



## The Podcasting in Unstable Times Playbook

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Eight principles for creators who want to build trust, clarity, and resilience,  
without turning their show into a news channel.

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## How to Use This Playbook

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When the world gets noisy, most podcasters do one of two things: they either go silent (afraid of saying the wrong thing) or they lean into the outrage cycle and burn through their audience's trust chasing clicks.

There's a third path.

Your podcast can become infrastructure: a stable, trusted, clarifying voice in a fragmented information environment. That's what this playbook is about.

This isn't a politics guide. It isn't a crisis communications manual. It's a creator guide, for the moment we're actually in. Each chapter addresses a different dimension of what it means to hold a platform when the ground is shifting beneath you.

You don't have to change your show. You don't have to become a commentator. You don't have to pick sides.

But you do have to reckon with the fact that your podcast exists in the world as it is, not the world as it was when you started. This playbook is designed to help you do that reckoning clearly, practically, and on your own terms.

*You're not being asked to change what you talk about. You're being asked to understand what your platform means.*

### **A note on tone**

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Every chapter in this playbook is written to be:

- Measured, not alarmist. The world has enough panic.
- Principled, not preachy. We're not here to tell you what to think.
- Practical, not abstract. Each chapter ends with something you can realistically do.
- Grounded in podcasting, not general politics. This is a craft conversation.

## Chapter 1

# How Do You Use a Podcast to Protest?

*Especially if it isn't political?*

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Let's start with a distinction that matters enormously and gets collapsed constantly: the difference between values and politics.

Politics is the arena of parties, candidates, policies, and positions. It's contested by design. It changes with elections. It's the place where people who agree on values often disagree on means.

Values are deeper. They're the things you believe regardless of who's in office: fairness, honesty, care for community, the dignity of people who are different from you. Most people, across most political lines, share more values than the current media environment suggests.

When we talk about using a podcast as a form of protest or resistance, we are almost always talking about values, not politics. And that distinction matters because it changes who you're speaking to and what you're doing.

### What protest really looks like in audio

Protest doesn't require a megaphone. It doesn't require a manifesto. In podcasting, protest can look like:

- Continuing to make thoughtful, careful content when the culture is rewarding noise
- Platforming voices that aren't usually heard
- Refusing to simplify things that are genuinely complex
- Being honest about uncertainty when everyone else is performing confidence
- Treating your listeners as intelligent adults capable of reaching their own conclusions

None of these require you to mention a politician's name. None of them require you to take a position on legislation. All of them require you to care about something beyond your download numbers.

*The podcaster who keeps making careful, honest content in a climate that rewards sensationalism is already doing something political, whether they know it or not.*

## The fear that stops people

Most podcasters who avoid this conversation do so because they're afraid of alienating their audience. This is a reasonable fear. But it's worth examining what you're really protecting. If you're protecting listener numbers, ask yourself: are those listeners with you because they trust your voice, or because you've never challenged them? The former is an audience. The latter is just traffic.

The podcasters who build lasting relationships with their listeners are almost always the ones who are willing to be clear about what they stand for, even when that means losing some people who were never really with them anyway.

## A note on niche shows

If you host a show about woodworking, wine, dog training, or true crime, you might be thinking: "this doesn't apply to me." But here's the thing, every show is made by a person with values, for people with values, in a world with stakes.

You don't have to talk about the news. But you might talk about why you care about craft, about quality, about honesty in your field. That's not politics. That's character. And character, right now, is a form of resistance.

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### THE QUESTION TO SIT WITH

*What does your show stand for, beyond its topic? If someone listened to 10 episodes, what would they know about what you believe? Not politically, but as a human being?*

## Chapter 2

# Why Every Podcaster Should Encourage a Call to Action Against Fascism

*On responsibility, platform, and what you owe your listeners.*

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This is the chapter with the uncomfortable title. Let's acknowledge that upfront.

If you're reading this and feeling some resistance to the word "fascism," that's worth noticing. The discomfort usually comes from one of two places: either you don't think the word applies to current events, or you do think it applies but you're afraid of what saying so might cost you.

