



This Is Your Life Podcast
Season 1, Episode 6
Published: August 13, 2014

Michael Hyatt

Michele Cushatt: Welcome to *This Is Your Life* with Michael Hyatt, where our goal is to give you the clarity, courage, and commitment you need to do what matters. My name is Michele Cushatt, and I'm your cohost today. I'm sitting in the studio with Michael Hyatt. Hi, Michael.

Michael Hyatt: Hey, Michele.

Michele: One of your blog readers recently left this comment: "For me the biggest obstacle to blogging is knowing no one will read it."

Michael: That does tend to throttle the enthusiasm.

Michele: Of course, I say that and I'm like, "True. Absolutely true. That kind of makes it a little bit less exciting to sit down and actually spend hours crafting a blog post." I totally feel his pain. I've been blogging since 2008 myself, which isn't as long as you've been doing it, but it does feel like a really long time.

Michael: It does. Yeah.

Michele: I can't tell you how many times I've had the exact same thought. We write this great stuff, but we can't force people to read and to comment. However, there are factors within our control that we can manipulate or change, mistakes we can avoid, in order to increase our blog readership, our list, or whatever it may be. That's what we're going to be talking about today because we want our readers, when they actually land on our pages, to hang around for a little while. Actually, we just want to get them there sometimes.

Michael: Exactly.

Michele: So have you ever had that frustration in the past? I mean, I know right now you don't have so much of an issue with readership, but I'm sure that when you started this was a real factor.

Michael: Well, first of all, it's kind of like the old adage, "You can never be too smart or too thin." You can never have too many blog readers, no matter where you are. Even at my level, I wish I had more.

Michele: Mm-hmm.

Michael: Because if you're writing because you want to make an impact, you want to make an impact on more. Making an impact on more people is better than making an impact on fewer people, but when I started out (I think we talked about this in another episode), it took me four years before I was getting more than 1,000 readers a month.

In the midst of that, I really had to find why I was writing, because I obviously wasn't doing it for the numbers. Part of it for me was that I was trying to find my voice. I was trying to settle on the right content, figure out what my expertise was and what I had to offer, and that just took a while. So yeah, I know what that frustration is like, to post something and then to be refreshing your page every five minutes to see if anybody has commented.

Then there's the disappointment when you can get through the whole day and you don't have one single comment. You're going, "Is anybody reading these? I mean, my mom stopped reading me."

Michele: Oh no! That's always a bad sign, when a mom stops. And sometimes it really is our issue. I mean, it really is. Sometimes we make mistakes that we can avoid that make it really prohibitive for those out there who are searching for great content to actually connect with us. So let's talk for a minute just about some of those mistakes. What we're going to do today is talk about the top 10 blogging mistakes...the top 10. I'm sure there might be even more than that.

Michael: There may well be. Yep.

Michele: But we're going to talk about these top 10 sins, many of which I have committed. Have you done that as well?

Michael: Me too. Every single one of them. Every single one of them.

Michele: Good. By the way, how long have you been blogging now?

Michael: Since 2004. I was kind of blogging before that, but it wasn't blogging software. I just noticed that when I started changing out posts frequently on my website or started putting up a different lead article, it garnered more traffic, but I started with Typepad in 2004. That was my first official foray into blogging.

Michele: Okay, nice...a former Typepadder.

Michael: Yes. Seth Godin is still on Typepad, so they're alive and well.

Michele: All right. Sounds good. Okay, so let's watch through these mistakes. What's the very first blogging mistake you see?

Michael: Well, the first one that I see is *you don't post enough*. Here's how that script runs. People get enthusiastic. I don't care if you're a corporate executive, a business owner, an agent, a writer, an author, or a speaker. You get all excited about blogging because you see the potential of a platform. You

probably start with a lot of enthusiasm. You may blog three times in the first week. Some people go crazy and blog five times in the first week.

Then, as you don't get the engagement you want or don't see the readers you want, that begins to drift off. If you don't post often enough, you're not going to develop that loyal following, and that's what it takes. It takes that consistent (to borrow a metaphor from Jim Collins) pushing the flywheel and continuing to push it before you develop enough momentum that it begins to move on its own. So not posting enough is the first mistake I see.

