day scams, Prince of Nigeria, were so obvious that they were scams. They worked because the argument was if someone would fall for that, they are gullible. They're gonna send their life savings to this. Yeah, if you're if you're willing to believe that, you're willing to believe anything and you're taking care of dust people. But now today's scams are very sophisticated.

AJ Harper

If you believe someone's a prince.

Mike Michalowicz

Very real for anybody, I think.

AJ Harper

Yeah, there's like there's what do you mean why?

Mike Michalowicz

Why is it changed? Why is the strategy change? Yeah, I guess I can hook more people.

AJ Harper

Yeah.

Can't cause they can. Yeah. I don't really know the psychology of it all. Yeah. But it makes it, you know, there's people who have this is not what we're talking about today, but well, maybe we

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are. We were most talking about these inbox scams, but we are talking about other bad ideas. There's people who pretend to be agents, people who pretend have full websites for it, have contracts, we'll talk to you. They're not agents at all. So, you know, you can but again.

You're an author who's been trying, trying, trying to get a deal. This sounds really exciting. Yeah. There's somebody who wants me. And maybe you're gonna overlook some red flags because you're just so desperate. It's the desperation and the mystery.

Mike Michalowicz

Yeah. There's an Instagram post that went live this morning. My friend Jen texted me and she goes, Jen Adams, her name's she goes, check this out. She goes, You're on Instagram, or this person referenced you on Instagram, and they're talking about programming Claude, which is I think anthropic. No, I I don't know who's who anymore. It's Claude. Claude. Okay. So Anthropic's Claude. There's a person on Instagram saying, I want to get better at money. So I told Claude Cowork, which is like a desktop version of Claude.

AJ Harper

Anthropic is

Mike Michalowicz

To manage my money just like the author of Profit First would. Okay. Yeah. And so, my point is But scam. It's not no it's not a scam. But my point is AI goes out and it replicates and it can get someone's persona. For sure. It's like I want this guy to be my coach and I don't have to ever talk with him. I don't have to know who he is. Yes. I just want it. And so that's it's coming across in emails. Is there other way people are scamming? Are they picking up the phone now? Is your phone ringing?

AJ Harper

Sure. What you mean? Your phone doesn't ring with scammers?

Mike Michalowicz

I don't get I only get email scams. I mean my phone I I

AJ Harper

Other types of email of phone scammers you get though. Really? Yeah. It says scam likely. Phone scam. I don't answer. People don't answer the phone anymore if they don't know the number.

Mike Michalowicz

Mm barely ever.

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yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. Yeah.

Exactly. Mm-hmm. Exactly. So there's mailbox scams like the actual physical mailbox that happens too. But did you ever hear

AJ Harper

No, but I don't think authors are getting phone scams. That not that I've heard of. It's the the email scams are the ones that are really problem right now.

Mike Michalowicz

Hmm.

Yeah. Yeah. And they can make him extremely personal because of AI. Yes. so let's let's talk about things how to vet it. We already talked about don't click on anything. Don't click

AJ Harper

on anything. Does the email address match the name of the person? is it just a Gmail or is it an actual company email?

Mike Michalowicz

I believe the reason there's so many Gmails is because it gets past the Gmail filter and most people are using Gmail as their receiving mailbox. Do you use Gmail account? I do. Me too. Now I have my own domain over it. I do. Okay. But it's Gmail. So every Gmail email gets through without any filter. That's probably why. Yeah. other other things to look for or to do?

AJ Harper

Yeah, so that's probably why. I mean if it's obviously AI, I think I would be I would question it.

Mike Michalowicz

Yeah. Yeah. I I would I always look for the phone number of of the person that's reaching out if I want to bet it. So this one since situation where someone's looking for me to be a board member on their organization, there was a phone number on there. Andrew actually did the actual call outreach. and that's another technique. If you have access to a virtual assistant or a real assistant, there's one of the same. They're the same. Yeah, they're one of the same. Yeah, that was stupid. But if you access to someone else to have them do the call on your behalf because they're I they're not in an emotional state.

