

This is the **DO IT SCARED PODCAST** with Ruth Soukup, **EPISODE 50**. On today's episode, we are going to talk with New York Times' bestselling author Michael Hyatt about being free to focus and how to win at home and at work.

Welcome to the Do It Scared podcast. I'm your host, **RUTH SOUKUP**, and each week on the show we will talk about how to face your fears, overcome obstacles, and, most importantly, how to take action and create a life you love.

This episode is brought to you and made possible by the world's very best tool for managing your time and getting your life in order, the Living Well Planner. Created by yours truly, the Living Well Planner is designed to help you organize your time, manage your budget, plan your meals and your to-do list, and crush your goals, all in one place. It literally is the tool that keeps me sane every day, and it can absolutely do the same for you. You can find it online at livingwellplanner.com, and be sure to use our promo code, **doitscared**, to save \$10 on your order in our special offer just for podcast listeners.

RUTH: Hey, there, and welcome back to the show. As always, my name is Ruth Soukup, and I am the founder of Living Well Spending Less and the Living Well Planner, as well as the founder of Elite Blog Academy, and the New York Times' bestselling author of five, soon-to-be six, books.

In today's episode, which I am so excited about, we are going to be talking to author, entrepreneur, speaker, and podcaster Michael Hyatt about what it means to get free to focus, how to win at home and at work, and exactly why that is so important. Michael is the New York Times' bestselling author of four books, including *Living Forward*, *Your Best Year Ever*, and, most recently, *Free to Focus*, as well as the host of the *Lead to Win* podcast. Michael is incredibly passionate about developing leaders and helping those leaders succeed in all aspects of their life, not just at work. And, you guys, he has so much insight to share, not just on leadership and business, but on what it means to be productive and even why we need to rethink how we look at productivity and getting things done.

And ultimately, that's exactly what this podcast is all about. It's about taking the steps that will help us make necessary changes so that we can create a life we love, because in the end, courage doesn't mean that we are never afraid; instead, courage is being scared but taking action anyway, despite our fear. It's putting one foot in front of the other, even when we're not quite sure where the path is going to lead.

Okay, guys. So just a couple more quick things, as always, before we dive into today's episode. First, you can download our "Do It Scared" manifesto to remind yourself to start living your own life of courage right now. You can get it by texting **doitscared** to **44222**. Or you can get all the show notes for this episode by visiting doitscared.com/episode50. Once again, either text **doitscared**—all one word—to 44222, or get the show notes at **doitscared.com/episode50**.

And now, without further ado, I am so excited to introduce you to bestselling author and productivity expert Michael Hyatt.

Hey, Michael. Welcome to the Do It Scared podcast. Thank you so much for being on the show. It is great to have you here today.

MICHAEL: Thank you, Ruth. Great to be with you. I love the title of your podcast. I mean, it's so awesome.

RUTH: Thank you. Thank you. Yeah, it's actually been one of our company's core values since the very beginning. It's been my own personal mantra before that, and then, it's just something that our community really embraced as well. So, it's been a lot of fun.

Okay, so, I am so excited to talk to you about so many things. I feel, like, first of all, I'm such a huge fangirl that I'm going to try not to geek out on this episode, but I also feel like you and I have kind of led parallel lives in a lot of ways. I don't know if you feel like that, too. We just have so many common—

MICHAEL: I do, yeah.

RUTH: —common interests. We have so many overlapping contacts and people that we know and stuff. So, I could go in a million different directions, but first, I want to just start at the beginning. Can you tell us a little bit, for those of my listeners who don't know you, a little bit about your personal journey, both who you are, what you do now, and then, kind of the brief overview of how you got to where you are today?

MICHAEL: Sure. Well, basically, I do leadership development. So, I've worked in the corporate world for about 40 years and got my start in publishing, and I worked for a small publisher in Waco, Texas. And then, I moved to Nashville, Tennessee, where I came to work for Thomas Nelson Publishers, which is, depending on how you measure, about the seventh largest trade book publisher in the U.S. I did leave that post after about two years to go out and venture on my own to start my own publishing company. That went bankrupt in 1992—

RUTH: Oh, wow.

MICHAEL: —which is kind of the beginning of my education. And so, from there, I started a literary agency. Then, I went back to Thomas Nelson in 1998 and became the CEO of that company in 2005, and at the time, it was a publicly traded company on the New York Stock Exchange. We were doing about a quarter of a billion dollars of revenue a year, about \$40 million of profit, very successful company, and I led that company for six years. Then, we sold it to HarperCollins, and then, I decided to venture back out on my own, and that was 2011. And now, I've got Michael Hyatt and Company, which does leadership development. We have coaching programs and other signature programs, which I'm sure we'll get into, but we have 33 full-time people right now, and it's a blast. I am having the time of my life

RUTH: Wow. That's amazing. So, I mean, that's a big jump to go from being the CEO of a company to venturing out on your own. How did that move start?

MICHAEL: Well, I'll tell you, and sort of apropos to the name of your podcast, I did it scared because when I went through that business failure back in the early '90s, I had sort of this nagging thought about ... Actually, I had a limiting belief around, "I'm not good with money," and so, that began a whole journey as I became the CEO of the company, and increasingly, with a public company, I had to be very conversant with our company's financial performance, and I had to do quarterly calls with our analysts and meet with investment bankers and all that stuff. So, I kind of overcame that limiting belief, but I still had this little nag in the back of my head, wondering if I had what it takes to start my own company. So, I said, you know, it's now or never. And I'd always wanted to be a full-time writer and speaker, or so I thought, and so I started the company, and initially, it was just me. I was a solopreneur, and that proved, initially, to be overwhelming. I mean, Ruth, I didn't even know how to find the FedEx box. I had two full-time assistants at Thomas Nelson that basically did everything for me, and so, to be on my own where I had to do everything, I found it overwhelming, initially.

RUTH: It's like culture shock, right?

MICHAEL: Oh, total culture shock. But that's improved over time.

RUTH: Well, now, you probably have an assistant who can find the FedEx box for you these days, right?

