

Book Journeys Author Interview - August 1, 2013

Dr. Angela Lauria with Dan Amzallag, author of *100 Days or Less to Reaching Your Ultimate Happiness*

“You should not write because your life is gonna change, are you gonna become ... the most popular author out there. You have to write because it is a passion. You have to write because it’s something that you wanna share with other people.” ~Dan Amzallag

Angela:

Well, hello, everybody, and welcome to Book Journeys Radio. My name is Dr. Angela Lauria, and I am the founder of the Author Incubator and creator of the Difference Process for Writing a Book That Matters. Each week, on Book Journeys Radio, we talk to another author about their experience writing their first book – usually about writing their first book and what they learned in the process that you can learn from them. Today, we tend to have a special treat, because we have a multi-time author, Dan Amzallag is the author of the forthcoming *100 Days or Less to Reaching Your Ultimate Happiness*, but he is also the author of *The American Dream: How do You Buy or Start a Business Using None of Your Own Money*, which sounds good to me, *Mission Possible: How to Eradicate Obesity in America*, and *Gloateus Maximus: Inside the Lives of Personal Trainers*. So, he’s got a pretty broad range of experience as an author and in life in general, and so we’re super-excited to have him with us, Dan, thank you so much for being on the show!

Dan:

It is a pleasure, Ms. Angela!

Angela:

Awesome. So, Dan, why don’t you tell us about your newest book, *100 Days or Less to Reaching Your Ultimate Happiness*? What’s it about?

Dan:

Well, obviously, the title says it all. A lot of ...

Angela:

It really does. (chuckles)

Dan:

Yes! (chuckles) It’s actually – getting to reaching your ultimate happiness. Now, obviously, it’s a very, very complex subject. The reason is because a lot of people have a different definition of what happiness is all about, so this book actually gives you not a hundred calendar days – that’s very, very important to understand the difference, it’s a hundred days, so each day can be – can take the person ten to fifteen to a month to be able to accomplish, ... a hundred days, not calendar, but actually days.

Angela:
Got it. ...

Dan:
So, we actually – yeah. So, we actually ... on how to understand.

Angela:
Yeah, so you can – yeah. On how to understand what?

Dan:
I think – yes, we're helping people on how to understand and define what happiness is all about, and this is what's been very, very difficult to write this book compared to all my other books, which are mostly facts, and – and details about – starting the business, or about obesity in America, this book has to have – had a lot – a lot of different research based on the concept of happiness and how to apply it.

Angela:
Hmm. Very interesting. How did you become interested in the topic of happiness, how did you decide to write this book?

Dan:
Well – (chuckles) – everyone is trying to be happy. Everyone is trying to reach what happiness is all about. And the key here is to be able to – for me, actually, as a – as a person that's been seeking happiness, and this is the reason why you know and – the – the – the whole part of happiness and all is – the pursuit of happiness. Pursuing happiness is not a one-day. It's a lifetime. So a lot of people can – they could be unhappy for decades, and finally, through the process of understanding what happiness is all about, that actually are approaching, day by day, closer and closer to what their happiness is. Some – for some people, it could be money. For some people, it could be having a family. For others, it could be living comfortably. It – it – it depends, if that's the reason why, when I wrote this book, is actually based on a different variation of what happiness is all about, so I had to really understand a concept and to be able to put it into words. And that's been the vo – most difficult part of it.

Angela:
And now, your book – is your book completed at this point? Are you – where are you now, in the process?

Dan:
I am at ninety percent completed.

Angela:
Okay, great. So, this is something that you are hoping to publish by the end of the year?

Dan:

That is correct, it's a book ... be published by October 31st, and – and we should be – it should be in print during that time, so before 2014, it should be on – in bookstores.

Angela:

Awesome. So, let's say you're right about that October date, one of the things I always like to ask people is, from the – from the moment you decided to write the book until the moment you're holding your book in your hands, which, let's say is October, how long was that process? When did you start this book?

