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BOOK MARKETING: How to Be An Authorpreneur Extraordinaire Interview with Mikki Williams

Susan : Welcome to Book Marketing Mentors, the weekly podcast where you learn proven strategies, tools, ideas, and tips from the masters. Every week I introduce you to a marketing master who will share their expertise to help you market and sell more books. Today, my special guest mentor of the week is entrepreneur extraordinaire, Mikki Williams. She's a speaker, trainer, consultant, coach, author, radio and TV personality, and a woman with super huge heart who I'm honored to call a friend.

Mikki Williams, CSP, CPAE, Hall of Fame Speaker, and TEDx Speaker, was chosen as one of the best speakers in the country by Meetings and Convention Magazine along with Tony Robbins, Bill Gates, Rudy Giuliani, Lou Holtz, Zig Ziglar and Jay Leno. She's the creator of Speaker School, the Original Keynote Kamp, and the Mikki Mouth Club. She's an award-winning speaker for Vistage International, the world's leading executive organization and a master chair of two of their peer advisory boards in Chicago. She's a global celebrity speaker and highly sought-after executive speech coach. Mikki has spoken in every US state, every Canadian province, and on every continent except Antarctica, where she can't wear her stilettos. I'm excited to welcome my dear friend and colleague to the show.

Mikki, thank you for being this week's guest expert and mentor.

Mikki: Susan, what an honor and what a pleasure to be in your company at any time.

Susan : Mikki, you certainly know what it takes to be an entrepreneur. Your mantra, "Be outrageous, it's the only place that isn't crowded," has served you really well. What advice would you offer our listeners as they begin their exciting journey into entrepreneurship?

Mikki: It's a great question Susan, because I like to say I'm an accidental brand. I was a brand before they had a term for it, and I just paid attention. My tip is this little phrase of "Pay attention." Pay attention to how people remember you, how they remember your book, what you're known for, what you look like, what you say. I just heard that word used around me so much that I actually exploited it, and exploiting it became a brand. If you say "outrageous" as you know, in the speaking industry I'm sure everybody would think of me. I think for most of your

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listeners it would be the same type of thing. Pay attention to what makes you stand out in the marketplace that you're serving.

Susan : You picked this "outrageous" brand, but how did that actually come about?

Mikki: I actually didn't pick it. I just paid attention to what people were saying about me. They refer to me as the speaker, "She's outrageous, she's flamboyant, she's glamour," and all this, and I just kept hearing it in so many different venues in so many different ways, that's where the mantra evolved from and hence the brand as well. I just kept using it and making it my own. That's really the nugget that's right in there about, how do authors and entrepreneurs stand out in a very crowded marketplace? Find what's so unique about you.

Susan : It certainly takes courage, because you really are unique in terms of your hair, your jewelry, everything about you. The shoes, your clothing. As you say, if somebody says "outrageous", they think of you. You've got no fear when it comes to that, and I really admire that.

Mikki: I appreciate that. I was working this week and I'm producing a one-woman show, something I've always wanted to do, and I took a workshop this weekend and that actually came up. The instructor gave me a big compliment, compared to the other people in the class she said, "You're absolutely fearless," and I guess in some ways I am. I'm just willing to take a risk. I think if you're an entrepreneur, that's just one of the characteristics of an entrepreneur. I'm a nine-time entrepreneur and I think what's embedded in that is the inherent ability to take risks and step into your discomfort zone.

Susan : Mikki, one of your true successes is using that extensive good, bad, and ugly life experiences to coach others. What advice would you offer our authors who want to add coaching to build their author platform?

Mikki: I think it's a wonderful idea, although I'd personally encourage them to speak before I'd even encourage them to coach. I believe everyone should speak, not to become professional speakers as we are so much Susan, but it is the best way to promote a book or any other product or service that one can have. I would say that's the first add-on, and then certainly coaching would be a great segue into coaching other authors, but they serve different purposes. One is an added value or income stream, the coaching, and speaking could be as well, but I look at that more as the marketing and promotional side of it for authors who really just want to write.

Susan : You run a successful speaker's school. What are some of the basic principles for authors so that they can take their message and become a dynamic speaker?