MICHAEL: I have an amazing assistant, yes.

RUTH: So, I actually love that you made that transition and that you called that your do-it-scared moment. How old were you? Can I ask you how old you were when you decided to make that leap?

MICHAEL: Yeah, 56.

RUTH: 56.

MICHAEL: Yep.

RUTH: So, that in itself is incredible because you've built this huge thing since then, and we're going to talk about that in a second, but so many people, and I don't know about if you have this, too, with your audience, but I have so many women that come to me just feeling like their life is over, and they hear me talking about do it scared, and all of a sudden, they're like, "But I'm 50 years old. What am I going to do? I've only known one thing my entire life, how can I do something different?" But you did. You did. So, how did you get the courage to do that?

MICHAEL: Well, I'm not sure I had the courage. I think that the courage came after. Initially, I just thought it's now or never to this thing that I was very passionate about. The thing about age that's fascinating is that that, too, can become a limiting belief, right? So, I talk to young entrepreneurs who say, "I'd love to start a business, but I'm too young, and I don't have any experience." And you talk to people over 50, and they say, "Well, I'm too old to do it now. There's too much at stake," and the truth is that regardless of where you fall on the spectrum, it can become an excuse that keeps you from jumping out. I mean, here's the truth.

RUTH: So true.

MICHAEL: I'm more healthy than I've ever been in my life. I'm now 63. I'm more energetic than I've ever been in my life. That, by the way, didn't happen by accident. It's been carefully cultivated, and I've been very focused on that very thing, but I feel like I'm in, truly, the prime of my life, and my best years are still in front of me.

RUTH: That's amazing. That's amazing. And you actually talk about some of that in your new book, *Free to Focus*—

MICHAEL: I do.

RUTH: —which is coming out very soon. What's the exact date on that?

MICHAEL: April 9th.

RUTH: April 9th, so very, very soon. So, let's talk a little bit about that because I loved your book, first of all, so thank you for letting me—

MICHAEL: Thank you. Thank you for endorsing it.

RUTH: Yes. Thank you for letting me read an advanced copy. But in this book, you basically lay out your own system for boosting your productivity and leading a more productive life. And I loved it because like everything you do, it's excellent—

MICHAEL: Thank you.

RUTH: —and it also gives a very different spin on the whole topic. And I love productivity. I have—

MICHAEL: I know you do.

RUTH: —all things productivity. So, let's talk about that a little bit. How does the *Free to Focus* system work, and what makes it different from any other advice that we've heard on this topic of being more productive?

MICHAEL: Yeah. So, the promise of *Free to Focus* is how to accomplish more by doing less. And so, I think the conventional wisdom is something I call the hustle fallacy, which says if you really want to win, if you really want to succeed, you've got to get out there and bust it. You've got to crush it. You've got to work longer. Elon Musk is probably the best example of this, and he said, basically, you've got to be working 100 hours a week. I literally have a quote from him. "You have to be working 100 hours a week if you want to be as successful as you can and realize your full potential," and I just want to call b.s. on that because—

RUTH: That's insane.

MICHAEL: You know, he's also the guy that—

RUTH: That's had quite the tumble.

MICHAEL: Yeah, I know. So many tumbles in his life, including smoking pot on YouTube and being fined by the FTC for things that he said in social media about his company, all kinds of crazy stuff, and it's just not sustainable. I think that the premise of *Free to Focus* is what I would call the double

win, and that is that you can win at work and succeed at life, and the key is actually embracing constraints. So, for example, I never work more than 40 hours a week. Well, I shouldn't say never. I mean, occasionally I do, like if we're in the middle of a launch or something, but I almost never work more than 40 hours a week. I don't start meetings before 9:00 AM in the morning, and I quite promptly at 6:00 PM. I've been married for 41 years, and I can't wait to spend time with my wife in the evening and on the weekends. Last year—this counts weekends—but last year, we took 165 days off.

RUTH: Wow.

MICHAEL: And still, our business grew 62% last year.

RUTH: That's amazing.

MICHAEL: Yeah, and so, it just proves that you don't have to do more to achieve more, and that's really the premise of the book.

RUTH: So, there's so many questions that I want to ask about that, but the first one is, I think that for people listening to this right now who go, "Okay, yes, you're only working 40 hours a week, but you're now 63 years old. You've had your whole life to work like crazy," how does this relate to somebody who's maybe in their 20s and feels like, "I am in the hustle phase. I have to hustle"? Does this apply to everyone? Do you get to certain point? How does that work?

MICHAEL: Well, there's definitely going to be seasons in your life where, perhaps, you have to work harder and you're willing to negotiate some trade-offs, but unfortunately, a lot of people are not aware of the trade-offs \ they're making.

RUTH: So, what are some of those trade-offs?

MICHAEL: Yeah. So, people will compromise their health for the sake of business success. That's why you get people looking out of shape when they hit their 40s and 50s. I mean, you can kind of keep it under control until they get to about 40, and then, life starts catching up with you. Or they go through a huge relational crisis—divorce or their kids won't talk to them, have no relationship with their kids, no friends, all that kind of stuff—but those are trade-offs that you're making, not because at the beginning of the process, you said, in a moment of self-awareness, "Hey, I'm going to trade my health, and I'm going to trade my marriage, and I'm going to trade my relationship with my kids for business success." What happens is that you get incrementally boiled, like the proverbial frog in the kettle. You do one little decision, one weeknight that you're going to work, one weekend that you're going to work, but again, I come back, Ruth, to this idea of constraints. Think about the Friday before you go on vacation, how unbelievably focused you are, how productive you are, and it's because you have a constraint.

RUTH: So true.

MICHAEL: Well, I try to do that every day. At 6:00 PM—and this is one of the things I talk about in the book, something called activation triggers—one of my activation triggers is that all the lights in this office are automated, and at 6:00 PM, they turn off.

RUTH: So you have to stop.

