

Five guiding principles can change your focus and generate incomparable personal and organizational success.

Giving It Your All

Five Principles for Creating a Culture of Excellence

Bob Burg and
John David Mann

According to a recent article in an online management magazine, there may be “trouble in River City.” Though in this case, unlike the havoc created intentionally by the swindler “professor” Harold Hill (actor Robert Preston) in *The Music Man*, this is not manufactured trouble or at least not purposely so. The article claims there is a serious talent crunch happening at all levels of corporate structure, including leadership and upper and middle management. Good talent, the article’s authors suggest, is simply hard to find.

We don’t believe this is true. In fact, as far as we can see, there’s more talent available in the workplace than ever before. What we have is not a failure of talent. “What we have here,” to paraphrase Strother Martin’s character in the film *Cool Hand Luke*, “is a failure to provide an environment where people understand what value, productivity, and true worth are all about.”

There may well be a crunch, but if so, it is one not of talent but of perspective. There are plenty of

people with wonderful job, technical, and people skills, but far too few such talented people who view themselves as having a personal value proposition.

The First Principle: Value

In our book, *The Go-Giver*, our fictional hero Joe goes looking for some big guns’ power to help close a tough deal; “clout and leverage” is what Joe says he’s after. Instead, he finds a system of five interlocking principles (called the five laws of stratospheric success in the parable) that at first sound counterintuitive, Pollyannaish, even silly, but in the end they prove to make Joe’s world his oyster.

For the story’s sake, we frame this as one individual’s experience, but in real life these five principles actually form a key that unlocks optimum productivity and job satisfaction for individuals, departments, and entire organizations. Taken together, they can create a culture of excellence in the workplace that results in both individual and team success.

The first of these five principles, the law of value, goes like this: *“Your true worth is determined by how much more you give in value than you take in payment.”*

We are not lacking people of talent. The issue may be that we have not taught our people, and perhaps not taught ourselves, to operate with the aim of giving more in value than we take in payment.

At this point, you might be thinking, “What are you talking about? How does one add more in value than one takes in payment and still survive? Isn’t that a recipe for negative cash flow and ultimate insolvency?” Not at all. Not only can you survive by approaching your work this way, but it is also the only way to ensure survival. In fact, when you adopt the first law as your guiding principle, you will not only survive but you also will actually thrive.

The Paradox of Value

The first law seems counterintuitive at first and even paradoxical. The key to grasping its efficacy is our perspective on the question of value. Value is not the same thing as price or compensation. Your value is not necessarily equal to your salary. An accepted definition of value is, “The property or aggregate properties of a thing that renders it useful or desirable.” Your salary is simply the payment you take. Your value is the relative worth you add to the organization—both in the mind of the person who signs the checks and also in the experience of the people (both in the organization and outside it) with whom you interact.

An example of the difference between price and value would be the accountant who charges you \$500 to do your returns but saves you \$2,000 as compared to what you would’ve paid in taxes had you completed the returns yourself. Add to this \$2,000 the 20 hours of hair-pulling frustration she saves you, plus the added security of knowing it is done correctly. So although her fee (price) was \$500, the value she provided was four times that fee in cash terms and much more than that when you take the full experience into account. At the same time, although she charged you \$500 for the work, it didn’t cost her nearly that much to do the work, so she made a significant profit, too—which she should, given the value she provided.

In our book, one character explains this first principle to Joe by parsing the distinction between three restaurants that offer differing levels of quality. “The bad restaurant tries to give just enough food and service, both in quantity and quality, to justify the money it

takes from the customer. The good restaurant strives to give the most quantity and quality for the money it takes. But the great restaurant—ahh, the great restaurant strives to defy imagination! Its goal is to provide a higher quality of food and service than any amount of money could possibly pay for.” The first restaurant may or may not survive, and the same goes for the second, but the third will survive and thrive.