Dan:

Okay. Well, for this book, the – the start – I mean, the – the origination of the – the start of writing this book was in 2010. The reason why is because, obviously, it was a – a subject, it was very, very difficult to be able to comprehend, from the get-go, and to put it all – i – it – starting – writing the outline 'til writing sho – completing the book after editing and all that, that will take me around two years, or three years. All my other books took me around eighteen months. The reason is because – the books are a subject of passion, which also this one is, but I think the – the first book, which is *The American Dream*, that was an extension of my thesis, my MBA thesis, so the second book was because I, myself, suffered from obesity, so it was very, very easy to write. But this book is very complex, because it required a – tons of research.

Angela:

And so – so, for you, this will be about two years for this process, and m – how can this book, or even any of your other books, before – before you wrote this book, or before even you wrote your first book, is there something that you wish you knew, you wish somebody told you, that you might have exchanged the experience, or made it better for you?

Dan:

Interesting question. Because of my experiences in writing books, it's very, very difficult to be able to make – answer that question, because now I know what it needs to be able to complete this book successfully. It's – let's say you would have asked me this in 2001, when I wrote my first book, then maybe I would have told you about how to write an outline, which is – basically the skeleton of the book, and a lot of people jump and stuff into writing books without really having a subject to, or – or a path, a guidance, on how to write it. So, they start something, but they don't finish it, because they don't even know what chapter to start with, and what chapter to end with. And that's the reason why a lot of authors have a lot of difficulty in completing books, is because they – it's like going into a huge ... and not – and basically going blindfold. You not – you do not know where you're going.

Angela:

Wow, yeah, I totally agree, when I work – when I'm one with authors in transformation, and in my Free Your Inner Author Program, creating an outline that feels really good and doable is a big – is a big piece of the puzzle, because, otherwise, you're trying to get somewhere without a map.

Dan:

That is correct, exactly, it's like – going to a destination without a GPS.

Angela:

Yeah.

Dan:

So, you have ... where you're headed. (chuckles)

Angela:

Right.

Dan:

And – ... you know, as being an author yourself, Angela, y – you have an understanding, at least an appreciation, of what it takes to ... write a book, and it requires a lot – a lot of hours, to be able to sit down, where a lot of people have difficulty in doing so. It could be either because of family obligation, work obligation, you come back from work, you're exhausted, your brain is totally fried, and you don't even have the - ... the mood to be able to write anything about your subject of passion, even if it's passionate about it, you still say, "Ah, I'll do it tomorrow," or "I'll do it the next day," so you never really complete it, and after a while, when you go the year or two years r – without writing anything, you basically put this into the back burner and you forget about it.

Angela:

And is that something that you've experience? And how – so, I'm gonna guess yes, how do you get through it? What advice do you give people?

Dan:

It's a change of environment, basically –

Angela:

Ah!

Dan:

– because, obviously, if you are sitting down and you're ... your desktop, and you're typing and typing and typing, sometimes you do – and you won't think writer's block, there's not one author on Planet Earth that hasn't suffered from this predicament. And, obviously, it is a

question of, how do you put yourself in a different environment, different – either physical environment or go, let's say, on vacation, bring your laptop, sit down near the beach, whatever it is, and write a book that will probably – allow you to write more, or maybe different – i – i – maybe a different subject, because you should – even though you write an outline about a book, don't be afraid that, during its process, you will change it – you will probably go into another path, which is okay, because, sometimes, writing about a subject might open new doors, ... “Oh, in my outline that wasn't existed, but now this is something important that I should write about.”

Angela:
Hmm.

Dan:
So, be open, do not – be open about – other options, because if you are really so adamant in trying to fold the deadline, chapter by chapter, it kind of like is a bit difficult because, obviously, when you write about a certain chapter in the book, you – that might open new doors about – saying, “Oh, you know what? I need this detail, I should write about it as well.”

Angela:
Right. Right. I think that's – I think that's a great point. And when you have been in a – a situation when you're not productive, and you're wishing you were writing more, wishing you had more time, whatever it was, how do you – how have you been successful in getting back – getting back that flow? You talked about changing your environment, are there also ways that you might – that you actually changed your thoughts or changed what you're writing about, or what you do?

