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Episode 138:

“Making the Shift from Academic Writing to Transformational Nonfiction”

Mike Michalowicz (00:00.182)

You're not a sloucher. Yeah. I slouch so much. I'm actually getting frustrated with myself. And I found there's this like communication going in my head, this little undercurrent saying you move faster, like lean toward it. Like there's this thing ringing in my head. I'm wondering what the resolution is to slouching. Have you ever looked into it?

AJ Harper (00:01.28)

I totally am. Are you? Yeah.

AJ Harper (00:24.182)

No the

Mike Michalowicz (00:26.232)

'Cause it's just ugly, in my opinion, that I do that.

AJ Harper (00:30.222)

It's not ugly. It just is. It's fine. You're just conditioned. Don't slouch, don't slouch, don't slouch. Yeah.

Mike Michalowicz (00:37.076)

my parents used to say that all the time. Mike, you're slouching again. Yeah. Father life cigarette five. No.

AJ Harper (00:44.726)

That's just yep, that's just your dad.

Mike Michalowicz (00:46.734)

My dad was the kindest best guy on the planet. And my wife and I are talking about he grew up in such a sad situation, physical abuse, impoverished. Yep. His mother in tenements, his mother was put into an insane asylum. and they think whatever, you they they couldn't diagnose anything back in the nineteen twenties. So it was whatever. And

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AJ Harper (00:57.592)

in the tenements.

Mike Michalowicz (01:14.124)

He grows up just being this gentle, kind guy. Like he didn't have to be that guy. I'm very proud of him. And the the cascade of benefit. Like I feel I am a big way who I am because of him.

AJ Harper (01:27.138)

Yeah. What makes a person choose that over something else? Yeah. Choose kindness instead. That correct Yeah. It is

Mike Michalowicz (01:33.486)

Courageous. What's something you admire about your parents?

AJ Harper (01:38.316)

My parents? so much. My mom's actually not she's in the decline, you know? I know. So I'm thinking of think about her I so much to admire. She's so brilliant, she's so fearless, she's so righteous. You know, she really s really did what she I asked her too the last time I visited her, is there something that you wish that you would have that you didn't do? I mean she

She marched. She she had an underground newspaper. She fought for every single thing that mattered to her. It's amazing. and she didn't, she said, no, I've I did all the things I wanted to do. How lucky, right? But I I also really admire my dad. He's kind of went along with her things when they were married and believed those things too, but he's really more of like a regular guy, you know, he's got the same bowling league he's had since nineteen nineteen seventy-three.

I visualize the balling shirt. They're in the eighty their eighties. They still meet on Tuesday nights. Those that are still living. Yeah. But I always admired about my dad that he would say money is only as good as what it can the freedom it provides you and how you can help others. And there's no point in just accumulating it. I understand. And he's a CPA, so he would he would always tell me.

Mike Michalowicz (02:39.842)

Sure.

They with their bowling bag.

AJ Harper (03:07.76)

to have this right view about money.

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Mike Michalowicz (03:10.882)

Yeah, he had a perspective on hundreds or maybe thousands of people over his career of how they manage money. That's really insightful.

AJ Harper (03:17.516)

Yeah, especially also we're from the Midwest where people tend to hoard it. Yeah. Tend to just, you know, keep it in coffee cans.

Mike Michalowicz (03:25.782)

It is an interesting phenomenon. It's kind that Scrooge. I'm not saying that extreme, but there are these phenomena where people, most cases, every dollar they make, they spend two dollars as a result. But there is a small portion, smaller portion of the community, that every dollar they make, they put ninety nine point nine percent away into a future fund and they never access. They live this life of compromise where money could have been a vehicle to access more things, do more good, serve a community, do whatever.

But they're they don't. They just save it for whenever until they vanish from this planet and didn't leverage it to their advantage.

AJ Harper (04:01.858)

Yes, I don't know that they would see it that way.

Mike Michalowicz (04:03.918)

I don't think they would. No. We become so ingrained in it. You know, we did an experiment in our office with money last week and now we may repeat it. I gave my colleagues twenty dollars each and from the company, we gave twenty dollars each and said, You have to give this to someone who doesn't normally get tipped in any capacity and you have to look in the eye and show appreciation when you give the money. And I've been doing this as a r you know, ritualistically now for approaching three years. I do it almost every single day. I'll do it today. I'll definitely do it tomorrow 'cause I'm traveling.

