

“This may be the most important Go-Giver book yet—and in today’s polarized world, it could not be more timely.”

—MARSHALL GOLDSMITH, author of *What Got You Here Won’t Get You There*

The
GO-GIVER
INFLUENCER



A LITTLE STORY ABOUT A
MOST PERSUASIVE IDEA

Bob Burg *and* John David Mann

BESTSELLING AUTHORS OF *The Go-Giver*

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PORTFOLIO/PENGUIN



Portfolio/Penguin
An imprint of Penguin Random House LLC
375 Hudson Street
New York, New York 10014



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ISBN: 9781591846376 (hardcover)

ISBN: 9780525533702 (e-book)

Printed in the United States of America

1 3 5 7 9 10 8 6 4 2

Book design by George Towne

This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and incidents either are the product of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously, and any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, businesses, companies, events, or locales is entirely coincidental.

*To Mike and Myrna Burg,
Alfred and Carolyn Mann,
and Ana Gabriel Mann,
whose influence on us has shaped
everything in our lives*

*and to the four-legged creatures of the world—those
angels clothed in fur—who make life richer and sweeter
for humans everywhere.*

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The Go-Giver Influencer

Introduction

It's hard to believe it's been a full decade since the first few copies of *The Go-Giver* stepped onto the bookshelves to state their message and see if the world was interested in reading about Pindar's Paradox—that *the more you give, the more you have*.

Turned out, the world was.

Most books enjoy an initial surge of sales and interest and then taper off to a relatively quiet life in the wings—the *backlist*, as publishers call it. With *The Go-Giver*, things went rather in the opposite direction: with each succeeding year, rather than diminishing, interest seemed to keep growing. And growing.

Something about the book seemed to touch a chord, often in the most unexpected places. Originally positioned as a *business* book, our “little story about a powerful business idea” began showing up in book clubs, community groups, sermons, and high school classrooms, as well as in boardrooms and sales-and-service trainings. CEOs and thought leaders were quoting it. It started becoming not simply popular, but *influential*.

In 2015, our publisher brought out a new expanded edition of the book, with a foreword and introduction, a Discussion Guide for readers' groups, additional commentary—and a curious feature on the back jacket that to us was both fascinating and significant: the handful of endorsements there were bracketed by a pair of quotes from Arianna Huffington and Glenn Beck. Not two people whose views you'd typically expect to find on the same page (whether metaphorically or, as in this case, literally).

Which brings us to the reason for the book you're now holding in your hands and the true meaning and value of *influence*.

The idea of influence has been at the center of all three Go-Giver books to date.

In *The Go-Giver*, Sam Rosen, the beaming white-haired insurance man, explains to Joe that grasping the true nature of influence became the key to his success—and that people typically get it backward:

“If you asked most people what creates influence, what would they say?”

Joe's answer came without hesitation. “Money. Position. Maybe a history of outstanding accomplishments.”

Sam nodded, grinning. “Ha! You're right, that's *exactly* what they'd say—and they'd have it exactly backwards! Those things don't *create* influence—influence creates *them*.”

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He also defined what he called the Law of Influence:

“Your influence is determined by how abundantly you place other people’s interests first.”

In *Go-Givers Sell More*, the third of its five parts—the keystone at the center of the book’s arch—expounded and expanded on that law and how it works in everyday real-life operation.

In *The Go-Giver Leader*, in a chapter entitled “The Substance of Influence,” Aunt Elle (that book’s mentor figure) offers up this definition of influence:

“Well,” she said, hitching forward eagerly in her seat, “the word *influence* means *an unseen flow of power*. It was first used in the Middle Ages, believe it or not, as an astrological term, from an Old French word meaning *a streaming ethereal power from the stars acting upon our character or destiny*. Imagine that!

“By the fifteenth century, the word was being used to mean *an exercise of personal power by human beings*. You could say, it describes how we exert gravitational force on each other. Like stars.”

We thought Sam, Aunt Elle, and the rest had pretty well summed it up. But the world moves on, and its needs change and evolve. If Pindar and his friends were here today, we wondered, participating in the world of 2018, what would

they say? What would they want to write about? Influence, we thought, for sure—but perhaps more specifically about the role influence plays in the capacity for empathy and civil discourse.

