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Episode 150:

“What to Do When You (or Someone Else) Blows Up Your Book”

Mike Michalowicz ([00:01](#)):

Welcome back to the Don't Write That Book podcast, where you can learn how to write your bestseller and own your authorship. Follow along with us as we give you an insider's view of the book industry. Now, here are your hosts, myself, Mike Michalowicz, and AJ Harper. This episode is gonna be a little bit of an insider peek, AJ. Your book got blown up?

AJ Harper ([00:23](#)):

Yeah. Oh,

Mike Michalowicz ([00:25](#)):

I'm, I'm so. This is what I love about Don't Write That Book is we shared the Money Habit journey. Mm-hmm. We were writing the book together as we were doing these episodes. We launched the book - uh-huh. As we're doing these episodes. We're now post-launch, we're giving, um, details. We talked about John Briggs' book last week. Uh, we're talking about your journey. We're talking about writing it. Um, you're doing a really unique approach, two books at once, not that you're gonna release them simultaneously, but you're working on two and-m. I don't even know what the heck they're about because you're not sharing it. Now your book's been blown up. No. Um, and I guess this happens with some frequency. So we'll explore that in a minute. And what you, our listeners should do, should you have a blow up moment. And what's interesting when you said blow up, I've heard blow up in a very positive connotation where things explode in demand, but I've also heard blown up in a more concerting - Yeah.

Mike Michalowicz ([01:18](#)):

Yeah. And that's your situation, I think.

AJ Harper ([01:20](#)):

Well, it's just, you know, we probably shouldn't use the term anymore because, you know -

Mike Michalowicz ([01:27](#)):

Well.

AJ Harper ([01:27](#)):

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Uh, but it's, it's what

Mike Michalowicz ([01:29](#)):

Happens. It's what happens. It what happens. Um, and we're doing this remotely. I, I appreciate you taking time from your, uh, home there, uh, in Madeline Island. Do you maintain a regular work schedule during the summer? Mm-hmm. Oh, you did? Yeah. Okay.

AJ Harper ([01:46](#)):

Yeah. I'm not on vacation.

Mike Michalowicz ([01:48](#)):

You're not on vacation, but you're at your, I call it a vacation home.

AJ Harper ([01:53](#)):

I don't think it's a vacation home. I think it's a, I think it's an island home. I think it's a dream home, but I don't. But really, I mean, I did three editing retreats this summer here. I had, um, uh, colleagues come out and stay. I have a really cool project I'm working on. Um, the, and the, those colleagues came out to stay. So it's really, um, you know, the only way that we could build it was if I could figure out how it could be part of my business, and it's definitely part of my business.

Mike Michalowicz ([02:23](#)):

That's amazing. So you did three retreats out at your home. You, you have a adjunct building, an annex building - Yeah. Where you do the retreat. How many folks came through this summer for business type related stuff?

AJ Harper ([02:39](#)):

So I. Oh, how, for the, for the whole summer, not just the retreats?

Mike Michalowicz ([02:43](#)):

Yeah.

AJ Harper ([02:44](#)):

Mm, 25 maybe.

Mike Michalowicz ([02:47](#)):

Wow. Okay. You gotta look into this thing. There's a thing called the Augusta Rule - uh-huh. Where there's a tax break.

AJ Harper ([02:56](#)):

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Oh yeah. Yeah.

Mike Michalowicz ([02:57](#)):

Okay.

AJ Harper ([02:57](#)):

Also John, John Briggs shared that at, in Nashville.

Mike Michalowicz ([03:02](#)):

Yeah. So we're looking into it actually. Kelsey's doing some, um, research on this right now because we use this space in my house for our studio. Yeah. Uh, we have, um, filmed at least. Matt was actually filming it, at least three or four podcast episodes already that I'm not involved in whatsoever, um, that use this space and it looks like it's growing. So, um, there could be some tax benefits from that. It's called the Augusta.

AJ Harper ([03:33](#)):

Google the Augusta rule, everyone. Yeah. It's not a tax, it's not a tax podcast, but go check it out. <laugh>

Mike Michalowicz ([03:38](#)):

It's gonna become one. So thanks everyone for joining us today. On this episode, it's What to Do When You or Someone Else blows up your book. I'm your host, **Mike Michalowicz**, or co-host, I should say Mike Michalewitz. I'm the author of Prop First and The Money Habit. I'm joined by our co-host, **AJ Harper**, who's the author of Write a Must Read, also my dear friend and co-writer in every single book I've done. She has an extraordinary business elevating authors to their top performing levels. And, uh, if you haven't worked with her yet, I'm, I swear, I swear you better work with her. Today, let's, uh, dive into AJ's own story with her book. Oh, I, I always forget to say this. Thanks Simplified. This is a imprint from Page Two. They are a sponsor for this and every episode we've done recently. So just thanks for being such a supporter of us.

Mike Michalowicz ([04:28](#)):

If you are an author and are looking for a new publisher, I challenge you to find someone more impactful, more engaged, better than page two. I, I don't think they exist. It's. I've worked with so many publishers now and, uh, I have perspective on many more and page two is, is hands down the best. And no question about it. Um, also, AJ, you, you have a sprint marathon coming up on October 17th. Yeah. I think this podcast episode will launch right before that. So tell us about that. Yeah.

AJ Harper ([05:03](#)):

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So twice a year, I do a writing sprint marathon, which is a free event and open to the public. And this is a full day of writing in community with others. We do it over Zoom. You can come at any level of expertise. You can be brand new. You can be a published author. There's a lot of published authors who come. And we hardcore get to work. We also have some extended Q&A time. Uh, so it's, it's like a big writing party where you get a ton done plus prizes. And I do it twice a year and it's one of the favorite events in my community.

Mike Michalowicz ([05:39](#)):

It runs from what, what's the start time?

