



Episode 18

Michael Port



Michael Port runs the Book Yourself Solid Mentoring Program and The Book Yourself Solid School of Training, which certifies consultants in the Book Yourself Solid methodology. Currently, he is developing marketing and productivity software programs based on the ideas and strategies in his books. He considers his most significant accomplishment and responsibility to be a devoted parent, son, friend, and citizen.

Voiceover *This is Business Reimagined. Every week we talk with thought leaders and revolutionaries who are bringing innovation to their industries, like today's guest, Michael Port.*

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This is Business Reimagined with Danny Iny.

DANNY Michael Port is the author of multiple bestselling books, including the smash hit, "Book Yourself Solid," and his new book, "Steal the Show." Michael is also a marketer, an entrepreneur and a coach, but he began his career as an actor starring in shows like, "Sex in the City," and several other TV series and movies, but he quickly realized that the actor's life wasn't for him.

MICHAEL I wanted what I wanted when I wanted, and part of the life of an actor, unless you just hit it really early, really lucky, is a lot of waiting. You don't know exactly when the big roles are going to come and even if



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big roles come, they can also go and then you're back waiting again. My personality didn't really like that. I'm not sure I'm suited for that kind of waiting.

DANNY So Michael left acting and went into the business side of the fitness industry where he did quite well, but it still wasn't what he wanted to do, so Michael shifted his focus again, this time to consulting, and wrote the wildly popular, "Book Yourself Solid," and several other books after that. He thought that was it. He had a solid foundation and his consulting business was flourishing, and so he never expected to write another book.

MICHAEL I had said I was done. I mean I was absolutely done. It was like having children, "I'm not having any more of these, this is it, I'm done," but I had to write this book. This was the book that I should've written first. This was the book that I was meant to write and when people read this book they say, "Oh that's Michael, that's the book I've been waiting for."

DANNY This book, "Steal the Show," is the culmination of Michael's experience combining his best insights from acting, business consulting and everything in between, all thoughtfully presented in a way that can help all people, not just actors or comedians or business professionals, to succeed by viewing the interactions in their lives as performances.

MICHAEL I think the quality of your life is in large part determined by how you perform during life's high stakes situations and if you fold during those situations, then you may play a smaller game, but if you can shine when the spotlight is on you, then you can do big things and you can really go after your dreams.

DANNY Now, when you're truly performing, Michael is quick to point out that while you don't have to be an actor or entertainer, you do need to be prepared.

MICHAEL Most people, I find, who need to give a speech of some kind or some kind of performance, and that might be leading a big team on a big



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project, they wing it. Especially people who think they're good communicators. They wing it. I've done that in the past, for sure. If you're quick on your feet, if you've got good timing, you can tell a good joke, you figure, "You know what? I know my stuff, I'm just going to go out there and wing it." It can work, but usually it's decidedly average and you know you can do a lot better.

It's interesting to me when we look at the things that we work on in our lives, let's say a book, I wrote a book, you know it takes me a good year and a half from the beginning of the project to when I submit it, and then it's another 6 months before it comes out, and then it's 6 months of marketing, etc., etc., so it's a very big project.

If you're asked to give a speech for 60 minutes, you might spend a couple hours putting your slides together and then maybe run through it once or twice in your head. Now you've got about 4 hours of work giving a speech in front of even if it was just a hundred people sitting there for an hour, that's a thousand hours of time. I have great reverence for that platform. To me, if you're up there, it's a significant honor that you've been given, it's a real responsibility. I'd like to see people put more time into their efforts.

Their efforts start at the content development stage and they start with the big idea, and the big idea doesn't need to be different to make a difference. This is important. Sometimes we get hung up on trying to be so different. We think, "Well, you know what? That thing I want to say has been said before so who am I to say it again?" Who's going to listen to me? Do I know enough? Am I enough to present on this?

As a result, we don't even get past the big idea. The big idea doesn't need to be different to make a difference, it just needs to be something that is true for you and relevant to the people in the room as it relates to the promise of the presentation.

When I talk about, "presentation," I want you to think of any time that you're trying to make something happen, to get people to think a particular way, to feel a particular way, or to do a particular thing.



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When I say, "audience," I want you to think of people in a conference room or in the theater or the one person sitting across the desk from you that you're trying to get to hire you because it's an audience. They've given you a platform.

