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The
GO - GIVER



A LITTLE STORY ABOUT A
POWERFUL BUSINESS IDEA

Bob Burg *and* John David Mann

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The Go-Giver



The Go-Giver

*A Little Story About a
Powerful Business Idea*

Bob Burg and John David Mann

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*To Mike and Myrna Burg
and Alfred and Carolyn Mann,
who gave us everything.*

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1: The Go-Getter

If there was anyone at the Clason-Hill Trust Corporation who was a go-getter, it was Joe. He worked hard, worked fast, and was headed for the top. At least, that was his plan. Joe was an ambitious young man, aiming for the stars.

Still, sometimes it felt as if the harder and faster he worked, the further away his goals appeared. For such a dedicated go-getter, it seemed like he was doing a lot of *going* but not a lot of *getting*.

Work being as busy as it was, though, Joe didn't have much time to think about that. Especially on a day like today—a Friday, with only a week left in the quarter and a critical deadline to meet. A deadline he couldn't afford *not* to meet.

Today, in the waning hours of the afternoon, Joe decided it was time to call in a favor, so he placed a phone call—but the conversation wasn't going well.

“Carl, tell me you're not telling me this . . .” Joe took a breath to keep the desperation out of his voice. “Neil Hansen?! Who the heck is Neil Hansen? . . . Well I don't

care what he's offering, we can meet those specs . . . wait—c'mon, Carl, you owe me one! You know you do! Hey, who saved your bacon on the Hodges account? Carl, hang on . . . Carl!"

Joe clicked off the "talk" button on his cordless phone and made himself calmly set down the instrument. He took a deep breath.

Joe was desperately trying to land a large account, an account he felt he richly deserved—one he *needed*, if he wanted to make his third-quarter quota. Joe had just missed his quota in the first quarter, and again in the second. Two strikes . . . Joe didn't even want to think about a third.

"Joe? You okay?" a voice asked. Joe looked up into the concerned face of his coworker Melanie Matthews. Melanie was a well-meaning, genuinely nice person. Which was exactly why Joe doubted she would survive long in a competitive environment like the seventh floor, where they both worked.

"Yeah," he said.

"Was that Carl Kellerman on the phone? About the BK account?"

Joe sighed. "Yeah."

He didn't need to explain. Everyone on the floor knew who Carl Kellerman was. He was a corporate broker looking for the right firm to handle an account Joe had nicknamed the Big Kahuna, or BK for short.

According to Carl, the boss at Big Kahuna didn't think Joe's firm had the "clout and leverage" to put the deal together. Now some character he'd never heard of had

underbid and outperformed him. Carl claimed there was nothing he could do about it.

"I just don't get it," Joe said.

"I'm so sorry, Joe," said Melanie.

"Hey, sometimes you eat the bear . . ." He flashed a confident grin, but all he could think about was what Carl had said. As Melanie walked back to her desk, Joe sat lost in thought. *Clout and leverage* . . .

Moments later he leaped up and walked over to Melanie's desk. "Hey, Mel?"

She looked up.

"Do you remember talking with Gus the other day, something about a big wheel consultant giving a talk somewhere next month? You called him the Captain or something?"

Melanie smiled. "Pindar. The Chairman."

Joe snapped his fingers. "That's it! That's the guy. What's his last name?"

Melanie frowned. "I don't think . . ." She shrugged. "No, I don't think I've ever heard it mentioned. Everyone calls him The Chairman, or just Pindar. Why? You want to go hear the talk?"

"Yeah . . . maybe." But Joe was not interested in some lecture happening a month away. He was interested in only one thing—and that one thing needed to happen by the following Friday, when the third quarter came to an end.

"I was thinking, this guy is a real heavy hitter, right? Charges huge consulting fees, works only for the biggest and best firms? *Major* clout. I know we could handle the

BK account, but I'm gonna need some big guns to win the deal back. I need *leverage*. Any idea how I can get a line to this Chairman guy's office?"

Melanie looked at Joe as if he were proposing to wrestle a grizzly bear. "You're just going to call him up?!"

Joe shrugged. "Sure. Why not?"

Melanie shook her head. "I have no idea how to contact him. Why don't you ask Gus?"