Michele: Now early on, even when I started blogging a while back, it seemed to be that if you posted more often you got more engagement, and by "more often" I mean maybe every day of a week.

Michael: Yep.

Michele: I've kind of seen that it seems to have changed a little bit. Audiences don't always expect it every day. Have you noticed that change, or...?

Michael: Yeah. Well, this is where I think I've matured in my view of this over the last several years. When I first started blogging, I was very regular. I mean, sometimes it was two times a week. Sometimes it was three times a week. Sometimes I would go a couple of weeks without blogging. Then I got into this thing where I discovered that the more I posted, the more traffic I got, so then I made this commitment one time that I was going to post 90 days in a row...every single day, seven days a week, 90 days in a row...just to see if I could do it.

Michele: Wow!

Michael: It was like the best thing I ever did.

Michele: Why is that? That just sounds like a heart attack to me.

Michael: I know. It was really tough, but once I got the momentum and got into the rhythm... First of all, I was looking at the world all the time, looking for blog posts, so I was noticing everything. Everything was a potential blog post. I was like one of the guys who buy a digital camera and then all of a sudden start looking at everything in life as a potential photograph, right?

Michele: Oh. Yeah. You can see that.

Michael: You start annoying your family, and they go crazy, like, "Put the camera away!" Well, it's the same thing with blogging, so when I got into that groove, it really did help me, but honestly, it was too much for my audience. Then I backed it down to five days a week, so Monday through Friday.

Michele: Okay.

Michael: I did that for several years. By the way, the entire time I had a full-time job while I was doing that, so I was doing this on Saturday mornings primarily and then occasionally early in the morning, but while I had my family...

Michele: Now you were writing *all* of your posts on Saturday mornings?

Michael: Yeah.

Michele: Wow!

Michael: Yeah. Here in a second, I'll tell you why that was possible. Then I did a really scary thing. After I made the leap and went pro and was out there doing this full time, I thought, "I'm spending way too much time blogging. I can't create any product. I can't get ahead of the curve because I'm writing five original posts a week."

So I did a really scary thing. I polled my audience, which in this particular case was of no use at all, because some people said, "Whatever you do, do not stop blogging five days a week, because I just like the regularity and the stability of being able to wake up in the morning and see your post is there."

Michele: Okay.

Michael: Then I had some people say, "It's about time that you throttle it back, because I can't keep up with you. The stuff goes into my inbox. I don't delete it, but I don't read it either. I'm way behind, and I feel guilty about that, and I'm probably going to unsubscribe." So I said, "Okay, here's what I'm going to do. I'm going to go to three days a week, and one of those is going to be my podcast, so it's essentially going to be that Mondays and Fridays will be original content, Wednesdays will be my podcast, and that's all I'm going to do."

I was scared to death. Now this was at a time when most of my revenue was coming off of advertising, so my page views would have a direct economic impact on me if they dipped. So I did it, and in the first two weeks, my overall page views dropped by about 20 percent.

Michele: That's a pretty significant number.

Michael: It's a lot. It really scared me. I was kind of lamenting all of this with a mutual friend of ours, Brian, and he said, "You know, I think you should just hold steady and see if it bounces back." Sure enough, about a week later, it all came back and then continued to grow. It had the same trajectory as before and has grown steadily since then. I cut my workload by... What is that? What's the math on that, 40 percent?

Michele: Yeah, two out of five.

Michael: Two out of five.

Michele: Mm-hmm.

Michael: So I cut my workload by 40 percent.

Michele: And you're still doing the podcasts, but as far as writing original content, you're only doing two posts with that.

Michael: Yeah, that's true. Yeah. So I cut it significantly, and it didn't have any impact. Tim Ferriss calls this *minimum effective dose*. Have you heard him talk about this?

Michele: Mm-hmm. Yes. Or maybe I've heard you talk about him talking about this, but yes, I do know the concept.

Michael: Okay. Well, yeah. So the concept, for those of you who don't know, is that you don't need a higher dosage than what it takes to be effective. The good example he gives is that water boils at...212 degrees?

Michele: Uh-huh.