This chapter is primarily for the second group.

### The platform problem

When you start a podcast, you accept a kind of implicit contract with your listeners. They give you their time and attention. In return, you give them honesty. Or at least, you give them your honest attempt at honesty. Most podcasters honor this contract on the small things. They don't lie about products. They don't misrepresent their credentials. They try to get their facts right.

But the contract doesn't have a carve-out for large things. And right now, the large things are very large.

*Silence isn't neutral. In a moment of genuine consequence, saying nothing is itself a choice, and your audience can feel it.*

### What "encouraging action" can mean

A call to action doesn't have to be a political endorsement. It doesn't have to be a speech. In practice, encouraging your listeners to engage with the world around them might look like:

- Talking about the importance of staying informed and seeking primary sources
- Naming organizations doing good work in your niche or community
- Encouraging listeners to participate in local civic life
- Modeling critical thinking in your own work
- Refusing to platform ideas that dehumanize people

That last one is important. You don't have to give airtime to every perspective in the name of balance. Balance doesn't mean treating all positions as equally valid. It means being honest about what you know and what you don't.

## The business counterargument

Some podcasters will say: “I can’t afford to be political. I’ll lose sponsors. I’ll lose listeners. This isn’t what my show is for.” This is a real concern, and it deserves a real answer. The answer is: you’re probably overestimating the risk and underestimating the cost of silence.

The listeners who leave when you express a clear value were never going to be your core audience anyway. They were there for the content, not for you. Losing them often makes the community that remains stronger, more engaged, and more loyal.

As for sponsors, companies are increasingly aware that silence in moments of genuine moral consequence carries its own reputational risk. The advertisers who matter are generally not the ones demanding you say nothing.

## This doesn’t have to be every episode

You don’t have to reformat your show. You don’t have to become a political commentator. One honest episode, one clear statement of values, one refusal to pretend things are normal when they aren’t... These are enough to plant a flag. Your audience is watching to see what kind of person you are when it costs something. Give them something to see.

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### THE QUESTION TO SIT WITH

*If your show were archived and someone listened to it in 20 years, trying to understand this moment, what would they hear? What would they be able to infer about what you believed and what you were willing to say?*

## Chapter 3

# Your Podcast Is Part of the Information Ecosystem (Whether You Like It or Not)

*On perception, influence, and showing up with care.*

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Here is a thing podcasters often believe: “My show doesn’t affect how people think. I’m not a journalist. I’m not an influencer. I just make a show about...” Fill in the blank however you want. The belief is the same, and it’s mostly wrong.

Every piece of content that reaches a human mind has some effect on that mind. It might be tiny. It might be contradicted by ten other pieces of content they consumed the same day. But the effect exists. And when you have a consistent relationship with a listener (when they show up week after week because they trust you) the cumulative effect is significant.

### How perception works in audio

Audio is an unusually intimate medium. Listeners hear your voice while commuting, exercising, cooking, lying in bed. There’s no screen between you and them. The parasocial bond that forms over months and years of listening can be stronger than many real-world relationships.

This means that the frame you put around things matters. Not just the facts you present, but how you present them. Your tone, your certainty, your emotional register, these shape how your listeners understand the world. Often in ways they’re not consciously aware of.

*You don’t have to be a journalist to have journalistic responsibility. You have an audience. That’s enough.*

### Even niche content shapes perception

If you host a show about financial planning, you’re shaping how your listeners think about risk, security, and the future. If you host a show about parenting, you’re shaping how they think about childhood, authority, and community. If you host a show about fitness, you’re shaping their relationship with their own bodies.

None of these are “political” topics in the narrow sense. All of them are consequential in the broad sense. And in an environment where information is fragmented, low-trust, and increasingly manipulated, the shows that help people think clearly are doing something essential.

## Responsibility without paralysis

The point isn't to make you anxious about every word. The point is to help you approach your work with the seriousness it deserves.