AJ Harper ([05:42](#)):

Uh, nine to

Mike Michalowicz ([05:43](#)):

Four. And you don't have to be there -

AJ Harper ([05:44](#)):

And you can come and go. Yeah, yeah. You don't have to be there on time. You can. We've had people who stay the whole time. We've had people who come late. We've also had people who come in the morning, go do something, come back. Yeah. Uh, we're, we're cool with

Mike Michalowicz ([05:56](#)):

All of it. And you're there the whole time.

AJ Harper ([05:58](#)):

Oh yeah.

Mike Michalowicz ([05:59](#)):

When, when I've been on there, I haven't counted the authors, but I've counted the Zoom pages. Like, you know, you can scroll Zoom and a whole new - uh-huh. Swash, swash? A whole new group of people come up and then you do it. I've gotten, I think, five or six pages deep. Like there's so many. And what's so cool is everyone or nearly everyone has their camera on. So

AJ Harper ([06:19](#)):

You see - Some, I mean, uh, there's a trend right now where people aren't keeping it on. And you don't have to keep it on, so don't worry if that, if you. There's no pressure to do it. Um, we, we put our cameras on for the Q&A time, but if you don't wanna have it on otherwise. But it's just a fantastic event. We get some. We've written millions of words now over the

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Mike Michalowicz ([06:38](#)):

Years. That's so cool. That's so cool.

AJ Harper ([06:40](#)):

Yeah, it's really cool. All

Mike Michalowicz ([06:41](#)):

Right. So let's dig into the meat of today's conversation. Uh, you're working on a new book. Give us the context of the new book and, and tell us what happened the other day and why it blew up. What

AJ Harper ([06:51](#)):

Do you mean give you the context? I'm not gonna tell you what it's about.

Mike Michalowicz ([06:55](#)):

Nothing?

AJ Harper ([06:55](#)):

I'm not gonna tell you. Nope. Mm-mm <negative>.

Mike Michalowicz ([06:57](#)):

But isn't the old one gone now? <laugh>

AJ Harper ([06:59](#)):

What do you mean?

Mike Michalowicz ([07:00](#)):

The old one. Well, you said your book got blown up, so I assume the old -

AJ Harper ([07:03](#)):

No, it's the same book.

Mike Michalowicz ([07:05](#)):

Okay.

AJ Harper ([07:06](#)):

But you experienced it. It's when you, you, you have the book and then you realize, "Oh, I actually need to change this dramatically." That's what it means when you blow up the book. So

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you've got, you know, some level of completion done or, you know, at least you know exactly what you're doing. In my case, a lot of it written and then you realize, "Uh-oh, I actually don't have that right or there's more or I have to completely ditch this structure or something." And it's blowing up the book.

Mike Michalowicz ([07:41](#)):

What, what triggered your realization?

AJ Harper ([07:44](#)):

Well, working on it. Just, I, that's it. You know, I'm working on it and I realize, oh, that's not it, um, in a big way, in a big way. So I thought we should talk about it because this also happens at. We were just talking about how I have retreats here in the summer. It happens at almost every retreat. And I, I feel like I need a t-shirt that says, "I'm sorry I blew up your book." <laugh>

AJ Harper ([08:08](#)):

Because, because it, you know, it feels overwhelming at the time when you realize there's so much more that you have to do. Mm-hmm. 'Cause it's usually you feel like, "I got this." And then you're cruising, cruising, cruising, and they're like, "Oh man, I, I don't have this." Mm. "And I have a lot more work to do. I have a lot of changes to do. It feels overwhelming. So I always feel kind of bad." I feel like, "Oh, no." But in the end, the book is better. Yeah. Because you realize, "Oh my gosh, it's actually this or there's more there."

Mike Michalowicz ([08:39](#)):

I guess you could frame that as that was necessary work to get to this epiphany moment where you do the full - uh-huh. Yeah. So it's, it's a good thing. It's, it's dev - a little devastating in the moment when it happens, but it's necessary and the book comes out better. Um, when, when you have this moment, and this was an internal realization, d- do you sometimes see an external factor that blows up a book?

AJ Harper ([09:02](#)):

It c - uh, sometimes. Okay. But it's mostly not. I don't know what you mean by. Wait a minute. Let me, what do you mean by external?

Mike Michalowicz ([09:11](#)):

Uh, a news, a news event that changes everything. Oh. Or perhaps pre-readers don't get what you're doing or it's not having the impact you expected or

AJ Harper ([09:22](#)):

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Something. Well, yeah. So that definitely all happens - Okay. With readers. But external events, I haven't had a lot of ex. No, that hasn't happened. Okay. To me anyway. Okay. Um, but I will tell you that, um, I do, I do wanna qualify. In case it, in case it's the first time you're listening or you weren't, weren't aware of my own journey of trying to decide what I wanted to write next, which we talked about many episodes ago, I'm not trying to be cheeky or secretive. The reason that I'm not sharing what my book is about is because I won't finish it at this stage. You know, I know myself, if I talk about it too much and how much I love this or that and how cool this is and how excited I am to share this and what I'm working on, there's a s - there's.

AJ Harper ([10:10](#)):

If I do it while I'm still drafting, I will not finish it.

Mike Michalowicz ([10:16](#)):

That's it. I, you know, I did not realize that was the reason.

AJ Harper ([10:19](#)):

Yeah. So I have to learn over the years, you know, I used to, when I was a playwright, I used to say, oh, and I'm working on this and then this happens and then that happens and then this happens. And then I would sit down to write and I just don't feel like it anymore because I feel like I already wrote it. Ha! So it's just how my brain works. Some people are the opposite. Um, Laura Stone, she's working on her fifth novel, which incidentally, I just need to do a little plug because she has a Substack, Laura Stone, and, um, she's part of the team that brings this podcast to you. And, uh, she has taken her fourth novel, Uncertain Texas, which is a gripping, uh, I guess I can call it a thriller, disturbing and fascinating and page turner novel, Uncertain Texas, set, set in, um, this Texas swamp country.