MICHAEL: If I haven't finished, I'm standing in the dark. So, that's a great reminder that my workday's over. So, sometimes, those last two hours a day, man, I am rushing the clock, but that's also when I do my best work, but it forces me to make decisions. I can't get sidetracked, for example, on unproductive social media or web-surfing or chit chat. I've got to stay focused on the things that matter.

RUTH: I love that. So, can you give us some other examples of activation triggers that you use in your life?

MICHAEL: Yeah. So, here's another one. When I started running, and this was about 12 years ago, I had a really hard time with it because I got up in the morning, and some days I felt like going out there and busting it, and that lasted for about two weeks. Once sort of the shine wore off the new shoes and the new gym clothes and the excitement of running, then it was just tough, especially when the weather got bad. So, as an activation trigger, one of the things I would do is just lay out my clothes the night before so that when I went into the bathroom—we've got this chair that's in the bathroom—and I would just lay out my clothes there with my shoes there and everything. So, now, I experience less friction. I mean, the clothes are there. I've already made the decision. What's going to keep me from going and working out and having a run? So, that was an activation trigger.

RUTH: Smart. I've done that, too, in the past. I should probably start doing that again because I was thinking about, "Yeah, that did used to actually help me," putting my clothes out, especially when we were living up in the Pacific Northwest, and it was cold, and I did not want to go out in the cold. I'd have my coat there. Yeah. It's funny how little things like that can work.

MICHAEL: Yes. So true. I mean, another one for that, I had a real struggle even after I started running, doing strength training on a regular basis. Now, I do it three times a week, but the only reason that I would do strength training, the only reason I got started is because a friend of mine said to me, he said, "Why don't you just hire a personal trainer?" Because that could sort of get me past the friction and get me past starting, trying to figure it all out, and I slapped myself on the forehead and said, "Yeah, why haven't I done that until now?" So, I hired a personal trainer, and now, just the thought of him at the gym waiting on me, I mean, I will not disappoint him. I'm going to show up.

RUTH: You and I are so similar because I am exactly the same way. I have a trainer, and I do the same thing, three times a week, and it's funny because he says that he does not have any clients who complain more than I do. I complain the entire time. I hate exercise so much, but he's like, "But you are the only one of my clients who always shows up if you have an appointment, every single time. You've never missed a single one." And that's true. I need the accountability of knowing somebody is waiting

for them because I don't want to let them down, but, oh, man, I am not going to like it while I'm there.

MICHAEL: You know, a deal I made with him, too, is I said, "I'm going to do this for me, not for you, but if I ever miss"—and I did miss a couple times—"If I ever miss, and I haven't let you know 72 hours in advance, I'm going to pay you for the session anyway," because all he's got to sell is his time. And so, now, I've hacked it a little bit more because what I have now is I have a personal trainer that I only meet with via Zoom one a month, but she designs my entire program, but that frees me up at the gym, which I love, to be able to listen to podcasts and audiobooks and that kind of thing and really amplify my—

RUTH: Oh, and then you do it all by yourself.

MICHAEL: Yep.

RUTH: See, that's impressive. I, as far as weight training, would never be able to do it if I didn't have somebody there forcing me to do it the whole entire time.

MICHAEL: That's good to know about yourself, though, right?

RUTH: It is good to know, yeah. And I will make no bones about it. I have two trainers: one on Monday and then the other guy's on Wednesdays and Fridays. And I feel like they are saints because they put up with all of my whining and complaining the entire time. They haven't fired me yet, which is amazing.

MICHAEL: That's good.

RUTH: Okay, so, let's get back on track and go talk about the books. See, I'm not focusing very well right now.

MICHAEL: It's all right.

RUTH: But I really feel like something that is so inspiring to me about you is your ability to get things done, and you're such a person that really practices what you preach. You talk about all of these things that you teach, you're also doing in your own life. So, what is your best tip for people who feel like they are constantly being distracted, either by things like email and social media, but also, things like real-life stuff—kids, laundry, needing to get dinner on the table. Not everybody has ... and I feel like I have to be careful about this, too, when I'm talking about productivity because people like you and I, we're entrepreneurs. We have more control over our schedule. We have the ability to say exactly what we want to do at most times. Not everybody has that luxury. So, how do you overcome that and still stay focused?

MICHAEL: Well, I think the key is to realize you don't have to do everything. So, this is one of the major differences between Free to Focus and a system like Getting Things Done. So, I love David Allen. He's a friend of mine. He's endorsed a couple of my books, but there's one thing that's missing from the Getting Things Done methodology that's huge, and that is a filter. So, every time something pops into your head, what does GTD teach? You've got to record it on a list somewhere. So, it's not unusual for me to talk to our clients or people that follow my postings on social media

that will have hundreds of tasks on their task list, and they feel overwhelmed. They can't seem to make much progress on it daily, so they get up dreading the day, and they go to bed beating themselves up because they didn't accomplish more. But the truth is not all that stuff is created equal. There's got to be a filter.

So, the filter in Free to Focus is something we call the Freedom Compass, and if you could imagine a two-by-two matrix where one axis has to do with your passion. It's a really simple idea, but you're either passionate about an activity, or you're not passionate about it. And then, the other axis is proficiency. You're either good at it, or you're not good at it.

So, there are activities in your life that you suck at. You don't like them, you're not very good at them, and we call that the drudgery zone. And those activities need to be either eliminated, automated, or delegated because, honestly, a lot of that stuff doesn't move the needle in your life or your business, and so, that's never the stuff that I prioritize. Even if I didn't have an executive assistant or hadn't figured out how to eliminate or automate, I wouldn't prioritize that. At the opposite end of the compass—so, that's, like, due south—at the opposite end of a compass is where passion and proficiency intersect. We call that your desire zone. And there's probably, for all of us, only a handful of activities that we really love and we're really good at. And so, for me, I know what those are, and there's only three things that I'm good at. There's only three things that I love doing, and I spend 95% of my time there. Everything else could either be eliminated for me, automated, or delegated. And if you're working in a corporate context or even a small business context, thankfully, your desire zone or your drudgery zone might be somebody else's desire zone. Like, my assistant, Jim, loves managing my inbox. He loves managing my calendar, booking travel. All that's in my drudgery zone. Jim, that's in his desire zone.