It's easier to do it then. And the fear it generates in the giver. So Amy and did it on the first day. Andrea, it took her three days to get confidence enough to do it. Amy gave it to the Amazon guy. It was Easter, day before, day after Easter. And she said, This guy is walking so carefully with all these boxes, he can barely see. He gently puts it down and she went right out of the house and said, I got to tell you something. You took such good care of my packages, not even knowing what it is.

AJ Harper (04:44.344)

They give it to?

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Mike Michalowicz (05:02.424)

I want to show you my appreciation. And the guy welled up. Cause he doesn't get recognized that way. And he's doing something good that will likely never get recognized. Andrea, she said she was so she was shaking when she did it. Because it's really difficult to look someone in their eye and tell them what you admire about them and acknowledge it with with some money. What I admire about you is how you recognize these nuanced components of people's lives.

And you recognize that it's their significance. So you're sharing the story of your dad, and you share of how he kind of served your mom's mission, but stayed true to who he was with the bowling club. You talk about your mom and and that underground newsletter. You just have these nuanced awarenesses that that epitomize what that person is in one succinct story. That that's really remarkable.

AJ Harper (05:53.036)

That's that's being a writer, but thank you. Yeah.

Mike Michalowicz (05:55.736)

Being a great writer. That's who you are. Most writers I I don't see that. You you just pick a nuance, but it it's just one little note in their entire life, and yet that's the melody.

AJ Harper (06:08.322)

That is an important lesson to learn if you are trying to write about a person in a in a book to give them one distinguishing characteristic like that. Yes. Jerry, who had the same Tuesday night bowling league since 1973, is maybe all you need to know about Jerry. Yeah. Right. It could be a different thing, right? I could give you another note about him that would also tell you a ton about him. But if that's the kind of if you want to understand that he's maybe a stable guy or

that he loves tradition, right? Or that he's a small town guy, that's normally a small town thing. You just give us that one detail instead of Jerry a CPA or Jerry 86. Mm-hmm. Right? Yeah. That's gonna be if I tell you that my grandma who all who wanted was on her way to become a nun when she met my grandfather, that actually tells you quite literally a lot about her.

Mike Michalowicz (07:08.174)

It really does.

One sentence. Yes. You know what her vision was for her future? Yes. Her yeah, she her heart is strong.

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AJ Harper (07:17.24)

She was on the train, going to be a novice, on her way to be a novice at the convent when she met my grandpa. Yeah. So you could choose. And I could there's a hundred different things I could have said, but it depends on how I want to tell that story. And I wish this is totally turning into something now. But I wish this is what it's like when you're in a class with me, but I wish people would see. It's not hard. Like they try to write these long descriptions and think about.

Mike Michalowicz (07:38.808)

I love it.

AJ Harper (07:46.69)

you know, Mike and he's this age and has this hair and has a beard and no, we can just let's do one thing that encapsulates it, encapsulates the essence of that person. And then we can that it's not it's easy for us to grab hold and we don't need a lot.

Mike Michalowicz (08:01.934)

Can do an episode called Encapsulating the Essence? Because I think there's a strategy to get there. It sounds like you have to actually understand all of the person to get to that one story, that one through line.

AJ Harper (08:13.89)

Don't though, because we were talking in an earlier episode, or was it today? I don't remember. Was it today's episode or yesterday or last week's? I don't know, but it was about this interview class I taught in my membership program. You can get that from just a forty five minute call. You can actually find that. You don't have to know everything about that person. is it you but you can get it from just a forty five minute call.

Mike Michalowicz (08:36.492)

Now I feel even more that we need to do that episode because that's such an interesting skill.

AJ Harper (08:41.953)

We can we can do a craft about how do you describe a person in a story. Yeah. That'd be fun. That would be fun. We haven't done we haven't done anything like that. So this actually is you just feed me up perfectly for what I wanted to say. Admire about you. You are weirdly curious. You are. Yeah. Like you asked me these questions. Like where one week you just recently you said, why did I call Substack? And why why does this happen? And we should do an episode on this totally weird thing.

Like the one that we ditched. Right. But I mean, you're you have a curiosity about all kinds of stuff. It's kind of weird. But I think it benefits you.

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Mike Michalowicz (09:13.038)

Yeah, I know. I know.

Mike Michalowicz (09:21.036)

It was funny, so we're in our studio here. Matt has done this extraordinary job of blanketing the room to to squelch the echo effect. And he cut out the little squares so you can access in this case I'm looking at switches over there, outlets and so forth. He's a sewer. He knows how to sew. He was trained by his mother and he's got a singer sewing machine. And literally I w I want to get like a a two-day master class on how to sew. I think it's just fascinating.

