

Episode #52 - Michael Silk

On How to Gain Extreme Empathy In Your Market

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John: It's John McIntyre here. The Autoresponder Guy. I'm here with a guest who's been on the podcast before. His name is Michael Silk. He originally came on to talk about how he wrote F.U.N. emails for a bunch of different companies. One of them was doing a high seven to eight figures. That podcast episode was all about these fun emails which was fun, unusual, and they get noticed.

If you want to check that out, you can go to themcmethod.com/42. Originally, we had ... On that episode you can get an intro or a background on who Michael is and what he does. He is a copywriter; a damn good one. He has some really interesting ideas, but today instead of going into formulas ... We talked a bit about this before the call. The idea of fun, that's a bit of a formula.

Today I wanted to talk a bit about why formulas aren't ... They're just not everything you need. There's a little bit more. We'll get into that. We are going to talk about a few different things. This is more of a free-flowing podcast. I've done a few of these in the past and I have no idea where they are going to end up, so we're just going to have some fun.

How you doing today, Michael?

Michael: I'm very good. Thanks, John. Yeah, thank you.

John: Good to have you back.

Michael: Yeah, good to be on. Like you, we'll just see where this podcast goes and I'm sure some good ideas will come out it and bring a lot of value to it.

John: Sounds good. Take 2. Second time lucky, right? So this is ... This is our second take, second attempt at this podcast. This doesn't happen too often but sometimes you've got to hit the stop button, delete it, and start again. Fingers crossed. '

Let's talk about these formulas. Just before I hit the record button, we were talking about how a lot of people are out there teach formulas. There's nothing wrong with formulas, but you made an interesting point about why ... basically why you don't want to talk too much about formulas. You think are some more important things. Can you rap on that for a little bit?

Michael: Yeah. First of all, I know your podcast is mostly directed to people writing email copy. I should just mention that although I do write email copy I don't see myself through the lens of just an email-marketing copywriter. I write sales letters. I do write email copy. I also write video sales letters. I come to the conversation as it were with more of an overall perspective. First off, off the bat, I'm not dissing any formulas. I gave you that fun formula for our last podcast and all of those are useful. What's I think ... What you wanted to talk about today was this ...

I think there's a couple of things that perhaps go a little bit deeper than formulas. You can ... There are so many different sales formulas out there. Probably most people are familiar with the formula. Then there's the problem agitation solution. There is lots of different markets and copywriters, they've all got their own take on those. All of them are useful. Perhaps what's more useful is getting the right appeal to the market. If I can just explain this with an example.

John: Go for it.

Michael: There was ... This is not based on myself but it is based on another copywriter I know of. He was doing some work for some mortgage brokers, selling to mortgage brokers I believe it was. Now let's say that this copywriter had followed the very best formula out there. Some copywriters come up with the de facto sales formula. He had followed it to a T. In his sales letter, he covered all of those elements, the components of that de facto formula that is the very best sales formula out there. He wrote to those ... His target market was the mortgage brokers. And he ... It was all about getting more clients.

What he found is that when he mentioned getting more clients the sales promotion didn't ever do as well as when he mentioned getting referrals. Every time he put in his marketing promotions about getting referrals, the response spiked up. That is all that these mortgage brokers were interested in was referrals.

Do you get what I'm saying there? The appeal was the referrals. He could mention getting more clients. He could mention getting paid higher fees. He could mention taking more time off. He could mention having more practices and so on and so forth, but all of that paled into comparison in terms of response compared to when he mentioned getting referrals.

John: Okay, so what you're saying is-

Michael: It's all about the appeal.

John: Right, so you could take a ... the best sales letter formula in the world and you could fit any of the appeals in that marketplace into that sales letter. What you're saying is that, that doesn't actually matter. You could have the best formula in

the world but the formula is beside the point. What makes it the sales letter convert is not the formula or the structure so much as the understanding that the key benefit ... This is one thing that I've tried to stress before is that people talk about benefits. That you should just go and write a list of benefits for the product, but it's just not about benefits.

It's about tapping into the right benefits. What we're talking about here, benefit or appeal in that the benefit is like you said, they are going to get more referrals. Are they going to get more clients? Are they going to have more time off? The key thing is what benefit do they actually care about. What appeal is actually in the front of their minds when they think about their problem?