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Mikki: That's a really great question Susan, because a lot of the people come through my speaker schools are authors who realize they need to speak. The biggest "aha", and you know this as well, it's like trying to take a speech and just transcribe it to make a great book. We know a lot of speakers do that. I don't know if that's, in my estimation, the ideal way to do it. I certainly feel the other way around, that you just can't take a book and verbalize it as it is, because they're two different mediums. One people are reading, and one people are using your eyes for, and the other one using your ears for. I think the biggest thing that people get out when they take Speaker's School, especially authors, is realizing the different platforms that they are and how to use one to promote the other, how to take those nuggets out of the books and turn them into real-life stories or something that people will enjoy listening to.

A perfect example is, I listen to many speakers through my Vestige groups as well as going to NSA, Susan. I'm always amazed, I'll say, "How do you want me to introduce you?" They'll say, "Read my bio." I'll say, "No, your bio is meant to be read. It's not meant to be said out loud." They say, "What's the difference?" Again, this is my bias. I believe there's a distinct difference between a bio and an introduction to someone before they speak. I believe the introduction has to have some entertainment value, some self-effacing humor. It has to humanize you, and people are listening to it, so reading a bio is part of my handout. Giving someone an introduction that someone's going to read out loud has to be a little more entertaining. I think that's something they need to remember.

Susan : Especially, when I just introduced you and talked about the fact that you can't wear your stilettos in Antarctica, that's hilarious and it is, because I know that you love to wear stiletto heels and outrageous shoes. They don't quite fit in Antarctica. I don't think those penguins go for them.

Mikki: They don't. A perfect example, one of the lines in my introduction is, "She's lunched in the Israeli desert, shopped in Singapore, pet the kangaroos in Australia," and I use that as an example when I'm teaching people in Speaker's School, I ask, "Can you tell the difference between that or someone saying, "She's spoken in Israel, Singapore, and Australia." One is just very boring. The other one is a mini-story, and I am so all about the stories. That's what I'm focusing more than anything, and especially trying to tell people who are authors to take those stories and turn them into speeches, to tell people who are doing marketing and sales to do it in the form of stories. Done a lot of research in this field and it's my lead topic right now.

Susan : Tell us more about that storytelling. I know I've attended several of your sessions where you talk about storytelling, but what are some tips when it comes to putting stories together?

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Mikki: There are so many aspects of a great story. One of the things I always say, Susan, if I can quote myself because I love to quote myself, is that people will take a story and just say things like, "My brother went to the park," and it's so boring. You need to make stories come alive by saying, "My brother John, who was about six foot six and he worked out all the time, and when he stood next to me I felt like a small little plant." It's colorizing your story. It's giving it texture by giving it names, giving it descriptions of places, by actually touching the senses so that we can see, hear, feel, smell as you're telling the story. I think that's a huge part of being a great storyteller.

My quote of myself is that people can talk, so they think they can speak. Well, that's not true, and you know that. Speaking is a craft and an art form, and storytelling is as well. We're all wired for stories, we're all natural storytellers, but to be really good at it I believe you have to study the craft of storytelling.

Susan : Very much so, and I've heard that over and over again. As you said, how can you really bring it to life and add that color, all the emotions that go into storytelling? When you teach this in your Speaker's School, how do you go about teaching that?

Mikki: Well, I draw first what it looks like. If you know anything about the, or any of your listeners know about the hero's journey, they may have heard of that before, or the antagonist and the protagonist. You start a story by introducing yourself with the character who's the protagonist. People are going along with you because there's interest, and they don't know why, but if you're telling it well they're with you the whole way. Then all of a sudden you have the peak of that arc, and that's the event. Something changes in the story, the whole dynamic that you didn't expect, and as a result of that comes your "aha" or your take-away or how it applies to you.

A good storyteller knows how to create that curve, that arc that takes people along that journey, and that life event comes as somewhat of a surprise, and then at the end of it is, "Now what do I do with that?" It is all about them. It's always about the reader, it's always about the listener.

Susan : It's interesting, because I remember always saying, "I don't have any stories." Do you ever hear that one?

Mikki: Oh my goodness, every single person who comes to Speaker's School practically. I have a form that I give out which triggers people's minds when it comes to stories, and I also teach them how to keyword their stories. If I said to you, Susan, what is your favorite vacation you've ever taken? Where was it?

Susan : Probably a safari.

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Mikki: Pretend you're in my Speaker's School and I've asked you that question and then I say to you, "Susan, could you tell everybody about the safari right now?" You would probably say ... ?