AJ Harper (09:48.802)

Yeah, you know what? You gotta watch that. I've got a I'm just you talked about your dad and I was telling the other day I fell asleep at a Ken Burns documentary. I ended up watching the whole thing. It was about the Roosevelts. Yeah. You gotta watch it because there it shows you how going to the tenements changed the way that Franklin Roosevelt saw things, which greatly influenced a lot of the choices he made as president that led to all of this New Deal stuff that we are yeah that changed our entire country.

Mike Michalowicz (09:59.357)

yeah, yeah.

AJ Harper (10:18.498)

And it was where your dad grew up that he went. Yeah.

Mike Michalowicz (10:21.186)

That's so interesting. Yeah. So today we're going to talk about making the shift from academic writing to transformational nonfiction. What inspired this?

AJ Harper (10:28.888)

Okay. So this is be one of my students, my alums, Irena Asmondson, is an former economist for the state of California and and I know is going to be a very important writer when as soon as she finishes the books she's working on. but she's an academic, you know? And I have a lot of them in my program that come from academia. They're teachers or they're in the doctoral programs or whatever scientists.

And making that leap from academic writing to what I would call an umbrella of transformational nonfiction. So not the nonfiction that's, you know, designed to be written for someone's intellectual curiosity, right? That is posing about ideas and theories and so forth, but is actually

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trying to help the individual who's reading it to make a change or solve a problem, that kind of transformational work, or that's more mainstream.

Right. It's it's accessible to people. That is a special kind of shift that has to happen from thinking like an academic to continuing to think like an academic, but making your work really approachable for the average person.

Mike Michalowicz (11:43.064)

So I'm trying to distinguish in my mind, an academic is not necessarily transformational, but it's educational. It's knowledge. Yeah. Without the primary intent, I guess, of transforming for moving someone from a spot to a new spot. It's more about elevating their awareness on a subject. Is that

AJ Harper (11:59.372)

Yeah. So you've you know, you're gonna read a lot of that work out of intellectual curiosity. Yeah. Mm-hmm.

Mike Michalowicz (12:04.494)

Okay. But transformational nonfiction, the space that we're in, is more about moving the person.

AJ Harper (12:11.244)

Yeah. So it's from you could be moving from one way of thinking to another, which one could argue academic writing does do. Yeah. But a lot of it isn't really thinking about who the end user is. And so you can't really move a person from one way of thinking to another if you don't understand the way they're thinking to begin with and where they might want to end up. So there's a different way to write when you are trying to help someone solve a problem.

Mike Michalowicz (12:34.798)

You know what's interesting to me, and maybe it's just me, but I'm curious how you consume academic literature. So I read a book by John Pierce in preparation of all in. It was the concept of psychological ownership. Mm-hmm. And the he had th three core theories, hypotheses, where he argued what makes someone sense that they own something, even if they don't legally or physically possess that thing. But it was a difficult read. It just it feels like a grind.

There was a coup there was a couple stories. I'm like, this is interesting. And then the application, and it's like, my God, it's just going on and on. Almost to the point where it felt like counterproductive. Like it was overwhelming. And this the concept was already my head. Is this me that I can't dig that deep? Is it

AJ Harper (13:20.126)

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No, it's just you the the rigor required for academic writing is not required for you to get what you need needed in that moment. Yeah. It's not like it's an easy, we're not gonna you know, it's not gonna be sweeping the nation. His book on psychological ownership. No.

Mike Michalowicz (13:30.06)

Yeah. So the rigor is

Mike Michalowicz (13:38.904)

No, but the the concept should. It's it's profound.

AJ Harper (13:41.696)

Okay, but you have to understand how under what why would knowing that about psychological ownership, what problems could it help people solve if they understood that?

Mike Michalowicz (13:51.254)

Yeah, and it's a a cornucopia of them, in my opinion. Yeah. And is that an opportunity for transformative authors to see what's going on in the academic world and do that bridge so it's more accessible?

AJ Harper (14:04.056)

Sure. If you always want to make a case for the thing that you believe and the way that you want to solve a problem. Yes. So you can rely on research, other people's studies, other people's work, and that's a common way for you to make your case for it. Are an academic, the challenge that Irena brought to my attention was just, you know, when you she knows I'm trying to help her think about the reader first. Yeah. This is a challenge because that's not what they're trained to do.