Just is this real vetted out and so

AJ Harper

That's true. You don't even need an assistant. Just get your friend. Get your buddy.

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Mike Michalowicz

Yeah. Yeah, you know another type of scam I sometimes get is podcast appearances. Like someone will say, Hey, I want you to be my podcast, there's always downloads and so forth, and they're I don't even know if it's a scam, it's just misrepresenting themselves. They're trying to get someone on their show, it seems.

AJ Harper

Well I'm sorry. That's a different situation. That's someone who's just trying to get anybody on their show. Yeah. I've definitely had at least one of those where I was like, Why am I here?

Mike Michalowicz

Yeah. Yeah. And sometimes people will those podcast show will list off all these names of people that have been on their show, which is really you had all those famous people on your show? I don't know, I question that too. I Yeah. Any other ways to help vet out scams?

AJ Harper

Do you too?

I mean, I think it's just take the information and put it into Google, you know. Is this a real company? Is this a real person? Is this a real thing?

Mike Michalowicz

And last thing is 24-hour pause for me is when I'm hyped up or excited about something, I I'm negotiating something right now. And the email came in, I received it. I'm okay, now I receive an email. Let me sit on these ideas for 24 hours just to get one night's sleep on it. And it seemed to I I move in more prudently. Yeah. In those circumstances. Yeah. we have contests listed here.

AJ Harper

Yeah, because you wanna you wanted to you actually asked to add that to it to talk about contests. It's funny because I've had a lot of my students win. They just clean up at con at all the contests. I'm super proud of them for that. but some contests are better than others.

Mike Michalowicz

yeah, I do get that thing like, Hey, we'd like to put your book in here, but you and you they want you to pay to get your book listed.

AJ Harper

Well, okay, that's different. That's not a contest. But contests do cost money. It's nor some of them do. And some of it is totally understandable because they might have, say, thousands of entries and they have to run, you know, the admin for that program. So it does cost a little bit of

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money. But I think you can vet the contests. So for example, does the contest is reputable? Is it a contest where the judges are the judges? Are the judges

You know, library if we're talking books here, they should be librarians and booksellers. They should not be a celebrity. Yeah. Right? There it should not be randos. And there's the judging criteria should be very clear. It shouldn't be it you should it should be listed there. Also

There should be other things you get from the contest besides winning it. So I don't mean the little dumb stickers that say gold, silver, bronze, whatever. I mean, is this then going out to, you know, librarians and booksellers? Are people gonna know about it? Is there gonna be press release about this? Is there going to be do are people gonna care about it? Yeah. go look at some of the previous winners. Are these reputable books or are these books that are just sort of

Whatever. so pay attention to the books that you love and the type of awards they get. And there are different awards for different types of books, not only genre, et cetera, but also were these independently published or traditionally published. Because if they're traditionally published, most of the time your publisher is handling those submissions. Not all the time, but most of the time.

Incidentally, now that you have the money habit, you can submit that to a couple of contests that I think are important for you to submit them to. I have to remember to tell Andrea.

Mike Michalowicz

There you go. Yeah. That I thank you. As you were pointing that book, that reminded me another scam is these international translations that are false. So I've had some international publishers reach out. They're not international publishers. What they are is they ask for a fee to see if they can get an international publishing deal for Yeah, but they don't even say that. They say, Listen, your book can be in Persian. I I'm just picking a random language. My books, one of my books is in Persian.

AJ Harper

Pretending to be scouts.

Mike Michalowicz

And then it says we will we we require a feat for us to actually now count this out. It's like, so you're not.

AJ Harper

No, 'cause but okay, so you scout so everybody listen, scouts don't work like that typically. A scout gets a fee when they secure the deal like any other agent. Exactly. So they they are

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supposed to be that is a real job. Okay. But typically their their only money they make is when they actually get the deal.

Mike Michalowicz

Yeah, exactly.