Dan:
Yes, actually, it's a – that's also – that's also a very interesting question. We – as authors, we have to be open-minded, because, obviously – to be able to break the – those challenges, that, when it comes to writing or changing your environment, you have to do a lot of research, especially this subject, about happiness. I could really – I cannot put in my mind, into the seven billion people who ... this planet, and define what ... concept of happiness is. There's a lot – I – I'm not sure it's a book, the – the – the book about *The Secret* –

Angela:
Mm-hmm.

Dan:
– ..., or *The Seven Key to Happiness*, what – there's so many books about it, and it's very, very complex, because a lot of those authors have had a lot of difficulties in being able to write, or to standardize what the concept of happiness is all about. So, for me to be able to break that writer's block, I go and research more, because that – open my mind into different variations of its concept, of happiness. And that's the reason why, if I feel like I have a writer's

block, I go and research about the specific chapter that I've got to write about, and find out exactly if my chain of thought meets with what other authors have shared in their books.

Angela:

Wow, that's a great suggestion!

Dan:

Thank you.

Angela:

I think that's fantastic. I – is that something – you have a story you can share with us about that?

Dan:

Well, actually, this book that I'm writing, the fourth one, I can tell you, Angela, this has been the most challenging book in my lifetime.

Angela:

Mm-hmm.

Dan:

The reason is not just in terms of time that it takes to be able to write it, but also the amount of research that I've got to conduct to be able to come up with a very simple solution in – it's encompassed in – in the subject of happiness. This is – the interesting part here, is that every chapter of my book, I – I don't call it – I don't call it "Chapter One," "Chapter Two," et cetera. I call it "Day One," "Day Two," "Day Three," until "Day One Hundred." Now, each day has three or four pages long. It's not – I'm not – spending twenty page for each chapter or each day. It has to be something, because you have to keep – you have to keep peoples' interest in wanting to go to the next chapter. And if, let's say, they have, or they come up with a day that they have a lot of trouble with, and not trouble in understanding, but trouble in applying the – the concept of happiness, they will be able to re-read it over and over again, to be able to si – to capture the essence of the chapter, and then be able to – "Okay, you know what, in this chapter, or in this day, I've got to really, kind of like, appease my anger."

Angela:

Mmm.

Dan:

"Or even understand how other people perceive my – what I say. I – i – it – either I'm sarcastic in my comments, and that offends people, I've got to really tone it down." So, they have to really focus on each day independently, and th – there's a link between each day, obviously, because ... goes from Day One, which is a very easy day to apply, to Day One Hundred, which is a very, very complex day to apply. And maybe, by Day Eighty to Day One

Hundred, it might take three or four months to be able to apply it, even though it's just twenty days, it might take three or four months to apply. So, it depends on each indiv - every individual.

Angela:

Very interesting. So, let's change your topic a little bit, and let's talk about publishing. I know, with all of your books, you have self-published, and that is over the course of alm – over a decade, I guess twelve years.

Dan:

That's correct.

Angela:

Can you talk about self-publishing, that's a great perspective, how has it changed in twelve years, what's better, would you recommend it and why, tell us your perspective of over a decade of self-publishing.

Dan:

Okay, absolutely. From 2001 'til 2013, obviously the – the – the world of publishing has changed drastically. The one ... year – the traditional publisher, what they do is, they print your book, and then they say, "We're gonna give you five percent or ten percent royalty," if you're lucky. You gotta be one of the top, top authors, and then, basically – and then, they let you do the advertising of the book. So, I said to myself, "If I'm gonna get – do all my effort, and I'm gonna do all the marketing, and I have to do everything, why not do the self-publishing part? And why not keep eighty-five percent of the – the proceeds?" So, with – now, with what you call "POD," which is "print on demand," it allows publishing company to have different equipment that allows you – not publishing, I'm sorry; printing company – that allows you to be able to print on demand, and instead of printing sixty thousand copies, like you had to originally, you could send two, three hundred copies and if, let's say, you have your book on Amazon or Barnes and Noble, and if they had to re-order some more, you could call the – the printer, and print it and ship it directly to them. So, that's ... the whole process.

Angela:

So, when you first published, were you buying – when you first published, were you buying a – a larger quantity of books and keeping them in your basement or something, how did it work then? ...