RUTH: Loves it. So, what are your three things?

MICHAEL: So, my three things are I'm either developing content, I'm delivering content, or I'm creating vision for the company and communicating that vision to our team.

RUTH: I can relate to those three things.

MICHAEL: Good. Yeah, I'll bet your list is similar.

RUTH: My list is very similar. In fact, it's almost exactly the same, those three things.

So, switching gears just a little bit, I am curious about the role that fear has played in your life and your business. We alluded to that a little bit when we were talking about your journey, but I think sometimes when you look at somebody who's been so successful, and it feels like, man, you were the CEO of this huge company. You've done all these amazing things. Now, you've built this amazing company that's got 33 employees. It's easy to think that someone like you would be completely fearless. So, what is something that just really scares you in life that you have to work to overcome or something that has scared you in the past that you feel like you have overcome, and how did you move past it or continue to move past it?

MICHAEL: Well, let me just start by normalizing fear. So, when I speak to audiences full of CEOs or business owners, one of the questions I used to ask all the time is, how many of you are just waiting for somebody to show up and say, “I’m sorry. We’re going to have to take your job away because you clearly don’t know what you’re doing,” and wake up in the middle of the night scared that you don’t have what it takes? I mean, literally every hand in the audience goes up. I mean, these are CEOs from major Fortune 500 companies all the way down to small-business people. It’s just the human condition.

RUTH: So true.

MICHAEL: I’ll tell you one of the things that used to scare me to death was public speaking.

RUTH: Really?

MICHAEL: Yes. And as fate would have it, that’s a lot of what I do now, and I actually like it, but initially, I was scared to death. I could remember one time ... You know Ken Davis?

RUTH: Mm-hmm.

MICHAEL: So, Ken and I were partners for a while in his SCORRE Conference, which teaches people how to—

RUTH: Which I went to.

MICHAEL: Yeah, you went. I thought you did.

RUTH: Yeah. Yeah. I was there.

MICHAEL: Amazing conference, but I remember the first time, Ken said, “I want you to speak to our speech coaches.” Okay, so, this was 30 people who are extremely accomplished speakers and critique speakers for a living.

RUTH: Yes.

MICHAEL: I was so freaked out. I was somewhere in the Rocky Mountains for this conference, Beaver Creek, and I called Gail, and I said, “I’m just beside myself. I literally have not slept all night, and I am just ... I’m having a panic attack.” And she said to me, she said, “You’ve got to stop doing this and go out for a run.” She said, “It’ll totally reset your thinking.” And I said, “I’ve got to go over my speech one more time.” She said, “How many times have you gone over it?” I said, “I don’t know. Maybe 30, 35 times.” She said, “Stop what you’re doing and go for a run,” and she was right. It kind of broke sort of the mindset that I was in, but the thing that helped me more than anything, Ruth, and still, I have to work at it today, but when I shifted the focus from me to the audience and I stopped worrying about what people think about me and started focusing on how can I be helpful, how are they showing up, what are their fears and challenges and concerns, and could I help move them from

where they are to someplace that was more enabling, all of a sudden, because the focus wasn't on me, I wasn't thinking about it.

RUTH: It's amazing.

MICHAEL: Back when I was a CEO at Thomas Nelson, when I first became a CEO, I remember going to an investor conference where I would speak at all these financial geeks, and these people have forgotten more than I would ever know about it, and I had to stand up and present. I had to wear—this is a moment of a truth—I had to wear two undershirts because I was scared that I was going to sweat through the first one and sort of give myself away because I wanted to look confident, but then, my hands were so cold that I was in the restroom before I spoke running the hottest water I could stand on me. Like, I dialed it up to create blisters, and then, moved it back a few clicks. I tried to warm up my hands so I didn't give myself away. But in that situation, all the focus was on me.

RUTH: Mm-hmm. And that's amazing because that's exactly the same kind of advice that, actually, somebody gave me, because I have the same fear, and I went to the SCORRE Conference. I have a funny story for you about the SCORRE Conference.

MICHAEL: I want to hear it.

RUTH: I went to that conference, and that was hell for me. That was, basically, my definition of hell was going to a conference where I had to learn how to do public speaking, because I was so terrified of it. I mean, I'm not talking a little terrified. In college, speech was a required class, and I put it off my entire college career until I was finally a senior in college with a bunch of freshmen. And I don't know how much you know about my background or history of depression, but I actually had a mental breakdown my senior year of college and ended up attempting suicide and hospitalized, and that coincided with that speech class, and I don't think that those two things are coincidence. So, I have a long history with hating public speaking.

So, I went to the SCORRE Conference, and talk about do-it-scared moment for me. That was this moment. And I went, and when you talk about being in that room full of 35 speech coaches, and that's the most intimidating crowd you could ever think of, I know exactly what you're talking about, and you did SCORRE, right?

MICHAEL: Yes.

RUTH: Before you even were partners with Ken. And to go, and you're in this small group, for those of you who are listening right now, so you go in this small group, and it's, like, eight people in your group, and you have to do a talk every single night. You get taught, and then you have to do your own talk. And oh, my gosh. It might as well be a crowd of 1,000 people.

MICHAEL: Just shoot me.

RUTH: It's terrifying to have these people critiquing you and giving you feedback. So,

the first night, I completely bombed my talk. I mean, I am not being generous to myself of, oh, I'm sure it was fine. No. I completely bombed it. It was awful. I ran out of the room crying. I called my husband—and this is the difference between my husband and your wife, apparently, because I called my husband, I was like, “I don't even know what I'm doing here. Why am I doing this?” He's like, “I don't know why you're there. You should just come home.”

MICHAEL: That's great.

RUTH: And I was so mad that he said that to me that I went, and the next day, I rewrote my talk, or I did a new talk—you have to write a talk every day, so I did my new talk—and it was about exactly what you're talking about. It was about putting your hands out towards others and paying attention to what other people need rather than how you're being perceived, and it was like a talk to myself more than anything else. But I just think it's so funny, just another example of parallel thoughts.