At its heart, *The Go-Giver Influencer* is a story about what it takes to bridge differences, to settle disputes and defang conflicts, to find common ground where there appears to be only irreconcilably polarized positions. (And, yes, even to negotiate business dealings.) It is also about what it takes to be the kind of person whom others come to trust, a person to whom others look for sound guidance, clear judgment, and, in times of challenge, evenhanded wisdom.

A person, in other words, of genuine influence.

In recent years the term “influencer” has come into widespread usage, a development we greatly appreciate. The more society explores the nature and significance of positive influence, the better off our world becomes. We thought Pindar’s friends would have something uniquely Pindarian to say about that—and we hope that, once you’ve arrived at the final toast that closes this story, you’ll agree.

Bob Burg and John David Mann

January 2018

1: Jackson

Jackson Hill looked like a man waiting to see the executioner.

“Are you sure you won’t have some coffee?” The young woman at the reception desk had already offered him coffee, a soft drink, and water, in that order.

“I’m good. Thanks, though.” He liked her energy. The nameplate on her desk said MIRABEL. *Perfect*, thought Jackson. *That’s exactly what I need today. A MIRACLE.*

He glanced at the wall clock. Ten after. Eleven, now. It had taken three weeks just to get this appointment. Three weeks he couldn’t afford to wait. And now the appointed hour had come . . . and here he was, still waiting. He suppressed the impulse to look at the clock again. After three weeks of waiting, another ten minutes—no, eleven—shouldn’t matter, right?

“Yes . . .” Mirabel was speaking into her headset now. “Okay. I’ll send him in.” She smiled at Jackson and said, “Ms. Waters can see you now. It’s straight down the hall, on the right.”

Finally.

As Jackson walked past her desk, Mirabel leaned forward a little and spoke in a stage whisper. "You're going to *love* Ms. Waters. She's really nice."

Jackson hoped that was true.

As he took his seat, Jackson noticed a photo on Ms. Waters's desk of a young girl (twelve, maybe?) curled around a beautiful Russian Blue cat, looking at the camera with big solemn eyes that said, *This is MY cat. Nobody messes with MY cat.* The elegant Blue stared at the camera, too, with haunting green eyes that said, *This is MY human. Nobody messes with MY human.*

Jackson smiled. Maybe this meeting would go well after all.

"So," the woman said, still looking down at the papers on her desk. "Mr. Hill."

"Hill," said Jackson, already feeling defensive.

She looked up. "Sorry?"

"It's Hill. Jackson Hill."

"Of course. Mr. Hill. Jackson. So," she sat back in her chair to give him her full attention. "Tell me about your business." *Showtime.*

"Sure. So, we started with our first line of dry dog food, five years ago. That was just for dogs. All different sizes and ages. And then within six months, we added a cat line . . .," and he went on, just as he'd rehearsed it, chronicling how over the past five years he'd built his fledgling business into a respected brand.

Of course, when he used the words "we started" and "we

added," he was really talking about just himself, Jackson, working solo in his cramped little kitchen, late into the nights and over long weekends, experimenting, crafting, adjusting. *Only the purest*, as his company motto went, *only the freshest, only the best*. Jackson had in every sense built his business from his kitchen table.

"Quite the entrepreneur," said Ms. Waters.

He shifted in his seat, unsure exactly how to respond to that.

Jackson had never intended to be a business owner. All he wanted was to see animals have the best food to eat. He'd just had to become an entrepreneur in order to do it. Six years ago he was working a sales job for an electronics outlet (and hating it), cooking for himself, Walt, and Solomon. When he shared his natural dog food concoctions with a few friends who also lived with dogs, word got out. By the time he let go of his sales job to focus full time on his pet food line, he had more than a hundred customers—and that widely respected brand.

All of which could come crashing down exactly one week from today if he didn't get this contract.

No, not *could*. All of which *would* come crashing down.

"So, you distribute to, what, now"—she was glancing down again, running her finger down the sheet at the top of her little stack of papers—"two states?"