In practice, that might mean:

- Checking your facts before you assert them as true
- Being clear about the difference between your opinion and established evidence
- Acknowledging when you've gotten something wrong
- Thinking about who benefits from the narrative you're reinforcing
- Considering whether the sources you're citing have clear conflicts of interest

None of these require a journalism degree. They require honesty and the willingness to slow down enough to ask the question.

## The trust dividend

Here's the upside: podcasters who take their role in the information ecosystem seriously tend to build deeper, more durable listener relationships. Trust, once earned, compounds. Listeners who believe you're careful with facts and honest about uncertainty will follow you through topic changes, format shifts, and slow growth periods. They'll become your most reliable evangelists.

The information ecosystem needs more careful voices, not fewer. And your show, whatever it's about, can be one of them.

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### THE QUESTION TO SIT WITH

*If you're honest with yourself, is there something you've said on your show in the last year that you stated with more certainty than you really had? What would it look like to go back and be more accurate?*

## Chapter 4

# Clarity Is a Form of Resistance

*On precision, nuance, and designing episodes for understanding.*

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The modern information environment rewards one thing above almost everything else: reaction. Not understanding. Not accuracy. Not nuance. Reaction. The hot take. The emotional spike. The thing that makes you feel something immediately, without the inconvenience of having to think.

In this environment, a clear, well-structured, honestly-argued podcast episode is a genuinely radical act.

### What “clarity” genuinely means

Clarity isn't simplicity. It's not dumbing things down. It's not pretending complexity doesn't exist. Clarity is the discipline of helping your listener understand what you deeply mean, not just feeling like they do. The distinction matters because a lot of content creates the feeling of understanding without the substance of it. This is, in fact, one of the primary techniques of misinformation.

Real clarity requires:

- Defining your terms, especially when using words that are contested or emotionally loaded
- Distinguishing between what you know, what you believe, and what you're speculating about
- Acknowledging the strongest views you disagree with before responding to them
- Being willing to say “I don't know” when you don't know
- Telling your listener what they should be able to do or understand by the end of the episode

*Nuance isn't weakness. In a media environment that treats complexity as a problem to be solved, nuance is the mark of someone who takes their subject (and their audience) seriously.*

## Structuring for understanding

Most podcast episodes are structured for engagement, which usually means: hook, tension, payoff, repeat. This works well for keeping people listening, but it doesn't always produce understanding. Engagement and understanding are not the same thing, and optimizing for one can actively undermine the other.

If your goal is clarity, try structuring your episodes around questions rather than arguments:

- What does my listener need to know to follow this topic?
- What's the most common misunderstanding about this, and how do I address it early?
- What's the honest range of opinion among people who know this topic well?
- What should my listener be able to think, do, or evaluate differently after hearing this?

These are editorial questions, not just production questions. They change what you research, how you interview, and what you cut.

## The misinformation connection

Misinformation spreads not because people are stupid, but because it's designed to slot into existing mental frameworks and emotional needs. The antidote isn't more information. The antidote is better thinking tools.

A podcast that consistently models careful reasoning is a podcast that shows its work, that acknowledges uncertainty, that resists the urge to be more definitive than the evidence supports, and is actively building its listeners' capacity to resist manipulation. This is not a small thing.

## The patience it takes

It's slower. It's harder to make viral. It doesn't spike your numbers the way a hot take does. But the listeners you build with clarity are different from the listeners you build with outrage. They stay longer. They trust you more. They're more likely to support you financially. And they're more likely to bring other thoughtful people into your community.

Clarity is a long-term investment in an environment that keeps pitching short-term returns. Make it anyway.

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### THE QUESTION TO SIT WITH

*Listen to your last episode and ask: would a thoughtful, skeptical listener come away with an accurate understanding of this topic, or just a feeling about it? What's the difference between those two outcomes in your show?*

## Chapter 5

# Why Outrage Is a Trap for Podcasters

*On reaction cycles, credibility, and the long game.*

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Let's be honest about something: outrage works.