Michael: So you don't really need to boil it to 213 or 215 or 220 degrees. That's wasted energy. The same thing was true for me. I was now getting the result with 60 percent of the effort...same result, but 60 percent of the effort...and it freed me up to do even more stuff I wanted to do. So picking the right schedule is important.

Michele: Once people kind of adjusted to the schedule, did you have any fallout with your readers, customers?

Michael: No. None.

Michele: Nothing at all? No comments? Really?

Michael: I would say that overall it was positive. There were a few people who said, "I'm kind of sad you're not blogging every day," and then both of those people got over it, and then... That was a joke. You didn't laugh! Even the guys on the camera laughed, but you didn't laugh. Thanks for showing up!

Michele: Thanks for cuing me on the laughter.

Michael: So what I feel like now, Michele, is that what's more important than the number of times you blog a week is the consistency.

Michele: Okay.

Michael: So if you pick once a week... And that's perfectly fine. That's a perfectly acceptable call, okay?

Michele: I do. I subscribe to the once-a-week posts because that really is doable for me. I can't do much more than that.

Michael: Do you do it on a certain day every week?

Michele: Uh-huh. Well, typically it's Tuesday, Wednesday.

Michael: There's no day called Tuesday-Wednesday.

Michele: In my world, on planet Michele, Tuesday-Wednesday is a day.

Michael: Okay.

Michele: It's *-ish*. It's like Tuesday-ish. Come on!

Michael: Okay, so listen. I'm going to cut you some slack on that, but let me tell you why it's important, if you pick a day, to be consistent. Now I wouldn't say you have to have ironclad consistency on that certain day, but it has to be every week if you pick that frequency.

Michele: Okay.

Michael: Here's why. The most important thing you can do as a blogger or person building any kind of platform is build trust, because without trust, sales don't happen. Even if you're only selling a point of view, you have to build the trust to be able to do that. The way you build trust is by showing up and being consistent. You know how it is. We all have that flaky friend who misses the appointment or is always late, and it kind of dings their reputation with us.

Michele: Mm-hmm.

Michael: We don't trust them. We're a little suspicious. But then there's that friend who is always there, is always consistent. We just have trust for that person, so as a blogger, that's what you want to do: show up consistently, regardless of the day of the week or how many times you blog. Consistency is more important than frequency.

Michele: So basically, what you're saying is my Tuesday-Wednesday-ish schedule means I'm your flaky friend.

Michael: No, because you're showing up once a week. It's just not always quite on the same day.

Michele: Okay. But yeah. I totally agree with where you're coming from. It's a promise you're making.

Michael: Yeah. It is a promise.

Michele: And when you tell people you're going to be there, it's a promise. You need to keep it.

Michael: But you have a complicated life, as we have explored here many times.

Michele: Yes. So the point is to write content. Be consistent. But the first mistake is not posting enough. See, if you're not going to write too much, you're going to notice a drop in your readership. That's just what's going to happen.

Michael: Yeah. It is.

Michele: If you don't show up for even a couple of weeks, it happens. So that is one of them. What is the next mistake?

Michael: Well, the next one is the mirror image of this one, and it's that *you post too much*. Now this often happens when you go out with a great deal of enthusiasm, like I was talking about before, and you just flood people's inboxes or people's RSS readers with too many posts. Now there are some posts out there... I'm tempted to unsubscribe them, but I subscribe to Mashable. Mashable has multiple...probably a couple dozen...posts a day.

Michele: They kind of just *ping* out throughout the day?

Michael: Yeah, it kind of kills you to keep up, but I keep subscribed to it because there is always some interesting content in there.

Michele: Mm-hmm.

Michael: But there are some other sites where I've had some friends who experimented with posting multiple times a day, and it was just too much. I think there were the people, even when I was posting five days a week, who just said, "It's too much." I would say that over time, over the last three years, people's tolerance for the number of posts has gone down. In other words, they can't handle as much content.

Michele: Because there's so much more out there all the time.

Michael: Yeah.

Michele: There really is, so being sensitive to that is very important.

Michael: Yeah. So the trend now is to be more thoughtful and be more thorough but with less frequency.

Michele: So now let's talk about post length, because that can be a mistake as well.

Michael: Yeah. Well, I think when you're just starting out, and maybe you're not a writer, the thought of doing 250 words may be kind of daunting.