"Three," he said. "Almost four," he added, and immediately regretted it. Almost four? What, like holding four fingers up high and proudly saying, "These many!" *You're in business now, Jackie*, as Walt would say. *You gotta act like it*.

"Three," said Ms. Waters, nodding to her papers. "Almost

four." She looked up and leveled her gaze directly at Jackson. "So tell me: Why do we want to carry you?"

Jackson winced. He knew she meant to say, "carry *your products*," right? But intentionally or not, she'd certainly nailed it, hadn't she. If—*if*—they gave him this contract, they would indeed be carrying *him*.

He took a breath.

"It's simple, really. I love animals. Adore them. Big, small, two-day-old kittens, old hounds on their last legs, doesn't matter what shape or size or breed or temperament, to me they are all, every one of them, the noblest, sweetest, kindest, most . . . well, most authentic creatures. I look at an animal like"—he almost said, *Like your daughter's cat*, but would that be getting too personal?—"well, like any cat, any dog, and I think they were put here as emissaries of how we ought to be. Emissaries of heaven on earth."

Ms. Waters smiled thinly. "Hence, the name."

Jackson nodded. "Exactly. That's how I see them."

She looked down at the papers again. "'Angels Clothed in Fur.'" And up again at Jackson. "A somewhat unconventional name for a business."

"We're a somewhat unconventional business," he said, feeling defensive again. "Anyway, as I said, it's simple. I want to reach more animals with the best the earth has to offer. Only the purest and freshest. That slogan—I really mean it. And if I can put my product in your stores, well, you can reach a lot more creatures than I can on my own."

Understatement of the week. Smith & Banks Pet Supply, the

chain Ms. Waters represented, had stores in every state coast to coast. A massive footprint. Or should he say, pawprint.

Ms. Waters glanced at her papers again, then back at Jackson and smiled once more, that thin smile that didn't seem to give much away.

"Well, I've looked through the materials you sent, and I have to say it's impressive. We like it, and we like you. We are definitely interested in the possibilities."

Jackson's heart leapt. He nearly leapt, too, right out of his chair. *Impressive—we like it, and we like you.* Wow!

Then his head caught up. Hang on, did she just say, "definitely . . . possibilities"? Wasn't that sort of like saying, "For sure . . . maybe"?

"We think Angels Clothed in Fur could sit very comfortably on our shelves," Ms. Waters was saying. "Just two points. You'd need to supply us on a national basis, of course. And we would want it to be an exclusive arrangement."

Jackson's heart stopped.

National?

Exclusive?

National distribution—that would mean he'd either have to ship his products clear across the country, which would be impossible, because part of his whole thing was their freshness and emphasis on locally grown ingredients . . . or he'd have to set up not one or two but at least a *dozen* separate production sites. Which would take an enormous investment. Which was completely out of the question.

And, *exclusive?* Pull out of all his existing clients' stores?

Turn his back on all those relationships? It hurt even to think about it.

“Okay,” he said, his heart racing, desperately hoping that she couldn’t see how rattled he was. “See, I was hoping to start out going into stores in four states, maybe five. I mean, that’s what we’re geared for at the moment.”

“I understand,” she said. “But you understand, we’re a national chain. Providing *only the purest, only the best* in these five states over here, but not in those five states over there . . . well, would that be fair to our customers?”

Jackson felt his face flush. *Would that be a rhetorical question?* he wanted to say, but he bit it back. Instead he just sighed. (Silently—he hoped.) “No, of course, I see your point. But I don’t see how . . .”

He stopped. How did he plan to finish that sentence?

The silence in the room felt positively chilly.

He had to say *something*, but he didn’t dare explain his actual situation.

Revenue from those early clients had allowed him take over an old out-of-business diner. With his own industrial kitchen, he had built out his pet food line and extended his sales to stores across the state. To extend that reach farther to cover three states—well, *parts* of three states—he’d had to set up a whole new separate production facility in the next state over so he could keep to his standards of freshness and local supply.

