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BOOK MARKETING: How to Spend More Time Doing Work That Matters Interview with Michael Bungay Stanier

Susan Friedmann: 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 is a coaching and creativity superstar. Michael Bungay Stanier is the senior partner and founder of Box of Crayons. On the way to founding Box of Crayons in 2002, Michael lived in Australia, England, the United States and Canada, which is now his home. He's written two books, the Wall Street Journal best seller "The Coaching Habit" and "Do More Great Work."

To balance all this out Michael was banned from his high school graduation for the balloon incident, was sued by one of his law school lecturers for defamation, and managed to give himself a concussion while digging a hole as a laborer. Whoa, we've got to talk about some of that.

Michael : Right.

Susan Friedmann: He was the first Canadian coach of the year as a Rhodes Scholar and in 2016 was recognized as the number two coaching guru in the world. Michael, it is a true pleasure to welcome and thank you for being this week's guest expert and mentor.

Michael : Hey, I'm very happy to be here so thanks for having me along, Susan.

Susan Friedmann: Michael, I can't leave our listeners hanging without asking you about that balloon incident so tell us more.

Michael : You know, honestly it's an okay story. The summary being we wanted to cause a bit of chaos and havoc on our last day of high school. The headmaster was not at all keen on that, it was his last day of high school as well. He was retiring after 35 years so there were security guards, we were banned from doing anything. A friend and I went in a chapel because we were in a Christian school and filled the conical roof of the

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chapel with a whole bunch of balloons because we thought that was pretty fun but innocuous and cause no damage. They didn't see it the same way as we did so hence getting banned from the graduation ceremony at high school.

Susan Friedmann: That's wonderful, I can just visualize that. Let's start talking about some of the concepts in your best selling book, "Do More Great Work." You talk about a simple model of turning good work into great work. Can you tell our listeners how they can benefit from this wise strategy.

Michael : The simple model that's at the heart of "Do More Great Work" is that everything you do falls into one of three different buckets. It's either bad work, good work or great work. Bad work, you could put it down to kind of mind numbing, soul sucking, life crushing, waste of time work, the stuff that makes you go, "This is my life and I'm doing this, what happened here?" Good work is best described as your job description or business as usual. It's getting things done, it's keeping things moving. It's perfectly okay but you feel a little bit stuck in a comfortable rut.

Whereas great work is the work that has more impact and the work that has more meaning. It has both sides to it, both the external this makes a difference but also the internal, this is what I care about, this is what I light up about. When you're in the conversation about book marketing it just might be useful to think about how could this model frame what you do and how you do it. Here's what I think is the challenge of book marketing. First of all, your publishers are terrible at it. Many of you will be self-publishing and I self-published my last book. Some of you will have your own publisher and many of you will have Susan as your publisher. Of course, Susan's probably brilliant at the marketing stuff but traditional publishers are terrible at it.

One of the things that I think is useful for every author to go is to go, "You know what? It's almost killed me to write this book but actually if this book is going to succeed in a way of out in the market, if you care about that, I've got to get a handle on the marketing. I've got to take responsibility for that." Then you face this daunting task which is there's an endless amount of time and money you can invest into marketing. What's actually going to work? It's impossible to do it all. You can have a budget of a million bucks and you still are going to struggle to get it all done.

You've got to be thoughtful, you've got to be particular, you've got to try stuff out. You've got to go with the stuff that you care about and

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that you think's going to make the difference. In some ways that bad, good, and great work model could be applied to go, how do you choose what to do? I have a really strong opinion on this, I think that one of the thing that many authors fall for is trying to do 16 things a little bit rather than doing five things really, really well. We're trying to do, "I want to do three podcast interviews, I want to do a couple of radio interviews if I'm lucky, I want to write a guest post. Surely that's enough because quite frankly I'm exhausted having got my book out into the world."