Michael: Absolutely. It's the make or break thing. Again, not to say that the sales formulas are not important. They have their place. I'm just saying that there is deeper stuff to look at.

John: How would ... I talked about this a lot in my emails and my ... this idea that you need to have empathy and without empathy even the ... without empathy, without really understanding what your, what the marketplace wants, the best copy in the world won't save you. I've talked about that with my audience, things like surveys, and going to Amazon, and things like that. What specific things do you do to figure out the appeal when you're writing for yourself or you're writing for a client? Are there any go-to tactics or strategies? Or do you sit down and visualize yourself in a chair opposite your prospect? How do you do it?

Michael: Again, it would be nice to give a cookie-cutter answer. Unfortunately, life is not always that simple. I think a lot of it for myself, to comes from conversing with the clients. They often got a more of a better understanding of the type of person that ... the core clients as it were or their core customers. They have a better understanding with what they want.

I'll give you an example of that. I write for a company that is involved in the hypnosis, hypnotherapy world. I write a promotion for them that's, I don't mind saying, didn't work. It worked but it didn't work to the extent that we were hoping it did. I wrote the promotion for ... it was very much aimed at people that, hypnotherapists and how to get more clients. A lot of their customer base, they don't actually want to be hypnotherapists. They just want to be able to do a lot of cool stuff with hypnosis.

There was a mismatch, you see. It wasn't until we went back and conversed more with the client ... It was like, ah, you know, this letter would have worked in another arena perhaps better than it did to their customer base.

John: When someone is sitting down to write an email or a sales letter or any sort of promotion or advertisement, the important thing is not so much the writing. Not being the best writer in the world but having the greatest understanding of

the prospect. It's like ... I've met plenty of people ... it's funny, a couple of my friends in this industry find this funny as well. When you hear about someone or meet someone and they've never studied marketing, they've never sat down and written out sales letters by hand, they've never read any books or anything by Gary Halbert or any of these guys.

They don't really know much about marketing yet they have a business that's just raging. They are crushing it. While they may not understand marketing in the whole direct-response fashion, what they do understand is that ... They have a very intimate understanding of what the marketplace wants. That gives them almost a huge, it's surprising, but a huge advantage over everyone else. Sometimes I feel like me or like some of my friends that where we put so much emphasis on the marketing side of it and being a good copywriter when it seems like almost all of the battle is really just understanding what this main appeal is. What's the main thing that people want?

Michael: If you take a step back from it, John, and I think it's good advice for me as well and it's good advice for everybody. From the customer's point-of-view, from the buyer's point-of-view, prospects, how much do they understand about the marketing side of it? Probably not anything. They ... What I'm saying is they couldn't care less if you got the best marketing system in place or you follow the very best sales formula. If you're not talking to them, if you're not communicating or connecting with them at the level that they resonate with, that's all they care about.

John: It's a bit like a kids. You could say kids are very fantastic sales girls and boys in that they know their parents so well that when they want to manipulate their parents to give them what they want, it just comes intuitively to them. They will say stuff to their parents that just make the parents crumble. They've never been trained. No one has ever taught them how to be good at this.

What they do understand is exactly what is important to them and their mother and dad. That allows them to lead, you could say manipulate, but really just lead their mom and a dad around. Sell them on doing something or not doing something. It's almost like if you can have the magical eye to see what your prospects really wants, what the marketplace really, really wants, don't even need to worry too much about having the best copy in the world.

Michael: Absolutely. People want to feel that you're for real as well. They want to have an understanding that you've got their best interests at heart. All of that is important.

Another area that I think is important, John, that is what I call cause-marketing. I don't mean attaching your marketing to a cause as in a charity or a fund-raising event or you know. Often that is denoted as cause-marketing. What I mean is coming up and finding the new or the hidden cause behind the problem that the

market has. I think instead of me rapping on and trying to explain this ... If I give some examples, I think it will become very clear. If you can find the new ... And when I say new it maybe the unknown cause.