But setting up and running a new plant from scratch was a lot harder than he expected. The financing he’d gotten to do it was drowning him. The bank had been patient for a

year, but now he had to bring his account current, or they would call the loan and shut down his operation. A week from today. There was no way under the sun he could come up with the cash—but if he could show up with a large purchase order from a major national company, he was betting, that would halt the process and keep his doors open. A contract with Ms. Waters's company, in other words, might just save him from going under.

And at that thought, an idea slipped into his mind, so quietly that it took him a moment to realize it was sitting there waiting for him.

"I understand what you're saying," he said. "That makes sense. I see that. Of course, to scale up on that level, I'd need some assistance."

For the first time since their meeting had begun, Ms. Waters looked ever so slightly taken off balance. "Assistance?"

"Well," said Jackson, "the entire continental United States, that's a good deal of territory. Our whole thing is *fresh and local*. That's more or less the heart of the brand. The brand you'd be featuring on your shelves. We'd need to put in place a network of kitchens—production centers. We have several now." (He had two, barely.) "To supply nationwide, we'd need to set up, oh, a dozen more around the country, I'd expect. A dozen at least. That'd take a little financing."

He tried to say this all in an entirely neutral, casual tone. Oh, sure, a dozen plants across the country. What he was planning to do anyway. *A little financing?* Just saying the words nearly gave him a heart attack.

"I don't mean you'd provide actual *funding*," he added.

“That would have to come from my own sources, obviously. But I’ve never gone into anything on this scale before. The only way it would work, I expect, would be with someone big, someone like Smith and Banks, underwriting it. Guaranteeing the loan, I mean.”

Ms. Waters regarded him with an appraising look.

“Right. Well, I can certainly run that past the Corner Office, see what they say. But to be honest, Mr. Hill, I can’t promise they’ll be friendly about the idea.”

Another chilly silence.

“Also, you said, an exclusive?”

She raised her eyebrows, as if to say, *Yes?*

“That’s . . . that’s a tall order. Right now I supply a lot of stores in our area.”

She said nothing. *And?*

“A lot of these small stores, these aren’t just clients, they’re friends. People I’ve known for years.” And without whom his business would never have gotten off the ground, he could have added.

“Of course,” she said. “You’ve got an existing pipeline. Agreements and contracts. We assumed there’d be a transition period. Time for you to fulfill your current obligations and gracefully withdraw from future commitments, work up new marketing collateral for our stores, and so forth. Say, three months?”

Jackson nodded numbly. *Marketing collateral.* He hadn’t thought about that.

Unexpectedly, Ms. Waters’s voice softened. “I know, it’s a lot.”

She was silent again for a moment—though this time somehow the silence did not feel so chilly.

“Tell you what, Mr. Hill,” she said after another moment. “Why don’t you go back and talk with your people, see what you might be able to work out. And I’ll go speak with the Corner Office here about that underwriting idea. And then we’ll meet again, okay? Say, next Friday, a week from today?”

A week from today. Exactly the words the bank officer had spoken to him that morning—only without the question mark.

He stood up, reached over her desk, and shook her hand.

“A week,” he said. “Thank you.”

You’ve got this, Jackson, he told himself as he slipped past Mirabel’s desk with a nod and a mouthed *Thank you!* (she was on the phone) and showed himself out the door. *You are a successful businessman. You are going to close this deal.* But it didn’t feel like he was going to close this deal. And he didn’t feel like a successful businessman.

He felt like a man who had just been to see the executioner.

2: Gillian

Gillian stared out her office window, trying to see her future.

Ten long years she'd been here. She was smart, and she worked hard, but it had been a struggle just to get where she was. A buyer. "Ms. Gray Flannel Suit," Katie would say, poking fun at her. "Ms. Mid-Level Executive." Well, that's what she was, and proud of it. Her company did a lot of good, and she was part of that.

But she was aiming higher. She wanted that Corner Office.

Everyone in the company knew that the senior VP of Distribution was about to retire. (It was the company's best-kept secret, ha-ha.) Gillian wanted that spot. If she got it, maybe someday she might even run the company. Hey, why not?

If she got it, more to the point, she would command a salary that would let her put Bo in that school she wanted, and save for her college. And buy her a horse. And give her the world. Because the kid deserved it.

Gillian felt her heart lurch.