In the short term, it gets clicks. It spikes downloads. It drives shares. It creates the feeling of community, because nothing brings people together like a shared enemy. Podcast hosts who have leaned into it have built large, passionate audiences quickly.

And then, more often than not, it falls apart.

### How creators get pulled in

The trap doesn't spring all at once. It usually happens gradually, through a series of individually defensible choices. You cover something that makes you genuinely angry. The episode performs well. You cover something adjacent. That performs well too. Before long, you're not selecting topics based on what your audience needs to understand. You're selecting them based on what will produce the right emotional response. Your listeners start to expect it. Your guests start to pitch outrage-adjacent stories. Your metrics reward the pattern.

By the time you realize what's happened, you've built a show that can't function without a villain.

*Outrage audiences are high-maintenance and low-loyalty. They followed you because you were angry about the right things. The moment you're not angry enough, they leave. Or worse, turn on you.*

### What it costs

The cost of the outrage cycle isn't just reputational, though it is that. It's also cognitive and creative. Maintaining outrage as a format requires constant escalation. The thing that made your audience angry last month isn't enough this month. It must be bigger, more urgent, more threatening. This is why outrage media tends to drift toward increasingly extreme positions over time. Not because the host believes more extreme things, but because the format demands it.

This is also exhausting. Podcasters who build their shows on emotional intensity tend to burn out faster, take fewer creative risks, and produce content they wouldn't be proud of in calmer moments.

## Trust vs. engagement

There's a useful distinction here between engagement and trust. Outrage drives engagement: clicks, comments, shares, time-on-platform. Trust is different. Trust is what makes someone recommend your show to a friend, support you on Patreon, give you the benefit of the doubt when you get something wrong, and come back after a break.

Engagement can be manufactured. Trust cannot. And the tactics that maximize engagement often actively erode trust. You can have a show with 50,000 engaged listeners who don't really trust you. You can also have a show with 5,000 deeply trusting listeners who will follow you for years and tell everyone they know. The latter is a more durable business, and it's a more meaningful relationship.

## Staying in the room without catching fire

This doesn't mean never being angry. Anger, when it's honest and proportionate and directed at something real, is a legitimate editorial stance. The question is whether the anger is in service of understanding, or whether understanding is in service of the anger.

A show that covers injustice because injustice deserves coverage is different from a show that covers injustice because injustice performs well. Your listeners can usually feel the difference, even if they can't articulate it.

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### THE QUESTION TO SIT WITH

*Look at your top-performing episodes from the last six months. Were they popular because they helped people understand something important, or because they made people feel a strong emotion? What does that ratio tell you about your show?*

## Chapter 6

# Build Your Podcast Like It Could Be Taken Away Tomorrow

*On platform risk, audience ownership, and resilience as strategy.*

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Every podcaster is one algorithm change, one policy update, or one platform collapse away from losing access to their audience.

This is not hypothetical. It has happened to newsletters, to YouTube channels, to podcasters whose hosting providers folded or whose Spotify exclusivity deals ended badly. It can happen to your show. The question is whether you've built something that can survive it.

### The illusion of platform stability

It's easy to conflate your podcast's health with your metrics on any given platform. If your Spotify streams are up, your podcast is growing. If your Apple Podcasts reviews are strong, your podcast is healthy. But those numbers don't belong to you. The relationship between you and your listener (at least as far as the platform is concerned) belongs to the platform. They mediate it. They can change how it works. They can end it.

The only relationship that truly belongs to you is one where your listener has given you their direct contact information, subscribed to your email list, or otherwise found a way to stay connected to you that doesn't depend on any intermediary.

*Your email list is the only part of your audience you own.  
Everything else is rented.*

### What platform risk looks like

Podcast platform risk isn't just about the platform shutting down. It includes:

- Algorithm changes that de-prioritize your show in recommendations
- Policy changes that affect what you're allowed to say
- Monetization changes that reduce your revenue
- Hosting provider price increases or service degradation
- Platform mergers that change the terms of your relationship
- Deplatforming (either targeted or collateral)

In an unstable political environment, some of these risks increase. Policies change. Platforms make decisions under pressure. Content that was acceptable last year may be flagged this year, not because it's changed, but because the context around it has.