MICHAEL: Parallel universes.

RUTH: Really, so much so. So, sorry, I got us way off track there, but I actually love hearing that because I think that it's so relatable, and I mean, it's relatable, too, because sometimes, when you look at people who have been so successful, you think, “Clearly, they've never made any mistakes, or they don't struggle, or things don't go wrong for them. They're a lucky star,” or whatever it is, the golden touch, but we all make mistakes.

MICHAEL: We do.

RUTH: We all have these huge lessons in our lives. So, I'd love to hear just some examples of some mistakes or lessons that you've had in your life and what they taught you.

MICHAEL: Yeah. Well, the biggest one—first of all, I've made a ton, and this has really served me well as a blogger and a podcaster, right? So, I've got so much stuff that I can write from, so many mistakes I can turn into lessons, but I'll tell you one of the biggest ones was when I started my publishing company, my own publishing company, back in 1986, and we experienced really successful growth really fast. And one of the biggest lessons I learned was that not all business growth is healthy growth. So, we outstripped our capital, and we basically went broke.

So, in 1992, five years after we started, we went broke. And it wasn't because our sales weren't increasing. It wasn't because there was not a market for our products—the market was responding enthusiastically. But our working capital got all tied up in assets that were in liquid, things like inventory and accounts receivable and author advances and all that. We were so broke, Ruth, that we couldn't even go bankrupt, not officially, because all of our assets were pledged to the bank, and when it was over, they just sent an 18-wheeler, came, picked up everything, and we were done. There was nothing to distribute to anybody else. So, it hurt our vendors, it hurt us.

But I think the thing I learned there is you've got to be very careful about

growth, and I see so many business owners get into trouble when they start to scale, either they're going faster and out too far over their skis, or they're skiing the blue trails when they ought to be on the black trails—or reverse of that. They're skiing the black trails when they ought to be on the blue ones. And growth is a tricky thing, and there's a way to do it that is a sustainable way, but man, that was a huge, huge lesson for me.

So, for example, one of the things that I really pay attention to all the time now, even in my current business, and one of the things we teach our clients to do is to pay attention to their forecasted cash flow and make sure that they see problems in the business before they happen where they've got as much time as they can react to them as possible.

RUTH: That's smart. So, how devastating was that? I mean, I can't even imagine. How did you react to that? What happened afterwards? I'm fascinated by this idea of just completely—not even being able to file for bankruptcy. I mean, where did you go from there?

MICHAEL: Yeah. So, what happened was we got a call from—the publishing company didn't ever live up to, excuse me, the distribution company that we had hired didn't live up to what they said they could do for us, and it was our fault. Frankly, we didn't do our due diligence. But they started loaning us money in order to get us past our cash-flow crunch, and so, by the time, in December of 1991, they called, and they said, “Hey, you guys are into us a million, two. That's how much you owe us, and we're calling the note. So, you guys either come up with a million, two in 30 days, or we're shutting down your business.” And so, oh, my gosh. We went to our board. We said, “Hey, could you guys help us with this?” And they were like, “No, we're in deep, and we're done.”

And so, I can still remember the day in January of 1992 when an 18-wheeler pulled up. Some people came into the office. I had to go tell all of our employees that it was over, and not only that, but we couldn't even pay them a severance, and these are people that we loved. They were like family to us. Everybody was crying. The movers were coming in. They're packing up everything, I mean, literally ever single thing. I had a business partner. He and I were sitting in what used to be his office, but now, it's stripped of furniture. All the employees have left; it's just the two of us. And we're crying in his office, just going, “How in the heck did this happen?”

And so, we decided that we weren't going to run from our creditors, that we were going to stay in contact with them to the best of our ability to repay them, and so, we stayed in touch with them, which they really appreciated. So, then, from there, we said, “Well, what's the lowest barrier entry thing that we can do because ... “ And I should've said this. I had people from my church bringing us groceries to my family.

RUTH: Oh, my gosh.

MICHAEL: So, it was humiliating for me, it was humiliating for my family, and I didn't know what was going to happen. I mean, I remember we had, like, six dollars in our checking account, and so, thinking, “Okay. I don't even have enough time to go get a job. What am I going to do?” So, my partner and I agreed that we were going to start a literary agency because that didn't require any

inventory, didn't require any capital, we could just start working immediately. And so, he said, "Okay. Great. I will answer calls from creditors and wind down this business. You go start the literary agency," and that ended up being pretty successful. And so, we ended up signing a bunch of authors, creating some deals, and generating cash flow almost immediately, but I thought I was going to die.

RUTH: That's amazing. Wow. I mean, I can't even imagine the humiliation that you must've felt. But the fact is that you had to pivot quickly but figured out something where I think that, that's ... I love the lesson in there, too, of assessing and going, "What do we have to work with right now? Which is not much. The only thing we have are our connections and our knowledge of the literary world. So, that's what we're going to use." And that's what you did, and you made it work. But man, I mean, how did you go home and face your wife at that point?

MICHAEL: Well, I have really married well, and my wife, Gail, and I, we've been, as I said earlier, for almost 41 years, and her top strength on StrengthsFinder is positivity. So, you've heard this before, I'm sure, but if you take her to a room full of manure, first thing she'll say is there's a pony in here somewhere. So, she just always asks great questions. She always sees the possibility. She's enormously resilient, and honestly, I think for an entrepreneur or any leader, resiliency is probably one of the most underappreciated and most important qualities that you can develop because life happens, business happens.

When I was running Thomas Nelson Publishers, I became the CEO in 2005 but the time we got to the backside of 2008, we knew that there was a slowdown happening in the marketplace, and our business in 2009, the entire industry, the entire publishing industry, and it was true of our business, too, our sales fell 20% in one year. We had to lay off 120 of our 650 employees in one year. And so, you could either get frozen and not take action, or you can be resilient, and as you said, I love this word, pivot, and figure out how to make it work. I tend to believe that things happen for us, not to us, and so, all this stuff is designed to make us better, designed to make us stronger, designed to help us fulfill our destiny.