She turned back to her desk and pushed the TALK button

on the office intercom. “Mirabel?” she said. “Could you see about getting me an appointment with the Corner Office?”

“Sure, Ms. Waters,” the voice said back. “For when?”

“As soon as he can see me,” she said. “Monday, hopefully.”

“We’ll give it our best shot, Ms. Waters.”

“You’re the best, Mirabel,” said Gillian, and she clicked off.

Only the purest, only the freshest, only the best.

When she’d said she was impressed with Jackson Hill’s company, she wasn’t kidding. His products were good—really good. She’d wanted to meet with him right away when he first contacted their office, but she’d needed a few weeks to research his company and his products. She bought samples, talked with customers, even went out and talked with store owners, including some of his oldest clients. The more she dug, the better it all looked.

No doubt to him she appeared fairly ignorant of his company—but that was just strategy. Better to keep it opaque. *Never show your cards*, as Craig would say. (Although look how *that* had turned out.)

She didn’t feel great about that. But she didn’t just want Jackson’s line. She *needed* it. Not only would it be a great account to win. It was an account that could make her career.

If she could bring Jackson’s unique line in-house, it would be a huge feather in her cap—which would put her within spitting distance of that promotion to senior VP of Distribution. Competition for that position would be fierce, no question about it. Gillian was no good at office politics, but she knew this much for certain: if she could land the Jackson Hill account, she would have a shot at it.

She turned in her chair and looked outside again, now at the fading light. She didn't want to go home, not just yet. She hated going home when the place was empty.

She thought back to their conversation that morning, when she'd dropped Bo off at school, and smiled.

"Looking forward to seeing your dad this weekend?" she'd said.

Bo squirmed in the car seat. "I guess. He's always busy."

That was Craig, all right. Always busy. "Busy, how?" she countered.

Bo gave a theatrical sigh. "On his laptop, and on the phone." Big gestures with both hands. "And stuff."

Gillian smiled. "I'm always busy, too, Bo-bird."

"That's different."

"Different, how?"

"Mom." Her daughter gave her a look that said, *Do I really have to explain this?* "Even when you're busy, you're still here. You're never busy busy."

Gillian felt her heart lurch again, like it did a thousand times a day.

No, not home, not yet. She took a big breath. She was done here for the day. So, if not home, then where? Ha. As if she had to ask.

Ten minutes in and she had already worked up a serious sweat—but she was just getting started. She sat up, reached down and added five more pounds to the weight machine, then lay back down on the bench and resumed her overhead chest extensions. Total weight: thirty pounds.

Push. Slow release. Push. Slow release. Push . . .

Gillian was ambitious, it was true. But it was more than that. And yes, she wanted a salary that would allow her to take the best care of her daughter, whom she loved with the fierceness of a mother tiger. But if she were honest with herself, it was more than that, too. She wanted to feel her own efforts having an impact, a real impact. That was why she'd joined this company in the first place, not just to keep a roof over their heads but because she wanted to make a *difference*.

She sat up and added more weight, then lay back down and kept going.

Forty pounds.

She didn't understand Jackson Hill's reluctance. She was offering him something even bigger than what he was asking for. Why wasn't he jumping at it? He seemed strangely uneasy and uncooperative. She could not figure the guy out. Did he want this contract or not?

She'd been positive they would end that meeting with at least an agreement in principle, details to be worked out in the days ahead. But he seemed to back up from every term and condition she put on the table.

And that request, to underwrite his "kitchens," she had not seen that coming. He had to know that was a huge ask. Big enough that she would now have to go get buy-in from the senior VP himself. The very guy whose position she hoped to land.

She sat up and added more weight.

Fifty pounds. Push, slow release . . .

She thought about the week ahead. Sunday afternoon she'd get Bo back. Sunday evening they would have a blast together.

And then Monday.

She didn't know which was going to be the bigger challenge: getting the Corner Office to agree to put its credit behind the financing for Jackson's string of "kitchens" or keeping Jackson himself from bolting at the first loud noise, like a skittish colt. When she'd said *national* and *exclusive*, she thought she was going to have to hit the intercom and ask Mirabel to bring a defibrillator.