As Joe headed back to his desk, he wondered how Gus had managed to survive this long at Clason-Hill Trust. He never saw him do any actual *work*. Yet Gus had an enclosed office, while Joe, Melanie and a dozen others shared the open space of the seventh floor. Some said Gus had gotten his office because of seniority. Others said he'd earned it on merit.

According to office rumors, it had been years since Gus had sold a single account, and management kept him on purely out of loyalty. There were also whispers about Gus that went to the other extreme—that he had been super-successful in his younger days and was now an independently wealthy eccentric who stashed his millions away in mattresses while living a pensioner's lifestyle.

Joe didn't believe the rumors. He was pretty sure Gus brought in *some* accounts. But it was hard to picture him as a sales superstar. Gus dressed like a high school English teacher and reminded Joe more of a retired country doctor than of an active businessman. With his relaxed, easy manner, his long, rambling phone conversations with poten-

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tial clients (conversations that seemed to touch on everything *but* business) and his erratic, extended vacations, Gus seemed like a relic of times long past.

Hardly a go-getter.

Joe stopped at Gus's open door and knocked softly.

"Come on in, Joe," came the reply.

"So you want to call right now and try to get in to see the man himself?" Gus thumbed carefully through his large Rolodex, found the dog-eared card he was searching for and copied the phone number onto a small slip of paper, which he then handed to Joe. He watched as Joe took the paper and punched in the number on his cordless phone.

"On a Friday afternoon?" Joe grinned. "Yup. I'm going to do exactly that."

Gus nodded thoughtfully. "One thing I have to say about you, Joe, you've got ambition, and I admire that." Gus absentmindedly fingered a meerschaum pipe as he talked. "If there's anyone on this floor who's a go-getter, it's you."

Joe was touched. "Thanks, Gus." He headed back to his desk.

From behind him, Gus called out, "Don't thank me yet."

After a single ring, Joe was greeted by a cheerful voice belonging to a woman who identified herself as Brenda. He introduced himself, told her he needed to see the Chairman, and then readied himself to parry her stonewalling.

Instead, she shocked him by saying, "Of course he can meet with you. Can you come by tomorrow morning?"

“To—tomorrow?” he stammered. “On a Saturday?!”

“Yes, if that works with you. Is eight o’clock too early?”

Joe was stunned. “Don’t . . . ah, don’t you need to check with him first?”

“Oh, no,” came her unruffled reply. “Tomorrow morning will be fine.”

There was a brief silence. Joe wondered if she had him confused with someone else. Someone this Pindar character actually *knew*. “Ma’am?” he finally managed to say. “You, ah, you know this is my first time meeting with him, right?”

“Of course,” she replied cheerfully. “You’ve heard about his Trade Secret, and you want to learn about it.”

“Well, yes, that’s it, more or less,” he replied. Trade Secret? The man was willing to share his Trade Secret? He could hardly believe his good fortune.

“He’ll meet with you one time,” continued Brenda. “After that, if you agree to his conditions, he’ll want to set up additional appointments to actually show you the Secret.”

“Conditions?” Joe was crestfallen. He was sure these “conditions” would involve a stiff consulting fee or retainer he couldn’t afford. And even if he could, it might require the kind of high-level credentials Joe certainly didn’t have. Was it even worth it to go on? Or should he cut his losses and find a graceful way to back out now?

“Of course,” he replied. “Oh, and what are his, ah, conditions, again?”

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“You’ll have to hear that directly from the Old Man,” she said with a giggle.

Joe took down the address she gave him, mumbled his thanks and clicked off the phone. In less than twenty-four hours he was going to meet with—what had she called him?—the Old Man.

And why had she giggled when she said that?

2: The Secret

The next morning Joe arrived at the address Brenda had given him and pulled up into the huge circular drive. He couldn't help being impressed as he parked and looked up at the beautiful stone mansion that stretched up a good four stories in front of him. He gave a low whistle. This was some place. The man had *clout*, all right.

Joe had done his homework the night before. An hour on the Internet had told him some pretty remarkable things about the person he was about to meet.