## The resilience stack

Building a resilient podcast means building multiple points of direct connection with your audience. The most important ones, in roughly descending order of control:

- Your own email list, which you own entirely and can take anywhere
- Your own website or RSS feed, which your listeners can subscribe to directly
- A community platform you host or control, like a forum or Discord
- A subscription or support mechanism you control, like a private feed or Patreon

None of these replace distribution platforms. You still want to be on Spotify and Apple Podcasts. But you want to be there in addition to owning the relationship, not instead of it.

## Resilience as a creative mindset

There's a broader point here beyond the tactical. Podcasters who build resilient shows tend to think differently about their work. They're not optimizing for platform metrics. They're building something that can survive the platform. This makes them more experimental, more honest, and often more interesting.

If you knew that your show existed independently of any platform, that your audience would follow you wherever you went because they're connected to you directly, what would you do differently? What risks would you take? What conversations would you be willing to have?

Build toward that version of your show. Don't wait until you need it.

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### THE QUESTION TO SIT WITH

*If the platform your podcast primarily lives on disappeared tomorrow, what percentage of your listeners would you be able to reach? What would it take to get that number above 50%?*

## Chapter 7

# The Role of Niche Podcasts in a Fragmented World

*On small audiences, deep trust, and the influence that comes from both.*

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We live in a media moment that rewards scale. Follower counts, download numbers, stream counts: everything is measured in terms of how many people you reach. The implicit message is clear: bigger is better. Reach equals influence.

This is partly true and mostly wrong.

### The trust differential

There is a category of trust that large audiences almost never achieve. It's the trust that comes from a listener who feels like a show was made specifically for them. Who hears their specific questions articulated and answered. Who feels seen in their particular corner of the world.

This kind of trust is the exclusive property of niche shows. And it's more powerful than it looks.

A listener who trusts you in this deep, specific way will act on your recommendations, follow your links, share your work with the exact people in their network who are most likely to become your listeners too. They will advocate for you in communities you'll never reach through advertising. They will stay with you through gaps, format changes, and slow periods.

*A thousand listeners who trust you completely will do more for your show (and your mission) than a hundred thousand who merely enjoy it.*

### Why niche voices matter more in unstable times

In a stable information environment, generalist voices carry a lot of weight. The major newspapers, the top podcasts, the big YouTube channels, they can anchor shared understanding in a way that small voices can't.

In a fragmented environment, that changes. When people can't agree on which large voices to trust, they fall back on smaller, more specific communities where trust is already established. The niche podcast about sustainable farming, or behavioral economics, or documentary filmmaking becomes a primary source of trusted information for the people in that world.

This is a significant responsibility that most niche podcasters haven't fully reckoned with. Your audience may be treating your show as more authoritative than you've imagined.

## Influence at the right scale

There's also a practical point about how influence moves through the real world. Ideas don't usually spread from large audiences to small ones. Ideas spread the other way. Niche communities develop ideas, build vocabulary, and establish norms that eventually migrate into mainstream culture.

If you're making a podcast for 2,000 deeply engaged professionals in a particular field, you may be shaping how that field thinks. And how fields think eventually shapes how policy is made, how organizations operate, and how culture moves.

The podcaster with 500,000 listeners who entertains people is doing one kind of work. The podcaster with 5,000 listeners who shapes how a community thinks is doing another kind. Both have value. Neither is more important than the other. But the second one is consistently underestimated, including by the person doing it.

## Building the niche community deliberately

If you host a niche show, lean into it. Don't try to broaden your appeal at the cost of your specificity. That's almost always a losing trade. Instead:

- Go deeper, not wider. The more specific you get, the more magnetic you become to the right people.
- Create spaces for your listeners to connect with each other, not just with you.
- Name your community. Give your listeners a way to identify themselves as part of something.
- Acknowledge your role. You are a trusted voice in a specific world. Take that seriously.