And when you self-publish, you you will get some international publishing houses to reach out to you. Sure. And the way they communicate is so English isn't the native language. Yeah. And they're legit. And they're legit. I've had particularly in non-Germanic languages, so like Korean. I I've had communications. I'm like, I don't Japanese. I don't know. I don't know if it's legit. In fact, I remember doing this deal with this guy in Japan. It was the most legit and it seemed the most sketch going into it.

AJ Harper

It it can be really strange. Yeah.

Mike Michalowicz

But I did follow these parameters of trust but verify kind of approach. And it it worked out. Yeah. It worked out. It was a legit deal.

AJ Harper

Yeah. I mean just do your homework on all of it. And if it sounds like a really good thing.

Mike Michalowicz

That's the key.

It ain't a really good I love it. I love it. Next week we have another episode. We don't know what we're talking about or we do. I s

AJ Harper

we do. I just didn't put it down there. Do you know what it is? Yeah. We're gonna talk about academic people who are academics and they want to write transformational nonfiction, meaning prescriptive nonfiction or memoir or something more commercial. And there's this challenge of moving from academic writing into this other space.

Mike Michalowicz

Like will you take a like those books you read out of college, for example? Th those those authors? No. Who sell their books for \$125.

AJ Harper

sometimes. Okay. But you know, there's people there are academics who write peer reviewed work or maybe write for an academic press, which is a different focus. Yeah. And now they want

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to go more mainstream and they want to write something transformational nonfiction in some fashion fashion. And it goes against the grain for them because of everything they've been taught.

Mike Michalowicz

Yeah. And I think my sense without seeing the outlines, they're gonna have to bone up on storytelling a lot. 'Cause in academic r and peer reviews there's not much storytelling. Mm mm.

AJ Harper

No. but I think the biggest issue that they have is actually thinking about the reader.

Mike Michalowicz

of course. Reader first. Yeah. Reader first. Talking about Reader First, our listeners can go to AJ Harper dot com. That's the site you want them go to. Anything special going on right now or or unique that they should be?

AJ Harper

I think this episode is airing in July and we're in the middle of summer camp, which people can join. It's free. if you go to AJ Harper.com and get on the mailing list, you'll hear all about it. but I always have membership. Yeah, it's I I don't talk about it that much, but I have a monthly membership that allows people to have quite a lot of access to me actually. Yeah. My full library of all my Mastercrafts.

Mike Michalowicz

Or you have a membership.

AJ Harper

I just I just did one on interviewing last week. It was so good.

Mike Michalowicz

And we we did an episode on interviewing here.

AJ Harper

I did a four hour mastercraft on how do you interview to actually pull stories, how to think about that. It's a very different way to think about interviewing than most people think. I love it. And so stuff like that. You can go get if you're in membership and watch all that stuff. Yeah. We did a I walked people through the process and what are the questions and how to how to focus it specifically for your book.

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Mike Michalowicz

Do you even demonstrate? Yeah.

AJ Harper

And then we actually did sample, we did interview. I had people interview each other with me and we did some feedback on that. So yeah. And then then there's a second part to it, which by the time this airs will already be done. But then they're bringing their interview transcripts to me. Nice. And yeah. So I do stuff like that in membership.

Mike Michalowicz

Also, one month from when this broadcast is Authors for Authors that we do, this will be our eighth consecutive year. You're gonna be presenting and and I asked you for a topic and you're like, I wanna talk about that. I wanna talk about this. What are you gonna be talking about? I

AJ Harper

Well, we haven't zeroed in it completely, but I really want to talk about underrepresented authors. I love it. And how the most successful authors can really make a difference. I

Mike Michalowicz

Love it. I love it. That's gonna be so much fun. Yeah. hope you had fun listening to this episode. Go to DWTB podcast.com to get the resources that AJ's prepared for this show. All available for you for free. I do ask you to rate and review the show. If you haven't done it yet, could you spend the 30 seconds? It's a big deal for us just to get the word out. And you can email us with any questions you have at hello at DWTB podcast.com. The grand reminder is don't write that book. Right.

The greatest book you can.