Susan : Absolutely. I'm visualizing it as you're talking.

Mikki: Right. You probably don't know if it has a message in it, but most stories do. It helps to have a professional like me or like you to help someone craft and cull the messages that come out of the stories, but everything in our lives, our family, the day we were born, every single day when we go to the store, everything's a story. People are just not ... Even though we're wired for it, sometimes people just don't think, and when they say, "I have no story."

My sheet that I give people has topics. It says "Travel", it says "Family", it says "Education", it says "Religion", it says "Funniest", "Most Poignant", "Outrageous", things that trigger, and all the sudden when people are reading these keywords, all the sudden the stories just flow. "Oh, right, I remember when my brother at Christmas when I was five years old ... " "Oh, I remember the trip we took to South Africa." The stories just come, and they come, and they come. Then I teach them how to create a story journal so you keep collecting them on a daily basis.

Susan : Then how about the point the story makes? How do you teach people to find that point within the story?

Mikki: For some people it's very natural, and for some they have to be trained or taught or learn it. It really depends on how astute you are at culling that. Authors have some gifts that speakers don't have and vice-versa, and sometimes even in the course of Speaker's School or if I'm doing a one-on-one coaching session with someone, or the ideal scenario is Keynote Camp. My Keynote Camp is a two-day intensive where I work one-on-one with somebody to design their whole speech. Basically what I'm doing on day one is asking a lot of questions and gathering info on these stories, because if I say to someone, "Tell me a story, and what's the point?" First of all they'll have a hard time coming up with a story and they'll totally freeze when I'll say, "What's the point?"

I do it in a very conversational way and I'm gathering all their stories, and also they've hired me because it's a speech on leadership or it's a speech on crafting their first job, or whatever it is. I listen for that, and that's where I pull the stories from, and that's where I pull the messages.

I give you a perfect example. I had a gentleman from Philadelphia who came to

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my Florida home to do Keynote Camp. He had a choice of Chicago in the winter or Florida. Smart man. We worked that first day and he was like, "I have no stories. I can't think of anything. I have to write it out." All of this, and things that just goes against me when I coach someone. Finally I said, "Steve, let's go to lunch."

We go to lunch, and he had hired me in the Keynote Camp to create a speech on leadership that he was going to give to his entire company, and he wanted everybody at every level to take ownership of being a leader, from the managers and all the way up. The essence of the whole situation with him was I said, "What was the highlight of your year last year?" He said, "Oh, that's easy. I was at the Boston Marathon when they had the bombing." "Really, Steve? Tell me about that?" He told me the whole story and I said, "That's your speech." He said, "What's my speech?" I said, "The Boston Marathon. That's your whole speech." He said, "I don't get it."

I said, "Steve, you told me about this person who took charge as soon as the bomb went off. You told me about this other person." I said, "We will make and find all the points of the Boston Marathon story which you know because you lived, we'll infuse it with some leadership quotes and some leadership metaphors or analogies, and that's what you'll talk on. You won't have to write it out, because you've lived it." It was the best speech he ever gave in his life.

Susan : That's fantastic. As you said, it's just being prompted and to talk to people about certain things that all of a sudden these stories come up and you're like, "Oh yes, I do have these stories." What are some of the biggest mistakes you see entrepreneurs or solopreneurs make?

Mikki: Just by being a solopreneur. I've always been ... Well, some businesses not so, but for the last thirty years as a professional speaker and a coach, very much a solopreneur, but I have a vast network and I think that's very important. I like to say that I could probably reach anybody I wanted to reach just from leveraging my network. There's not a topic or an idea or a service that I need that I can't leverage that network. Sometimes I feel like I work in the biggest corporation, MM&I, Me Myself & I, and I can tap all that. I would say get out there and make friends and leverage them, and leverage the LinkedIns and all the different networks, the social ones you belong to, your professional ones. I think that's a tremendous thing, especially if you work by yourself or you're isolated in some way. That's one of the biggest advantages for me.

Susan : What other things come to mind as you think about mistakes that you see that your Speaker's School participants make?

Mikki: One of the other things I'm a really big advocate is, it's like preaching to the

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choir with some of your audience, is I'm a voracious reader. I read a lot on topics that I either speak on or that I know, because I'm looking for new ways to look at things or I'm looking to learn new things. I'm a lifelong learner, and my experience some people stop that at certain points. I always used to say Baryshnikov continued to take class even when he was the number one dancer in the world. That's the way I feel, and I feel sometimes people stay too narrow in their niche and don't either read or attend things where they can broaden their scope of experiences, which would help in writing and marketing and business and all of that.