Michele: Mm-hmm.

Michael: I used to advocate... In fact, I think in my book *Platform* I say the sweet spot for a blog post is about 500 words. For me, I can bang that out in a little less than an hour, usually. Sometimes I get stuck and it takes a little bit longer, but that's not a bad length. The trend I have seen...and the reason I'm hesitating on recommending that anymore...is that some of the most trafficked posts out there, the ones that get the highest organic searches from Google, are the ones that are the longer, more authoritative pieces. I'm talking about even 1,200 to 2,400 words.

Michele: Really?

Michael: Yeah. So I wouldn't be afraid of those.

Michele: Now that surprises me because I find that as our attention span is going down and seems to be shorter and shorter all the time, people don't want to camp out for that long.

Michael: They don't, unless it's a really authoritative piece that promises to be kind of like *the bible*, *the* thing on whatever it is. I just read one from Social Media Examiner this week. I think it was today, in fact. They always do these authoritative pieces. They were talking about four new resources for creating images on your blog, and it was pretty long. It was probably 1,500 words.

Michele: Okay.

Michael: I mean, I devoured it, and I saved it to Evernote because these were tools I was excited about.

Michele: So it was practical. It had a great title, which is part of it too. That title captures your attention, gets people engaged and bought in.

Michael: Yeah.

Michele: Then I would imagine it wasn't just long copy. They broke it up and had images.

Michael: Totally. They broke it up with images and with action items and with links and other things that kept it interesting. Yes, definitely.

Michele: So we've gone through three of these 10 blogging mistakes: You don't post enough, you post too much, and your post is too long. What's the fourth mistake you see people making?

Michael: The fourth one is *not inviting engagement*. I hear people complain all the time, bloggers especially, that they're not getting enough engagement on their websites, and by that they mean either they're not getting the social shares they would like or they're not getting the comments they would like. Now what I'm going to tell you is not a silver bullet. This doesn't work in every case, but it'll work better than it has worked if you'll try it. That is to simply ask people.

As you begin to build trust with people, they naturally want a way to reciprocate. They want a way to be able to give back to you, and for you to ask them, to say, “Hey, if you found this helpful, would you please share it with your friends?” and then make it easy for them with Twitter or Facebook or LinkedIn or whatever it is, use social share buttons...

And ask a question to invite them into the conversation. Web 1.0, back in the day, in the late 90s or so, was all about a monologue. I post stuff on my site. I don’t invite or ask for a response from my readers. I just post it. Then web 2.0 was all about this engagement. We’ve come a long way beyond that now, but it was about engagement, about a dialogue.

Michele: Mm-hmm.

Michael: One of the best ways to do that is to ask. See yourself as the person who has the privilege of starting the conversation, but you don’t have to finish the conversation. I intentionally leave holes in my posts. I don’t say everything that could be said about the post, because I want to leave room for my readers to share their experience. It’s kind of like if you had a dinner party at your house. You set up the conversation at the dinner table. “We’re going to talk about...” Well, then if you launched into a soliloquy about that topic, how boring would that be for everybody else?

Michele: Uh-huh. Everybody else is just expected to sit there and listen to you.

Michael: That’s right, and be polite. Then they kind of yawn.

Michele: And nod.

Michael: And then they look at their watches, and it’s time to leave. Instead of that, you can set it up by kind of framing it and maybe telling a story or two, whatever, and then invite people to the conversation with an open-ended question...not a yes-or-no question but an open-ended question...and invite them to comment. Some of the best content on my blog is in the comments.

Michele: Mm-hmm. I’ve found too, just with experimenting on my site, that the more practical or down-to-earth that question is, the more likely it is that you’re going to get a response.

Michael: Yeah.

Michele: So if it’s a question that asks a *big* question, something that’s...

Michael: Global.

Michele: Yeah. A *huge* question. I mean, that’s too much for people to then dive in and participate in.

Michael: How would you solve the problem of evil in the world? That’s probably too big.

Michele: Yeah. Mental note: That's not a good way to close your blog post. Yeah, so find that question. Make it kind of practical or down-to-earth, something they could easily want to respond to. Okay, you don't invite enough engagement. What is the fifth mistake you see bloggers make?