AJ Harper ([11:17](#)):

And, uh, she's serialized it on Substack so you can get like a chapter a week. And now at the time of this, that we're recording this, I think it's chapter 12, so you could get in there now and really get. And she, and she used to be an actor. I don't know if you knew that about her, but, um, she recorded the audio which she's performing, and so you can get all that. Um, it was free, but now I think it's only 250, as in \$2.50.

Mike Michalowicz ([11:47](#)):

Oh my Gosh.

AJ Harper ([11:47](#)):

And you. Anyway, so big plug, go to, um, Substack to. We'll put a link in the show notes if you wanna go read that and listen to that. But, uh, the reason I'm mentioning her is we went out to

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breakfast at one of my favorite places in Minneapolis after a retreat. We went to the original Pancake House and, um -

Mike Michalowicz ([12:08](#)):

IHOP, like, As in IHOP?

AJ Harper ([12:09](#)):

No, it's called The Original Pancake House.

Mike Michalowicz ([12:15](#)):

Oh, the Original.

AJ Harper ([12:15](#)):

<laugh>

Mike Michalowicz ([12:15](#)):

Okay.

AJ Harper ([12:16](#)):

Okay. So we went there before her flight left, um, and, uh, we dropped Shade off first and then she had some time to kill, so I said, "Let's go eat." And she tells me her whole fifth novel idea, she lays it all out over the whole meal. And first of all, can't wait for that one. Won't say a word about it here, out of respect for her process, but I was thinking, "Gosh, I, if I had done that, I would not write it then."

Mike Michalowicz ([12:44](#)):

That's so interesting.

AJ Harper ([12:45](#)):

But what, but what she, but that's what she needs. So we're all different. You know, there's no right or wrong way, but I just wanna make sure listeners know, I'm not trying to be super secretive just because. I would like to finish. <laugh>

Mike Michalowicz ([13:00](#)):

So. Yeah, it's brilliant. Know thyself. Um, so once you had this blow up realization, what is changing in the book?

AJ Harper ([13:11](#)):

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Well, well, you know how I talk about book fundamentals and they're like the GPS for your book? Yeah. And one of them is a transformational core message. So that changed. Okay. And that's like <laugh> -

Mike Michalowicz ([13:24](#)):

If the core message changes, to me, that means the entire book has to change.

AJ Harper ([13:31](#)):

Not - Okay. Not really. I mean, it does change fundamentally, but not the entire book because this is a prescriptive nonfiction book that much I can say. And so, you know, what I'm teaching, I'm still teaching, but that fundamental mindset shift on which everything hinges, I definitely needed to change it. And uh, go ahead.

Mike Michalowicz ([13:52](#)):

Would you give me an example of a core message change, not for your book, I wanna respect that, but can you give me another example? Sure.

AJ Harper ([13:59](#)):

I'll, I'll do one for write a must read. Okay. Okay. So back when I was a ghost writer, I always used to say to folks, "A book is forever. Make it great." Meaning at the time. Remember at the time, and actually it's still happening today. It doesn't even matter. It's still a day ending in why. So people are still saying, um, "A book is a better business card and we just wanna get a lead gen out and blah, blah, blah." Mm-hmm. They're still saying that. They've been saying it. I've been in this business almost 22 years. Well, at the time I wanted people to shift their thinking because there was so many projects coming to ghost writers where people were just like, "I just wanna get that out. I just wanna get that out." Or people would, you know, it was not cheap to hire me.

AJ Harper ([14:46](#)):

So people would be like, "Why does it cost so much?" Well, like I'm not writing your pamphlet, you know, like this is. So I used to say, "Can you think about the fact that you're thinking this as a throwaway marketing piece, but really it is forever?" I mean, even if you pull a book from print, people still own it. I mean, like - Right, right. You can't, and you can't eradicate it from the planet and your kids and grandkids can read it and strangers will read it. And is this really how you wanna approach writing it? You really just want a better business card? Mm. Or can you, can you see that this is a book that people will always be able to read that you wrote? And so I thought, that's the core message of write a must read. I wanna shift their thinking so they don't, they want excellence.

AJ Harper ([15:40](#)):

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But as I was starting to write it, I realized, oh, but that's not actually the shift that teaches them how to write a must read. The shift that is actually foundational for them is something else I say all the time, which is that a book is not about something, it's for someone. Mm-hmm. That's the real shift that needs to happen so that I can teach you all the stuff, because you have to stop thinking about what it's about and start thinking about who it's for. And everything I teach is rooted in who it's for. The book is for everything. I think that's not the main deal. I think people coming into it already want that. It's on the, it's in the title, write a must read. Mm-hmm. So I put that in the intro instead, and it, it's not the, it's not the foundation of the whole book.

AJ Harper ([16:32](#)):

So I had to make that change.

Mike Michalowicz ([16:34](#)):

Thank you for that context. So now I understand the core message shift. It sounds like you had something equivalent, sub - pretty substantial when you had this - Yeah. Blow up moment. Okay. So now you changed the core message for your new book that you're working on. What's the cascading impact?

AJ Harper ([16:53](#)):

Okay. So that means the intro and chapter one are total tear downs because in chapter, in chapter one, you, part of your main job is introducing that core message and then making sure people understand it and you have to kind of prove it. So they might not - Does

Mike Michalowicz ([17:12](#)):

That mean that you throw out, basically you rewrite it from scratch or do you try to salvage - Yeah. Some of the bones? Okay.

AJ Harper ([17:18](#)):

No, I pretty much just chalked it.

Mike Michalowicz ([17:21](#)):

And does that, does that go potentially into your lo. Uh, this is getting a little bit in front of this, but, you know, we have this lost content we've been doing - uh-huh. Which is very kind of a, a way for people to see the stuff that got discarded, but if it's not, um, cohesive with the core message, the new core message, is that something you even wanna share anymore or does that go into the bucket of trash?