It may not actually be the new cause but it may be a cause behind their problem that they've not been aware of. If you can bring them that to their attention and bring clarity around that, then that is also very powerful and can create some sales breakthroughs in and of itself. Again, all of these principles ... I prefer to talk about them as principles as opposed to formulas, can be applied to email marketing or more traditional sales letters or website copy or even conversations, however you communicate with your market.

In any case, here is some examples of cause, what I mean by cause-marketing. It used to be universally believed that stomach ulcers were caused by excess intestinal acid. Most of the products sold helped alleviate stomach ulcers were based on the concept, on the precept, that they were going to reduce stomach acid. It was then discovered that stomach ulcers are in fact caused by too much of the wrong type of bacteria.

The companies selling remedies to alleviate stomach ulcers, if they can educate and bring clarity to the situation and say, hey, your stomach ulcers are not caused by too much stomach acid but actually caused by intestinal, the wrong type of intestinal bacterial. The reason our product is so superior to all the other products on the market, because it actually targets the real underlying cause of stomach ulcers and blah, blah, blah and etc., etc., etc. Does that make sense?

John: Absolutely.

Michael: If you yourself or anyone listening had a stomach ulcer and they've been trying all of these different tablets and ... I don't even know what kind of things are that deal with that kind of stuff. If they've been dealing with everything and they're going to the doctors and it's all been about stomach acid and then all of a sudden they come across something that says, actually, it's caused by stomach bacterial and this alleviates the problem by targeting the stomach bacteria, etc., etc., etc. it's like, wow, why has nobody ever told me about that before? That's the answer.

If you can position your product or your solution as addressing that when nobody else is then it can give you a significant advantage in the sales marketplace.

I'll give you another example. It used to be, or pretty much still is, universally believed that cholesterol level is the most meaningful indicator of heart disease, whereas it's becoming more common knowledge that the actual, real underlying cause and best indicator of heart disease is something called your blood homocystine level. If you can out with a product, a heart pill or whatever, that

actually educates the reader into you being ... Cholesterol is not where it's at, it's actually ... You need to get your homocystine levels checked and this product will reduce those. Then again, you can create a significant sales advantage for yourselves.

I'll give you another example and this actually from a real example. There was a company, a maintenance supply company in the United States, the sales, utility, maintenance, goods to businesses ... Things like kind of maintenance stuff from brooms to probably big industrial cleaners and everything like that. What was happening is that had accounts across the county with a number of businesses but they were losing a lot of those accounts because the businesses were going more locally to buy maintenance supply equipment as and when they needed it.

The big, centralized maintenance company that had been supplying businesses all across the country started to lose a lot of business because the businesses could buy more locally and buy cheaper. they addressed this problem by ... They were able to show ... They were able to go back to the businesses and say, look, you closed your account with us, but they were able to demonstrate this in raw format that a company buying its items locally could actually buy those items locally a lot cheaper as and when they wanted to. But when they factored in all of the disruption costs, the buying costs, the storage costs, and what these companies were tending to do, the businesses were tending to do, is that if they needed to replace one item they tended ...

It's human nature that you would buy three items just in case you got backup. They were actually spending more over the course of the year. They were able to buy the items more cheaply but they weren't able to save money throughout the year. The big, centralized maintenance supply company was able to go back and demonstrate that they were actually causing themselves to spend more money. Now they've got a lot of these businesses coming back on board and reopening their accounts. Although they were able to buy the items cheaply, they didn't have ... They weren't able to reduce their management costs of buying, if that makes sense. That's a bit of a convoluted ...

John: Tell you what's going on here. They can buy them for say \$10 at the main-, the big maintenance national warehouse guys, but if they're buying them from the local guys they can buy it for say \$8 which is a cheaper price.

Michael: Yeah.

John: Then what's the reason that they should go back to the big one?

Michael: If they're buying them \$8 locally they can buy the item obviously cheaper. When they've got to factor in the time that it costs someone to actually to and make the purchase, to go and have the thing delivered, companies were tending to buy, if they're going to buy one we may as well buy two or three so we've got

backups in future. Then they've got storage costs that they've got to take care of. All of these ancillary quote-unquote "hidden costs" all of a sudden start adding up. Where they can by the item for say \$8, it may in actual fact be costing them \$15.

John: Okay.