Michael: That's when *you don't participate in the conversation*. Now to continue our dinner analogy, it's like if you invited a lot of people over for dinner, you stood up after the dessert was served and said, "Hey, tonight we're going to talk about such-and-such," and you asked the question, so you did all of that beautifully, like we were talking about in the last mistake. Then you just left the house.

Michele: Bye-bye!

Michael: Yeah.

Michele: While everybody is getting ready to answer, you just turn around and walk away.

Michael: You just turn around and walk off, and you're nowhere to be found.

Michele: Uh-huh. I know none of us would do that in a social situation, and yet on our blogs, that happens.

Michael: It happens all the time! Somebody says, "Gosh, I've given all of the time I can possibly give to this in writing the blog post."

Michele: We hit publish, and then we split.

Michael: Then we split, and it's like inviting people over to your house and not being present when you're throwing a dinner party.

Michele: That's such a great analogy right there. You just painted such a beautiful picture of exactly what happens when you do that.

Michael: Well good. Good. So instead, what you have to do is participate. Now here's what that doesn't mean. This would be equally annoying: if I felt like I had to comment after every comment. Imagine the dinner party again. Every time somebody comments, you keep interjecting yourself and feeling the need to kind of have the last word. After a while, people are looking at you like, "Okay, this is socially awkward. Where did you learn these skills?"

Michele: Not to mention the fact that you appear very dominating or on top of everybody else.

Michael: Yeah. It's all about you.

Michele: Uh-huh.

Michael: So what I try to do, typically, is comment on the first several comments of the day to kind of get the ball rolling and let them know I'm present, that I haven't checked out, I haven't left the room, I'm still there, and then I disappear. Then I'll comment maybe once or twice throughout the day where I think I can add value. Now honestly... I shouldn't still be doing this, but I do. I read every comment that comes into my blog, even though I have community leaders like you.

Michele: Mm-hmm.

Michael: I do read every comment, but I don't respond to every comment, and I don't do that in the social media world either. On Twitter or Facebook, I don't respond to every mention. I just can't.

Michele: Not everybody has 100 comments a day like you may have, so what about the person who is only getting two or three or four comments? Would you encourage them to respond to all of those?

Michael: Well, I think you can in that situation because it's like having a small-group discussion. I think where it gets awkward is where it's more people.

Michele: Okay. So it would make sense to interact with all of them. If you were sitting with three people, you would interact with all of them.

Michael: You would.

Michele: Okay, so that makes more sense, but once you start having 100 comments, we don't need to hear a reply to each one of those.

Michael: No. But see, one of the things you're really good at...I've noticed this on my blog...as a community leader is... You won't always comment with your own thoughts. You'll sometimes ask that person a question to try to drive the conversation deeper. Everything you've ever learned about being a good conversationalist applies here in the blog world as well.

We were talking with the crew before we did this episode...that seems totally unrelated, but it does relate here...about Dale Carnegie's book *How to Win Friends and Influence People*. All of that stuff applies in the web world. In fact, those guys ought to do a version of that and apply it just to the online world. That would be pretty cool.

Michele: That is true, and I would say it's probably more important in the web world. When we leave comments, they're there for a long time.

Michael: It is.

Michele: It's not just like a conversation that evaporates into air once you walk away and are done with the conversation.

Michael: It's documented.

Michele: Yeah, it's documented. It's in print.

Michael: Yeah.

Michele: You can go find it later, so it's important that we learn those skills in that venue as well. Okay. You don't participate in the conversation. That was the fifth mistake, so let's move on to number six.

Michael: Okay. This is where *you don't make your content accessible*. What I mean by that is you have to provide the content in a way that your customers, your readers, want to consume it. So, for example, I go to a lot of blogs, and I would love to subscribe to that blog, but there's no way to subscribe to that blog because they either don't have a link so I can subscribe by email or by RSS (Real Simple Syndication is what that stands for)... If you don't know what that is, that's okay.

That's how I read most of the blog posts that I read, and a lot of times there will be no way to do that. Sometimes I go to the more sophisticated marketers, and they're trying to build their email list, so they remove the RSS function altogether. I think it's a huge mistake. It's a self-centered mistake. I know they're trying to build an email list, but it's not about me as a blogger; it's about them as readers, so I need to make it accessible to them so they can consume it in the way they want to consume it.