Dan:

... I printed a lot of books, put into the – the – in my basement, and then I fulfilled the orders myself.

Angela:

Wow.

Dan:

Because I had – I had a merchant account, I had the – a website that they could order directly from, and order came directly to my e-mail with the address et cetera, and then either people ... pay through PayPal or they pay through a credit merchant ... solution, and then, what they got the order, I put into the packaging, send them to the customer, and then it's done. Usually, the publisher does that for you, but it – when you see that they're taking a large chunk of your money, of your hard-earned money, because, let's face it, you're the one who sat down and wrote for year and a half to three years for them to be able to take most of it? I thought this was a bit unfair.

Angela:

Right. And not only did you – did you take the time to write the book, but you're also the one who's gonna take the time to – to market the book, because your publisher's not gonna do your marketing, either.

Dan:

Absolutely not. When I went to – to Bloomberg Radio for the first book, I explained that same part of the – the complexity of marketing, because a lot of people have to, themselves, present to Barnes and Noble or Borders and do – book signing. You're the one who has to do it, because the publisher – does not just have one author under their belt. They have fifty, sixty to eighty authors, they could not publish or – or market every of those authors, unless if you're Stephen King, and then they'll do the par – the publishing for you, the printing – the promotion for you, but if you're just a startup author, I would say to go all the way, and you're the one who has to do the marketing, you're the one who has to promote yourself, you're the one who has to go on radio shows, like this one here, you have to go and – and call radio stations and press release – I mean, you're gonna do most of it, I'd say a good ninety-five percent of it. And the five percent is basically what the publisher would do, which they will put your name on their website, they will put your book cover pu – book cover page on your – on their website, so compared to what they do versus what you need to do, I would say that self-publishing is the best way, or the best option, for you.

Angela:

Wow. And so, do you feel like it's gotten easier for you over time? With the changes in the market?

Dan:

Absolutely, it – it – it – it did become easier, because I have the experience, I have the knowledge, and knowledge is power, and when it comes to – to helping others, because one part of my consulting business is to help other authors get published. And when I have other authors get published, not to put them in contact with a publishing company, because that would be some kind of conflict of interest here, but actually help them in promoting themselves and publishing themselves, because that will give them a more – a better

appreciation to all the hard work, because, let me tell you, printing a book or finishing a book – this is just the tip of the iceberg.

Angela:
Mmm.

Dan:
Because the hard work is right after. The writing is easy.

Angela:
So, what – what are some of the mistakes that you have seen people make, that have wanted to publish – they wanted to self-publish and come to you, what – what mistakes do you see are most common that first-time authors make?

Dan:
They – they lose hope very quickly. That's one of the main – main issues that the first-time authors do suffer from, so I would say that, no matter what happens, if you stake in a year, two years, out of your life, because, let me tell you, that requires a lot of time to write and to be able to organize your thoughts and to be able to come up with something that is easy to read, for – for all your other readers, so – have that heart, you could have saved a lot of challenges when it comes to promoting your book, and when you're gonna be able to face those challenges, it will depend on if you're ready to overcome them or say, "Ah, forget it, I'm just gonna go and call a literary agent to be able to take the task of promoting me." But then again, like I said, you're cutting a lot on your royalty and you have to realize that, probably, you're not gonna hit the two hundred fifty thousand copies to be a New York bestseller from the get-go.

Angela:
Right.

Dan:
You're gonna have to really push and push and push to a point of getting – probably, if you're lucky, twenty, thirty thousand copies, you should be very, very lucky about that, but the key is to always be there, always be in the space of every other people, and letting them know you have the book that will change their lives. Depends exactly on the subject, but if you come up with a new theory, and that will make a change in the world, yeah, you've got to make sure to call the right people so they could promote the book for you. That's the key.

Angela:
Right.

Dan:
And you cannot do the whole thing yourself.

Angela:

So, let's talk about being an author. What are some of the things that have happened to you because you're an author, opportunities you've had, people you've met, what – why is it worth it to you, to be an author?

