

# BusinessWeek

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## What is a Go-Giver?

How a simple shift in focus can result in greater career and personal success: A new parable illuminates the value of giving

by [Marshall Goldsmith](#)

It's great to be a go-getter. Go-getters are people who take action. Rather than waiting for circumstances to go their way, they create circumstances that go their way. Go-getters make things happen. But as great as it is to be a go-getter, Bob Burg believes that being a go-giver is even better.

To Burg, co-author (with John David Mann) of the new national bestseller, *The Go-Giver: A Little Story About A Powerful Business Idea*, being a go-giver means you add value to others in a way that helps them significantly while at the same time increases your own sense of joy and improves your bottom line, both in your business and your personal life.

I discussed this idea with Bob, who speaks to companies nationwide on the process of generating business referrals. John David Mann is an entrepreneur and author or co-author of many books. Edited excerpts of my conversation with Bob follow:

### **The book seems to contradict conventional wisdom. What is the basic premise?**

That shifting one's focus from getting to giving—constantly and consistently adding value to the lives of others—is not only a nice way to live life but a very profitable way as well.

### **Isn't that really just saying, "Nice guys finish first?" And wouldn't a lot of people simply think you're being naïve?**

There are actually several very practical reasons why go-givers are the most successful people. One is that being "other-focused" instead of "me-focused" makes other people feel good about you and makes them recognize the value you bring to their lives. When that happens, they're much more excited about adding value to your life, just as you have for them. Everyone wins.

Another reason is that in a free enterprise-based society, where no one is forced to buy from you, the only way someone is going to pay for your product or service is if they find value in it [beyond the price]. Those who give lots of value get the most back. In a relationship, businesspeople can often sense if you really care for them or if you are just faking it. Smart people can often read true caring vs. feigned sincerity.

### **So it all comes down to being nice?**

It takes more than simply being nice. Many simply nice people are simply broke people as well. Success as a go-giver is also a matter of doing the correct things in what we call "the success process" that allows one to be successful and "finish first." The book's story walks the reader through those five principles.

### **The book's main character, Joe, is frustrated, and he's described as a go-getter. Are you and John saying that being a go-getter is a bad thing?**

Not at all. A go-getter is, generally, a person who gets things done. That's terrific. And many go-getters are also go-givers.

The opposite of a go-giver is not a go-getter; the opposite of a go-giver is a go-taker—someone who feels entitled to take, take, take without ever adding value to the relationship or the process in any way.

When we say go-giver, we're simply referring to the man or woman who has the great attributes of a successful person. One of those basic attributes is the ability to take one's eyes off oneself in order to focus on contribution and adding value to the lives of others. That's the person who accomplishes the most.

And by the way, there's nothing self-sacrificial or martyr-like about this. What we're talking about is extremely practical—it's following a methodology that allows you to be principle-based, continually adding value to the lives of others, and doing very, very well for yourself at the same time.

### **What kind of response does this idea get?**

When John and I were sending out galleys of the book to business leaders, we were thrilled to get back responses that said things like: "Thank you for sharing the truths that so many successful people know but so few people have yet embraced."

While there are good and bad people of all types in the world, when one truly makes a study of people who are successful in the long term, both financially and in their personal lives, you find that by and large these people live lives and conduct their businesses based on character traits and values such as honesty, integrity, humility, and encouragement—and that they go out of their way to add significant value to every relationship in which they are involved.

### **What are the five laws you and John share in the book?**

No. 1 is The Law of Value: Your true worth is determined by how much more you give in value than you take in payment. The key is realizing that price and value are two different things. Price is a dollar amount; value is desirability to the end user. Always strive to provide more in "use value" to your customer than what you charge them—while still making a healthy profit.

No. 2 is The Law of Compensation: Your income is determined by how many people you serve and how well you serve them. While No. 1 discusses the value you provide, No. 2 shows you how to get well compensated for the value you provide. You do so by touching the lives of a lot of people.

### **And what about the other three?**

The Law of Influence is No. 3. Your influence is determined by how abundantly you place other peoples' interests first. This might sound a little Pollyanna, but it's actually extremely practical. The golden rule of business is that all things being equal, people will do business with and refer business to those people they know, like, and trust. There's no quicker, more powerful, or more effective method of eliciting those feelings in others than by focusing on putting their interests first.

No. 4 is The Law of Authenticity: The greatest gift you have to offer is yourself. The most significant way you have of adding value to others' lives is by honoring your own nature—by being genuine and not trying to be someone you're not. Consciously or not, people can tell when you're not being authentic, and it interferes with your interaction just as surely as if you broke off an electrical current. You cannot truly give to another person unless you're being authentic.

Finally, No. 5 is The Law of Receptivity: The key to effective giving is to stay open to receiving. This is what really brings it home. It says that receiving is good—it's great—because it is a natural result of giving.

### **Do you feel most people don't understand that concept?**

John and I both feel that addressing this may be the most positive aspect of this book. We would love for this little story to help change that common belief—what John calls the "treacherous dichotomy"—the idea that you can help others or help yourself, but not both at once. I call it the "false dilemma."

I think perhaps the most prevalent false-dilemma question is: "Would you rather be rich OR happy?" What an awful question. Why not be both? And far too many people have bought into that artificial contradiction. Let's instead see the world as one of abundance. In this great country, if you can create, if you can add value—you can be rich and happy.

#### **How can readers get in touch with you?**

Through my Web site, [Bob@Burq.com](mailto:Bob@Burq.com).

*Goldsmith's new book, [What Got You Here Won't Get You There](#), was recently listed as America's best-selling business book in *The Wall Street Journal*. He can be reached at [Marshall@MarshallGoldsmith.com](mailto:Marshall@MarshallGoldsmith.com), and he provides his articles and videos online at [MarshallGoldsmithLibrary.com](http://MarshallGoldsmithLibrary.com).*

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