I've experimented with this in a lot of ways. Earlier this year, one of the things I did was write my blog post and then recorded it. I think I was using a service called SoundHound, but I actually read the blog post and then put the audio file at the end so people who would rather listen to the blog post could do so.

Michele: Hmm.

Michael: But the truth was nobody was listening to it, so it didn't work. It was a failed experiment, but that was okay.

Michele: Hey, but it was worth trying to see.

Michael: It was my drive to make it accessible and easy.

Michele: Okay, so on this particular mistake, let's talk about something else. There are times when people have a website, and their blog is hidden within the website somewhere, so they have a truly static website, and then they have an additional page where they have that content.

Michael: Yeah.

Michele: Sometimes it can be hard to find, so even if you are someone who does that, that needs to be accessible or clear, easy to find, as well. Correct?

Michael: Yeah. Absolutely. That has to be in the top navigation so people can see it, and by *top navigation* I mean the menu items at the very top of the blog. Keeping that simple is also part of

accessibility. I've seen these menu trees that are unwieldy and outrageous, with multiple levels. Nobody can follow that stuff. You haven't done the hard work of thinking through it to simplify it.

Michele: Yeah. We don't want to make people work for it.

Michael: That's right.

Michele: I mean, really. We don't. We want to serve it up to them.

Michael: Yep, make it easy.

Michele: Make it as easy as possible. Now do you have any preference or advice for those who might be considering a web versus a true blog? You know, like mine is a blog. You go to my website and the content is right there, and yours is the same way right now as well.

Michael: Yeah.

Michele: I've done both. Is there one you recommend over the other?

Michael: Nope. I will say that I'm about to switch. My homepage at www.michaelhyatt.com is a static page that introduces you to my brand, the full array of offerings I have.

Michele: Okay.

Michael: But that's because I'm at a place where there's no other way to do that in a way that makes sense, but my blog will be hanging off of that main site. There's no right or wrong.

Michele: But there's not a right or wrong, just personal preference?

Michael: No.

Michele: The point is that if you have that blog hanging off of a website, make sure it's visible and easy to get to, that they don't have to work for it.

Michael: Well, a lot of people, your regular readers, probably won't be coming back to your blog very often. I hate to say that, but they don't.

Michele: Mm-hmm.

Michael: They subscribe in whatever format you make that available, and then they don't think about it. It's coming to them. It's being pushed.

Michele: It's delivered to them.

Michael: That's right.

Michele: Talk about accessibility... That's what we want for them. Okay, mistake number seven?

Michael: Mistake number seven...and this is huge because you won't get read if you don't figure this one out...is *not creating catchy headlines*. Headlines are everything because the way people read today is by scanning. For people who are scanning, either in their inboxes or in their RSS readers, all they're seeing is the headline. Imagine walking into a bookstore... Remember those?

Michele: Vaguely.

Michael: So you walk into a bookstore, and let's say you go into the business section. You're trying to find a business book. There will be a certain number of those books that will be what the publishing businesses used to call (and still do, I assume) face out. The front of the book was out.

Michele: Yes, rather than the binding.

Michele: That's right. So 95 percent of the books that are on the shelves are spine out, so all you see is the title of the book. So we used to say to ourselves, "We have to get the title right, because they're not going to see this really interesting graphic and this beautiful design. All they're going to see is the title."

Michele: Mm-hmm.

Michael: The same thing is true in the blogging world. All most people are going to see is that headline. If the headline doesn't compel them to click and go deeper, they're on to the next thing. You have a couple of nanoseconds to live before they bounce to the next thing, so it really is worth your time. If you're serious about blogging, if you really want to get traffic, if you want to build an audience, you have to get great at writing headlines, which means you have to study a little bit of copywriting.

A couple of resources I've recommended in a lot of different contexts are www.copyblogger.com... That's a great website. They have a resource called "How to Write Magnetic Headlines," which we'll link to in the show notes. Then there's David Garfinkel's book, *Advertising Headlines That Make You Rich*. It's kind of a cheesy title, but it's a bunch of templates that he deconstructs and explains why they work. He gives you a lot of variants of each of those headlines.