It starts with this big idea and then when you're pretty clear on this big idea, you articulate. First you identify but then you articulate the promise, and the promise is what you deliver and the big idea is the through-line that supports this entire promise.

Take, "Book Yourself Solid," that's my very first book that I wrote in 2005, came out in '06 and I've been giving keynotes on it for years. What's the big idea? The big idea is that marketing doesn't really get you clients. What it does is create awareness for the products and services that you offer. What you do once somebody becomes aware of you is what actually books you the business. That's the unique perspective to, "Book Yourself Solid," and I bet there are other people who have a similar perspective but I'm not worried about it. I'm not saying that my big idea is something that I should win a Nobel Prize for, but it's very important for the people that I serve to understand that big idea and to adopt that philosophy. The promise is you'll get booked solid if you do it.

Of course you now have to create and execute on the whole, "Book Yourself Solid" system, but first adopting this big idea's important. They won't adopt a big idea, however, if it's different than the current idea that they have unless they want the promise and they know that you know the way the world looks to them right now, and you've articulated the consequences of not adopting this big idea, and those are consequences they want to get away from and you've articulated the rewards of adopting this big idea. Those are rewards that they want to get, too, and those are usually the benefits of the promise.

There are five components that I just went through. Your big idea, the promise, making sure that anybody that you're talking to knows that you know the way the world looks to them, the consequences of not adopting the big idea, and the rewards of adopting the big idea. That's where you start. Once you've got that, then you can go into the actual



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content development and I have very specific frameworks that you can use that will help you create that content.

DANNY Michael, you're leaning pretty heavily on the preparation, which makes me wonder how generalizable is the preparation for a performance, because I would think that there's got to be a threshold under which ... If you're over the threshold, if something is super high impact like the job interview for the job of your life or you're giving a performance and it's a TED talk or something where the stakes are really high, it makes sense to do all that preparation and just steal the show.

There are a lot of kind of everyday performances that it would seem that the amount of preparation time would outweigh the actual return of just how much... you can't spend a month preparing for every first date because ...

MICHAEL It would be unrealistic and completely unnecessary. The amount of rehearsal time that we give a particular performance should be relative to the either importance of the performance or the length of the performance. Certainly, some performances get more attention than others and generally the higher stake performances get more attention and more rehearsal. This is why I focus very heavily on improvisation in everyday life. I'm not trying to teach people to be comedians, although I do devote a chapter to comedy and how to write jokes and tell them, but everyday life is filled with lots of opportunities for improvisation and ad libbing. If you know how to use the basic tenets of improv, then you tend to be much more comfortable staying in the moment because great performances, they live in the moment.

What's exciting is to watch somebody actually existing in the moment rather than obsessing about what happened in the past or obsessing on what is going to happen in the future. Of course you can never predict a result. If we get better at staying in the moment, we become better performers and then we can utilize some of the performer's principles to help us win the day during those situations.



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When I talk about improvisation a lot of people think, "Oh, that's comedy, improv is comedy, it's what Tina Fey does and Amy Poehler, and they do it brilliantly," but that's not necessarily what improv is. Improvisation is staying in the moment, thinking on your feet, focusing on your objective, being able to act, "as if," so your imagination allows you to step into different roles, different styles, different types of behaviors comfortably and authentically, and say, "yes," and rather than say, "no," being the devil's advocate rather than shutting things down, what we're doing is building on what exists in the moment creatively and adding value to the environment.

These are all improv skills and these are things that people can learn and get better at. They can't obsess about the mistake that they made five minutes ago because then they won't be in the moment now and they'll continue to make mistakes, and they can't obsess about what they're going to say in a few minutes or the moment will be lost and they won't captivate any attention in that particular moment.

DANNY It sounds like there are two levels of reimagination happening here. It's not just that you're kind of reimagining most interactions in life as performances, but it's also as much as you're talking about preparation and that seems to be very important and I agree with you, even more so, the purpose of the everyday preparation is not just to deliver a good performance but to make yourself a better performer, is that right?

MICHAEL I mean... I don't know if I necessarily thought about it that way specifically but I like the way that you articulate that and I think that you do become a better performer when you focus on performance skills, certainly, and you know it's like this in business. You start out in business and you have a problem and you solve that problem and then you think, "Thank God, I solved that problem, I'm not going to have any more problems." Then you have another problem and it's a bigger problem because you moved to a higher level of business and then you solve that problem, you go, "Oh my God, thank goodness, I'm not going to have any more problems now," then you keep growing, the problems get bigger and bigger because your business gets bigger



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and bigger and you have more and more responsibility and your job is to get up every day and solve problems, that's what you do.