I think it's like pick two or three tactics that feel like they're going to make a difference and that you care about and play to your strengths and then really do them. Here's an example, "The Coaching Habit." This book came out on February 29, 2016. My goal with my team was to do two podcasts per week, every week since then. What's that, 14, 15 months? What's that, 90 weeks? What's that, 180 podcasts? I've done a lot of podcasts because for me this plays to one of my strengths and I enjoy doing it. I think it's one of my key marketing strategies. Susan, that's an enormously long answer. People have probably forgotten the question but where do you want to go from here.?

Susan Friedmann: First of all, I'm sending you big hugs because you're saying all the right things as far as I'm concerned with regard to the marketing. You're absolutely right, people get scattered like spaghetti or confetti is the word that I wanted to say.

Michael : What spaghetti? If you're clumsy with spaghetti you may be scattered like spaghetti as well.

Susan Friedmann: Exactly. We get stuck. We get stuck in these vicious cycles and you talk about that in your book as well. Talk to us more about those vicious cycles that we get stuck in.

Michael : Well, "The Coaching Habit" is written for people who want to be more coach-like with all the people they work with. It's written in part with managers in mind but it's really if you interact with other human beings you're going to find this book useful. The three vicious circles you talk about are number one, an over-dependent team. This is like somehow the more I'm due for advice the more you give them advice. The more you give them advice the more they come to you for advice. In the end they become completely disempowered and you become completely overwhelmed by that particular dynamic.

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The second vicious circle is just being overwhelmed. The more you try and do the more you lose your focus. The more you lose your focus the more you try and do. The more you try and do the more you lose your focus and so it goes. You get that sense that I bet lots of people are feeling right now, "I've got too many emails, I've got too many commitments on my calendar, I've got too many responsibilities. I'm never going to get on top of it all. Even though I carry my gadget around with me every hour I still don't get on top of it."

Then the third one, kind of connecting back to the bad work, good work, great work that we've already talked about, is to feel disconnected. You feel disconnected from the work that matters. You're the kind of, the less impact you have you more you kind of give up. The more you give up the less impact you have, and that vicious circle and spirals like that. My experience is that everybody's got one of those at least and they go, "Oh my goodness, I totally get that one." For many of us actually all three of those have a degree of resonance to them.

Susan Friedmann: Very much so. I wanted you to speak more about the overwhelm because we live in this age of overwhelm. There's so much information out there and as you said earlier people get very scattered with what they do and then they feel that they're not doing enough. You do, you sort of get into this vicious cycle of overwhelm. How do we get out of that?

Michael : That's a great question. Here's what lies at the heart of getting beyond overwhelm, two parts. The first is, know what you're trying to achieve. The second part is say no to all the stuff that doesn't contribute to knowing what you want to achieve. Now, easy to say, hard to do. In the context of this conversation about book marketing what are you trying to achieve with your book? It's not going to be a New York Times best seller or a Wall Street Journal best seller. You're not going to get on a list unless you're willing to fork out 200 grand to one of those people who'll get you onto the list. It's almost certainly not going to get onto the list.

It's a bit like trying to get onto Oprah 10 years ago, it's like, probably not going to happen. As they say, hope is not a strategy. You may not want to set yourself up for some unrealistic goal like that. You may go, "I'm trying to sell X thousand copies of my book." Even more subtly and I think sometimes more powerfully is to articulate the process that you're committed to rather than the outcome. Susan, you're the expert here so you may be able to help us all but I find it nearly impossible to guess

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how many books you're going to sell. Now, "The Coaching Habit" has been an amazing success for me, sold about 200,000 copies since we launched it 14 months ago. Honestly, that's probably at least 190,000 copies more than I was expecting.

I just don't know how people guess how many copies are going to be sold. I don't think even traditional publishers know, that's why they give these random advances out because they're like, "I was guessing." Rather than setting the outcome as something you want you may go, "what's the processes that I'm committed to." Is it guest blog posting? Is it find hubs of people who can champion your book? Is it appearing on podcasts? Is it a campaign to get people to write Amazon reviews for you? Is it something else? Then going, "Okay, if I've got these two or three or maybe four strategies what am I going to do now and what am I going to say no to that allows me to truly focus on that?"