Michele: You actually use that, don't you?

Michael: I use it like a desk reference.

Michele: Uh-huh.

Michael: So when I'm stuck, I'll flip through it, and I'll say, "Okay, will that work? No. Okay, will that one work?" and I just keep trying until I get it right.

Michele: Until you find the right template that works for what you're writing.

Michael: That's right.

Michele: So what about those who do... Your posts are more linear. They usually have three or five or seven points or whatever it may be, so it would be really easy for you in your title to say, like in this podcast, for example, "The Top 10 Blogging Mistakes You Can Avoid." But there are some people whose blog content is more narrative or story-related or something a little different that's not going to necessarily have that.

Michael: Mm-hmm.

Michele: So is there one set template for doing headlines, or are there different ways to do that?

Michael: No. The best advice I would give there...and I don't do that kind of writing, so I'm not the best expert to ask on that, but...is that you have to write from the reader's perspective. What's in it for them? I can tell you another thing that doesn't work: the clever headline that requires explanation. It's really cute if you got it.

Michele: Uh-huh.

Michael: Like if I could explain this joke to you, you'd laugh. That's no joke at all. The same thing is true with the headline. If it's not intuitively obvious the first time I see it, and it requires somebody explaining it, it's not going to work. It has to have a promise. It has to create intrigue.

Michele: Mm-hmm.

Michael: It has to do something that pulls people into it, even (I would say) for those more narrative blog posts, saying what's in it for the reader.

Michele: Okay.

Michael: Like we were talking about in another episode, people are tuned in to WIIFM, "What's in it for me?" If you can't tell them quickly in a headline, you're not going to get read. Period.

Michele: I heard Dave Ramsey make a quote the other day. I think it was Dave Ramsey. He said, "At the end of the day, we're not selling; we're serving."

Michael: That's right.

Michele: That's really what it comes down to for this too. Even when we write headlines, we're serving.

Michael: We are.

Michele: So we have to keep that in mind.

Michael: We're being respectful of their time.

Michele: Mm-hmm.

Michael: People don't have the time to figure out what the heck we're trying to say. Help them.

Michele: So now we've talked about the frequency of our posting. We've talked about the length of our posts and about the engagement and the headlines. Let's actually talk about content. We think (and it's true) our content, what we write in our blog posts, is a really key part to whether or not our blogging is successful, so let's start talking about that. What are some mistakes you see within the content?

Michael: Well, one of the first ones is just that first paragraph, sometimes called the *lead* in journalism, is weak.

Michele: Mm-hmm.

Michael: It just doesn't connect, because once they read the headline, the next thing they're going to read is that first paragraph, and if you don't clearly articulate the problem you're trying to solve, the issue you're trying to address, the benefit to the reader, or just something that's so curious that it makes them want to read further... That first paragraph is critically important. Now every other paragraph has to keep people moving through it as well, but that first one is kind of the most important of all of them.

Michele: Mm-hmm. So that eighth mistake in this list of 10, then, would be that *your first paragraph is weak*. Do you have any suggestions? I mean, when you sit down to write, do you immediately have something strong to open up with, or do you write the post and then maybe go back and fix that first paragraph?

Michael: I often go back and fix it, but I try to write it like this. I try to write it as though that's all anyone is going to read and I have to hook or tease them into reading more.

Michele: Okay.

Michael: Usually in WordPress I use a plugin called the All in One SEO Pack. This is all of the SEO I do. I don't do anything fancy, but I just have this plugin, and there's a paragraph description that gets posted with it.

Michele: Okay.

Michael: That first paragraph is what I'm writing for that, because that's all that the search engines are going to see, and that's all that a lot of readers are going to see. They'll see a summary of it, so I want to get that right.

Michele: That's what you end up using as that first paragraph.

Michael: That's right, but I don't want to give it all away there either, so I'm going to create the entry that makes them want to click through to get to the rest of the story.

Michele: There's some intrigue, but yet you don't want to have them completely lost. You give them some content, enough to... It's kind of like an appetizer to get them to the table and make them hungry without making them full.