AJ Harper ([17:46](#)):

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Bucket of... I don't know. Well, we'll see. Yeah. I don't have this. I don't release the deleted content the same way you do. Yeah. I have released stories that got cut and, but I don't think I would do rough drafts that way.

Mike Michalowicz ([18:03](#)):

Interesting. Okay. So you, you, do you have to redo the intro of the chapter, the first chapter, other changes?

AJ Harper ([18:10](#)):

Yeah. So then I realized, okay, let me. I kinda want this book to be shorter than write a must read. Most people don't realize that write a must read is by 80,000 words.

Mike Michalowicz ([18:23](#)):

No way. It's 80,000 words?

AJ Harper ([18:25](#)):

Yeah.

Mike Michalowicz ([18:26](#)):

It doesn't feel like it. It doesn't even look like - I know. I'm, I'm actually looking at your book right now. It doesn't even look like an 80,000. Is the font really small? I got. <laugh>

AJ Harper ([18:35](#)):

Huh. No. It just, it reads, um, I mean, it's a design to not feel like a dense book.

Mike Michalowicz ([18:42](#)):

It doesn't feel like a dense book at all. No,

AJ Harper ([18:44](#)):

That's, that's the craft of revision.

Mike Michalowicz ([18:46](#)):

What were you trending toward with your new book on word count, do you think, and where do you think you'll end up now with this blow up?

AJ Harper ([18:53](#)):

Um, so in the '60s and I really wanted to be more like under 50. Wow. Okay. And so, um, you know, books are trending shorter. That's not the only reason though. I just think it's. I want it to

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be so useful and, uh, what I can say about it is it's not really how to, it's more like how to think, how to do. It's more like how to think.

Mike Michalowicz ([19:23](#)):

Okay. Okay.

AJ Harper ([19:25](#)):

About a certain topic.

Mike Michalowicz ([19:26](#)):

Okay. So, okay. So what else? Tell me more of the cascading effects regarding

AJ Harper ([19:31](#)):

Your book. So then I took three chap - three separate chapters and they're now one. So just like sm - t - just simplify, simplify, simplify so that three chapters are now just one. And then I, I did have to, um, add one chapter. So I had to kind of make, make sp - make space for things. I also wrote this new intro that caused me to realize, oh, okay, I have to add this chapter, um, talk about something that I hadn't thought I was gonna talk about. And, um, and then I, I hated my call to greatness, so I killed that. I still don't have one now, which is, if you're a regular listener, you know what that is, but this is how I do conclusions and how now Mike does conclusions. Um, so I didn't like that story, so I tossed it. And then I added a new section in each chapter that, um, I will tell you is I added, decided to do an FAQ in each chapter.

AJ Harper ([20:34](#)):

I will tell you that. Um, and the reason is I'm trying to speak to the reader who needs a quick, um, set of answers for things. Um, so I'm experimenting with that. So these are some of the things I did do. These are big changes though.

Mike Michalowicz ([20:52](#)):

Tell me about the emotion you feel now and you felt in that moment.

AJ Harper ([20:59](#)):

Um, you know, I'm, I mean, I've been to this rodeo, so. <laugh> I mean, it's. We've done it with your books. I actually noted. I have a list here for us to talk about of the different ways we blew up your books and who was responsible for the blow up. Yeah, yeah. Um, so I don't know. I, it's always for the greater good. So I mostly feel like, okay, I'm relieved, right? Because then when you think about what you were doing and then now what you're going to do, you realize, oh man, if I hadn't have had those epiphanies, this would not be as good as it could be. Yeah. So I'm, I welcome it, but it is a lot of work.

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Mike Michalowicz ([21:40](#)):

Yeah. So I, I respond differently. In the moment, I feel defeated. Oh. <laugh> Um, it's like sh - this was. It does feel like wasted time in the moment. Really? Yeah. I'm thinking of. I don't even know which book I'm thinking of. May- maybe The Money Habit, because that's the most recent one. Um, just anything that was built and now just gets abandoned. Even if it's just trashing a story, it's like, uh, there was times - Really? Yeah. Yeah. No, yeah. I don't like throwing anything away, but-

AJ Harper ([22:12](#)):

But it's not thrown away because it informed - Correct. How you go. Yeah. Correct. Nothing's

Mike Michalowicz ([22:16](#)):

Wasted. I'm just saying in that moment, my, my impromptu reaction is disappointment, frustration that was wasted. In reflection, I consistently feel that was the best thing to do. Um, there's a psych- psychological phenomenon called loss aversion. And loss aversion - Yeah. Once we possess something, losing it is more painful than it was to gain it. Uh, we feel te - supposedly, you know, 10 times the effect of loss over gain, even though if they were balanced equivalently. You gain the same thing and you lose the same thing, losing that same thing is 10 times more painful, supposedly, but that's called loss aversion. No. And I do feel that when, when something was created, I feel an accomplishment, but it's minor. Once that same thing is lost or deleted, it's like, ugh. So I, I'm surprised that. I guess because you've been through rodeo so many times that it's just whatever, this is normal course, but even, even though we've blown up so many books together or, or blown up sections, I still feel that pain.

AJ Harper ([23:19](#)):

But see, okay. I feel like it's more than loss aversion for you. Maybe. I think that I am. Really love the creative process. I think you are becoming, like you, you're learning to, to love it.

Mike Michalowicz ([23:32](#)):

Yeah.

AJ Harper ([23:33](#)):

But I think that you are inherently a person who is interested in efficiency, productivity, optimization. Yeah. Yeah. And that's sort of your jam. Yeah. And that is contrary to what you've, what you value. And so it's hard for you to reconcile that it's actually part of the process. And so, because it feels like this should be easier, faster. I should have known this earlier. How can we, how can we get here without losing something? How can we get here, um, more efficiently? And I, that's how you work in your business and that's how you think about your life even. So -

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Mike Michalowicz ([24:12](#)):

Yeah, that's absolutely true. It's interesting. I, I struggle with being present, just appreciating the moment. I'm always thinking the next step ahead and the cost of that is missing on the presence. And I, I think that's the same thing with these blow up moments. But, you know, you said you've had this happen at retreats with your clients and - uh-huh. <affirmative>. Uh, your members. Wh- what are some of the trigger moments that they experience that caused this?