I think the same thing is true for performance. The better you get at it, the bigger your stage is. I don't mean literally if you're not going to be a public speaker professionally, but the more that you're given the spotlight and the more willing you are in the early days to be comfortable with the discomfort that comes from performance, the better you'll get over time and the more comfortable you will get with it. One of the ways to overcome stage fright is to actually know what you're doing when you get up there.

That's one of the reasons I wrote this book because stage fright is completely natural. I'm nervous before I speak, I'm nervous before I'm interviewed, I'm nervous all the time, I just don't see the nerves as stress that will debilitate me. I see the nerves as, "Okay, that means I'm excited for this, let me go in there and try to be as helpful as I possibly can to produce the best results that I possibly can," not worry about being good because you can't be good, you can only be helpful.

One of my friends had a big, big broadcast TV network interview on one of the morning shows for her book and she called me up a little bit frantic, and she said, "Michael, I've got this interview and I want to be really good. What should I do?"

I said, "Well, you can't really be good." There was a big pause and she said, "What do you mean?" I said, "No, it's not that you're not good, but you can't go into a performance trying to be good." You can't go into the job interview say, "I'm going to be good." You can't go on the first day, "I'm going to be good." What you can do is you can choose an objective. "This is what I want to make happen." Then you can, in the moment, try as many different tactics as you possibly can to achieve that goal. Often times it's by being very helpful.

This is why the performance skills that I teach specifically allow you to use acting skills to go after what you want because what an actor does when they're working on a character is trying to be as action-oriented



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as possible. What I mean by that is this. You choose objectives as an actor for your character. My character, I want to achieve this. I'm trying to make this happen. Because when the audience sees the character going after what they want, they understand the character. Otherwise you're just indicating or playing at the idea of the character.

The audience gets it if you're going after what you want and trying to get it. A good writer is going to write a script where the character has a lot of trouble getting what they want so lots of conflict ensues, and the more tension that builds, the more exciting it is to watch. What the actor needs to do is choose a tactic to get what they want.

The writer has written in an obstacle. That tactic didn't work so let me try another tactic. The writer has written in another obstacle. Okay, that tactic didn't work, let me try another tactic. That's what we do when we are going after goals in real life, but I think we can be even more intentional about it and when we go into these high stakes situations, focus on what's the goal and let me try as many different tactics as I possibly can. Let me choose some tactics going in there, but if they're not working let me stay in the moment and find something else and trust that I will find it in the moment rather than going in there trying to be good.

DANNY I want to get a little bit specific about things people can do. Let's imagine a scenario for a moment. You've spoken everywhere, you've criss crossed the globe. Let's say you're getting on a plane from New York to Chicago to go give a presentation. You sit down, you buckle in, you have something to snack on, and you're watching some TV. At some point during the flight you strike up a conversation of the person sitting next to you and it turns out that they're exactly who you wrote this book for. They need to just do better in all the performances of their lives and you really hit it off and you want to help them.

You've already spent some time reading your book and watching your movie and New York to Chicago is not that long a flight. You've got about 20 minutes. What would you tell them?



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MICHAEL Here's what's ironic. The keynote that's associated with this book is that. For example, let's say this person who is sitting next to me on the plane, they're working on their toast for a wedding, say. They're trying to come up with the speech. They don't know what they're going to do. They don't know what they're going to talk about and it's a little bit overwhelming.

Starting the process of creating your speech is very, very challenging for many people because you're just a blank piece of paper, don't know where to start, so I always say this. Let's see if we can uncover some stories that have to do with the people you're giving the toast for or about. There is a couple different ways we can do that.

Let's source our stories starting with people. If you think of a particular person, I'll do this with you now, how about that?

DANNY Let's do it.

MICHAEL I want you to think of your first girlfriend. What story came to mind when I said, "Think of your first girlfriend?"

DANNY Honestly, in my mind I was like, how far back am I going with...

MICHAEL Go back pretty far. Let's go, did you ever have a girlfriend in middle school or high school?