RUTH: That's so true. Do you find that, when you think back and when you look at this kind of stuff in your life, you feel like, "Oh, my gosh, how did I get here?" Or do you feel very much like, "This is the path that I'm supposed to be on"?

MICHAEL: Yeah, I definitely think it's the path. Gail says it this way, my wife, she says, "Nothing's wasted."

RUTH: Mm. So true.

MICHAEL: And I think it's true. You know, it's like everything gets recycled into something better, every bad experience, every setback, every challenge. If we embrace it and see it sort of like when we're going to the gym, and the trainer's coming up with these, what feel like at the time, torturous exercises that he or she ... their objective is to make us stronger, not make us weaker. So, I mean, my worldview is just such that I just believe I've been guided and directed.

RUTH: That's amazing. So, let's take a quick detour and talk about StrengthsFinder

because I'm obsessed with StrengthsFinder, and I make my whole team take StrengthsFinder. I've talked about it on the podcast a lot. What are your five strengths?

MICHAEL: Okay. So, I actually have a mug with all five—

RUTH: I have a mug, too.

MICHAEL: Do you have a mug?

RUTH: I got it for my whole team for Christmas. Everybody has the mug. Yeah.

MICHAEL: We do the same thing as part of our onboarding process, all new employees. So, here are my top ones, and I'll bet you, you and I share some. Achiever is number one. Intellection is number two. Strategic, futuristic, relater.

RUTH: Yes. I have those three, the last three. My top two are focus and competition, and then, the other three are the same, but—

MICHAEL: That's awesome.

RUTH: —and then strategic is number six for me.

MICHAEL: Do you ever have strengths envy?

RUTH: Strengths envy?

MICHAEL: Yeah.

RUTH: No, I don't. I mean, honestly, I don't. I feel like my strengths are right where I'm supposed to be, and what's funny ... I don't know. Have you and Gail done the strengths-based marriage stuff at all?

MICHAEL: No.

RUTH: Oh, my gosh.

MICHAEL: I should do that. I didn't even know there was such a thing.

RUTH: There's a book that's strengths-based marriage, and so, my husband and I did it, and we did our full strengths profile, and we found that my top 10 is his bottom 10 and vice versa. I think the only one we share in our top 10 is strategic.

MICHAEL: We're the same way.

RUTH: And it was incredible to figure out, and I'm sure you ... just by doing the test, you can kind of figure out some of this stuff, but when we really started to realize how much of a difference ... The things that we fight about are always—his top one is adaptability, and that is my number 34. My worst one is adaptability. And that is what we fight about because I want to have a plan, and he never wants to have a plan.

MICHAEL: We're the same exact way.

RUTH: That's so funny.

MICHAEL: So, Gail's number-two strength is adaptability, and it's my 34. That's hilarious.

RUTH: That is really funny. I bet Gail and Chuck would get along really well.

MICHAEL: Oh, my gosh. Well, Gail and I are actually teaching a marriage class at my church right now.

RUTH: Oh, that's amazing.

MICHAEL: And so, what we say is that as you discover differences, first of all, it's what attracts you. That's number one. It's what attracts you to the other person. They're so different. You complete me. Then, that quickly moves from attraction to annoyance, and then, it's "that depletes me." It doesn't complete me anymore; it depletes me. But then, if you can hang in there and work at it, you can move to appreciation, and that's where you really get back to sort of that other person really does complete me. I can't imagine trying to go through life without the strengths that she brings to our marriage.

RUTH: I agree. I agree. It's funny. I call Chuck the sharpener of my sword. He's the one who will call me out on everything. I mean, nobody will call me out like he will, but he also gives me that balance that I would not ... If I had somebody in my life who was just like me, I think we would probably kill each other.

MICHAEL: Oh, me, too. Me, too.

RUTH: Oh, my goodness. So, what are you working on right now that has you super fired up?

MICHAEL: Well, I'm super fired, and by the time this airs, it will already be public, so you're going to hear it for the first time before the public hearing, but we've gone through a major, major refocus of our business. So, one of the things that we realized is that over the years, we'd gotten into a lot of stuff. I have a signature program, Your Best Year Ever and Free to Focus, and we've got Platform University, and we've got our Business Accelerator Coaching Program, and the list goes on and on and on.

Well, we had a consultant that came in back in December and said—as he saw this put on the board, I mean, he was just shaking his head, and he said, "Okay, explain to me the customer journey." And we were like, "We don't know." Then he said, "So, where does the customer start, and where do they move from where they are, and what's the next step?" And we're like, "We don't know." So, literally, in a morning, we completely figured that out.

RUTH: Wow.

MICHAEL: And so, we've really rebranded everything. Well, first of all, we're sunsetting Your Best Year Ever. We're sunsetting Free to Focus.

RUTH: Really?

MICHAEL: Yeah. And so, Platform University is now spun out to its own LLC. So, it will continue to live and grow, and that's one asset in my portfolio, but it's not really part of Michael Hyatt and Company. So, now, we're rebranding everything under this trademark, The Focused Leader. So, everything is going to be—so, the best parts of Free to Focus, the course and the live event, and the best part of Your Best Year Ever, both the course and the live event, will be put into a one-day seminar, or workshop, called The Focused Leader, and also, an online course called The Focused Leader. So, now, we have a very logical progression, a very clear customer journey from sort of first contact all the way up through our most advanced and expensive programs, which is our coaching programs.

RUTH: That's amazing. That's amazing, and you put that all together in one day.

MICHAEL: We put it together in one morning. Now, obviously—

RUTH: There were a few details that need to be worked out.

MICHAEL: ... there were a few details. Like, for example, this is kind of a funny thing that happened. So, we're all excited about The Focused Leader. We said, "That's it." We have the Full Focus planner. We've got Free to Focus. Focus is what we do, and people have said to me, "You're extraordinarily focused," and I don't have the strength, but I do think I have the practice. I'd learned to be focused over the years. Problem was ... You know this moment? You have a business idea. So, you go to GoDaddy. Okay, let's see if the URL's taken. Dang. Somebody's already got it.