AJ Harper ([24:40](#)):

Well, if you're in a retreat for a week where you are dedicated to focusing on your book, you're not doing work, you don't have personal obligations, and then you also have someone like me as your guide, you, you can do this deep work that you pro - may not even get into when you're out in the world and you're trying to find time to write your book. So I think some of it is just thinking about it so consistently for six days, you know?m <affirmative>. Mm-hmm. <affirmative>. That's, that's hardcore. So you realize things. And then I have exercises that are designed to help you realize things, right? Mm-hmm. <affirmative>. And so it's just this cascade of awakening and deep thought and clarity that eventually makes them realize, oh my gosh, I forgot about this or this isn't useful. Or what I love is when they realize the book is more.

AJ Harper ([25:32](#)):

Mm-hmm. <affirmative>. I thought it was this, but it's, oh, it's deeper, it's bigger, it's way more awesome than I thought it was gonna be. Um, that's my fave. That's my fave. But I mean, it happens to people all the time, you know? I mean, I was working with, um, I'm doing these, um, VIP two day things now where helping people who don't wanna be in my class because it's too time consuming, you know, 14 weeks to just do it, develop the book over two days. And this person was wanting to write for Gen Z and realized we had to blow up the book in that VIP because they really don't know Gen Z that well. And assumed that they wanted certain things and I would identify with what this person was saying, but they really don't based on some of the work we were doing.

AJ Harper ([26:29](#)):

So it blew up the whole book. That's, you know, that can happen all the time. You think that your reader is. You get your reader, but you don't. And when you realize that you don't get them, that blows up your book. I've had people realize it's the wrong reader. Hmm. That's not my reader. That really, that's, that would be almost a tear down if you realize the completely different reader. If it's just a slightly different nuance, then that's okay. But if you're like, oh my gosh, it's not for them, now you really have to go back to the drawing board. Um, but I, I wanna say that, um, it's mostly just seeing what's under the surface. Hmm. That's what happens. The more you work on it, the more you realize what else is going on.

Mike Michalowicz ([27:16](#)):

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One of the authors that we worked with through our literary agency, it's Penned with Purpose, uh, was Melissa Dugolecki and she wrote a book called Scar Tissue. We were working with a publisher and it was just a poor, poor experience. So Adayla, uh, reached out to Inspired Girl, which is a hybrid publisher that I just admire so much. They're so. They're a boutique shop, so dedicated to their authors. And they take on this project with Scar Tissue with Melissa, and they said this whole book needs to be done from scratch. And I remember Melissa, this felt like a defeating moment. She worked so hard with a publisher prior to Inspired Girl that was just horrific. And, uh, sh - just by brute force was seeing this book through and Inspired Girl says, "The book is not where it needs to be. Your story is not there enough." She did, she wasn't willing to go deep enough or she wasn't able to.

Mike Michalowicz ([28:09](#)):

And she redid the book. The book is excellent. And it required that blow up. And Melissa, I remember reaching out to me after the book launched and said that this was a necessary process. Mm-hmm. <affirmative>. Um, it's almost like the chrysalis, you know, the caterpillar goes in and out comes the butterfly. One interesting story about Inspired Girl, uh, I was just speaking with Jen Tuma Young, the founder of the company. One of their books called Tiny Hot Dogs, it just got booked as a television show, six episode series broadcasting on a major network. I'm not sure. So keep your eyes open for it. But it was an author who perhaps had a blow up moment and dug deeper into their own story. They were a caterer for these like super celebrities, hence Tiny Hotdogs, you know, pigs in a blanket. And, um, just had these crazy, crazy stories and Inspired Girl invited them to dig in deeper into those things.

Mike Michalowicz ([29:04](#)):

And it, and this book has caught fire now. It's becoming a television show. Cool. It, it, it points to the fact that something you said earlier is if you frame it right, this is a necessary transition you go through the blow up moment to find the better book.

AJ Harper ([29:18](#)):

Yeah. And I, I think another time that it happens is when people start writing the book, they're not writing with the same confidence that they have later. Mm-hmm. <affirmative>. And so they miss things, you know? Yeah. They don't, they aren't as willing to try new things, which is something I'm always trying to get my authors to do, just give it a shot to see if it works or not. And the more they do it, the more they realize, oh, okay, um, there's, there's something else I can do here that they didn't think they could do before. Yes. But then also a book often blows up in. Because an author is willing to be vulnerable, and that also takes time, um, when I'm teaching my workshop. That takes a minute. <laugh> That takes a minute to try and get people to actually share things that they previously weren't willing to explore on the page.

AJ Harper ([30:08](#)):

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I have one author, Susan, who hadn't been sharing a lot about her own experiences. And once she started doing that, some of her own personal stories, the whole book just clicked. It just, she just started to go with it, but it did, did change the structure for her. But it changed it in a good way because she had been sort of, um, beating her head against the wall trying to figure out, "Why don't I wanna write this? Why don't I wanna write this one section? I don't know how to get this right." And then once she started being more vulnerable, "Oh, okay. I see how I can do this." So to me, this is, this is just a creative process, but the blowup moment feels, feels like a lot. So I thought it would be a good thing for us to talk about. Why

Mike Michalowicz ([30:51](#)):

Don't we go through some of our blowups on the books we've done together? It's funny - Sure. In the notes here, I'm like, "Oh, there's probably gonna be three or four." And I wrote that, I look at the list you wrote. It's like all of them. <laugh> Um,

AJ Harper ([31:02](#)):

Almost all of them. Yeah.

Mike Michalowicz ([31:03](#)):

It starts off with TPE. Tell me about that story.