DANNY Yeah, there was a girl I was into in high school.

MICHAEL What was her name?

DANNY Her name was Yael?

MICHAEL Yael? Israeli?



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DANNY Yeah. I grew up in Israel.

MICHAEL There you go, sure. [foreign language]

DANNY Awesome.

MICHAEL First time I've ever spoken Hebrew on a podcast interview. In any event, think of Yael and start to just allow your mind to explore some of the experiences that you had with her. Any stories come up?

DANNY Yeah, I'm remembering the night we graduated I guess middle school. We went for a long walk, it was like there was this really cool park with interesting architectural sculptures, like a 45 minute walkway, we walked there and hung out, it was really nice.

MICHAEL That's beautiful. Now there's a story and there's probably some more depth to that story if you reflected on it more. We don't know if that story would be the story that you'd use in this toast, but you just write it down. Story with Yael in this grade where we walked to the park. Great.

Let's just take for another example take a place. A place. Did you have a summer house as a kid or did you go on particular vacations to certain places?

DANNY Yeah, so I was born in Montreal and I lived in Montreal until I was about 13, then I moved to Israel, so when I was a kid, every summer we'd go visit my grandparents in Israel.

MICHAEL When you think about visiting your grandparents in Israel, think about an experience that you had, something that comes to mind.

DANNY Sure. My grandfather taking us fishing.

MICHAEL Now you've got that and you write that down. "Grandpa taking us fishing." Great. There are probably some things that happened there that might make good stories. You continue with this and you can do this with lots of different people, you can do this with lots of different



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places, so then you go, so people, places, and things. Then you look at things. Your first car. Do you remember your first car?

DANNY Yeah, I only bought my first car like 9 months ago.

MICHAEL Oh wow.

DANNY I can vaguely remember it.

MICHAEL There's a good story around the fact that you bought your first car as an adult. I'm not sure how old you are, but that's unusual.

DANNY Early 30s, yeah.

MICHAEL Early 30s. Then you might have some stories may come up about the sales process or about how nervous you were when you drove it off the lot, or how great you felt about your negotiation skills, things will come to you that were important or relevant.

If people, places, things, then times and events. You can think of maybe you can think of a high school graduation, you can think of a wedding, you can think of a divorce, you can think of a period of time when a parent was ill. There are lots of different times and events that you can look to and find stories. This is one of the most wonderful ways into the story discovery process because you're not limited. You're only limited by your imagination or not your imagination but your memories, and we have so many memories that we do not recall on a daily basis.

I mean when I said, "girlfriend," when I asked you about a girlfriend I thought about this girl that I kissed, Marisol Espinoza at Camp [Killalete] when I was about 11 and I kissed her but then she broke up with me, and I clearly felt like I must've done a horrible job or something's wrong. There's definitely a story in there but I hadn't thought about that in I guess 40 something years. You see?

It's a great way to source of stories and that's where you can start and you start thinking about people, places, things and times and events as it relates to say in this case, the toast that you're giving about this couple.



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DANNY Interesting.

MICHAEL That's just where we would start and then you get deeper into the content development but if I just sat down with somebody on a plane next to them, I want to help them with that, I'd have them go through that exercise and they'd probably come up with a number of different stories, some of which they could use in the actual speech itself.

DANNY This isn't specific to a toast, I mean this could be any kind of presentation, it's just a matter of stories being hooks that engage the audience.

MICHAEL Absolutely. You do the same thing for your job interview. You're looking for well what stories would I have ready to tell that illustrate a problem that I overcame or a solution that I found, because then the next thing is actually being able to sculpt that story, and there's a very specific process for doing that and it's using Aristotle's three Act Structure. The three act structure is used by most playwrights, most films adhere to the three act structure, episodes on television. It's a very, very common structure and most stories and many, many jokes, because many jokes are stories. If you listen to Louis C.K or Kevin Hart, most of their humor is in story form, use this three act structure.

Often we think we can tell a story because we lived it, but telling a story in an interview or telling a story to an audience or at a wedding is very different than just living it, and telling a couple friends one night at dinner about it.

What we want to do is we want to sculpt it, we want to mold it, we want to craft it, and we use this three act structure. In the first act is the exposition. It's the given circumstances. It's the time, the setting, the place, people, it's what we need to know in order to understand what's about to happen. If we don't get enough exposition, we're confused. We say, "What exactly is happening right now?" We can't keep up with the story, it doesn't make a lot of sense to us and we zone out.