This is the essence of the personal value proposition (or, in this case, the business’s value proposition, which most likely is a direct reflection of the restaurant owner’s personal value proposition). It is the trade secret of all exceptional businesses and the core element that lies at the heart of their success—providing more in value than they receive in payment.

The ability to provide exceptional value is not limited to only the highest-end businesses or those with luxury-level product lines. The “great restaurant” in the example could be a high-end fine dining establishment, and it could just as easily be a simple grill and sandwich counter, local tavern, or neighborhood coffee shop. It is the driving force behind the stunning success of high-end Lexus and no-frills Southwest Airlines, both of which have not only survived but also thrived—in an era when the competition is struggling to stay alive.

Value is value, not price, and the consistent overdelivery of value is the cornerstone for creating a culture of excellence.

The Value of Value

The same principle can be applied just as effectively by you, individually, as by Lexus, Southwest, and your favorite restaurant. You can use it in your work regardless of whether that work brings you face to face with customers or involves interaction only with others in your company, and regardless of the scale of your business. Whether you work deep inside the structure of a national corporate giant or at the front counter of a small, local shop, you can find ways to add greater value to the business—and that added value will insinuate itself into the fabric of the business’s culture and translate ultimately into a greater perceived worth for you.

When you focus on adding more value to the operation than you take in payment, two things happen. The first is that you virtually assure yourself of consistent and permanent employment—simply because you become more valuable. Remember, your company doesn’t pay you because you owe on your mortgage; they pay you

About the Book

The Go-Giver: A Little Story About a Powerful Business Idea tells the story of an ambitious young man named Joe who yearns for success. Joe is a true go-getter, but he sometimes feels as if the harder and faster he works, the further away from his goals he seems to find himself. Joe learns the five laws of stratospheric success when he connects with Pindar, a legendary consultant known to his devotees as the chairman. Ultimately, Joe learns that putting others' interests first and continually adding value to their lives can lead to unexpected returns. By changing his focus from getting to giving, Joe realizes he can achieve the personal success he craves while simultaneously making a true difference to his customers and associates.

The five laws of stratospheric success presented in this book go against conventional wisdom in a dog-eat-dog world, as follows:

- *The law of value*—Your true worth is determined by how much more you give in value than you take in payment.
- *The law of compensation*—Your income is determined by how many people you serve and how well you serve them.
- *The law of influence*—Your influence is determined by how abundantly you place other people's interest first.
- *The law of authenticity*—The most valuable gift you have to offer is yourself.
- *The law of receptivity*—The key to effective giving is to stay open to receiving.

This book provides a heartwarming and inspiring take that brings new relevance to the old proverb, "Give and you shall receive."

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because your worth to the company exceeds what they pay you. This also means that while your peers are worrying about justifying their paychecks, you are

leaving such concerns in the dust because you already exceed that standard in your normal course of business.

The second thing that happens is that you place yourself in a prime position to scale the corporate ladder and rise to positions of greater potential. This happens not because you're a nice person or because you deserve it or because you're recognized for trying really hard; it happens because the exceptional value you provide to the business and its customers cannot help but be noticed. Right away? Most likely, no. In time? Most likely, yes.

There are a lot of people in corporate America today working with a mindset that is not particularly productive. They're looking at trading time for dollars, as opposed to trading value for value. Of course, like anyone working for an hourly wage or yearly salary, you put in a certain amount of time and earn a certain commensurate amount of money. When your aim is to add extreme value, such as the "great restaurant" of the book's example, when your focus is on giving even more in value than what you're getting paid to do, you will create a cycle of advancement that will sooner or later see your position, pay, and influence all increase—and increase significantly.

Make the first law your North Star, navigate by it daily, and you will never be caught in the vice grip of the next talent crunch. Quite the opposite will occur; when things become tight and everything around you seems to be sliding into mediocrity, you will be the sought-after commodity. In a talent crunch, you will become the talent others seek. When you focus on hiring people who seek to provide that kind of value, you'll never be at a loss for finding good people to staff your teams, either.