Michael: Yeah, and I hate to say... This is kind of a negative analogy, but it's like a fishing lure. You have to pick the lure that's going to get the most fish to bite on it.

Michele: Okay. Got it. Okay, we're on number nine here on our top 10 list of blogging mistakes. What is number nine?

Michael: Nine is that *your topic is off brand*. You're not focused enough or niched down enough, and you're kind of writing about everything, and therefore you're writing about nothing. I did this in the early days too.

Michele: Mm-hmm, which in some sense... When you're an early blogger, part of developing as a blogger is just to get out there and write, right? That helps you hone your message.

Michael: It is, and find your niche, find your expertise, and all of that. All of that is fine, but at some point you have to exercise the discipline of saying, "Just because I can comment on everything or just because I have an opinion about everything doesn't mean I can write about everything." For example, I have (this will be shocking to you) political opinions, but whenever I try to write something political, it totally blows up in my face.

Michele: Yeah.

Michael: It's just something I stay away from.

Michele: Well, it's not in keeping with your brand either.

Michael: It's not in keeping with my brand. It's off topic. People don't come to me for political opinion. There are political bloggers out there, and that's fine for them to blog on because that's in fact what people are coming for, but not for me. It's off brand, and I have to exercise the discipline of staying on brand. I recently, like a week and a half ago, had the unfortunate experience of... I did it on Facebook. I didn't do it on my blog, but I threw out a political thing. It totally backfired.

Michele: Not a good idea.

Michael: Not a good idea.

Michele: I bet you won't be doing that again anytime soon.

Michael: Well, I said that before I did it the last time, so every couple of years I kind of think, “Okay, I can do this and it’ll be okay.” In this one I even tried to actually put it under the umbrella of leadership, so I was kind of...

Michele: Trying to make it fit the brand.

Michael: Making it fit the brand, and... No.

Michele: Just don’t go there.

Michael: No. I just... No. I’m just not going to go there.

Michele: I’ll tell you what. If you have the urge to do that again, you just call me and let me know, and I’ll talk you off the ledge.

Michael: Okay, good.

Michele: Okay, well, let’s get to our last one on our top 10 list of blogging mistakes. What’s number 10?

Michael: Number 10 is that *the post is about you*. Now this is tricky because you actually do want to use your own stories, your own personal anecdotes and what you’ve experienced, but there always has to be in that story that you’re telling what I call the *pivot*, where you turn the story to the audience and you make it relevant to them. If you don’t do the pivot, it’s mostly narcissism, or it’s a personal journal. You’re not writing to serve your audience.

You’re writing maybe for self-expression, to cast it in the best possible light, or you’re just totally fixated on yourself in the worst possible light. The pivot is where you turn it to the audience and say, “Have you ever been in that situation?” and then you start making it relevant to them. You’re telling the story to serve as a point of connection, to create empathy, to (again) build trust, but then there has to be the pivot. It can’t be all about you.

Michele: Well, thank you, Michael. For those of you who are bloggers out there, your blogging is a very unique signature to you, and where you invest your time and how you handle that can really determine how successful you are and how many readers you get.

Michael: Yes.

Michele: I know you’re not spending all of this time blogging because you want only your mother to read, so one of the keys Michael walked us through today is to avoid some of the most common mistakes with blogging. If you’ve enjoyed today’s conversation, you can get all of the show notes and the full transcript of this entire episode at www.michaelhyatt.com.

If you missed any of those 10 mistakes or you want to go back and review them again, you can find all of that in those show notes at www.michaelhyatt.com. In addition, if you’d like to watch the recording

of this episode on video, we have that posted on Michael's website as well. Any other thoughts on this topic?

Michael: Yeah. I would just encourage people who are listening to pick three of these and to flip them around and make them positive. Like, "Here's how often I'm going to post. Here's what I'm going to do to write better headlines. Here's what I'm going to do to write better leads, better first paragraphs." Give yourself some action assignments and really drill into this. You'll be amazed at how quickly the results will improve.

Michele: Mm-hmm, and rather than all 10, maybe today you can just start with those three.

Michael: Yeah, just pick three.

Michele: Good advice, Michael. Thank you for joining us today. It has been our pleasure to have this time with you.

Until next time, remember: Your life is a gift. Do what matters.