The man known as the Chairman had had a very successful career with a wide range of enterprises. Now mostly retired from his own companies, he devoted most of his time to teaching and mentoring others. He was in great demand as a consultant to Fortune 500 CEOs and as a keynote speaker at top-shelf corporate events. He had become something of a legend. One article had dubbed him "the business world's best-kept secret."

"Talk about clout," thought Joe. "Leverage, big time!"

“Joe! Welcome!”

A slender man with neatly combed graying-black hair, a pale blue shirt, light gray jacket and pressed, light gray slacks stood outside the great oak door. Early sixties, Joe guessed, maybe even late fifties. The man’s age was one detail the Internet search had not yielded.

His precise net worth was another, but by all accounts, it was *stratospheric*. The castle that stood before Joe confirmed that impression, as did the man’s stately, elegant presence. From his beaming expression, it was clear that his “Welcome!” was genuine and not just a figure of speech.

“Good morning, sir,” said Joe. “Thank you for taking the time to see me.”

“You’re welcome—and thank *you*, for exactly the same reason.” Pindar smiled broadly over his firm handshake. Joe returned a somewhat bewildered smile of his own and wondered, “Why is *he* thanking *me*?”

“Let’s head over to the terrace for a hot cup of Rachel’s famous coffee,” said Joe’s host as he ushered him onto a small slate path that led around the side of the mansion. “Surprised to be here?”

“Actually, yes,” Joe admitted. “I’m just wondering how many business legends would open their homes to a perfect stranger on a Saturday morning.”

Pindar nodded as they walked along the path. “Actually, successful people do this all the time. Typically, the

more successful they are, the more willing they are to share their secrets with others."

Joe nodded, trying his best to believe that this could possibly be true.

Pindar glanced at him, then smiled again. "Appearances can be deceiving, Joe. In fact, they nearly always are."

They walked for a moment before Pindar continued. "I was sharing a stage once with Larry King—you know, the radio and television interviewer?"

Joe nodded.

"And since he'd interviewed so many famous, successful and powerful people, I thought I'd check my own observations against his. 'Larry,' I asked, 'are your guests as genuinely nice as they seem? Even the real superstars?' He fixed me with a gaze and said, 'Tell you what. The interesting thing is, the bigger they are, the nicer they are.'"

Something about Pindar's warm, raspy voice had put Joe curiously at ease from the first moment he heard it. Now he identified that something: it was a *storyteller's voice*.

Pindar continued. "Well, Larry thought for a moment about what he'd said, and then he said more. 'I believe that a person can reach a certain level of success without being particularly special. But to get really, really big, to reach the kind of *stratospheric success* we're talking about, people need to have something on the inside, something that's genuine.'"

As they arrived at the terrace table, Joe glanced around—and just managed not to gasp out loud. Beyond

the city stretching below them to the west lay a range of long, rolling mountains, half-shrouded in cottony clouds. The view took Joe's breath away.

They took their seats, and the young woman Pindar had called Rachel appeared with a pot of her "famous" coffee. As she poured cups for both of them, Joe thought, "Susan won't believe it when I tell her about this place." He had told his wife only that he was going to "meet with a potential client." He smiled as he pictured the expression that would light up her face when she heard about his adventure.

"Wow," said Joe. "Larry King, huh? By the way, this coffee is spectacular. Is Rachel's coffee really famous?"

"It is in this home," Pindar said with a smile. "I'm not a betting man, but if I were, you know what I'd bet?"

Joe shook his head.

"I'd bet that one day it will be famous worldwide. Rachel is very special. Been with us for about a year now, but I expect she'll be leaving us before long. I've been encouraging her to open a chain of coffee houses. Her coffee is too good not to share with the world."

"I can see what you mean." Joe leaned in and adopted his best confidential, just-us-guys-talking manner. "If she could reproduce this on an industrial scale, you two could make a killing." He sat back in his chair and took another sip.

Pindar set his cup down and looked at Joe thoughtfully.

"Actually, Joe, in the brief time we have this morning, that's where I want to begin. You and I are coming from two different directions when it comes to wealth creation. If we're going to take this walk together, we need to start

by facing the same direction. If you notice, what I said was, 'share her coffee.' What you said was, 'make a killing.' Do you see the difference?"