Michael: The big centralized company was able to go back and show that actually what buying from them ... From buying from independent stores, they were actually causing themselves to spend more money.

John: Okay. Then they had a promotion that went out that basically explained what was really going on.

Michael: Yeah.

John: Then the people came back. Okay. To bring that back, this goes back to the idea of the cause. If you can see into the problem better than prospect can and explain it in a way that really, really makes sense, it's going to connect with them.

Michael: I think a big part of the job of a quote-unquote "copywriter" or however you want to label yourself up as or an email person or marketer is to bring clarity to your target audience. I think if you can be a source of clarity and ... into what is for all of us a very cluttered world. There is so much information out there but if you can bring clarity around their situation and their problem, they immediately identify with you as somebody as having the solution for them. That comes back again to you mentioned the word empathy. How do you in practicality demonstrate empathy?

You could be sitting where you are writing your promotion, feeling very emphatic for your target market, but how does that actually transfer across to them? If you can bring clarity to the situation, all of a sudden you've already provided a service to them.

John: It's a bit like when you have a problem, a personal problem sometimes, and it helps to go and talk to a really good friend about it. You sit down, you go out with your friend for coffee, and you start talking. You just go into event mode where you talk your way through the whole problem. Sometimes the friend just listens, sometimes the friend is able to add a bit of perspective, but what you really walk away with from that conversation is clarity. It's the hard part when you have problems.

When I ... If I'm going about my day and I'm used to having a lot of energy, which is pretty typical, some days, there's a day where I can't get out of bed or I crash and burn at 3pm, it makes me really frustrated unless I know what's making me tired. If I go, hang on, I ate a plate of rice over lunch, that's going to be it. All of a

sudden there is no need to worry about it. When I don't know what's going on or maybe I thought it was the plate of rice and then I tried ... then I get rid of the plate of rice at lunch but it still keeps happening. I'm frustrated and it's annoying. When I finally figure out what's going on, in comes that clarity. I can relax now.

Michael: Yes, you've still got the problem. Some to me, yes, is burn a bit yesterday afternoon. My heart felt really e ... Two days before I did some really heavy leg-training work, weight training. I correlated it now but that really takes it out of me. It can kind of creep up on me. It doesn't ... Straight after the workout I feel really buzzed and alive. Then a day or two later it really ... It's just like you're saying there. It's like, ah, that's the reason for that is that and now I don't have to worry about it too much.

John: If you could come in and explain to someone, basically give them clarity and what's going on with problem, that's going to build an enormous amount of trust in what you're about and what you're going to end up selling them

Michael: But clarity in a way that it identifies as the real cause behind what's happening.

John: Not clarity for the sake of clarity. Clarity with a purpose.

Michael: Yes.

John: How would ... An interesting topic would be how would, say I'm ... This is a hard thing to think of. How would one go about finding or giving someone clarity? Let's say you're in marketing and you're trying to sell something. You've got several competitors and you all seem to be saying the same thing more or less. Do you have to ... It sounds like it's worth spending quite a decent chunk of time as well as I'm trying to understand your prospect, trying to look for angles in the market that would give you a leg up on your competitors if you could walk in and you could explain something that no one else has explained.

That's an interesting way of looking at it. If you could for a U. S. P. or a unique approach you could go in there and explain something that no one else is explaining. You might sell the same thing, but if you explain something that no one else has really touched on yet and it's a bit of a paying point that's going to be a big win.

Michael: Absolutely. I'm just ... This like ... This is an area, John, that is, it's not something that is a ... it takes thinking but I think this what we're discovering for this conversation. It's not just a ready-made answer to everything. This is the kind of stuff that you have to cut a bit deeper with. Often times, there's not ready-made answers like you can just pull out of a hat, and oh, I can use that read-made answer to this. It does take a bit of investigation and bit of introspective sometimes and thought into it and some time. You have to circle the desk as it were. I think ... Here's my take on it.

Probably like you and probably like a lot of people listening to this recording or who will listen to it at some stage, if I read in a sales letter online sometimes it can have all the right elements to it but it still leaves me a bit cold. It's saying all the right things. It's just somehow I don't just quite ... sometimes I just quite put my finger on it. I can't ... It's something just not resonating with me or something I just don't feel comfortable parting with money for. It all sounds good but I don't quite ...