Mike Michalowicz (14:17.784)

So let's talk about

AJ Harper (14:33.806)

Yeah. In fact, the oppos you know, the opposite. Well, I don't think they would say that, but that's not the point. The point is, that rigor that they have to go through to prove what they're saying has nothing to do with a person solving a problem or wanting to make a change.

Mike Michalowicz (14:35.926)

Read or laugh.

Mike Michalowicz (14:54.254)

So transformational writing applies to prescriptive nonfiction. Is there other st

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AJ Harper (14:59.372)

I would say teaching memoir and I would also argue memoir in some cases.

Mike Michalowicz (15:04.126)

Okay. What's the difference between a teaching memoir and just a

AJ Harper (15:08.384)

Right out So a memoir is just a story, but it's not necessarily directly speaking to a specific lesson. The lesson is in in the in the subtext.

Mike Michalowicz (15:17.358)

Mm-hmm. Okay. So tell me why for academic writers it's difficult to make this transition.

AJ Harper (15:25.134)

For for some of them, and I have had quite a few of them, it's just their focus is on that that rigor of proving what they need to prove. And they're also dissuaded in their work as academics from speaking directly to the reader, from attending to any, even thinking about what might they need in that situation. It's not even a consideration. accessibility is not a consideration. Being able to actually act on something, not a consideration. And then also

totally dissuaded from sharing anything personal themselves. So you're stripping away all the things that you really need in transformational nonfiction that make something readable, that make us connect with it, that make us feel like it should matter to us, that make it a page turner.

Mike Michalowicz (16:11.49)

There's a podcast called The Path to the Main Stage by Lee Hayes. yeah, I know actually I listened your episode. You yeah, I know. I listened to the second episode. Yep. Yeah. Yep. So because I can learn stuff on that. What was interesting, she had a comedian come on and talked about the they call it the fourth wall on stage where you engage with one person. And I

AJ Harper (16:17.292)

I love it. I've been on it twice now. you did? Yeah. I had two. The marketing one. Yeah.

Mike Michalowicz (16:40.374)

I think there is a a challenge with academic reads as you were sharing this. And when I read something like, especially in college or even nowadays, it just feels like you're talking to no one. It's vacuous. It's just ugh. Conversely, when I read a book that I fall in love with, it feels like it's just me and that author. And somehow immersed where are academics trained to write the way they write? Like is there is there an AJ Harper

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AJ Harper (17:08.096)

In school.

Mike Michalowicz (17:09.112)

There is. Yes. There's another one of you out there but it's only for

AJ Harper (17:12.366)

No, it's just how it's done. This is how you write these this is how you write this paper, this this this this is how you present this study, this is how you handle your dissertation. Yeah. Yeah.

Mike Michalowicz (17:24.334)

They I also noticed there's no personal stories. Th there is stories usually about case they call case studies, it seems like in many

AJ Harper (17:30.07)

Yeah, but they're not pers that's not that's about analysis. Focus data focus.

Mike Michalowicz (17:33.686)

Is that if you're an academic writer to write a personal story?

AJ Harper (17:36.984)

Yes. Wow. Yeah. So you have to root you have to let go of what you've been trained to do. Yeah. And that can be really challenging, especially if you've been doing it for a really long time. Like that's another thing. Tone. Well there's what's the tone in academic writing?

Mike Michalowicz (17:47.992)

Tell me about tone. Tell me about it. Well

Mike Michalowicz (17:56.11)

cardboard. A wall?

AJ Harper (17:58.158)

I'm sure people could write in and say, this one's riveting. This has a riveting time. I don't know. I haven't, but maybe it exists, but it's not for the average person. Because you're making that leap where you want mainstream book, meaning you're gonna pick it up. I'm gonna pick it up because maybe we want to learn something, but mostly we want to change something. We want to be able to do something that we didn't know how to do.

Mike Michalowicz (18:04.75)

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Anyone ever said that?

AJ Harper (18:28.314)

that type of transformational work, that you need to care about tone. That means you have to have a personality. And they're stripped their personality from their work. Yeah. Because it's superfluous.

Mike Michalowicz (18:42.722)

So is that step one if you want to go from academic to traditional traditional transformative?

AJ Harper (18:48.418)

I don't think that's step one. I think that's I think that's like going I think that's like advanced placement to start with personality. Okay. I don't that's I think you would just get stuck there.

Mike Michalowicz (19:00.02)

So then walk me through the steps, how how do I go from academic

AJ Harper (19:02.006)

I it really is starting with thinking about the reader and what is the transformation. Where where are they on page one? What is the driver? Why would they pick up the book? Yeah. Can we start with that? Why would they pick up the book? Why do they want this? Would you

Mike Michalowicz (19:17.774)

You start with an outline, would you just No. Okay.