Joe wasn't sure if he did or not, but he cleared his throat and said, "Yes . . . I think so."

Pindar smiled. "Please don't misunderstand me. There's nothing wrong with making money. Lots of it, in fact. It's just not a goal that will make you successful." Reading the bewilderment on Joe's face, he nodded and put his hand up to signal that he would explain. "You want to understand success, yes?"

Joe nodded.

"All right. I'm going to share my Trade Secret with you now."

Pindar leaned forward a bit and softly spoke one word.

"Giving."

Joe waited for more, but apparently, that was it. "I beg your pardon?"

Pindar smiled.

"Giving?" repeated Joe.

Pindar nodded.

"That's the secret to your success? Your Trade Secret? *Giving?*"

"Indeed," said Pindar.

"Ah," said Joe. "Well, that's . . . that's . . ."

"That's too simple, even if it were true, which it can't possibly be?" asked Pindar. "Is that what you're thinking?"

"Something like that," Joe admitted sheepishly.

Pindar nodded. "Most people have that reaction. In fact, most people just laugh when they hear that the secret to success is *giving*." He paused. "Then again, most people are nowhere near as successful as they wish they were."

Joe certainly couldn't argue that point.

"You see," Pindar continued, "the majority of people operate with a mindset that says to the fireplace, 'First give me some heat, *then* I'll throw on some logs.' Or that says to the bank, 'Give me interest on my money, *then* I'll make a deposit.' And of course, it just doesn't work that way."

Joe frowned, trying to parse the logic of Pindar's examples.

"You see? You can't go in two directions at once. Trying to be successful with making money as your goal is like trying to travel a superhighway at seventy miles an hour with your eyes glued to the rearview mirror." He took another thoughtful sip and waited for Joe to process this thought.

Joe felt as if his brain were going seventy on the highway—in reverse. "Okay," he began slowly, "so you're saying, successful people keep their focus on what they're . . . giving, sharing, whatever," he saw Pindar nod, "and *that's* what creates their success?"

"Exactly," cried Pindar. "Now we're facing the same direction!"

"But . . . wouldn't an awful lot of people take advantage of you?"

"Excellent question." Pindar set his cup down and

leaned forward. "Most of us have grown up seeing the world as a place of limitation rather than as a place of inexhaustible treasures. A world of competition rather than one of co-creation." He saw that Joe was puzzled again. "Dog eat dog," he explained. "As in, 'Oh, sure, we all act polite on the surface, but let's face it, it's really every man for himself.' That about sum it up?"

Joe admitted that it did about sum it up indeed. That's certainly what he believed, anyway.

"Well," said Pindar, "it's simply not true." He noted Joe's skeptical look and continued. "Have you ever heard people say, *You can't always get what you want?*"

Joe grinned. "You mean, the Rolling Stones?"

Pindar smiled. "Actually, I imagine people were saying that well before Mick Jagger's time. But yes, that's the general idea."

"You're not going to tell me *that's* not true, are you? That we actually *do* get what we want?"

"No," said Pindar, "that one *is* true. In life, you often *don't* get what you want. But," he leaned forward again and his voice grew softer with emphasis, "here's what you *do* get—*You get what you expect.*"

Joe frowned again, trying to mentally test out the truth of this last thought.

Pindar leaned back and sipped his coffee, watching Joe. After a moment's silence, he continued.

"Or put it another way: *What you focus on is what you get.* You've heard the expression, 'Go looking for trouble and that's what you'll find'?"

Joe nodded.

"It's true, and not only about trouble. It's true about *everything*. Go looking for conflict, and you'll find it. Go looking for people to take advantage of you, and they generally will. See the world as a dog-eat-dog place, and you'll always find a bigger dog looking at you as if you're his next meal. Go looking for the best in people, and you'll be amazed at how much talent, ingenuity, empathy and good will you'll find.

"Ultimately, the world treats you more or less the way you expect to be treated."

Pindar paused for a moment to let Joe absorb that thought, then added one more.

"In fact, Joe, you'd be amazed at just how much *you* have to do with what happens *to* you."