The Second Principle: Impact

Of course, there is more to the excellence equation; simply adding more value than you receive in payment isn't enough. Our second principle, the law of compensation, asserts, "*Your income is determined by how many people you serve and how well you serve them.*"

The second principle says that in addition to adding value to the process, you also must touch as many people as possible with that added value. Another character in the story explains it to Joe this way, "The first law determines how valuable you are; that is, it describes your potential success—how much you could earn. But it's the second law that determines how much you actually do earn."

For example, the accountant in the earlier example makes a tidy profit by adding more value to her client than she takes in payment, but it is only by serving a large number of clients that she develops a healthy income. As word gets around about the great job this accountant does and the superb value she offers through her services, her clientele increases. She's still offering the same service and the same level of value, but she now is having greater impact through greater numbers. Impact equals income.

This is why word of mouth is the most powerful and effective marketing force. From Hollywood executives gambling hundreds of millions on the latest summer blockbuster to a daycare center owner hoping to fill her capacity of a few dozen clients, everyone in business knows that his/her trade ultimately rises or falls on the word of mouth generated. It's not that other forms of advertising and marketing are not effective; they certainly can be, but they are effective only to the degree that they mimic, emulate, or reinforce the effects of word of mouth—namely human beings communicating the impact that the business has had on them. Again, impact equals income.

One way this principle operates in the business world is through referrals. Serve people so well that people feel compelled to brag about it to others—like the great restaurant, superb theme park, or exceptional retail outlet that provides a phenomenal buying experience.

The word-of-mouth force of referrals can operate powerfully within a business, too. To harness this principle successfully in your company or organization requires that you have a positive impact on as many people as you can, including both those within your area of direct influence and others throughout the company. Doing this effectively can take some creativity. Be an “intrapreneur” instead of an entrepreneur. Find creative ways to touch the lives of as many people companywide as possible to add value to their daily experiences.

For example, the suggestions below can build your internal impact:

- Find out what others need and determine how to help them get it.
- Send handwritten thank-you notes (on real paper, not e-mails) to people in other departments who have provided you with timely information or assistance.
- Take a solution-oriented approach to helping people in other departments who need your help.

This approach is beautifully captured by syndicated columnist and author Anita Bruzzese (www.45things.com), who writes, “Get to know others in the company. No company or individual can exist in a vacuum in today's fast-paced global marketplace. Employees need to understand how their work connects with the bigger picture and how their skills and abilities might help other employees to compete better in a demanding marketplace. By asking other employees what they do and the challenges they face, a worker can foster better communications. A good question to ask: ‘Is there anything I—or my department—can do to help you with your job?’”

Are finding ways to add value over and above the expected always an easy task? Certainly not. Is finding ways to touch more people in an environment that doesn't encourage this approach easy to accomplish? Absolutely not. That is exactly why when you succeed in doing it, you set yourself above the field, and why you'll be the one your company insists on keeping—and even promoting—during the next talent crunch, budget crunch, or any other kind of crunch that comes around.

In the second article in this series, which will appear in the *JQP* Summer issue, we will describe the final three principles of the laws of stratospheric success.

Bob Burg and John David Mann are co-authors of The Go-Giver (Portfolio). You can download a free chapter of their book at www.thegogiver.com.



Burg is a highly respected speaker, instructor, and coach who also authored the classic text Endless Referrals: Network Your Everyday Contacts Into Sales. In addition to his work with corporate, financial services, and direct sales organizations, Burg also uses his abilities to assist a variety of charities.

He can be reached at bob@burg.com.



Mann has been writing about business, leadership, and the laws of success for 20 years and currently serves as editor of Networking Times. He recently also co-authored You Call the Shots: 19 Secrets of Entrepreneurship with Cameron Johnson, and he has edited and written numerous other articles, plays,

and books. He also has had a successful career as a concert cellist and prize-winning composer. He can be reached at jdmann@earthlink.net.