Dan:

Well, it gives you a nore – notoriety in the subject. It's a – when you do – because I'm a public speaker as well, so when you actually go and do presentations, they – you have to really have, I would say, experience in the subject, and writing is what makes you, I would say, some kind of a knowledgeable individual in that specific subject, so when I help people or entrepreneurs in starting businesses using leverage techniques, I have at least the information behind me that will enable me to be able to make other people understand it. If, let's say, my consulting hours a – is not enough for them to understand, at least I have my book to be able to complement what I've already tried to teach them. So, if you don't have anything behind, or any – any subject that you wrote about, then other people will not really take you as seriously as if you are a published author. So, yes –

Angela:

So, do you have a specific example you can give us, about the time that you – you actually experienced that, as an author?

Dan:

Well – when it comes to my first book, the – *The American Dream*, that enabled me to open new doors in terms of consulting for that subject, so once I got my book published, a lot of people ordered the book, and after reading the book, those who didn't have a complete understanding, or they did have some doubts or some concern or – or some misunderstanding about the subject, they would call me and say, "Okay, well, we'd like to be able to – I didn't understand that part or this part," and that allowed me to be able to at least fill in the gap. The thinking for the obesity book, since I was obese myself, and from obesity I became – I – I went into professional bodybuilding, that enabled me to help people have that – that part of their lives that is really difficult in terms of being overweight, and let them adapt a new, healthy lifestyle. So, all of this complements my knowledge – I've been a fitness trainer for over twenty years, so writing a book about fitness makes sense.

Angela:

Yeah. Yeah. And are there – have you – let's talk about book sales a little bit. What are some realistic goals that you think people can set in terms of book sales, and what are some of the ways that you have found to be most successful to get your book into these stands?

Dan:

Well, first of all, you have to have a website – a website that push all your books online. You have to have book on Barnes and Noble, and the Barnes and Noble and Amazon, it's a bit

difficult to be able to sell – to – to get them to approve the book. It depends on how many other books were written about the same subject. So you have to have something totally different and unique, the way that you wrote your book, for them to approve it.

Angela:

Mm-hmm.

Dan:

... some – everyone that could get approved, so you have to really be persistent and send them the book, either send them a few chapters for them to require at least a little bit more information, and then you could send them the full book, I mean, i – i – it all depends on your effort, Angela. You could have an amazing, amazing book, a great subject, but if you don't know how to promote it properly, it will just be a book that will never be read. But if you have ... book –

Angela:

Right, so give us a tip. What is a specific tip, something you've done, that really worked for you?

Dan:

That really worked. A lot of radio interviews, because, obviously, every radio station will hit a different – a different crowd, these are like young crowd, the business people, so you really have to do your research in which radio station will be able to target your audience. So if you are in the south of the US, which is in the – in Houston, in Texas and all that, then, obviously, this is where they have the biggest problem about obesity. So, I was focused on a demographic that has to do with a higher concentration of obese people.

Angela:

Got it.

Dan:

And when it comes to business – yeah, you ... tackle the New York market, which a lot of people are entrepreneurship. If you're talking about – it depends o – it depends on your subject. Happiness subject is so wide, I could cover the whole planet.

Angela:

Wow. Right. Exactly, happiness ...

Dan:

Which might take – which might be ever more challenging.

Angela:

Mm-hmm.

Dan:

Yes, exactly, because everyone wants to be happy. Everyone wants to – to be the happiest ever, so the question is, what are they ready to do to be able to get to their happiness?

Angela:

So, how will you target – that sounds like – since that's everyone, how will you – how will you target that? How will you ... right now?

Dan:

You see, I – I would – I would prefer a more targeted niche of individual, such as the first and second and third book, but the fourth book ... a challenge.

Angela:

Uh-huh, well, why'd you write this book then? (laughs)

Dan:

Yes, I know. (laughs) Exactly. So, i – i – it all depends – i – it – that – that's gonna be quite a lot more work on my side, when it comes to marketing and promotion, because I'm gonna have to tackle a lot more radio stations, I'm gonna have to tackle a lot more newspaper and a lot more press releases, so it will – it will require a lot more effort on my side, to be able to cover a wider audience. So – but – but then again, the subject of happiness, it's a very popular subject, because a lot of people suffer from depression, and if you really understand it – e – even though some people say it's a chemical imbalance, you really have to understand what the core, and what the origination of the – their depression is, and to really go deep inside, and you really try to understand, I hope that my book would be able to, at least, clarify or ... their doubts as to why they – they're unhappy, instead of going and seeing a – a psychiatrist.