Joe drew a breath. "So," he spoke this next thought slowly, thinking it through out loud, "you're saying, people don't take advantage of you because you don't expect them to? That because you don't put any focus on selfishness and greed, even when it's all around you, it doesn't have much impact on you?" Then he had a flash of inspiration. "Like a healthy immune system—the disease is all around you, but you don't catch it?"

Pindar's eyes sparkled. "Wonderful! That's an exquisite way of putting it." He kept talking as he scribbled in a little notebook he had produced from inside his jacket. "I have to remember that. You mind if I use that bit of brilliance?"

"No, go ahead," Joe gestured grandly, "take my bril-

liance. I'm full of it." He paused, then added, "Least that's what my wife always says."

Pindar burst out laughing as he slipped his little notebook back into the unseen pocket. He put both hands on his knees and looked directly at the younger man.

"Joe, I'd like to do something with you. I'd like to show you what I call my Five Laws of Stratospheric Success. If you can make a little time, say, every day for a week."

"Seriously?" Joe nearly stuttered. "For a week? I . . . I don't know how much time I can take off. . . ."

Pindar waved his hand vaguely, as if to say, *Time means nothing*. "Not a problem. All we'll need is one hour a day. Your lunch hour. You do take time for lunch every day?"

Joe nodded, dumbfounded. The man was going to meet with him every day for a week? And hand over the details of his most valuable Trade Secret?!

"First, though," Pindar continued, "first you'll need to agree to my conditions."

Joe's heart sank. The conditions. He had forgotten all about that. It was only after he agreed to Pindar's conditions, Brenda had said, that they would set up further meetings.

Joe gulped. "I really don't have the means—"

Pindar held up his hands. "Please, don't worry, it's nothing like that."

"So," Joe began, "do I need to sign an NDA or . . . ?"

This brought a big, booming laugh from Pindar. "No,

no non-disclosure agreements—if anything, the opposite. I call these Five Laws my Trade Secret, not because I don't want people to find them, but for exactly the opposite reason. I call them my Trade Secret so that people *will* find them—so they'll *seek* them. So they'll place the proper value on them. Because it's really a term of honor."

"Excuse me?" Joe was lost.

Pindar smiled. "The word itself. *Secret*. Originally, it meant something treasured—something sifted, weighed and *set apart* for its special value. Actually, if I had my way, *everyone* would know these Five Laws.

"In fact," he added, "that's exactly why I have put these conditions in place. Actually, it's just one Condition. Are you ready?"

Joe nodded.

"I need you to agree that you will test every Law I show you by *actually trying it out*. Not by thinking about it, not by talking about it, but by applying it in your life."

Joe started to give his assent, but Pindar stopped him and continued.

"And that's not all. You must apply each Law *right away, the same day you first learn it*."

Joe looked at Pindar to see if he was kidding. "Seriously? Before I go to sleep that night? Or I'll turn into a pumpkin?"

Pindar's face relaxed into a grin. "No, you have a point, you won't turn into a pumpkin. But if you don't abide by my Condition, our meetings will come to an end."

"But," Joe stammered, "not to sound impertinent, how would you know?"

“Another excellent question. How would I know?” Pindar nodded thoughtfully. “I wouldn’t. But you would. It’s the honor system. If you don’t find a way to apply each law I show you the very same day you learn it, I’ll trust that the next morning, you’ll call Brenda to cancel the rest of our appointments.”

He looked at Joe.

“I have to know you’re taking this seriously. But here’s what’s far more important: *you* have to know you’re taking this seriously.”

Joe nodded slowly. “I think I understand. You want to make sure I’m not wasting your time. Fair enough.”

Pindar smiled. “Joe, no offense, but you don’t have that power.”

Joe looked confused.

“I mean, the power to waste my time. Only *I* can do that. And truthfully, it’s a vice I gave up a long time ago. The reason for my Condition is that I don’t want to see you wasting *your* time.”

Joe looked down and saw Pindar’s outstretched hand. He took it and gave it a firm shake. He felt a thrill go through him, as if he had just embarked on an adventure worthy of Indiana Jones, and mirrored the Chairman’s broad smile with one of his own.

“You’ve got a deal.”