AJ Harper ([31:06](#)):

Okay. So for those of you who don't know, I met Mike when he hired me. Well, he said that he wanted me to work ghostwrites and blogs. Right. But then when I met him in person, he said, "Psych, I wrote a book. I need you to fix it basically." <laugh> Right. That's what you said. You mean, but you told me it was blogs.

Mike Michalowicz ([31:26](#)):

Yeah.

AJ Harper ([31:27](#)):

Yeah.

Mike Michalowicz ([31:28](#)):

Yeah. And what was interesting about that moment is, um, you know, I was, I was trying to, I, I realized I am not a good author and what I produced is something that I wouldn't even consume. And so that was a big red flag for me. I'm like, I need to find a professional. Uh, ends up we're within a 50 mile radius of each other by pure kooky coincidence. We found each other online. Mm-hmm. And I invite you to come down to the office. And you came down with Polly.

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AJ Harper ([31:53](#)):

She sat in the car because I just, you were, I didn't know you. <laugh>

Mike Michalowicz ([31:57](#)):

Yeah, yeah. Y came down to.

AJ Harper ([31:58](#)):

I was like, you have to come with me because I don't know this dude.

Mike Michalowicz ([32:02](#)):

Yeah. And, uh, I just instantly admired you, A, for making the effort to come down and meet. B, the quality of your work was so exceptional. And your willingness to s - to tell me a hard truth even during a, a, basically a sales process. Like, you know, I'm about to pay you money for work you're about to do and you have an opportunity to sell me and you could have said what anything to get the deal. Mm-hmm. <affirmative>. But you chose to speak the truth. Um -

AJ Harper ([32:32](#)):

Yes.

Mike Michalowicz ([32:33](#)):

Is this a crappy book? No pun

AJ Harper ([32:35](#)):

Intended. Didn't, no pun intended. I didn't say it like that. I would never say it, but - No, I know. I d - I, we blew, I blew that whole thing up. Yeah. But I've always tell people, you really only let me do about 60% of what I wanted to do.

Mike Michalowicz ([32:49](#)):

That's good. And that's absolutely true. Um, and I wonder if that was the best outcome because the book has sold, admittedly Hustle is a major part of it, but that's true for all books. Hundreds of thousands of copy. I know it's well over 100,000. I don't even have a record of it, uh, available to me at the moment. So I don't know. But it staged us for something even more significant. Our first project together from the, the foundation, which was the Pumpkin Plan, got a call from Penguin Books. They said, "Hey, TPE is selling so well. Um, we'd love to do your next book with you."

AJ Harper ([33:23](#)):

Right, but that was a big blowup.

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Mike Michalowicz ([33:24](#)):

That was not a blow up.

AJ Harper ([33:26](#)):

No, the TPE. So but I just wanna, I wanted to ask you when I blew up that book - Yeah. What were you feeling? I did the, I did - Gra-

Mike Michalowicz ([33:35](#)):

Grateful. 'Cause I knew I had a piece of crud on my hand, but I didn't know a blowup was permissible, you know? I just though, I guess I just gotta keep on polishing a turd as opposed to flush it down the toilet and start a new one. Like I didn't understand that perspective.

AJ Harper ([33:49](#)):

Okay. So there's that. Then there's Surge. So Surge - Blow Up. You don't. It's because this book is like a cipher. It's like a ghost nerve. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. It's a, it's a good book, y'all. Um, still waiting to find out if there's any, it's ever made it into the black.

Mike Michalowicz ([34:11](#)):

Yeah. Our records as of now, no. Still.

AJ Harper ([34:15](#)):

Okay. Right. So c - so for our listeners, we actually have an, a pretty cool episode where we talk about the worst book we ever wrote and that's Surge. And we were coming back from a creative breakup. Yeah. You asked me to come back into that one. Yep. And so we had written TPE, The Pumpkin Plan, and Profit First. That's

Mike Michalowicz ([34:40](#)):

Right.

AJ Harper ([34:41](#)):

So then we had a creative breakup and then you said, "Will you please come back?" And you had gave me what you'd been working on with Serge. Mm-hmm. And we had to -

Mike Michalowicz ([34:53](#)):

That's right.

AJ Harper ([34:54](#)):

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Yeah. So we had to, I think you had real vision for it, but it just wasn't working in a practical way. So I don't know if you remember, but you had done, I know you remember the interviews you did. Yeah. You did these really in depth interviews with the UGGs guy. Yep. Brian, what's his name? And then - Smith, Brian Smith. Brian Smith. Brian Smith. And then the, um, Burt's B's guy, right?

Mike Michalowicz ([35:21](#)):

I, if we did an episode about interviews, the reason I'm laughing is the Burt's B interview is the most peculiar scenario ever. And, uh, that'd be fun to do a, a, did we do a podcast about interviewing techniques? Yeah.

AJ Harper ([35:33](#)):

I think we did. We did. Yeah. But, but so what, you had this vision for the book that was not quite what your readers would want you to do. Right. And so I think stylistically you were trying to do something totally different and it just wasn't working. So I blew that one up. Yeah. Because structurally, we needed to make huge changes. I mean, that was just like a, okay, take the puzzle apart completely, put all the puzzle pieces out on a table and see, okay, now what are we gonna make? That kind of situation. And it was partly because we hadn't been working together when you started it.

Mike Michalowicz ([36:12](#)):

That's right. Um - Then we move on to, you wrote in the notes, different is better. There is no book, Different is Better. Uh -

AJ Harper ([36:18](#)):

Oh God. I forgot that we changed

Mike Michalowicz ([36:20](#)):

It. Which is part of the, a little part of the - Can you

AJ Harper ([36:22](#)):

Believe that? I forgot we changed it.

Mike Michalowicz ([36:25](#)):

To Get Different.

AJ Harper ([36:26](#)):

I know. It would've, I still like your change. It should be Get Noticed.