Angela:

Right. So, let's talk about the process of becoming an author, I know it's hard, but think back to before 2001, before your first book, and – a lot of people, I don't know if this is you, but a lot of my clients, the people that I work with one-on-one on their books, they have this idea of what life is gonna be like once their book is written, what life is gonna be like as an author, and sometimes the reality doesn't match up with this image in their head.

Dan:

(laughs)

Angela:

So, let's talk about what was your image, when you first decided to become an author, and how has it been different, maybe, than you expected?

Dan:

Well, obvious – you have to – y – y – you should not write for those reasons. You should not write because your life is gonna change, are you gonna become the – the mo – publish the – the most popular author out there. You have to write because it is a passion.

Angela:

Mmm.

Dan:

You have to write because it's something that you wanna share with other people. I know a lot of authors that will ..., so it – for them, it was very therapeutic to be able to write. If you're writing to be able to be – if you're writing for the purpose of being rich, then I would state to start changing your – your way of way of ... the end result of being an author.

Angela:

(chuckles) Change your thought! ...

Dan:

Because that's not gonna happen unless, as I said, if your book is being captured by a publisher and they – they really push and push with the promotion for you, and then you become a New York bestseller, then, yes, you will make money.

Angela:

Mm-hmm, but that's very –

Dan:

I'm not saying that you're gonna make as much money as the publisher, but you will make money. But the thing is – who would have wished to be able to be J. K. Rowling, the one who wrote *Harry Potter*?

Angela:

Right.

Dan:

Her – what she was before, in welfare, and now she's richer than the – the Queen Elizabeth –

Angela:

...

Dan:

– then you start saying, “If she did it, how come I cannot do it?” But – she didn't do it for that purpose, she didn't do it because she knew that *Harry Potter* would become a multinational success. She wrote it because she had kids, and she knew that a fiction book about – what

was that concept, I didn't read all the *Harry Potters*, but – that would interest her kids, and that was the purpose for her. But then it became a popular – a popular book.

Angela:

Right. Right. What I'd like to say is, yes, that happens, but it's a little bit like winning the lottery, and you definitely, as an author, don't want to make that your – your only goal. There are lots of great things that can come out of being an author. And so, I guess that's – that's my last question for you, is just any advice, wha – i – is there any advice that you would give in – in our last minute here, to people who wanna write a book that haven't done it yet? Any final parting words of advice?

Dan:

Yes. Actually, the – the best advice I can give is that you really have to write something that you have the most passion for, and that I'm gonna reiterate myself, over and over again when it comes to that, it is because, if you do not write a book in which you're passionate about the subject, I could guarantee anything that you're gonna stop halfway and you will not complete the book. So, you have to write something that you love, something that really interests you and something that you really are looking forward to write about, because this is going to be a very difficult journey, and the definition is gonna be definitely, as being a published author, you're gonna really feel great about the end result, even though you will not end up to be a multinational success –

Angela:

Yeah. Great.

Dan:

– but at least you could say that, “You know what, that was something that I loved doing, ...”

Angela:

Absolutely. Well, that was great advice, and thank you so much for being on the call today. Dan's book is called – it's ..., it's called *100 Days or Less to Reaching Your Ultimate Happiness*, Dan Amzallag, his last name is spelled a-m-z-a-l-l-a-g, you can find his other books on Amazon, and stay tuned, and *100 Days or Less to Reaching Your Ultimate Happiness*, we'll be there soon. Dan, thank you so much for being our guest today.

Dan:

Thank you very much for having me, Angela, I really, really appreciate it, and I hope that my participation actually helped a lot of future author understand what it means to be able to become one.

Angela:

I'm sure it has, so, together, we are changing the world one book at a time, and we will be back next week, doing it again!

Dan:

Thank you very much.