This happened the other day actually. This brings to mind something the other day. There was a program, a selling system being sold by somebody who is quite well-known. They have a celebrity appeal as it were. They have a selling system that they are currently promoting. I watched ... There wasn't a letter for it, it was actually an interview webinar thing. I watched it all and I didn't ... It's strange, it was almost like I wanted to buy it but then I didn't feel comfortable buying it. There was something lacking. There was something ... and I think you're hearing I don't know quite what it was.

The more I think about it, I think what it was is that I didn't understand the reason why it would work above and beyond any other system. I didn't understand the mechanics of it.

It was like ... Going back if we tie this back into to where I was talking about the cause marketing or coming up with a quote-unquote "new cause behind the problem" that obviously can be quite difficult to do because sometimes there isn't another known cause behind the problem. Everybody knows what the cause is. It's universally accepted. It's universally been proven or whatever. Everybody knows what the underlying cause of the problem is. I'm trying to think of an example off the top of my head and I can't quite.

You get what I'm saying? There is no new cause you can come up with. What you can do is that you can illuminate on what you're selling. You can go into ... You can get somebody to ... Here's where I'm going with this, you want somebody to conceptually understand why the thing that you have actually works.

John: Okay.

Michael: For example, let me try and give an example because otherwise I'm talking very surface-level. Let's say, for example ... What should we talk about, John?

John: I'm thinking-

Michael: Let's say, let's say, okay ... for the gym. Somebody wants to pull a muscle at the gym. There are so many different supplements out there ... protein shakes and muscle-building supplements and so on and so forth. They, nearly all of them will take basically the message is, take this and you will gain x-amount of muscle.

John: Right, right.

Michael: In x-amount of days.

John: I see where you're going with this.

Michael: What really ... Personally what I would want to say is show me why it would work. Don't just tell me that it will ... Don't just ... I think this goes back to you saying before about the benefits ... keep ... okay so you're going to get more muscle and you're going to look good and blah, blah, blah, and you can reduce your fat and so on and so forth. You can train better and you can have more energy. All of those ... All of that is a paid-end stuff. All of that is, yes I want all that. I want it but I may not necessarily be comfortable buying it because I don't quite believe, I don't quite have the conceptual understanding, the clarity of why it would it. If I take this, what's it going to do on my ...?

If somebody can come along and communicate that. Not necessarily in a very anatomical, biological way but in a way that perhaps uses analogies and so on and so forth. It's like you can paint a picture into someone's mind. Oh, it get why that works now. I want the benefits. I now understand why it would work. I understand what causes it to work. I now feel comfortable buying it. You've got this emotional side just to want those benefits but the logical side is like ...

John: Yeah, I know exactly what you mean. I can think of a few different examples. One, one is that a couple of weeks ago I saw some ads popping up on Facebook for another make-money-online product. It was a very niche one but still very much a make-money-online. It looked the same, the way they all look. Very -- claims. Very make x-amount of dollars in x-amount of time and all that sort of stuff. I read it for a bit. I always scan those things just to see what is going on, but I didn't buy it. Obviously, I want that, I want to make \$10,000,000 in an hour and all that sort of stuff. That's not going to happen. You can't really ... You haven't told me how it's really going to do it.

Then I spoke to a friend today who has actually ... He told them about not so much the product but he explained that he was using a strategy to make money. Then he told me about the product. He told me about how it all worked, how he was making money. I was like, all right, that all makes sense. That's a great explanation. Then I ... and then he mentioned the product that I had seen a couple of weeks ago. Finally, by that point, I knew what the product was offering. Then from him I had the explanation of why the product worked. Then I went and bought the product because now you can back up those claims, knowing how you're going to achieve those claims.

Michael: That's an excellent example. He conceptually understood the mechanics behind it, mechanics that would make it work.

John: Yeah. This is like when you go, you sound like you'll get a six-pack or you'll lose x-amount of weight or anything like that. When you can explain it that there is some unknown recently discovered mechanism within the body that when you ingest 100 mg of RHEA and Vitamin D 30 minutes prior to be that has an effect on ... who knows, your digestive system blah, blah, blah. He explained the whole scientific mechanism and layman's terms in a way that's very easy to understand. Perhaps you explain it like a classic way. You put a chain on the ... I'm coming up with stuff now.