RUTH: Yes.

MICHAEL: Okay. So, we look it up. So, number two is that we go to the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office database. Now, we're going to look and see if there's a trademark on it. Dang. Same guy that has the URL has the trademark. So, it's back to the drawing board. So, we thought about the Full Focus Leader, playing off our plan, but we just liked the simplicity and the elegance of The Focused Leader. So, I said to the team, I said, "Looking at his website, I don't think this is an active brand." And so, I said, "This is a total long shot, it probably won't work, but let's contact him and see if he would be willing to sell us the trademark and sell us the URL." And long story short—

RUTH: Did you do it secretly, like, have somebody on your behalf?

MICHAEL: Yes.

RUTH: Yes, very important.

MICHAEL: So, I had our attorney. I said I don't want you to reveal who I am yet. So, yeah, we negotiated a price, and it was well within the scope of what we were willing to pay, and we own it.

RUTH: That's amazing. It's awesome when that works out, isn't it?

MICHAEL: I know, and it's worked out for me a couple different times, but usually, people don't think about that, but there's a lot of things that get trademarked, a lot of URLs that get grabbed, that people just park them. I probably have 300 URLs that I'm sitting on that I don't...

RUTH: So, true.

MICHAEL: You know, they pop into my head and so I buy 'em.

RUTH: They just sit there. Right. Oh, yeah. I feel like every online entrepreneur does that. We all have our GoDaddy accounts full of URLs. I know I collect URLs, and then, they are always coming up for renewal, and I'm like, "Well, I'll just pay them for a year, one more year." But yeah, we actually did that with Do It Scared and had to go out and get that one.

MICHAEL: Yeah, that's cool.

RUTH: Yeah, but I totally understand that, but that's exciting, Michael. It's actually really, really amazing to hear you. So, who would you say is your ideal person? Who's your avatar?

MICHAEL: Okay. So, we've given a lot of thought about this. They are overwhelmed, successful leaders. Now, there's two ways to be overwhelmed.

RUTH: I love that.

MICHAEL: If you're unsuccessful, you're going to be overwhelmed, right? And we don't deal with those people. We only deal with people that are successful, but they're overwhelmed because of their success. And so, that's really our avatar. We also would say people that are high achievers or consider themselves high achievers. They've got big dreams, big aspirations, big goals, but they're struggling to get where they want to go to, and so what we're trying to do is to break down those challenges, those obstacles, and help them get from point A to point B faster.

RUTH: That's amazing. So, you've really honed in on a specific subset of this bigger audience that you've always had is these are our people.

MICHAEL: Yes. It really is, and just to add another layer or dimension to this. Kind of the promised transformation, the thing that we're really selling is not the courses, not the books, or any of that, but what we're really selling is a lifestyle, which is win at work and succeed at life.

RUTH: I love that.

MICHAEL: So, we want people that are after that double win, people that just sort of intuitively gravitate to that but just can't figure out how to make it work, and that's the thing I'm the most proud of. One of the things that's happened with our Business Accelerator Coaching clients is, on average in their first year in the program, their revenue goes up by 67%. Some less, some more, but on average ... but even more important, I think, is that, on average, they get back 11 hours a week to put into their offstage time or backstage time, but it's time

not working, and I love that.

RUTH: Well, that's exciting for me because I just signed up for Business Accelerator.

MICHAEL: I know. I'm excited for you.

RUTH: I am very excited to get my revenue up 67% and get 11 hours a week.

MICHAEL: 11 hours.

RUTH: So, I'm going to hold you to that.

MICHAEL: Okay. Going to take two of us.

RUTH: Good. So, we should probably wrap up here, but a couple quick, quick questions. First of all, self-care. How do you practice self-care in your life and business? I mean, you're all about winning at work and at home, so what are some specific things that you do to practice self-care?

MICHAEL: This is so important to me. In fact, I spoke at Leadercast. Are you familiar with that conference?

RUTH: No.

MICHAEL: It's out of Atlanta, but there were 3,000 people in the room and another 80,000 watching by simulcast or satellite.

RUTH: Oh, wow.

MICHAEL: So, it was a big audience, but I spoke on self-care as a leadership discipline because I feel like if you're going to be your most effective you, if you're going to be the best version of you, then just like a fine musical instrument, you've got to take care of the instrument.

So, for me, here's what that looks like—and I've got to calibrate this. I'm in a different season of life than some of the people listening to this podcast are, right? So, there were times when we had ... I have five daughters, and we had five little girls underfoot, and I was lucky if I could get a morning ritual in that was 20 minutes. Now, it's a couple hours. So, for me, what it looks like is I get up first thing in the morning, and I attend to spiritual things. So, I pray, read the Bible, read something in a book, or get some kind of input. Then, I head to the gym. So, I'm taking care of myself spiritually, intellectually, also psychically, and then, I'm also making sure that my evenings are free. I talked about my trigger at night to get me out of the office by 6:00.

RUTH: Which I love. I'm going to start doing.

MICHAEL: It's cool, and you can do it so cheap. The automation technology is so cheap. So, spending time with my family at night is a way of self-care. I never really had friends through most of my career. I thought the people at work were my friends, and they were at some level, but they weren't friends that were peers, and they're weren't people that ... I wanted people that weren't

impressed with what I'd accomplished, people that could hold me to account, cheer me on when I was discouraged, but people with whom I could share my life. So, my evenings and my weekends are spent either with family or with my friends. And all of that is important for me to rejuvenate. In fact, I've got an entire chapter in *Free to Focus* that's about rejuvenation and why it's so important and the science behind it.

RUTH: I love it. I love it. So, what do you do, then—and this might be along the same lines of self-care, but what do you do to protect your confidence, specifically?

MICHAEL: Yeah, one of the things—and you and I have both been part of Dan Sullivan's programs in the past, but one of the biggest lessons I've learned from Dan is focus on the game, not the gap.

RUTH: I love that.