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Mike Michalowicz ([36:31](#)):

I should, the book should have been titled Get Notice and It Wave Sold More. Um -

AJ Harper ([36:35](#)):

So many more.

Mike Michalowicz ([36:36](#)):

It is such a freaking good book. It's a great book. I teach it from stage and, um, often get commentary, oh, this is such a powerful and simple structure. I never saw it this way. Yeah. But because we're, because the title is Get Different, um, it's telling people what to do and a great fear people have is to be different. Yeah. We, we want to be noticed without being noticeable. So it should have been called get noticed. Yeah. But nonetheless, what was the blow up moment for, for Get Different? For,

AJ Harper ([37:05](#)):

For that was mostly about, um, me challenging you because you are a total freak and you will do anything and allow yourself to be humiliated and you do not have fear or whatever fear you have is inconsequential compared to your desire to get noticed in a way that is useful to moving, advancing your mission forward. So the rest of us little ci- civilians do not feel this way. It's just like a, you're just a freak. And the problem is you can't write a book from a freak perspective and expect the civilians to do it. Yeah. And so the blowup was, okay, this is not doable. Right. That was the blow up. So sometimes it's not the whole book. Sometimes it's more like, okay, we, let's have a get real moment. And so we had to, I, uh, we tried everything. And I still think we didn't achieve maximum doability because of the fear people have.

AJ Harper ([38:07](#)):

Yeah. Um, there's only so much we can do about that. But we busted our butts to make sure that we give as many examples, walk through all these different things to try and show people how it works. Um, but that was the big blow up for that one. Easier to manage, but it was related to doability.

Mike Michalowicz ([38:27](#)):

You know who just reached out to me and I spoke with last week? A buddy from the past, your buddy David Tireman?

AJ Harper ([38:34](#)):

I know he could, he called me. I was driving, uh, I was driving to visit my mom. So I have this two hour and 45 minute drive one way to see my mom. Hmm. I get, and, um, uh, I listen to

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podcasts and I take phone calls and stuff. And so he called me during that time to tell me he has a big branding thing he's doing and he wanted to catch up. Um, but yeah, he said he talked to you.

Mike Michalowicz ([38:59](#)):

Yeah. And he told me about that too. Um, his, his book, which I love is called World Famous. The reason he said he was reaching out inspired, he's like, I'll never forget the first time he and I met, you introduced us. And, uh, we actually met up in Vegas. We had breakfast together. And I, I said, David, your book is so good. I don't know, I don't understand why you're not world famous. Mm-hmm. <affirmative>. I, and I actually don't remember saying that, but he's like, I've never forgotten this. Fast forward 12 years later, he's like, I, I had to call you to tell you that that's been an inspiring moment in his life. Um -

AJ Harper ([39:34](#)):

That's a great book, by the way, everyone. Hardly anyone knows about it, but it's so good. World famous. So

Mike Michalowicz ([39:41](#)):

Good.m. Next book, uh, we have to race through these, uh, just looking at the clock here. So Clockwork, what happened - <laugh> That was Kaushik? I don't even remember the blow up moment. Was it sitting at the, in the conference room?

AJ Harper ([39:52](#)):

Yes. You do remember. You just pulled it right

Mike Michalowicz ([39:55](#)):

Out. Yeah. I can't remember the word said or the moment. I remember drawing on the board. The

AJ Harper ([39:59](#)):

Whiteboard? Yeah. We were in the conference room at, uh, Penguin's offices. I don't know if they were Penguin Random House yet. I don't

Mike Michalowicz ([40:07](#)):

Think they were.

AJ Harper ([40:09](#)):

Um, and we were in constant, we were just in development mode and you and I walk in and we know like, here's our outline. Here's everything we're doing. We know what we're doing. And he just starts asking us these questions and we don't have the answers.

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Mike Michalowicz ([40:23](#)):

That's right. <laugh>

AJ Harper ([40:25](#)):

We did not have the answers. And he was so dry.

Mike Michalowicz ([40:28](#)):

He was so dry. That's what I loved about Kaushik.

AJ Harper ([40:31](#)):

And he would just ask you this question in this monotone voice. Yep. No emotion.

Mike Michalowicz ([40:36](#)):

Dead stare.

AJ Harper ([40:38](#)):

And it was the kind of question that was like, uh, what now? And then you can't answer. And then two seconds later he'd say, "Yeah, um, can I get your lunch order?" Baby,

Mike Michalowicz ([40:49](#)):

Yeah. I, I re - that's funny. I was about to bring that up. So that, that was the most funny, unique and painful moment because he tore the book apart. We were flow charting it on the whiteboard. Yes. And he, whatever the biting comment was, it was like, "Ooh, he, he's right." And he's like -

AJ Harper ([41:08](#)):

He wasn't a biting comment though. He was just plain, he was just plainly saying, "But, but how can that be if X and Y?" Oh,

Mike Michalowicz ([41:15](#)):

You're right, you're right. It was just a, it was a truthful observation that cut through

AJ Harper ([41:18](#)):

All the fogs. But we felt the pain. Yeah. He was just like, "This doesn't make sense."

Mike Michalowicz ([41:22](#)):

He slice through the fog and then he's like - Yeah. "Do you want a ham and turkey sandwich?" <laugh>

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AJ Harper ([41:28](#)):

It's like, "Dude, you just, you just totally tore us, tore it all apart." Tore the

Mike Michalowicz ([41:32](#)):

New one.

AJ Harper ([41:33](#)):

Yeah. I remember leaving there and the two of us just sort of having like a shell shocked look on our faces in the elevator because we knew we had to, it was a lot of work. And that's the blow up thing. It's gonna be a lot of work.

Mike Michalowicz ([41:48](#)):

In many ways, he was my favorite editor of all time.

AJ Harper ([41:51](#)):

Same. Um,

Mike Michalowicz ([41:52](#)):

There's been a, a few. Page two has been extraordinary. Um, and, and, and perhaps the most engaged. W- was it Brenda? I can't remember her name at the moment.