AJ Harper (19:21.912)

Start with the reader and why they want to pick up the book. Why? Yes, intellectual curiosity can be enough. But if we're talking transformational nonfiction, that's not enough. The transformational part is I want something I don't have. I want a deeper understanding. I want relief. I want to fix something. I want something to be better. I want to make something. I want to break something, whatever it is.

Have some understanding of their day one, page one. Who are they? Why why they need this?

Mike Michalowicz (19:59.34)

And you have protocols for finding that information. Yes. Is it the same for the academic person? Yes. And so

AJ Harper (20:05.4)

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trying to do this type of book. If you're making the leap over here and you want that, you want to do that.

Mike Michalowicz (20:09.848)

So give me some of the protocols.

AJ Harper (20:12.822)

It's again, it's well, we you mean for how they can get to know their reader better? Yes. I see. Yes. So you can do focus groups, you can do surveys, you could do test drives. We did a whole episode on test drives recently. Yeah. You need to get in there with people and ask them actual questions. Why would you want to learn this? What's happening with you? What matters to you? Why do you care about this? and it's not just your own curiosity. we started at the top of this talking about our parents.

My mom is a PhD, her PhD is in ancient history. The amount of hours that I spent falling asleep at somebody's house while they pontificated until three o'clock in the morning about ancient Mesopotamia or whatever boring thing to me. Their her dissertation is her own intellectual curiosity. Which she's her research studies are her own intellectual curiosity. And

It's important to her and maybe to the world too, for us to understand. But it's not about an individual, like her her interests are not gonna help a yearning I have. Do you know what I mean? So you have to be get outside of your own intellectual curiosity why you think I should want to read this thing and understand what's driving me to pick a book up like this. You have to and to do that, you have to talk to folks. Just talk to folks.

Mike Michalowicz (21:40.92)

We used to talk to common folks like like not the other intellectuals. I I think the prototypical professor is as the academic writer

AJ Harper (21:48.598)

It's the idea you have to identify the ideal reader first. Who who am I writing it for? And then go have a conversation.

Mike Michalowicz (21:55.49)

Yeah, immersed with them. Yes. So when I had my forensics business, computer forensics, we had this thing we called the Patty test. Now Patty was my personal assistant, Patty Zanelli, and we had to do what was called drive mirroring. We called it encapsulation. There's a whole reason why we did this. But you would basically go to a scene where you needed to capture the evidence. You would take a fresh capture drive, take the data off, copy it off the source drive, then you would could analyze this.

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Duplicate without contaminating the data effectively. Well, it was a technical process. You had put these tools in place so you didn't accidentally overwrite the original source and all those things. And originally, it was only like the people that really knew what they were doing could do this. And then we said, This is not scalable. We have to find people that are very capable at doing this very specific protocol. It's gonna be very expensive. This is not a scalable business. How do we get Patty doing it? Someone just said that exasperated because Patty knew nothing about technology.

in this capacity, she was extraordinary at her role, but but this wasn't her gig. So we ultimately called the airplane card. We wrote the steps down pictorial, and we would give it to Patty and say, Patty, can you do this? And she started duplicating drives. And we're like, okay, now we can hire for this role. Is that similar? If I'm an academic, I'm surrounded, I presume, by like people, like people, you know, people like people like them, I should say. We surround ourselves with people who are similar.

Do I find a group of my end readers and and and start kind of testing out my ideas with them, playing with it to see what their level of comprehension is so I can see how I can move them?

AJ Harper (23:32.926)

That's comprehension, yes. That's further down the road. Incidentally the Patty's in L airplane car. Similar book. It is. I was just while you were talking, I was like, which book was that plan. Maybe pumpkin plan.

Mike Michalowicz (23:36.694)

Okay. I'm getting ahead of myself.

Mike Michalowicz (23:44.906)

Yeah, yeah.

AJ Harper (23:50.552)

So maybe fix this nest. Fix this. At any rate, it's earlier, earlier that it's yearning. This is where people get tripped up. Yes, you're talking about accessibility. Can they understand it? That's a big factor. Yeah. When we're writing for academics, and as an academic, there's an expectation that we're just gonna get through that, even if we don't fully get it. and that because we have some form of intellectual curiosity.

Mike Michalowicz (23:52.461)

Maybe.