If we get too much exposition then we're like, "All right, buddy, get to the point, let's go, come on." You want to find just the right amount



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of exposition so that the listener has enough to understand what's coming next. That's all the exposition is for.

Then you get to act two and that's the conflict. There's an inciting incident of some kind. Something happens that caused some kind of problem, and then an action occurred in order to try to solve that problem, which then caused another problem and then an action was taken which then caused another problem. The more tension you create in that story, often the more engaged the listener is in that story. Now the bulk of your story is generally in that second act. Probably about 85% of your story is going to be in that second act.

The third act is the resolution. It's the “everybody lived happily ever after”, or “everybody died in the end”, or it's the punchline for the joke. The resolution has got to be worth waiting for. If you tell this very, very long story but you get to the resolution and the resolution is sort of eh, then they go, "Oh geez that was waste of time." What you do is you look at these stories and you craft them. You write them out using this three act structure, and you try to make them as lean as you possibly can but you're also looking to build and build and build and build in that second act so that it gets more exciting and more exciting and more exciting so there's a progressive action moving forward rising toward that resolution, toward that conclusion, towards the transformation, the change, etc., or the punchline if it's a joke.

DANNY Cool. Michael, whenever we talk about a reimagination, it's kind of like you look at reality and you have your TV movie kind of film effect of the clouds coming and then it's changed, right? It's better. It's like seeing how things could be and trying to make things that way.

What is your vision for the impact this book is going to have? What's your win scenario?

MICHAEL I appreciate that question actually, there's two. One is I really hope to change the face and the foundation of all professional public speaking. I would love to see people who give speeches either for money or for just as a part of their work, turn those talks into real performances so they're experiences for the audiences, because I



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think the audience deserves an experience while they're learning something. That's one.

Number two, I really hope to be able to encourage people who don't see themselves as performers, and people who think you need to be an entertainer to be a performer. I want to help those people shine when the spotlight is on them. I want them to feel like, "You know what? I nailed it," and maybe even feel like, "You know what? I just stole the show." That's what I want for those folks, those two things.

When you talk about reimagination it really brings up something that I think about a lot. I think sometimes when we want to change we rebel against what we have or what we're doing. "I don't want to do that anymore, I'm done with it. I'm sick of it. I want to do something else." We rebel against it and we throw it away and then we start something new from scratch.

I've always looked at reinvention as a reconfiguration of what I have and I turn it into what I want simply by reconfiguring what already exists. For example, when I left the fitness industry I thought I hated the fitness industry. I was like, "I'm so sick of this industry," I was making up all sorts of crap. I don't know, the people are not sophisticated or just really negative. judgmental things.

Then when I left and I started my consulting business, I realized I just didn't like doing what I was doing over there but there's nothing wrong with the people or the industry. I just didn't want to do what I was doing, so let me reconfigure what I had. What did I have? I had connections in the industry, I had knowledge of the industry, so now I'm just going to consult for the industry, do what I want to do rather than what I was doing, and which wasn't pleasing me. It was a slight reconfiguration which created a massive change. I mean my whole world changed as a result, but really it was just a reconfiguration of what I had, I turned it into something for me, just a little bit better.

DANNY I really like that. In just one of the recent episodes that we published on this show, Taylor Pearson, who wrote, "The End of Jobs," was quoting the original definition of entrepreneurship, which is the reconfiguration of resources in service of a higher purpose.

MICHAEL Wow I love it. That's exactly right.



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DANNY That was Michael Port, reimagining influence through the lens of performance, and inviting you to steal the show in your next performance by being better prepared, more present and completely focused on being as helpful as you can be in the process. It's good advice that I hope you'll take to heart, and if you want to learn more about it, grab Michael's new book, "Steal the Show," anywhere that good books are sold, or better yet, visit stealtheshow.com and see the bonus packages that Michael's offering to book buyers.

Voiceover We love hearing from you. Your feedback makes this podcast even better, so take a minute to write us on iTunes and write a review. Each week we'll share what one of our reviewers has to say.

DANNY Today's reviewer is Neesh Keek who says, "Great interviews full of amazing insights and I love the peek inside the company. Well done." Well thank you very much Neesh Keek, I'm so glad you're enjoying the show.

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