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### THE QUESTION TO SIT WITH

*Who are the 50 listeners who get the most value from your show? What would it take to serve them so well that each of them brought one more person like them into your community?*

## Chapter 8

# What Your Audience Actually Needs From You Right Now

*On stability, consistency, and the kind of presence that lasts.*

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If you've read this far, you've been sitting with some uncomfortable questions. What does your platform mean? What do you owe your listeners? How do you show up when the world is difficult without losing yourself in the difficulty?

This final chapter is simpler than the ones before it. It's about what your audience really needs from you, not in theory, but in practice, this week, on your next episode.

### They need stability

When the environment is chaotic, consistency becomes a form of care. Showing up on schedule, sounding like yourself, staying focused on your subject: these things signal to your listener that you're not going anywhere. That your show is a place they can return to. This sounds obvious, but it's not. A lot of podcasters go quiet during difficult periods, or dramatically change their tone, or let their publishing schedule slip. These are understandable responses to stress. They're also the moments when your most faithful listeners need you most.

Stability doesn't mean pretending everything is fine. It means being a reliable presence, whatever the weather.

*Your listeners come back because they trust what they'll find.  
The most powerful thing you can offer in an unstable world  
is: "I'm still here. The show is still here. Come in."*

### They need consistency

Consistency is different from stability. Stability is about showing up. Consistency is about showing up as the same person, with the same values, the same voice, the same quality of attention. The podcasters who build the deepest listener relationships are the ones whose audience can predict not what they'll say, but how they'll approach a problem. The quality of thinking, the fairness, the willingness to say, "I don't know," these become part of your brand in the deepest sense.

Consistency also applies to your values. If your show has stood for careful thinking, for honesty, for taking your listeners seriously as adults, stay standing for those things. Especially when it costs something.

## They need thoughtful leadership

Leadership is a word that gets overused in creator culture. Here it doesn't mean charisma or authority. It means orientation.

When people are confused, they look for someone who can help them see more clearly. When they're anxious, they look for someone who can help them understand what they're anxious about. When they're overwhelmed, they look for someone who can help them figure out what matters. You don't have to have answers. But you have to be willing to think carefully in public, to model the kind of attention and honesty that produces clarity, and to trust your listeners enough to bring them along in the uncertainty.

That's thoughtful leadership. It doesn't require a following of millions. It requires showing up, telling the truth, and thinking carefully.

## A closing thought

The podcasters who will matter most when this period is over are not necessarily the ones with the biggest audiences right now. They're the ones building real trust, one careful episode at a time. You are in the middle of the most consequential moment in modern media history. The information environment is broken in ways that are going to take years to repair. The work of podcasters who care (about accuracy, about their listeners, about the world their shows exist in) is not a small thing.

Keep making the show. Keep telling the truth. Keep treating your listeners like the intelligent, curious people they are.

That's enough. That's everything.

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### THE QUESTION TO SIT WITH

*What would it mean to show up for your listeners not just as a content creator, but as a genuine presence in their intellectual life? What would change in how you prepare, what you say, and how you close each episode?*

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## About Podcast Wizardry

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Podcast Wizardry is a resource for serious podcast creators: people who are building something that matters, for audiences who care. We cover the craft, the strategy, and the harder questions: what your show is for, who it serves, and what responsibility comes with holding a platform.

Sure, we can talk about gear. But it's more fun to talk about fundamentals: what makes a show trustworthy, what makes a listener relationship durable, and what it means to be a podcaster in the current moment.

This playbook is part of the *Resistance Series*, a collection of writing about podcasting in unstable times. You'll find this blog series available in full at [podcastwizardry.com](https://podcastwizardry.com).

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## What This Series Stands For

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- Measured, not alarmist. The world has enough panic.
  - Principled, not preachy. We help you understand your platform, not tell you what to do with it.
  - Practical, not abstract. Every chapter ends with something you can realistically apply.
  - Grounded in podcasting, not general politics. This is a craft conversation first.
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*podcastwizardry.com*

Share this playbook with a podcaster who needs it.