MICHAEL: So, here's what it looks like for people that have never heard this before. So, let's say you come up to the end of a product launch, or you come up to the end of your fiscal year, and let's say that you fell short of your goal. Let's say you hit 87% of your profit goal, but you were still ahead by 15% over last year. You got a choice. You can focus on where you fell short, the gap, or you can focus on the gain. Now, the truth is, I think, to have integrity with your team, you have to acknowledge the gap, right, because you don't want to look like Pollyanna, glossing over what happened that wasn't so great. But that's not where you want to camp. If you do that, it will destroy your confidence, and it will dispirit your team. So, you've got to focus on the gains. And so we do this as a discipline as a team. So, every single time we do a launch, every single time we end a quarter or end a month or any natural financial milestone, we will acknowledge whether we were short or whether we were above, and then, we will focus on what was the gain. And even if it wasn't a financial gain, there were things that we learned, things that can improve us for the next time that we do this.

RUTH: Yes. I love that.

MICHAEL: That's a big concept for me.

RUTH: So, how soon afterwards do you do that? Like, the next day? Do you do it the next week? Is there a timeline on that?

MICHAEL: Yeah, almost immediately. So, we have a whole process—you'll learn about this in *Business Accelerator*—called the After Action Review. So, literally after any major event—like we just brought our team back from our annual team retreat. So, we took all of our team, all their spouses. It was about 70 people. We took them to a luxury resort in east Tennessee, and you would think, I mean, it was unbelievable. Food was phenomenal, accommodations great, but we came back, and as soon as I got back and got back to work, first thing I did was an After Action Review on that event because I want to, for sure, acknowledge the things that I want to keep next time we do it, but I also want to notice the things that we can improve, the things I want to start doing, and the things I want to stop doing. So we use that kind of model for evaluating everything.

RUTH: I love that. I love that. Okay, final question. What is the best piece of advice that you've ever received, and why?

MICHAEL: The best piece of advice I ever received was to keep your word because there's nothing more important than trust, and when you lose it, it's doubly hard to regain. So, I had a boss when I started in the publishing industry right after college who said that he was going to give me a raise after 90 days, and I had no training in marketing. So, he said, "Look, just, I think this is going to work, but just to be fair, I want to give you 90 days, and if you're successful then, then I'll give you a big raise." So, at the end of 90 days, he calls me into his office. He says, "You've killed it. You've exceeded my expectations. Well done. Unfortunately, our company is in the middle of a salary freeze, and I cannot give you the raise I promised you. My hands are tied." And he was very empathetic. He was very sorry. I could tell that it broke his heart.

So, I went home, and I told Gail, and being the resilient person she is, she said, "Well, okay. We just have to trust that if we work hard, it's all going to be rewarded eventually." Next day, he calls me into his office, and he says, "I couldn't sleep last night." And he had an envelope in his hand. He said, "Sit down." He said, "You can't say no to this." He said, "My wife and I discussed this at dinner last night, and the truth is I gave you my word, not the company, and so, here's the \$3,000 I promised you, and it's out of my personal account, but you can't say no."

RUTH: Wow.

MICHAEL: That is integrity because he made his actions—

RUTH: That's amazing.

RUTH: —line up with his words, and that has become a huge corporate value for us and a personal value for me.

RUTH: Wow. That's amazing. Drop the mic right there. That's an incredible story. Thank you.

MICHAEL: It is.

RUTH: Thank you for sharing that. So, Michael, thank you so much for being here. Is there any last final words? I don't know how you could actually top that, but any final things you want us to know? And then, let us know where we can find you online.

MICHAEL: Yeah, I think the only thing I would say, and especially in light of your theme, lean into your fear. Tony Robbins has this thing that he says that if you're afraid of it, then you must do it, because the alternative is you're controlled by your fears, and the only way that you can actually break free and experience freedom is you've got to lean into your fears. And I'm sure you can validate this from your own experience, but every fear is bigger than it really is. I mean, it appears bigger than it really is, and you lean into it, and you do that thing scared, and then, you go, "You know what? Why was I so afraid of that? I mean, for years, that controlled my life."

I had my daughter, Megan. She was afraid of public speaking. She gave a speech at our Achieve conference last year, and this had controlled her life for almost 20 years. She gave a speech, killed it. I mean, crushed it, and now, she's like, "I am so glad that I've been liberated from that fear. I had no idea how much that was controlling my life."

RUTH: So true. So true. It's like I always say, courage is like a muscle, and the more you exercise it, the stronger it gets, and you just have to keep taking that step. So, where can we find you online?

MICHAEL: Michaelhyatt.com, and if people are interested in finding out more about the book *Free to Focus*, they can find that at freetofocusbook.com.

RUTH: Amazing. Michael, thank you so much.

MICHAEL: Thank you, Ruth. Great to be with you.

RUTH: Great to have you.

Okay, so, don't forget that if you would like to grab our "Do It Scared" manifesto or get all the show notes for this episode, along with all the links to everything that we just talked about, you can find it all at doitscared.com/episode50. Once again, get all the show notes and links on our website at doitscared.com/episode50. And then, before we go, I just want to say, as always, I love hearing from you. So if you have any questions about what we talked about today, or any other topics that you would like to see addressed on the Do It Scared podcast, any other guests you would like to see interviewed, please feel free to reach out either via email or just by messaging me on Instagram. And that about does it for this episode of the Do It Scared with Ruth Soukup podcast. Thank you so much for joining me today. And if you liked what you heard, you can leave a review on iTunes, or, better yet, share this episode in your Instastory and tag me to let me know. If I repost your story, we will send you a "Do It Scared" T-shirt just for fun. Also, be sure to subscribe either on iTunes or Stitcher or wherever you like to listen to be notified of new episodes.

And speaking of upcoming episodes, be sure to join me next week for a very special episode as we chat about a topic that I know so many people struggle with, including me, and that is confidence and feeling confident even when you are unsure. And I'm going to share a few surefire strategies for boosting your confidence, including some things that might just surprise you, but you'll have to come back to find out what they are. So, I will catch you then.