Susan Friedmann: I'm sure our listeners are itching to know and I am too, 200,000 copies, how did you do it? What was your process to market those books?

Michael : The most complete answer I can give you is to actually reference an article I wrote. About four weeks ago so maybe some time in April on a website called Growth Lab. It's run by a guy called Ramit Sethi who by the way is a fantastic online marketer. He's one of those people you should just sign up for his list just so you see how he does what he does. This is an aside Susan but I'd encourage, if you're interested in marketing, you should be on the mailing list of everybody who you think does an interesting job marketing to people online. I'm on the mailing list of Brendon Burchard, Ramit Sethi, Michael Hyatt, in part because I'm kind of interested in the content, although not always. I'm always interested in how they're marketing and seeing what I can steal, and adapt, and learn from that.

Anyway, I read a book, I think it was called "How I Sold 180,000 copies of My Book", it's on Growth Lab. It's really comprehensive, it's like 8,000 words so I really put down all the tactics that worked and a bunch of tactics I tried that didn't work. I really shared all I can there. If you're interested that could be a useful resource. If you like it share it with your other authors and pass it along. Some of the things that have worked for me, I'll tell you a couple of things that really mattered. One I've already talked about which is trying to figure out what success meant. What was I looking for for success?

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One of the things that became clear to me was that I wanted my book "The Coaching Habit" to be considered a coaching classic. In other words, when somebody said, "Hey, do you have a good book on coaching?" I wanted my book to be one of the three books that could get mentioned. Here's why that was really helpful for me, Susan. It got me over the launch anxiety. We all have this thing around, "Oh, it's my launch date. I've got invest my entire ... I've got to open my wrist and bleed into the ground to make my launch thing happen."

Most launches are a little anti-climatic and a little disappointing. The danger is it's like you've invested everything into the launch. You collapse exhausted at the end of your week's campaign. The book has a little surge and then it starts dropping down Amazon or however you measure sales. You're like, "I'm so done with this book now," that you kind of give up on it. One of the critical things, mindsets for me is going, "I'm going to market this book for three years and persistence is going to trump a whole lot of sound and fury signifying in that first launch week. I want the launch to be good, I did a bunch of things to try and get people to pay attention to it." The bigger win is to be still talking about, and marketing, and banging the drum on the book 14 months later.

That's been a really key plank in the strategy was actually a mindset rather than an actual tactic.

Susan Friedmann: What else did you do that is something simple that our listeners can put into practice once they finish listening to this incredible interview?

Michael : Here's what I see happen in a lot of traditional book publicity. Your publicist, if you have a PR person. Honestly, I think hiring a PR person is an utter waste of time almost always. If not your PR person then your publisher. If you're a traditional publisher they've gone, "Okay, we're doing some little launch for you." They just have a list of people and they send out a whole bunch of books to those people hoping that somebody pays attention, then they put out a press release. "Michael Bungay Stanier has a new book out, it's a book about coaching. It's fantastic. If you like books about coaching you'll like this book."

First of all, that's a terrible press release because nobody cares. Honestly, nobody cares that you've got a new book coming out. Your mother does, your spouse is now pretending that he or she cares, your kids don't care, nobody cares. You've got to find a way of making it news. You've got to find a way of it being a story. First of all, if you're

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going to put out news about your book find the story that somebody can tell because your book coming out is not a story and it's not news. Secondly, be really selective about who you send your book out to. Here's what I did. I thought about the authors who I loved who targeted a similar audience that I did, it was just typically busy managers, and whose books had been successful, who'd got press and had been written about.