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AJ Harper (24:20.578)

We have a baseline of understanding. And so we're gonna get through that text, no matter if it isn't that accessible. Yeah. Right. There's no actual goal for it to be accessible. So it's not the readability is not the focus. Readability is not the but before that there's a yearning. And this is a what I wish everyone would get is you need to understand what is truly driving someone to pick up the book. You have got to understand this. The yearning.

What is the yearning? Why do they need it? Yes, again, intellectual curiosity, people will buy books because of it. They're not are they gonna immediately read it when they get home? Are they gonna prioritize it? Are they gonna tear through it? That's what we're trying to do, you know, is trying to create books that people are compelled to purchase and finish.

Mike Michalowicz (25:12.846)

I do a little offer to people that buy one of the books that we've written, like The Money Habit. I'll say, my challenge to you is just to read three pages. And if it doesn't hook you by then, I've failed my job as an author to keep you compelled and to serve what you're needing. I remember academic books. I read those books because specifically I was told I had to read it. And it was so difficult. Now there's certain fields like John Pierce's book. I was like, I want to learn all about this. And they were much more easier to absorb.

In transformative writing, you have that initial yearning, but it can it can fade away pretty quickly, I think. How do you keep

AJ Harper (25:49.678)

I don't think it fades away until you solve the problem and get the thing you want.

Mike Michalowicz (25:52.77)

But you you do have to p walk people step by step and keep them engaged and moving along, see that they're feeling progress, that they're that this book is of service to them.

AJ Harper (26:00.622)

But then you did the job. Yeah.

Mike Michalowicz (26:02.872)

Yeah. Yeah. But but an academic writer has to realize they have to win the reader every every sentence, every paragraph, as opposed to traditional academic writing where that's not necessary. It's

AJ Harper (26:14.894)

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And some of it is also, you know, maybe you're gonna have to slow down the unfolding of knowledge. Maybe you're gonna have to take it down.

Mike Michalowicz (26:23.756)

Is that kind of the ever you were talking about the everyman here? Is that the everyman? Right for the everyman?

AJ Harper (26:29.002)

I don't think it's every man. I think it's a person who wants something. Yeah. And you have to you have to get at that. A person who wants something. I keep coming back to this over and over. I just did this in a one of my writing sprints and someone working on a reader statement and I s and they completely left out the want. What do they want? What do they want? That we have to have that. We have to understand what that is. The money habit.

People who never want to worry about money again. That's a want. I don't I want to be stress-free about money. I do not want to worry ever again. That's what I want.

Mike Michalowicz (27:09.027)

have you ever seen and maybe you have transformative writers go to the academic space? Do you see that or is it more often you see the academic Okay. But you see why do you see academic writers come to the

AJ Harper (27:16.94)

Maybe they exist but I haven't seen a person.

AJ Harper (27:21.998)

Because they want to take their ideas to the mainstream where it can do more good. Right? Because they're of a limited readership when they're being published by an academic press. It's important. It matters. I'm and people are reading it. But if you're really trying to make a change in the world, like Irena, my gosh, she she has so many amazing ways of looking at things and helping us understand our country in a way that

Mike Michalowicz (27:26.294)

Okay.

AJ Harper (27:50.488)

Feel so hopeful at a time right now that is most of us do not feel that hope. She does. And she's an economist, and she so her knowledge comes from her fascination and expertise and experience with be with the economy and understanding not just our economy, but the world

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economy and her great study in that. But if we're gonna understand what she understands.

somehow she has to connect to why we would want to understand it, why we would need to know what she knows, how what she knows solves a problem for us or helps us get something we want. And I would argue that it's wanting to feel like the thing we believe about this country is true. And that we can actually make some sort of difference.

That it's we're not completely disconnected from what happens and that we can actually do something, even on a small scale. And I hear her teaching us about the way we think about power and money and need and the way we need to change our thinking around that is so empowering actually. But she is used to explaining that and backing that up.

And needs to tap into and is doing that now, tapping into the individual who has that yearning of I want to believe in this country and my neighbors and my community. And I want to feel like I can actually do something. And I want to understand how all these things connect. And if she can tap into that desire, then now this is a book that will pass around because I just described something and your face lit up.

Now, wouldn't you want to read about that? Absolutely. And you've been saying lately that you're feeling like I gotta pay attention to this stuff because it's getting to you. Yeah. But if you read Irina's book, you would say it would blow first of all, it would blow your mind because of the way she understands the economy and how it represents our values. And she you'd read it and you'd say, holy crap. It would blow your mind. And if she's able to connect to that desire that you are feeling right now of I need to be involved.