AJ Harper ([42:02](#)):

Oh gosh. Kendra.

Mike Michalowicz ([42:04](#)):

Kendra, not Brenda. Kendra. Um, the most back and forth dialogue, the most thorough. Cowshack had this special quality of just - He

AJ Harper ([42:13](#)):

Really did.

Mike Michalowicz ([42:15](#)):

Just cutting through all the fog. And you

AJ Harper ([42:16](#)):

Could not, you could, but you couldn't make him laugh.

Mike Michalowicz ([42:19](#)):

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No, and I tried so hard. And you tried. Like I'm smiling once. And I, I have photographic evidence, uh, my arm over shoulder.

AJ Harper ([42:27](#)):

Um - You did, yes. Okay. So then there was Profit First, and this was what you, you blew it up. So when Penguin Random House decided to publish it after it was self-published - Yeah. We did Revised and Expanded, but you blew the heck out of that thing because you, that was a doability issue.

Mike Michalowicz ([42:45](#)):

Yeah, it's interesting. The, the perspectives changed. So when Profit First came out, the original edition, we had, I don't know, 25 case studies. I'm just picking a number, but it was a small minuscule amount when this revised and expanded edition came out. We had over 100,000 people had already consumed the book. We had all these deployments that were out there. And the though I had with the original book was there was a simple implementation and then there was these advanced techniques. But people were getting confused. Like, am I more in the advanced category? Am I more in the basic category? And the advanced was really just another step. So we made it into a homogenous single system that wherever you're entering, you start with the first steps and you end with the final steps. Mm-hmm. We just brought that clarity about. Yeah.

AJ Harper ([43:35](#)):

Simplification.

Mike Michalowicz ([43:35](#)):

It's an extraordinary rewrite. You know, a lot of people do these, uh, revised and expanded editions and they really just add a chapter and they don't do anything else. You and I, it's back down to the studs.

AJ Harper ([43:45](#)):

Studs.

Mike Michalowicz ([43:46](#)):

Yeah. Yeah. Profit first. Profit first was ranking, I remember in the BSRs in the 9000s, sometimes a difference of 8,000 with the first pub - self-public edition. I was like, this is, this is the best of us. And then when we did the revised and expanded, it dropped down to its best performance was consistently in the 800s. Mm-hmm. Um, which is more than 10 times improvement.

AJ Harper ([44:08](#)):

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So see, it's good to blow up the book. It's good to blow up. For, for All In, I think that was mostly you just trying to work out, um, how much you wanted to cover in that book. Yeah. And there, because we had a, it was a, got a really different structure because it's covering so much about teams. Yes. And you had this whole recruit routine something. I can't remember what the Rs were. And then we ditched that and we went through a lot of different structural changes while you were trying to figure that out.

Mike Michalowicz ([44:40](#)):

Yeah. Um, and the last one is The Money Habit, which was interesting. I think you had a revelation. Something that I s - I think I saw but wasn't communicating well, if

AJ Harper ([44:50](#)):

I recall. Well, I did it to myself. We've talked about it on the podcast before. We have had the same reader for all those other books. So then we got a new one <laugh> for the money habit. So we went from having underdog entrepreneurs to people who don't wanna worry about money. People who don't wanna worry about money.

Mike Michalowicz ([45:12](#)):

Yeah.

AJ Harper ([45:13](#)):

That's a big shift because actually most of the people are not entrepreneurs. That's right. Which means they don't have that hunt and gather mentality about money. That's right. They have a fixed income. That's right. And I was going with the hunt and gather and, uh, yeah, that was me. I had to blow that up. I did it to myself.

Mike Michalowicz ([45:36](#)):

So just to put a wrap, uh, a bow around this, this gift we're giving to our listeners is when your book gets blown up, it ain't the end. It sounds like it's the beginning. The beginning of something

AJ Harper ([45:49](#)):

Like that. Oh, nice. See, that was good. You put a really nice bow, pretty bow. <laugh> That was a good bow.

Mike Michalowicz ([45:57](#)):

And, uh, one last question. Wh- when you do this, the publisher, don't they freak out? Like are you

AJ Harper ([46:01](#)):

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Crazy? No, they're all, they're gonna support you because they want the better book.

Mike Michalowicz ([46:05](#)):

They want the better book.

AJ Harper ([46:06](#)):

They want the better book.

Mike Michalowicz ([46:07](#)):

Yeah. But please communicate with your publisher. Um, any stuff you got going on with ajharper.com? Anything you want our listeners to do, uh,

AJ Harper ([46:16](#)):

Participating? I think this airs right before our writing sprint marathon. Yeah. So we mentioned that already. Um, definitely go check out my Substack. I'd love for you to do that. I, it took me a while to get, I, I tried to launch it last year, but I just didn't have the time. And, um, so now we're cooking. So go over there and, um, check it out.

Mike Michalowicz ([46:35](#)):

It's ajharper.com is the site to go to, right?

AJ Harper ([46:38](#)):

Well, right. But also, I'm on Substack. Yeah. So you have to go to Substack for that. Okay. It's called A.J. Harper on Craft.

Mike Michalowicz ([46:48](#)):

Oh, I love it. Ajharperoncraft@Substack. Next week, we have an episode that was submitted from Lindsay, uh, a listener of ours, as a topic. It's when to give away free copies of your book. Is that prudent at all? And I would say, yes. And I'll share some of the stuff that I've done.

AJ Harper ([47:07](#)):

Okay.

Mike Michalowicz ([47:07](#)):

Um, please go to dwtbpodcast.com to get all the free content that we have available for you. Email us at hello@dwtbpodcast.com and, uh, ask us any questions you have and give us topics you wanna hear about. If you're interested in the imprint that I'm doing with Page two, it's called Simplified. Just mention that in the subject and we'll give you some more details on that.

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