One of the first people who came to mind for me was a guy called Dan Pink. Dan Pink's written a number of really great books. My favorite of his is probably called "Drive" which is about the truth about human motivation, what really makes people motivated? How do you get people engaged? It's like really sweet spot between that and coaching skills for busy managers which is what the book is focused on in part. Here's what I did. I hired a researcher, I went on to Google.com and put out a little brief and I said, "I'd like somebody to do this research for me." Her job was to find the top 50 ranked articles written about Dan Pink's book "Drive" and to find the name of the journalist who'd written that article and his or her email. If not her email, their Twitter handle.

After a couple of weeks of somebody doing this research, it didn't cost a whole lot of money, it was less than 100 bucks to come up with that list, we now had a targeted list of people to approach. We wrote to each one of them individually by email and said, "Hey Bob, I loved the article you wrote on Dan Pink's book, blah, blah, blah, and it was in, let's say, Fortune Magazine. This new book is a brilliant supplement to that. Dan Pink actually says it's ..." Dan had written a nice blurb for me about it so he's like, "Dan Pink says blah, blah, blah. Would you be interested in getting a copy of this?"

More than 50% of people said yes and more than 50% of those people ended up writing articles about the book for us. It was a much more targeted outreach to writers, and bloggers, and podcasters. It was successful not only because it was targeted but because we were just really persistent. We would follow-up and then we'd follow-up, and then we'd follow-up. We'd say, "Hey, have you read it yet? Hey, do you want to write something? Hey, have you read it yet? Hey, do you want to write something? Hey, have you read it yet? Hey, do you want to write something?"

For instance, I get sent books fairly regularly by publishers and that's it. They never follow-up, they never ask if I've read it, they never ask if I'm going to do a podcast, they never ask anything about it. They're like,

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"That's it, my work is done. I sent a package." The package is easy. The persistent following up, that's the tricky thing. Just as an aside, one of the things that's in that long article that I told you about, I actually share ... You can download the scripts I use to actually reach out to the various people so you could take that and adapt it, and adjust it to make it work for you.

Susan Friedmann: That's brilliant, absolutely brilliant. Did I cut you off?

Michael : No, no. You saved everybody from me monologuing so save us all, Susan.

Susan Friedmann: No, I'm definitely going to put that article up, put a link to that article in the show notes.

Michael : Brilliant, yeah.

Susan Friedmann: That'll be very helpful for our listeners. Thank you, I love that strategy, it's the first time I've heard it. I've been doing marketing for many, many years and I love this strategy, I'm going to use it.

Michael : Cool. Hey, let me give you one other tactic or one point of view around stuff, Susan, just to round out what I've said so far. It's the who do you get to write a blurb for your book because lots of us chase famous people to write the nice blurb. "Look at these famous authors and they've all said my book is awesome." Here's what I've learned, almost nobody cares about blurbs, almost nobody. I think it can be a bit of fake marketing to go, "Look, I've collected 20 blurbs about why my book is amazing. Your readers really don't need 20 blurbs, get two or get three. Get the three very best you can and then go, "Brilliant, my blurbing is done, now I'm going to think about how to get this book into people's hands who are influencers."

Susan Friedmann: When you say blurb are you referring to testimonials for the book or reviews?

Michael : Yeah, exactly, the stuff you'd see on the inside cover, on the inside pages of a front cover. "Brilliant, insightful, I love this book, I've given it to my friends," says Bob Smith of something or other company or whatever it might be.

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Susan Friedmann: I've always loved to talk about mistakes, common mistakes that you see people make in this environment. What are some that you could share with us?

Michael : Here's one possibility. We all make mistakes all the time but you know the saying, Susan, the best time to plant an oak tree or an acorn that will grow into an oak tree was 20 years ago. The second best time is today. I think that's the way to think about your book marketing, which is as you stare at that blank sheet of paper that is going to become your book now is the time you start thinking about the marketing of it. The more you can build the marketing-ness into your book the more robust your marketing will be. Rather than going, "Hey, I've finally got across the line, I've finished my book. It's in copy editing, it's brilliant." All right, now how am I going to market this?