Sixty pounds.

Actually, now that she thought about it, that was easy, no contest: *both* challenges were impossible. But she had to walk out of that meeting next Friday with a signed contract in her hand. *Had* to.

She groaned out loud.

"Were you bad?"

Gillian paused in her reps and looked up into the face looking down at hers. Even upside down, Katie's brightly freckled face made her want to laugh. "What?"

"Were you very bad? I think you've been very bad. 'Cause you sure are punishing yourself."

Gillian sighed and sat up.

Katie was not only her dedicated trainer but also her best friend. She wasn't sure which she really came here for, the workouts or the "talkouts."

That one was easy, too: both.

"I'm trying to land this account I told you about?"

Katie nodded as she grabbed Gillian's arm and tugged her over toward another machine.

"I don't know what the guy's story is, but it feels like I'm

pulling up a tree stump with a piece of thread. If I pull too hard, the thread'll break—but if I don't pull at all, he'll just sit there."

"Like a stump," volunteered Katie.

"Exactly. Thank you."

"Sit."

Katie had Gillian lie down on the bench, then set the weights and gave her leg a *Let's go!* whack. Gillian obediently started doing her leg lifts. Forty pounds.

"I really need this, Katie. It's the only way I'm going to have a crack at that Corner Office—the only way I'm ever going to get Bo into that school—"

"Etcetera." Katie nodded. "I know, sweetie. I know."

Gillian had gone through another twenty reps before it dawned on her that Katie was standing there, just watching her. She dropped her feet down onto the floor, took a big breath, and looked at her friend. "What."

"Maybe you should go see the coach," said Katie.

Gillian stood up and put her hands on Katie's shoulders, looking her in the face. "Katie. You're not only my best friend and the biggest pain in the neck I know, you're also my trainer. *My* trainer. I don't need to work with another coach."

"Not a coach," said Katie. "*The* Coach."

Gillian sat back down on the bench. "*What* coach?" she said, as she resumed her leg lifts.

"This guy," said Katie. "I think he used to be a football coach or something, like high school. I don't know if he was ever pro or not. But now he's some kind of high-level execu-

tive coach, works with CEOs and people in high-stress positions, things like that.”

“Help me,” said Gillian. “And this miracle-working motivational guru’s name is . . . ?”

Katie pursed her lips in thought. “I don’t think . . .” She shrugged. “No, I don’t think I ever heard it mentioned. My client, the one who’s worked with him? She always just calls him ‘the Coach.’ Says he teaches this thing he calls his Winning Strategy. Here,” Katie fished out her phone as she talked, “I’ll text you his number.”

Gillian made a face. “Aha. His Winning Strategy. Fantastic. Probably an ax murderer who lures women like me to their doom with sweet promises of corporate jets and their face on magazine covers.”

Katie swatted her on the thigh. “You’re terrible!”

Gillian nodded. “Yes. I am. Now, back to my punishment.”

She reached forward, adjusted the weights, sat back, grabbed the handles, and continued her reps.

Fifty pounds . . .

Ninety minutes later, Gillian stepped into her front vestibule, closed the door, and heard it go *click!* She stood, motionless. When Bo was away and the house was empty like this, the silence was so thick it felt like it had a weight, a density all its own. Like a spell cast over a dark forest while a princess slept for a century.

She felt something brush against her leg.

She looked down and smiled at Cleo silently twining her tail around Gillian's leg. She mimed blowing a kiss at Cleo, without making a sound. For some reason, the silence felt to her as if it should not be broken, not yet. Like an enchantment. Like if she broke the spell, her daughter would never be returned to her but would sleep in the dark forest forever.

She shook her head abruptly. "The things a mother thinks," she said aloud.

Cleo looked up at her and silently agreed.

Gillian slipped off her shoes and padded to the kitchen to make herself a cup of hot tea.

A high school football coach. Seriously? His "Winning Strategy"?

Give me a break.

While waiting for her tea to cool enough for a sip, Gillian Waters sat on a kitchen stool, staring out the window, trying to see her future.

After a few minutes, she reached into a pocket and pulled out her phone.