AJ Harper (30:16.246)

If she can connect to that, then now you're passing that book around. Now you're finishing it and you're saying, I read this book, you have to read it. Yeah. That's what we're all trying to do here. Get to a point where a reader feels compelled to buy it, open it, read it, finish it, and then say to someone, I just read this book. You gotta read it. Yeah. That's what we should all be going for. But we can't do that if we do not understand the yearning. We have got to understand the yearning.

Mike Michalowicz (30:43.522)

Did Irina write and I may have missed this. Did she write prior in academics or she's okay. And this this book, this new book is a transformative book or she's actively working on this right now?

AJ Harper (30:55.575)

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Yeah, she's actively working on it. And she has a second book she's also working on that's also I would say about our country. No, she doesn't have a deal yet.

Mike Michalowicz (31:02.938)

Is her book available for pre order? Okay, okay. So she's actively writing, does not have a deal yet. Yeah. But she's making this transition over.

AJ Harper (31:11.704)

She will have a deal. But she wanted us to talk about that struggle that academics have in getting to that place.

Mike Michalowicz (31:19.81)

Yeah. Any other tips to get more comfortable with this kind of reader first?

AJ Harper (31:26.254)

It really is so simple. It it really is just I know I know, but it is that you can't jump over that. You can't think, okay, I got it now. Let me move on. You have to constantly be checking in with the journey of the reader. You have to constantly be checking in. So I mean, it's knowing them, understanding that, g getting out there and having these conversations about what would drive somebody to pick up the book.

Mike Michalowicz (31:31.479)

Simple's hard.

AJ Harper (31:55.638)

And then caring for them the whole way through. And that's just practice. It's just, okay, let me check in with them again. Yeah. You know? after every chapter, thinking, okay, wait, let me go back. What's it like to read this for the first time? Is this gonna if this is gonna blow their minds? Is this are they gonna put it down because it's too much to think about? How can I help them? What can I do? How can I stay connected to them? And if you're just constantly checking, you don't have to do this in the first draft. This is this is all revision.

But if you're checking, that's my whole editing methodology, by the way, is the reader experiences let's see if we can take care of them along the way versus just here's what I have to say. You know? Yeah. So it's just practice.

Mike Michalowicz (32:41.484)

My sense is getting out there is gonna be a little or a lot of it intimidating. I think one thing is to go to the established communities. So where are maybe complimentary authors already speaking or writing to? Maybe you can connect with those authors to get in front of the

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communities and test things out. I think it's hard to pick up the phone or send out that first email to get that first reader to give you critical feedback.

AJ Harper (33:04.684)

Yeah. I I know it's not critical feedback. It's not. It's this is again this

Mike Michalowicz (33:08.832)

Right. It's not critical feedback, but to see if they get what you're trying to teach. If what I'm putting down is being picked up.

AJ Harper (33:14.892)

That again is later. Reader first is just do I understand them and why they would be compelled to read this, how this helps them in their life.

Mike Michalowicz (33:25.326)

How do know you really understand someone's life?

AJ Harper (33:28.044)

You need to have these conversations or you can do it in a survey. If it's a really good survey, if it's a detailed survey, you can have salons, you can have focus groups, you can have meetups, but you gotta get out of the cave. The especially if you're an academic. And this also goes for corporate. Same di same set of problems. Academic and corporate, same set of problems, different objectives. The corporate.

No personal stories. Right. Right. Data analysis. So No, not necessarily, but that but you are not you're supposed to strip yourself away. Yeah. No formal tone corporate tone versus academic tone is still not accessible. Neither of them are accessible. Yeah. Same problem, same solution.

Mike Michalowicz (34:01.502)

Yeah.

Mike Michalowicz (34:17.678)

I love that. That now is landing with me. Yeah. Connect, learn. It's really about the learn.

AJ Harper (34:24.287)

It that is the most important thing and and the rest comes from that.

Mike Michalowicz (34:30.328)

We we don't have an episode for next week because this is our final recording going into the summer. When do we record next, you know? okay, okay. So we'll record again in a month.

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AJ Harper (34:35.584)

In May. Not that long.

We're really we're banking because I'm gonna go up to the lake. I'm actually going on Saturday. amazing. For a month. That's amazing. Or like two and a half weeks.

Mike Michalowicz (34:42.114)

When you head up to the lake.

Mike Michalowicz (34:49.014)

Is the house ready to receive you? I mean you had to do some repairs, major repairs.