You know the other big thing that I've always said, and I've run a lot of different businesses. I started as a dancer. I think you knew that, but I wasn't a dancer running a business, I was a businessperson running a dance school. Hence, it became nationwide. It's the same thing with speaking. I know you hear this, Susan, with authors and with speakers, "Well, I just want to speak. I don't want to do any of the marketing or sales or that business stuff." Again, I'm not a speaker, I'm a businessperson who speaks. I'm a businessperson who coaches, and I'm sure you feel that way. I think that's a huge mistake a lot of people make. My attitude is you either learn it, you hire it, or you delegate it. Those are your only three choices, but "ignore it" is not one of them.

Susan : That's so important, because you're absolutely right. It's all about the business side of it that you are a businessperson. This whole idea of being scared about marketing or selling, I hear that so, so often. The writers say, "I just want to write. That's what I'm good at. Let somebody else do the rest."

Mikki: As I said, you either learn it, delegate it, or hire it, but "ignore it" is not one of those choices. You find that a lot in artistic fields like writers, like speakers, like dancers. The more creative they are, the more the people, in my experience, want to stay with the part that they love, the creative part, and look at the other part as the parts that they don't like.

Nowadays, like I said, especially with authors who are writing stories in the context of whatever their book's about, facts tell, stories sell. Take some of your stories and that becomes your marketing. That becomes your sales. Part of my big audience nowadays is training salespeople on how to tell the stories of the company and the product and service instead of dumping data on everybody. If you have data, I respect that, but you've got to cushion it in a story so it becomes more palatable. I don't think authors or speakers or coaches are very different in that regard, Susan.

Susan : As you've grown all these different businesses, what's maybe one of the toughest lessons you had to learn in this growth process?

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- Mikki: Part of it is, and I think we touched on it a little bit, that even though you're alone, you shouldn't be. I always hire an assistant from the day I started, and I listen to people all the time saying, "I can't afford it, I can't afford it," and I don't buy that, because you have to look at your own talent and creativity. "Should I be filing things or should I be cleaning this, or should I be creating?" It was early on when we had data entry and I'm standing there doing data entry, and then one day I'm thinking, "Really? Is this the best use of my time?" I think one of the mistakes people make early on is saying, "I can't afford to have an assistant." I don't think you can not afford to have an assistant, no matter when or where you are in the process, so you can clearly delineate what your talents are and what you should be doing, because that'll expedite your success. I totally believe that, and I don't have a lot of patience, so I don't want to take years to reach whatever I want to reach.
- Susan : Unfortunately I was one of those people who said, "I can't afford it," and I ended up doing everything myself. As you know, you don't get very far doing things that you shouldn't be doing.
- Mikki: No. You slow down your own progress and your own success. Everybody will get there organically, but to get there exponentially you have to realize what you're good at.
- Susan : What's the best way for our listeners to contact you if they want more information?
- Mikki: You can go to Mikkiwilliams.com. If it doesn't scare you, that's good, and you know what I mean, Susan. Although I am redoing it right now which is kind of exciting, because I haven't redone it in about twenty-five years. Why? Because I liked it. Either at my website, and you could email me right from there, or simply my email: Mikki@Mikkiwilliams.com. I'm easy to reach and I'm on Facebook and I'm on LinkedIn. I'm out there. Twitter.
- Susan : You certainly are. If you could leave our listeners with a golden nugget of information, what would that be?
- Mikki: Figure out what makes you unique and then exploit the heck out of it, because it's a very crowded marketplace out there for speakers, for authors, for coaches. Find your USP, your Unique Selling Proposition, and then exploit the heck out of it.
- Susan : That goes back to your mantra, "Be outrageous, it's the only place that isn't crowded." I love that.
- Mikki: [crosstalk 00:21:51] the advice too, find your outrageous. Find your freaky. Find

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whatever you want to call it, but everybody's got it in them; it just looks different for different people.

Susan : Thank you Mikki for sharing your expertise and thank you all for taking precious time out of your day to listen to this interview. I sincerely hope that it sparks some ideas you can use to sell more books. Here's wishing you much book marketing success.