Like I say, if you haven't done it before start today but start as soon as you can. As a tactic that I used in "Do More Great Work" I reached out to five or six people and I asked them to write guest columns for the book. Some of these people who are still famous like a Seth Godin or a Michael Port, Chris Gillibeau was one of them, [inaudible 00:20:22] was another of them. I could have went, who are people who have a big platform who I can feature so they're stars in their own right, they get to appear in a book which is great for them but who might then go, "Hey Michael. I might mention this book to my tribe when the book comes out." It means that when I put the book up on Amazon I go, "Michael Bungay Sanier with guest contributions from Seth Golden and Michael Port and Chris Gillibeau."

So that when people look up Seth Godinn on Amazon my book actually appears shortly after all of Seth Godin's books actually appears. That's one of the ways I baked marketing into the structure and the design and the thinking of "Do More Great Work" even as I was creating it. The sooner you think about marketing, the sooner you think about who you're writing this for, the sooner you think about how will this hook them. One of the things that happens in "The Coaching Habit" is there's all sorts of encouragement to go and actually check out very practical, very useful videos that are on my book site, thecoachinghabit.com. That's deliberate there because I want to be of service, I want to give people additional information. I also want them to get onto my website and to get onto my mailing list so that I can start building a relationship with them and engage them like that.

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Baking in the marketing so that you're truly in service to the person who's reading your book can be a really powerful thing to do. I think it's a common mistake that people don't start doing that early enough.

Susan Friedmann: You mentioned all these famous people. Are these people who you knew before or are they people who you established a relationship as a result of writing the book?

Michael : It's a combination of those things. What's a great insight that Susan's just kind of sharing with you is, you figure out who you want to build relationships with and build them now before you have to ask them for a favor. Seth Godin wrote something for me, I'd been emailing him back and forth for two or three years before I asked him to do that. [inaudible 00:22:25], I had him onto my podcast twice before I asked him to do that for me. I'd help them and I found a way to contribute to them. One core insight is that most so called famous people are far more accessible than you might think. It's like look up their email, send them a note, send them another note. Follow-up with that note again, re-send that note. You'll either get a no, go away or you won't hear from them at all. Often enough they're like, "Okay, how can I help? What would you like from me?"

Obviously, the more you can build that relationship beforehand the less transparent and transactional that it feels. Nobody wants to feel like you're just writing to me because I'm famous.

Susan Friedmann: That's interesting. Seth Godin's very approachable and he actually wrote a testimonial for my "Riches In Niches" book. I was blown away.

Michael : Right, it's awesome isn't it?

Susan Friedmann: Yes, it really is. It's fantastic so thank you. How can our listeners find out more about your services?

Michael : Well, we have a very niche company. What we do is we typically offer training to managers, busy managers and leaders in bigish organizations typically so that they can coach in 10 minutes or less. Our website is boxofcrayons.biz. There's all sorts of information there. What might be most interesting for people listening right now is actually thecoachinghabit.com website because that's where you'll find information about the book. It's probably just worth checking out from a marketing point of view. What do you see working on that website

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that is compelling or interesting or that you can use, adapt, steal, work for yourself, for your book, and for your book's website?

There's a ton of free videos, some download reports, the first one or two or three chapters you can download. There's a bunch of free resources there as well so please help yourself to that if you'd be interested.

Susan Friedmann: I will highly recommend that our listeners go to the website, I absolutely love the videos where you're asking people what their favorite question is. I thought that was priceless. I believe everybody should invest in your books because there's so much great information in there that I believe you can adapt to any environment. Go ahead listeners, buy Michael's book. I will put a link to all of those in the show notes as well. Michael, if you could leave our listeners with a golden nugget what would that be?

Michael : I think the ongoing mantra for me is get good at saying no to a bunch of stuff and then say yes to a few things that really matter. That matters if you're writing, if you're working in life, in book marketing. It's like have the courage to focus, have the courage to say no so that your yeses really land with clarity and power and determination.

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