Michael: You're doing a much better job ... You're doing a much better job than me, John.

John: Yeah, you would take something, give it a good explanation, and then all of a sudden it's so much more believable. I've had fun with friends out ... Sometimes we've been out drinking and I'll start off a story. A couple of my friends, they know what I do, they know that I write stories like this for a living. I'll start telling a story. There might be a few people there that might not know what I do and I'll tell a story about what, about something.

I know that by telling the story and almost ... speaking with a very authoritative tone as though the claim or the result is guaranteed and here is how it works. Then you just explain it with a very serious voice and make it interesting on why x is true. Most people will believe it. They start going, ah, how did they, ah. They really ... They've got no idea whether to believe you or not. It's absolutely incredible. Even if the explanation is absolutely crazy, just the mere fact that you have an explanation seems to bolster their belief big time.

Michael: Yeah, and it comes back to that ... What Jay Abraham was saying, you know if you want to sign a secretly, silently begging to be led. Again, it's a way of emphasizing leadership and authority. You don't have to ... It's not like banging the drums kind of authority. It's not talking down to anyone. It's demonstrating authority by the way that you're able to come into a situation. Again, on account of all of these things, the sound like they're all different separate techniques but they're not. They all fit ... They all weave together.

Again, by being able to demonstrate this authority and this, and the mechanics behind why something would work brings us back into the area of clarity. You proved clarity to the situation again. I think what ideally in sales everybody ... The holy grail is always, is everybody to say yes to what you're saying all the time. I think actually what you want is, yes, because ultimately you would like someone to say yes to buying something from you. I think actually it's more profound to have actually somebody say, ah, I've never actually thought about it like that before.

Like, huh, it's like that. Here's what's coming to mind. Instead of just relaying information to somebody to make the sales, make the sale, you're

communicating in such a way that the person is getting insight. When they have their own insight into what's being said, they feel very much drawn to you and very much drawn to the mission and very much drawn to the products. It's like their internal idea. It's like I've discovered this and nobody else knows this. Ah, I put A and B together in my own mind. Does that make sense?

John: You trigger, you make people think differently about something. You give them a new perspective. Some people say to say what no one else is saying. Go into an industry and start calling ... don't call people out by being a douche bag but its say stuff in a way that no one else is saying. Try and talk about stuff that no one else is talking about. I've seen this ... You can see this with copywriting and I saw it recently with something completely different. There is a site out there that sells stock videos. That's where you might get a video of, any of those videos you might have seen in an advertisement on television. This is the sort of company that does it.

Now they created an ad for their website which actually poked fun ... Yeah, it was basically a, about ... What was it? It was an ad where they have different words on the screen like vision and truth and progress and then they have an image of a train in the background. The writer was just reading out the ... I guess explaining the mechanism of, ah, so we're trying to inspire people so we're going to use forward-thinking words like progress and like I said vision and positivity. These flash up where there's an image on the, in the video of someone reaching their hands to the sky on top of a mountain with sunflowers all around. The whole video was just poking fun at how companies use these stock videos to try and make a point and present themselves as some world changing company. They are saying something that no one else is saying. It's like poking fun at all the corporate companies. When you watch it, you can't help but think differently about the whole thing. All of a sudden, oh, yeah, that's totally rad. Aha, I see what they're doing. That kind of thing.

Michael: Yeah.

John: The aura effect. We're right on-time here. Before we go, I give people a heads-up about where they can find you if they want to learn more or how I even used to work with you. What is the best place for them to go?

Michael: I have a website where I hang out online which is my name, so it's michaelsilkconsulting.com.

John: Consulting.

Michael: Consulting I N G dot com. Yeah.

John: Michaelsilkconsulting.com. That will be in the show notes at theMcMethod.com/podcast and any other links to anything else we mentioned

by John McIntyre, The Autoresponder Guy - <http://www.themcmethod.com/52>

in this show. Michael, thanks for coming on again.

Michael: Appreciate it. Thank you very much.