AJ Harper (34:52.032)

No, we're well we have an apartment above the garage. So we're just gonna stay there. Where you stayed. Yeah, we're just gonna stay there. We just need to check on everything and see if we have to file a damage claim for my furniture.

Mike Michalowicz (34:57.035)

I know, yeah, I love that spec.

Mike Michalowicz (35:04.024)

Probably. Okay. Well send me an update.

AJ Harper (35:06.828)

You know what? I have no I'm you know what? I'm nervous to walk in the house. I I don't know if I wanna look at it, but I feel like these are not problems that we need to obsess over. So I'm of course not. Yeah. So I'm just gonna go and be happy there.

Mike Michalowicz (35:21.006)

The thing I remember most fondly of my first visit with you are those flowers. I literally was driving to the fair the lupins. I pulled over and started taking pictures of these lupins. They were breathtaking.

AJ Harper (35:30.488)

He went up with the loop in.

AJ Harper (35:37.154)

Taking. It's such a great thing. It's a magical fairyland. And then they're gone.

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Mike Michalowicz (35:40.234)

It really is and then they're gone. So I haven't seen them gone. I only saw present and I just blown away.

AJ Harper (35:46.848)

Yeah. It's a lot of natural beauty. Yeah, so we're going for a few weeks and then when I get back, you and I will record more episodes.

Mike Michalowicz (35:53.294)

Okay. Yeah. And you don't forget you have to buy a jet ski, because I had a dream of you and I jet skiing around. So can we rent one? Would that be fun? That'd be fun. All right. also a last thing before I let you go, what do you have going on in July for our audience to to

AJ Harper (35:58.626)

We can rep one. Here we go.

AJ Harper (36:11.256)

Check out to come into membership and and work on your book and work on your marketing and and get support within that community. A harper.com.

Mike Michalowicz (36:19.022)

And the best websites, AJ Harper.com. All right. So go do that. Also, I want to thank Simplified. That is the imprint with page two for sponsoring today's episode. If you are an entrepreneur author or aspiring entrepreneurial author, maybe there's a space for you you can Google Simplified Page Two or Page Two Colin Simplified. Either one will get you there. Thanks for listening to today's episode. Go to DWTB podcast.com. We have tons of resources, all prepared by you, AJ. So thanks for doing that.

That will get you going on your journey or amplifying it, or if you're an academic writer, it's going to get you to the transformative writing. At least get you started. And you can email us at hello at DWTB podcast.com. Where did you get this? Irena sent in this request. Did she just email you directly or did it come in?

AJ Harper (37:02.828)

I was asked I asked I often ask my people in the community. I say, Hey, I'm about to record another podcast. I'm looking for some ideas and she she hit me up with one.

Mike Michalowicz (37:11.862)

Okay. We love getting emails from you. And I got a special bonus story before we wrap up, I'm gonna share you about an email. we just got you and I both got it from a fella. And I'll re you'll

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remember it in a second. But go to DWTB podcast.com to get our resources, email us, and also please rate and review the show. Now here's a little bonus tip. Brian Harriet, he d actually texted us. So we we talk about he's got a brand new book out called Time Freedom. Or it's not out yet. It's for free.

AJ Harper (37:32.586)

yeah. So funny.

AJ Harper (37:39.808)

No, because when this when this errors

Mike Michalowicz (37:41.846)

And launches in September Pretty close. Yeah, months away. It is available for pre-order. We mentioned Brian Harriet in Time Freedom on this show. Yes. And he was spotted in the wild. Yeah. And they said, my gosh, you're the Brian Harriet from Don't Write That Book.

AJ Harper (37:56.012)

He was he was recognized his name w and book were recognized from someone who listens to this show.

Mike Michalowicz (38:02.252)

Is that remarkable? Yeah. And so you emailed him saying, Congratulations. I think he he texted Adayla. Yeah. Yeah. So Adayla responds, says congratulations. And I respond saying, Mark your calendar. Today is the day Brian became a diva. Yep.

AJ Harper (38:08.33)

He produced a group.

AJ Harper (38:19.074)

And he said, Marked. He said he's such a good dude. He is and I did.

Mike Michalowicz (38:25.152)

And he did market. Diva Bryan. So D.Va Bryan, if you're watching today, or then was the day you became a D.Va. And congratulations. And who knows, maybe your book will be featured on this show and you'll be spotted in the wild. But you gotta send your question, comments, and thoughts for a show episode to us at hello at dwtv.com. And don't forget this: don't write that book. Write the greatest book you can.